

Theology in Context

Hungarian and Korean Protestant Challenges
and Opportunities

Studies in Hungarian and Korean Protestant Theology

Series Editors

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Volume 5.

Theology in Context

Hungarian and Korean Protestant
Challenges and Opportunities

Edited by
SZILVESZTER FÜSTI-MOLNÁR & JAESHIK SHIN

Edited by: Szilveszter Füsti-Molnár & Jaeshik Shin

Published by
Debrecen Reformed Theological University • Honam Theological University and Seminary
Debrecen • Gwangju, 2025

Publisher in Charge: Béla Levente Baráth

Cover Design: Kamilla Mikáczó

Technical Editor: Éva Asztalos Szilágyiné

ISSN 2676-8356

ISBN 978-615-5853-79-1, DRTU Debrecen
ISBN 979-11-958594-5-0, HTUS Gwangju

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Printed by: Kapitális Ltd. Debrecen, Hungary

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SZILVESZTER FÜSTI-MOLNÁR
and
JAESHIK SHIN

Editors' Preface

With great joy and deep appreciation, we introduce this volume, a collection of theological reflections born out of attentive listening, shared questions, and long-standing friendships. The essays included here represent not only individual scholarly work but also the collective spirit of the HUN–HAN Theological Forum – a dialogue now in its sixth edition, held in 2024 in South Korea.

This Forum has never aimed at easy agreements or decorative theological work. What has always distinguished it is its honest engagement with difference – in theological perspective, ecclesial experience, and social context. Over the years, Hungarian and Korean scholars have come together not merely to present papers but to learn from one another's history, witness, and way of doing theology. As the fruit of that ongoing conversation, this volume is testimony to the richness that emerges when theological thinking remains open, grounded, and rooted in mutual trust.

The themes covered are wide-ranging yet not random. They reflect questions that have emerged again and again in our shared work: how to read Scripture today with both reverence and critical awareness; how to make room for neglected voices, particularly those of women and marginalized communities; how to rethink theological education so that it genuinely forms both the intellect and the heart; how churches can be present with integrity in rapidly changing societies; and how our faith traditions might speak meaningfully into ecological, political, and digital realities.

Some essays turn to biblical texts, not to repeat familiar readings but to slow down and listen differently. Others revisit church history – whether in diaspora settings, under communism, or amid colonial pressures – to better understand the tensions that continue to shape our communities today. Some contributions explore the church’s identity, often with an unease that is not a weakness but a sign of moral seriousness: What does it mean to be a church in a divided nation? What does reconciliation demand of us when politics and piety pull in different directions? And what might faithful diakonia look like in contexts where institutional credibility has been eroded?

Some of the questions raised are deeply practical, while others move along more conceptual lines. But all are offered in the hope of contributing not to abstract theory but to a deeper discernment of what it means to live, teach, and serve as Reformed Christians in our time.

We are especially grateful for the witness of our Korean hosts in 2024, whose hospitality extended far beyond logistics. In lectures, meals, informal discussions, and prayer, we were reminded that theology is not merely what we say but how we meet and stay in conversation even when agreement is not immediate. This is perhaps one of the quiet strengths of the Forum: it does not chase novelty for its own sake, nor does it retreat into theological nostalgia. It listens forward.

The essays in this volume are not intended to be the last word on anything. If they succeed, they help clarify the questions that still lie ahead. We do not offer them as a program or a manifesto but as companions on the road – texts shaped by people who care deeply about the gospel, the church, and the world God has entrusted to us.

As editors, our hope is that this book will be read not only in libraries and lecture halls, but also in congregations and study groups, where theology is not just taught but lived. May it serve as a source of encouragement, challenge, and even surprise.

And may the conversations it contains – like the Forum that gave birth to it – continue well beyond these pages.

Debrecen – Gwangju,
2025, Easter

PART I

*Scripture, Theology, and
Education*

The Disclosure of Porousness in the Binary Oppositions Concerning Gender in Judges 1:11–15¹

Abstract

This study offers a deconstructive reading of Judges 1:11–15, focusing on how the gendered binary oppositions—subject/object and fertility/barrenness—are rendered porous rather than overturned. While traditional interpretations either reinforce patriarchal norms or elevate Achsah as a proto-feminist figure, both approaches remain within hierarchical frameworks. Drawing on Derridean deconstruction and feminist criticism, the analysis explores how Achsah’s ambiguous agency—particularly the verb “to incite”—destabilizes fixed roles. The text’s syntax and narrative shifts create fluidity between subject and object, complicating gendered assumptions. Similarly, Achsah’s request for water springs amid barren land invites both literal and metaphorical readings of fertility, implicating her body and land as intertwined symbols. The porousness of these oppositions reflects not a triumph over patriarchy but a subtle exposure of its inconsistencies. Rather than resolving tensions, the passage presents gender roles as inherently unstable, opening space for critical reflection on narrative authority and interpretive frameworks.

1. Introduction

As Trent C. Butler highlights, Judges 1:11-15² showcases the prominent role of the tribe Judah in the conquest of Canaan and anticipates the emergence of the first judge Othniel.³ However, much scholarly energy has been invested in this passage not only due to its parallels with Joshua 15:13-19,⁴ but also because it presents Achsah in a positive light, emphasizing her proactive request for a field and her acquisition of springs of water. Such a description portrays Achsah as both the subject, rather than the object, in the text and a woman who boldly undertakes actions within the patriarchal framework.⁵ In particular, Achsah can be likened to other female characters depicted in the book of Judges, who are often mistreated. These women are portrayed negatively as objects subjected to the actions of male protagonists in the text and as victims who suffer attacks, injuries, rape, or even death at the hands of powerful males.⁶

The unusual portrayal of the female character Achsah in Judges 1:11-15 has sparked two interpretations, particularly in regard to her action, 'to incite him' (wattēsîṭēhû / and she incited him)], in verse 14a of the Masoretic Text (MT) within the context of ancient patriarchy.⁷ The first interpretation, exemplified by the Septuagint (LXX), reinforces the male-dominant paradigm by shifting the subject of the action 'to incite him' from Achsah to her husband Othniel.⁸ As Jack M. Sasson suggests, the LXX limits "Achsah's motivation and initiative," thus emphasizing the central role of her husband Othniel.⁹ Conversely, the second interpretation challenges the patriarchal viewpoint by presenting Achsah as an exemplary model of femininity. For instance, Lillian R. Klein portrays Achsah as a strategist who "knows how to live within the constraints of her society" and as "an ideal woman for all Israelite women to emulate."¹⁰ In a similar vein, A. Rebecca Basdeo Hill views Achsah as "an ideal female character whose story shows that women act, speak, and are named at the beginning of the book."¹¹ However, Judith McKinlay harbors suspicion against Achsah's action 'to incite him' in the MT, suggesting it could be interpreted as a "purposeful pillow talk."¹² Regardless of whether one's stance on the male-dominant system, these two interpretations, striving to uncover a singular meaning within the text, ultimately perpetuate in a hierarchical gender dynamics.¹³

Regarding the unequal interpretations of Judges 1:11-15 concerning gender, Danna N. Fewell significantly challenges "the authority of the traditional

interpretations” by contesting the notion of a singular meaning in the text, particularly in light of gender hierarchy.¹⁴ Employing deconstructive criticism in her analysis of the passage, Fewell reveals the inconsistencies between the text’s explicit assertions of meaning and the narrative used to convey those assertions. Rejecting the figurative interpretation that relegates the passage to a folk-etiology and thus undermines Achsah’s central role, Fewell argues that Achsah “refuses to be hobbled,” as evidenced by her dismounting from her donkey, contrary to the implications of her name.¹⁵ While Fewell’s deconstructive approach effectively highlights the fluidity of meaning production in the text, it falls short of fully demonstrating how the binary oppositions related to gender are profoundly deconstructed: specifically, the dichotomy between subject and object, and fertility versus barrenness.

On one hand, the hierarchical relationship concerning gender in Judges 1:11-15 is related to the roles of subject and the object within a given action. In the passage, the protagonists do not strictly adhere to either role but instead fluctuate between them. On the other hand, a stereotypical evaluation of the biblical women often centers around their fertility, particularly their ability to bear children. In Judges 1:11-15, Achsah appears to defy patriarchal norms by assertively requesting a gift from her father. However, Achsah’s acquisition of the upper and lower springs ironically ensnares her in the androcentric trap of being seen primarily as a means for the preservation of posterity. Consequently, the binary oppositions concerning gender become blurred. In conducting a deconstructive reading of Judges 1:11-15, my focus lies on the permeable nature of these binary oppositions, rather than on outright subversion of hierarchies. To achieve this objective, I will first provide an overview of deconstructive criticism. Following this, I will provide an exegetical analysis of how the binary oppositions—specifically, subject vs. object and fertility vs. barrenness—are deconstructed in Judges 1:11-15.

2. Deconstructive Criticism

As Fewell points out, deconstruction has a notorious reputation in biblical interpretation, often being labeled as “nihilistic” and subversive.¹⁶ However, this understanding deviates from Jacques Derrida’s own description of his

philosophy: "...Destruktion, which Heidegger uses, explaining that *Destruktion* is not a destruction but precisely a deconstructing that dismantles the structural layers in the system, and so on."¹⁷ Furthermore, Derrida's deconstruction aims to reveal "the aporia," which includes unresolved tensions and inconsistencies. It challenges the notion of ideality by positing that there is no "purely ideal meaning" but rather an "endless series of reverberations."¹⁸ Deconstruction seeks not to reject all existing interpretations but to critique "the established hierarchies of Western thought."¹⁹ Regarding these hierarchies, deconstruction aims to demonstrate that the separation of binary oppositions is inherently "porous" or "permeable," rather than merely subverting existing hierarchical relationships.²⁰

Given the previous definition and theoretical foundation, deconstruction aids in clarifying the multiple meanings and their inherent ambivalence within a text. Consequently, conflicts that are overlooked by non-deconstructive readings are not hidden or repressed but are instead revealed and liberated within the text. Moreover, the "slippery" nature of language supports the premises of deconstructive criticism, which posits that a text has multifaceted aspects and that no single interpretation can be considered privileged.²¹ In this sense, deconstructive criticism paradoxically respects the text and demands a close reading, allowing the interpretive conundrums to contribute to the "elucidation" of the text.²²

3. The Deconstruction of the Subject-Object Opposition

In Judges 1:11-15, several characters make an appearance: the tribe of Judah (v. 11), the inhabitants of Debir (v. 11), Caleb (vv. 12-15), Achsah (vv. 12-15), and Othniel (vv. 13, 14[?]). Consequently, one may pose the question, "Whose story is depicted in this passage?" In other words, who is the primary subject of the narrative? Some interpret Judges 1:11-15 within the context of its literary position in the introduction of the book of Judges (1:1-2:5).²³ This literary context prompts them to designate it as "Jerusalem and the South" in a geographical sense,²⁴ or as "Judah and Caleb"²⁵ and "Judah at Hebron and Debir with Caleb and Othniel"²⁶ to emphasize the role of the Judahites as the vanguard in the conquest of Canaan. Others view Judges 1:11-15 as a narrative that serves to prefigure and prepare for

the introduction of Othniel, particularly his subsequent appearance as the first judge in Judges 3:7-11.²⁷ While the two interpretations of the story shed light on the editorial coherence of the book of Judges, they overlook another character, Achsah, by treating her merely as “the element of the Othniel story.”²⁸ The mistreatment of Achsah not only has incited resistance but has also prompted newer interpretations that emphasize her role as the primary actor who “takes the initiative” in acquiring the water²⁹ and “resists the social stereotype” within the hierarchical relationship between a father and daughter.³⁰ Furthermore, Barry G. Webb contends that Achsah usurps the leadership from “Caleb and Othniel, the two dominant males of the story” through her “shrewdness and resourcefulness.”³¹ Nonetheless, the reinstated role of Achsah as the central figure remains fluid and susceptible in the text, suggesting that the male characters, Caleb and Othniel, also oscillate between the realms of subject and object.

In Judges 1:11-15, it is Caleb who initially takes the initiative by pledging to give his daughter Achsah to whoever takes the city Kiriath-sepher (v. 12). In making this public declaration, Caleb leverages his authority as the leader of Judah and the head of his family within the male-dominant system. By stipulating that the beneficiary of his pledge must be someone who conquers the city through physical strength and martial prowess, namely a warrior, Caleb effectively exploits Achsah as “the incentive for heroism and territorial expansion.”³² This correlation between the heroic task and the award of a woman as a prize is also evident in the narrative involving Saul, David, Merab, and Michal (1 Sam 17:25; 18:17-27),³³ indicating that the exploitation of women as rewards for heroic deeds was not uncommon in ancient patriarchal societies. As a result, the passage reinforces Caleb’s role as the primary decision-maker who asserts authority over the disposition of his daughter as a spoil of war.

While the capture of Debir shifts the focus from Caleb to Othniel in Judges 1:11-15, Caleb still maintains a role as the primary figure in the relationship with Othniel, as he is the one who offers his daughter to him (v. 13). Regrettably, the text does not portray Achsah as the initiator but rather as an object, identified solely as Caleb’s daughter and subsequently as Othniel’s wife, with no indication of her thoughts or actions during the transaction between the two men. From this perspective, the hierarchical dynamic between males and females is reinforced through the portrayal of the former as subjects and the latter as the object in the narrative. However, this male-dominant hierarchy is suddenly disrupted in

verse 14, where Achsah takes action to request a field from her father. This verse is renowned for its ambiguity, particularly regarding the question of ‘Who incited whom?’ or ‘Who are the subject and the object?’.³⁴

Regarding the MT of verse 14a (literally translated as “When she came to him, she incited him to ask her father for a field”), Soggin argues that it is illogical for Achsah to request land from her husband.³⁵ Therefore, Soggin changes the subject of the first verb *běbô’āh* (when she came) and the second verb *wattēsîlēhû* (and she incited him) from Achsah to Othniel, resulting in the following translation: “When *he* came to her, *he* incited her to ask her father for a field.”³⁶ Soggin’s translation chimes with the LXX and the Vulgate. While this alteration clarifies why Achsah sought land from her father more explicitly than the MT,³⁷ but it raises doubts about whether Othniel is portrayed as an honorable hero.³⁸ Moreover, there is no clear rationale for why the amended text is preferable to the MT.³⁹ In contrast to the amended text, where Othniel is depicted as the one incited, the MT reinforces Achsah’s role as the primary actor by presenting her as having control over her relationship with her husband. Nevertheless, the MT does not depict Achsah as an ideal actor because she is still compelled to urge her husband to fulfill her request.

Mosca proposes the alternative translation of verse 14a by interpreting *liš’ōl* (to ask) as a gerund rather than the infinitive construct. Mosca’s suggested translation reads: “When she arrived, she beguiled him (*Caleb*), asking from her father arable land.”⁴⁰ According to Mosca’s interpretation, Achsah does not rely on her husband Othniel but instead takes the initiative to acquire fertile land by appealing directly to Caleb, who holds authority over land distribution to the Judahites. Consequently, Achsah’s role as the primary actor and the subject remains intact, while Othniel is entirely absent from the narrative. Although Achsah’s significant initiative undermines the patriarchal hierarchy between males and female, Caleb is portrayed as being influenced by his daughter and thus grants her property. Yet, Mosca’s translation fails to elucidate why Achsah approaches her father again and repeats the same request in verse 15, suggesting that she may not exert full control over her father’s decisions.⁴¹

Schneider addresses the dilemma of verse 14 by interpreting the movement *běbô’āh* (when she came) as symbolic of sexual union, thereby defining Achsah’s subsequent request as a natural outcome of this intercourse.⁴² Schneider’s translation, “*he* came (*sexually*) to her,” is underpinned by the lexical meaning of

the verb *bô'* (to come)⁴³ and its usages in various contexts.⁴⁴ This interpretation characterizes Achsah as a woman who devises a plan and promptly puts it into action. However, Schneider's translation confines Achsah to a stereotypical gender role as a woman who utilizes sexual allure, a theme commonly found in the book of Judges.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, this characterization of Achsah does not imply that Othniel assumes a dominant position in his relationship with his wife; rather, his role as the primary actor and the subject is limited to the act of intercourse.

In these respects, Judges 1:14 *per se* does not establish any dominance or subordination regarding the roles of the subject and the object. Since no one is explicitly designated as the subject in the verse, anyone could be the object of another's action. Thus, neither a male-dominant nor a female-dominant relationship is established; instead, the distinction between subject and object is shown to be porous and penetrable.

4. The Deconstruction of the Fertility-Barrenness Opposition

Achsah's distinctive characterization stems from her inheritance of her father's land through her courageous request for springs of water in Judges 1:15. While female inheritance is uncommon in the Old Testament, it is redolent of a notable exception: the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11; 36:1-13). However, the inheritance of Zelophehad's daughters in Numbers differs significantly from that of Achsah in Judges, as the former resulted from a law addressing a father without a male heir.⁴⁶ In Judges 1:11-15, it is noteworthy that Achsah implored her father to grant springs of water in the land of Negeb, where he had placed her, and ultimately succeeded in obtaining them.⁴⁷

As noted by Smith and Bloch-Smith, the land of Negeb is "proverbial for its lack of water (Gen 21:14-15; cf. Ps 126:4)" in the Old Testament.⁴⁸ Achsah's request for a blessing (*bě'rākā*) aligns with the understanding that Caleb had already bestowed upon her the barren land, namely, Negeb.⁴⁹ This suggests that Achsah would not have been content with Negeb due to its unsuitability for cultivation or habitation. Moreover, the land of Negeb, given to Achsah by Caleb, is commonly interpreted as a form of "dowry" for her marriage to Othniel.⁵⁰ Thus, Achsah's efforts to expand her dowry depicts her as not only "a shrewd negotiator"⁵¹ but

also as a female who boldly challenges her father's decision.⁵² As Susan E. Haddox observes, Achsah's acquisition of land also facilitates her husband, Othniel's establishment of a secure identity as an Israelite through "the tribal allotment of Judah."⁵³ The threat of barrenness surrounding Achsah appears to be alleviated by the presence of upper springs and lower springs, which have the potential to enhance fertility in the land of Negeb (v. 15b). Nonetheless, Achsah finds herself ironically ensnared in a hierarchical opposition between fecundity and infertility, symbolized by the juxtaposition of a womb and a barren land.

On one hand, Achsah's statement in verse 15a, which refers to the Hebrew word *negeb*, can be literally translated in a territorial sense as "you have given me the land of Negev" (New American Standard Bible) or "the land you have given me is the Negeb" (New Jerusalem Bible). These translations employ double-object constructions, where "the land of Negeb" serves as the direct object and "me" as the indirect object, implying that Achsah is the recipient of the land in the text.⁵⁴ Consequently, one might interpret her statement as a complaint to her father about inheriting the barren land of Negeb. Yet, if the land of Negeb is considered "an accusative of place," Achsah's statement can be translated as "you have set me in the land of Negeb" (New Revised Standard Version).⁵⁵ This translation aligns with the LXX rendering, which states, "you have given me away in the land of the south" (New English Translation of the Septuagint).⁵⁶ Regardless of whether the land of Negeb is interpreted as the direct object or the accusative, it poses a threat to Achsah, symbolizing barrenness and the ensuing challenges of survival.

On the other hand, if Achsah's statement is interpreted in the sense of "a metaphor for dryness or worthlessness,"⁵⁷ it can be figuratively translated as "you have given me away as Negeb-land" (JPS Tanakh).⁵⁸ This figurative translation suggests that Achsah perceived herself as being treated unjustly by her father, much like the barren and unproductive land of Negeb. Additionally, considering a dowry as Achsah's inheritance rather than physical land, this translation implies that she would voice her objections to her father regarding being offered as a dowry and a gift to Othniel. It is noteworthy that both the literal and metaphorical translations portray Achsah as the female who resisted being allocated barren land and being treated as a mere dowry in the patriarchal system.

From another figurative perspective, however, it is possible to consider the land as a metaphor for Achsah's womb in the sense of reproduction.⁵⁹ As

mentioned earlier, verse 14 carries a sexual connotation through verbs such as *bô'* (to come) and *sût* (to incite), even though the intercourse is implied rather than explicitly stated in the text. This sexual implication related to reproduction in verse 14 is further emphasized in the next verse, where Achsah voiced "an angry complaint to her father" about his mistreatment of her, likening herself to the barren land, that is, Negeb.⁶⁰ Expanding on this sexual implication concerning reproduction, one could infer that Achsah might be at risk of bodily barrenness in addition to the land's infertility. This inference finds support in the parallel drawn between a womb (*reḥem*) and the earth (*'ereṣ*) in the book of Proverbs 30:15b-16: "Three things are never satisfied; four never say, "Enough": Sheol, *the barren womb* (*wē'ōṣer rāḥam*), *the earth* (*'ereṣ*) ever thirsty for water, and the fire that never says, "Enough."" (NRSV). In this proverbial saying, the barren womb and the earth are listed as two examples of four insatiable things, akin to the leech that cries, "Give, give" (Prov 30:15a). Although Proverbs 30:16 does not provide a specific reason why the earth constantly thirsts for water, it appears to require continuous watering "to make plants and crops grow."⁶¹ As noted by Bruce K. Waltke, the barren womb is paralleled with the earth in the sense that both exhibit an unquenchable thirst for "seed[s]" and "water."⁶²

The parallel between the barren womb and the land that are never satisfied with seeds and water in Proverbs 30:15b-16 intersects with the metaphorical sense of infertility in Judges 1:15a. This intersection suggests that Achsah may be likened to the barren womb within the patriarchy, forced to bear children in order to survive in her marriage to Othniel, much like the land of Negeb thirsts for water to avoid being abandoned. The Hebrew phrase *gulōt mā'im* (springs of water, v. 15a), which transforms barren land into fertile soil capable of producing seeds, can be interpreted as a euphemism for a blessing that empowers Achsah to bear children for her husband, thereby validating her worth as a woman within society. Seen in this context, Achsah does not outright defy the patriarchy but conforms to the conventional stereotype of a woman valued for her ability to propagate the species through childbirth in the male-dominant system.

The two interpretations of Achsah's statement regarding the land of Negeb give rise to differing perspectives on the outcome of her request. Firstly, if one interprets Achsah's plea as a literal complaint about the arid land or as a figurative protest against Caleb's mistreatment, she ultimately succeeds in achieving her objective -- the acquisition of springs. Ostensibly, by granting Achsah the

upper and lower springs, Caleb reinforces his authority as the patriarch of the household.⁶³ However, the LXX rendition of Judges 1:15b introduces another layer of meaning through wordplay involving the personal name Caleb. Unlike the MT ("Caleb gave her springs in the upper springs and the lower springs"), the LXX includes the Greek phrase *kata tēn kardian aytēs* (according to her desire) in verse 15b. Boling suggests that the *Vorlage* of the LXX likely contained the Hebrew word *kēlibāh* (her desire) instead of *kālēb* (Caleb).⁶⁴ Not only does the LXX elevate Achsah's dominance over her father, but it also undermines Caleb's authority in matters of inheritance. Consequently, the gender binary opposition in the LXX is more explicitly destabilized compared to the MT. Secondly, if one interprets the land as a metaphor for Achsah's womb in her request, she achieves her objective by receiving the blessing that could mitigate the risk of barrenness. Ironically, Achsah is idealized as an exemplary woman who diligently strives to produce abundant descendants despite her significant resistance to the androcentric structure. Therefore, the binary opposition between fertility and barrenness in the gender role is deconstructed in terms of vulnerability and permeability.

5. Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis of Judges 1:11-15, it becomes apparent that the binary oppositions regarding gender in the passage are neither definitively established nor entirely subverted. Upon examining the narrative, it becomes clear that simply applying deconstructive criticism to the text is insufficient in demonstrating alternative interpretations or revealing a complete overturning of hierarchical oppositions. Regarding the gendered separation of subject and object, the characters such as Achsah, Othniel, and Caleb do not firmly occupy one side or the other but instead continuously oscillate between both roles, exacerbated by the ambiguity surrounding the question of "Who incited whom?" within the text. Moreover, the text renders the boundary between fertility and barrenness permeable, depicting Achsah as a woman who boldly challenges patriarchal norms but ultimately succumbs to societal expectations of reproduction. In conclusion, the binary oppositions concerning gender in Judges 1:11-15 are deconstructed, resulting in a porous layer of separation between them.

References

- 1 This paper is a revised version of the presentation delivered at the 6th Han-Hun Theological Forum, held at Honam Theological University and Seminary on April 24, 2024. It was subsequently published in *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies*, 93 (2024): 304-326.
- 2 Judges 1:11-15 is commonly referred to as 'the story of Achsah' or 'the story of Judah's conquest' from a broad perspective. However, I refrain from using such titles incorporating personal names in this paper because they can potentially introduce hierarchical implications regarding the question, "Whose story is it?" or "Who are the subject and the object?" Given that the aim of this paper is to deconstruct binary oppositions related to gender, particularly concerning the subject and object in the text, I deliberately opt for the term 'Judges 1:11-15' to denote the passage.
- 3 Trent C. Butler, *Judges* (Word Biblical Commentary 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 23.
- 4 For instance, Serge Frolov, by examining the parallels between Judges 1:11-15 and Joshua 15:13-19 with a focus on "the theme of leadership," argues that Caleb's role in Judges more distinctly resembles "an act reminiscent of a royal grant." Serge Frolov, *Judges* (The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 6B; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 43-50. Moreover, J. Cornelis de Vos identifies two common features between Joshua 15:13-19 and Judges 1:10-15. He notes that these passages exhibit a significant divergence from their respective "context[s]" and present an intriguing "course of events." J. Cornelis de Vos, "The Caleb-Achsah Episode: Judges 1:10-15", Shelley L. Birdsong, Jacobus Cornelis de Vos, and Hyun Chul Paul Kim(eds.), *Reading Gender in Judges: An Intertextual Approach* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 89. Furthermore, Lawson Stone's analysis of the Hebrew phrase *haqāṭōn mimmennū*, meaning "the one younger than him," in Judges 1:13 compared to its parallel in Joshua 15:17, suggests that the author of Judges may have intentionally lowered the age of the individual who "marri[es] Caleb's daughter." Lawson Stone, *Judges* (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 3; Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 215.
- 5 Tammi J. Schneider, "Achsah, the Raped Pileges, and the Book of Judges", Elizabeth A. McCabe(ed.), *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 45.
- 6 Richard D. Nelson, "What Is Achsah Doing in Judges?", Calvin J. Roetzel and Robert L. Foster(eds.), *The Impartial God: Essays in Biblical Studies in Honor of Jouette M. Bassler* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 21. In the text above, the phrase "they [other female characters] are negatively described" does not imply blame directed at the female characters for their tragedies. Instead, it refers to the portrayal of these characters in the book of Judges through negative events such as human sacrifice, sexual temptation, gang rape, and murder. In relation to the violent incidents involving women in Judges 19-21, Dae-Jun Jeong argues that the passage should be read as a narrative demonstrating that "YHWH is the sole king for the Israelites". Dae-Jun Jeong, "A Coherent Reading of the Violence Incidents in Judges 19-21", *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 90 (2023), 131.
- 7 The MT of Judges 1:14a can be literally translated as follows: "When she came to him, she incited him to ask her father for the field." Thus, the MT of Judges 1:14a brings about a textual ambiguity regarding the unclear object to whom Achsah came and incited. As noted by Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, the phrase 'to incite him' (*wattēsîṭēhû* / and she incited him]) suggests her action in a scenario where "she encounters her husband or father." Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1: A Commentary on Judges 1:1-10:5* (Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 92. Yet,

the textual context of the MT suggests that Achsah would come to her husband, Othniel, and incite him.

- 8 Ibid., 92; Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (The Anchor Bible 6A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 51. While the LXX A (*Codex Alexandrinus*) alters the subject and object regarding the action to incite ('he urged her'), the LXX B (*Codex Vaticanus*) specifies the subject who incites her by adding his name, Gothniel ('Gothniel urged her').
- 9 Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1-12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Yale Bible, Volume 6D; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 146.
- 10 Lillian R. Klein, "Achsah: What Price This Prize?", Athalya Brenner(ed.), *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Second Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 26.
- 11 A. Rebecca Basdeo Hill, "Dismembering Israel: The Downward Spiral of the Abuse of Women in the Book of Judges", *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31 (2022), 202.
- 12 Judith McKinlay, "Meeting Achsah on Achsah's Land", *The Bible and Critical Theory* 5 (2011), 1.
- 13 Joy. A. Schroeder has recently conducted a study on the reception history of Judges 1:11-15, identifying three distinct interpretive approaches. The first approach portrays Achsah as "an obedient wife, or a symbol of the soul at prayer." The second approach criticizes Achsah "for her assertiveness," rebuking and blaming her. The third approach presents Achsah "as a positive example" for women in their own time. Joy A. Schroeder, "The Assertiveness of Achsah: Gender and Intertextuality in the Reception History of Caleb's Daughter", Shelley L. Birdsong, Jacobus Cornelis de Vos, and Hyun Chul Paul Kim(eds.), *Reading Gender in Judges: An Intertextual Approach* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 55.
- 14 Danna N. Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)Razed City of Writing", Gale A. Yee(ed.), *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 115.
- 15 According to the Hebrew lexicons, the personal name, Achsah (*'aḵsā*), derives from the Hebrew word *'eḵes* which means "anklet" or "bangle." In addition, the "Arabic cognate" means "to hobble, of camel." Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 747; Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 824; Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism", 126–131. Taking note of the shared element between the two meanings attributed to Achsah, namely, "anklet" and "to hobble," Fewell proposes that "Achsah's self-determined mobility" would surpass the obstacles associated with her name.
- 16 Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism", 115.
- 17 Jacques Derrida and Christie McDonald, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 86.
- 18 Craig G. Bartholomew, "Deconstruction", Kevin J. Vanhoozer(ed.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 164.
- 19 David W. Odell-Scott, "Deconstruction", A. K. M. Adam(ed.), *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 56.
- 20 Stephen D. Moore, "Deconstructive Criticism", Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore(eds.), *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 99.

- 21 Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism", 119.
- 22 Odell-Scott, "Deconstruction", 56.
- 23 Nelson, "What Is Achsah Doing in Judges?", 12.
- 24 Boling, *Judges*, 50.
- 25 J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 18.
- 26 Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges* 1, 85.
- 27 Butler, *Judges*, 23; Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (The New American Commentary 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 97.
- 28 Schneider, "Achsa, the Raped Pileges, and the Book of Judges", 43.
- 29 Danna N. Fewell, "Judges", Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe(eds.), *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 74.
- 30 Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (The New Cambridge Bible Commentary; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40.
- 31 Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 104.
- 32 Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism", 127.
- 33 Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 41.
- 34 Regarding the textual variants among the MT, the LXX, and the Targum of Judges 1:14, Yonghyun Cho provides a detailed analysis of the three texts, particularly in relation to characterization. Yonghyun Cho, "A Textual-Critical Analysis of Achsa's Story With Focus on the Characterization", *Journal of Biblical Text Research* 47 (2020), 273-278.
- 35 Soggin, *Judges*, 22.
- 36 Ibid., 18; Boling modifies only the subject of the second verb, "when she arrived, he nagged her." Boling, *Judges*, 51.
- 37 Paul G. Mosca, "Who Seduced Whom?: A Note on Joshua 15:18//Judges 1:14", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984), 19.
- 38 Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism", 128-129.
- 39 Pong Dae Im also argues that there is no need to necessarily alter the MT, as the same word is used in both Judges 1:14 and its parallel passage, Joshua 15:18. Pong Dae Im, "A Study on the Settlement of the Southern Tribes and the Fulfillment of the Promise of the Land in Judges 1:9-15", *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 75 (2020), 43.
- 40 Mosca, "Who Seduced Whom?", 21.
- 41 Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 13.
- 42 Schneider, 12-14.
- 43 The BDB denotes the verb *bō'* (to come) as "of bride coming into her husband's house." Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *BDB*, 1054; Köhler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 113.

- 44 Schneider, *Judges*, 12. Given that the verb *bô'* (to come) rarely takes its subject as a woman, Schneider modifies its subject to Othniel.
- 45 Schneider, 14.
- 46 Heidi M. Szpek, "Achsah's Story: A Metaphor for Societal Transition", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 40 (2002): 251.
- 47 The inheritance of Achsah does not result from the fact that Caleb had no male heirs. This point is implicitly bolstered by the statements of 1 Chronicles (2:18, 49; 4:15).
- 48 Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges* 1, 95. To quote the HALOT, the Hebrew word *negeb* means "the arid depression south of the Judean hills, the northern part of which becomes rather unstable after periods of rain." Köhler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 665.
- 49 According to Smith and Bloch-Smith, the Hebrew word *bērākā* literally means "a blessing" but "denotes more specifically, 'a grant, estate'" in a sense of "an inheritance from the family estate or, more likely, a dowry." Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges* 1, 94.
- 50 Joseph Fleishman, "A Daughter's Demand and a Father's Compliance: The Legal Background to Achsah's Claim and Caleb's Agreement", *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 118 (2006), 355; Szpek, "Achsah's Story", 249.
- 51 Nelson, "What Is Achsah Doing in Judges?", 22.
- 52 Schneider, "Achsah, the Raped Pileges, and the Book of Judges", 46.
- 53 Susan E. Haddox, "Bizarro Genesis: An Intertextual Reading of Gender and Identity in Judges", Shelley L. Birdsong, Jacobus Cornelis de Vos, and Hyun Chul Paul Kim(eds.), *Reading Gender in Judges: An Intertextual Approach* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 26.
- 54 Exum, "Feminist Criticism", 127.
- 55 Nelson, "What Is Achsah Doing in Judges?", 19.
- 56 Sasson, *Judges* 1-12, 149.
- 57 Nelson, "What Is Achsah Doing in Judges?", 19.
- 58 Explaining a grammatical feature of the Hebrew word *nētattānī* ('you have given me') namely, the perfect verb with a pronominal suffix, Sasson argues that it offers "the impression of someone doing something to someone else." For this reason, Sasson undergirds the translation of the JPS Tanakh. Sasson, *Judges* 1-12, 149.
- 59 Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 68; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 26.
- 60 Niditch, *Judges*, 41.
- 61 William D. Reyburn, *A Handbook on Proverbs* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 634.
- 62 Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 16-31* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 488.
- 63 In the NRSV, the springs are regarded as the names of certain places, "Upper Gulloth and Lower Gulloth."
- 64 Boling, *Judges*, 57.

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Interpreting Psalm 2

Where Is Theology?

I have found
that in the oldest editions
theological commentary predominates;
in the nineteenth century, historical;
and currently, aesthetic...
Jorge Luis Borges (1984: 9)

ABSTRACT

Jorge Luis Borges has observed that premodern commentaries were theological, modern ones historical and currently, they are aesthetic. Following him, I will demonstrate how Psalm 2 has been interpreted theologically, historically, literarily, and, in addition, canonically. The objective of the study is to see where theology is in the various interpretations and how much each interpretation takes the text of the psalm seriously. An evaluation will conclude the essay.

Introduction

What Borges observed of Dante's *Comedy*, also holds for the Bible. Theological commentary predominated prior to the 19th century. Indeed, apparently, it did not just predominate but was the only known and accepted form of commentary. With the enlightenment gaining ground and finally triumphing in the 19th century, this slowly changed: it was questions of origin and history that occupied researchers. In the 20th century, this changed once again. Starting in the '60s, literary approaches (which Borges calls "aesthetic") were introduced in biblical interpretation, and from the '70s on a plethora of different methods (narrative, canonical, feminist, structuralist, deconstructionist, post-colonial etc.) have emerged.

As for Hungary, biblical scholars tend to be content with examining background questions with historical criticism being as good as the only interpretive approach to the Bible. With the emergence of various other approaches, however, this monopoly seems to be crumbling. Indeed, there is now debate on hermeneutics and what counts as theological interpretation (see Fabiny 2023).

In this lecture, I will discuss four different interpretations of Psalm 2. I will concentrate on how and to what extent they are theological. In defining “theological interpretation”, I take a rather general approach by referring to D.F. Wright’s definition: Theology means “basically an account of, or discourse about, gods or God” (1988: 680). An interpretation can thus be considered theological when it is a discourse about God or issues anything related to God.¹

Theological Interpretations: Luther and Calvin

The Protestant Reformation, following the Renaissance, saw the first attempts at asking historical questions. Still the Reformation solidly remained in the tradition of theological commentary of which Martin Luther and John Calvin were significant representatives.

In his 1519 commentary,² Luther interprets Ps 2 from Acts 4,24-26 as a psalm predicting³ Jesus’ suffering. “The people” are the Jews, “the heathen” (2,1) the Roman soldiers. They “plotted/meditated in vain” to crucify Christ (2,1). By their “vain” endeavor “they make themselves a derision” (44).⁴ V. 2, by speaking of “the Lord” and “his Anointed,” seems to be referring to God the Father and the Son. The bonds in v. 3 are Christ’s commandments for “the justification of the spirit,” the cords for “the mortification of the flesh.” Uncharacteristically Luther declares, “The whole verse then is allegorical” (48).⁵ General literary forms express theological meaning: the *parallelismus membrorum*, called “tautology” by Luther (50), in v. 4 “is a sign of the thing being established” (50), whatever that means. Mount Zion is the church, instituted by the Holy Spirit. V. 7, “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you,’” is a Christological declaration. Luther discusses in what sense Christ was born (see Jn 8,58). V. 9 is about how Christ rules, with the rod being the gospel.

Luther explains difficult phrases and verses by reference to the NT (e.g., 79-80). The overall objective of the psalm is to sustain Christians in their faith and action.

Calvin's 1557 commentary is clearly theological right from the start. The psalm is "a prophecy concerning the future kingdom of Christ" (40). Even though this is a psalm without a heading, Calvin attributes it to David, following medieval theological tradition.⁶

Thus the background of the psalm is David's political struggles caused by internal and external enemies. Since, however, he was chosen and anointed by God, the attacks against him are at the same time against God as well. This is only background, however. The "substance of the type" is that the psalm is a prophecy of Christ (42). The predictions are not to be applied to Christ strictly or allegorically, "but were truly predicted concerning him" (42). Clearly, then, the psalm describes Christ's kingdom, as Acts 4,24 also attests. God rules through his Son, therefore those unwilling to submit to Christ rebel against God; they do so in vain, however. Here is an example of Calvin's interpretation:

although David in these words had a regard to the promise of God, and recalled the attention of himself and others to it, yet, at the same time, he meant to signify that his own reign is holy and inseparably connected with the temple of God. But this applies more appropriately to the kingdom of Christ, which we know to be both spiritual and joined to the priesthood, and this is the principal part of the worship of God. (45)

Calvin goes on to elaborate on the Christological aspects of the psalm's presentation of the Messiah: how Jesus as the eternal Word has always had, and not received, authority and majesty; how his declaration as the Son of God, i.e. the second person of the Trinity, points to his resurrection; how his kingdom is over all nations. His rule strikes terror in his enemies who will not voluntarily submit to his rule.

In 2,10-12, David exhorts his opponents to acknowledge his authority. Christ admonishes his enemies to do the same. In the last sentence, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him," the psalmist declares the results of loyalty to Christ.

Historical Interpretations: Briggs and Craigie

Even though Calvin's approach demonstrates some historical consciousness, genuine historical questions were first raised in the wake of the enlightenment.

Charles Augustus Briggs, a firm historical critic, discusses mainly philological, grammatical and historical questions. However, he briefly addresses the Messianic-Christological aspect of the psalm too. It is a messianic psalm, since it presents the universal rule of a Davidic king even though it was never realized in Israel's history. The NT presents Jesus as the Messiah, who is recognized by God at his baptism, transfiguration and ascension (1906: 13-14).

The Ps. is Messianic because it presents a world-wide dominion of the Son of David, such as was not a historical reality in the time of the poet or in any previous or subsequent time in history, but remains an ideal at the goal of history. Jesus of Nazareth is represented in the NT. as the Son of David and heir of this ideal. (1906: 13)

Peter Craigie's interpretation of Ps. 2 has the heading "A Coronation Psalm" (1983: 62), which indicates the historical setting. Even though the king is God's anointed, *mashiah*, this is originally not a messianic psalm. Still, over the centuries and by NT times it became one for historical and theological reasons: the fall of the Davidic dynasty, the failure of its re-establishment after the exile, and hence the development of the concept of messiah.

Craigie finds the key to understanding the psalm in its purported original setting, the coronation ceremony. After outlining the psalm's fourfold structure he comes to see the psalm as having "a dramatic character" (65). This is apparent when seen from a perspective of the liturgy. Though much is uncertain, "it is possible that the different sections of the psalm were spoken by different persons during the course of the coronation ceremony" (65). Craigie interprets the psalm by describing the dramatic scenario and explains it by reference to the NT in the Explanation. Ps 2 is frequently quoted or alluded to as a messianic psalm: Jesus is seen as God's anointed king whose realm will have no end. Indeed, the psalm is a drama. Craigie uses the words "dramatic/drama" six times in the Form/Structure/Setting and Comment sections and interprets the psalm accordingly. Even though he never applies such phrases in the Explanation part, Jesus's life shows clear parallels. Whereas the coronation in the psalm was a one-day event, Jesus

was declared anointed king during his ministry several times: at his baptism (Mt 3,17), at his transfiguration (Mt 17,5) and with reference to the resurrection (Acts 13,33). Thus, in Craigie's interpretation, the psalm's drama is transposed into the multiact drama of Jesus's life.

Literary Interpretation: van Wieringen and Jacobson

Since the psalm is generally seen as having a specific historical/life setting, it is hard to find purely literary approaches to it. Thus, I have had to cherry-pick commentaries best suited to my purposes.

Archibald van Wieringen (2016) lays out the text of the psalm colon by colon and demonstrates that it is a poem that transforms its readers (6-8). He notices the parallelism of v. 1, "the macro-syntactic signals" of vv. 5 and 10 and some other literary tools (8). He mentions the traditional view of it being an enthronement psalm (8-9).

"A first step to understanding what is happening in this poem is to identify the direct speeches," van Wieringen claims (9). To do so he identifies the speaker and the addressee and finds four direct speeches (vv. 3, 6, 7-9, 10-12). Next, under "The Development of Events in the Poem," van Wieringen outlines the psalm's story. It is not much different from the traditional reading except on one count. In his understanding, the kings have already been taken prisoners for rebellion, and that is why they are in chains (see v. 3). They appear before Yahweh and his anointed (v. 2) and are being mocked and rebuked by Yahweh for their rebellion. Van Wieringen claims that the "kings" and the "rulers/dignitaries" (v. 2) are different.⁷ The dignitaries have already submitted to Yahweh's rule. It is they who ask the kings to submit too (vv. 10-12). Thus the psalm's goal is the transformation of the kings and the reader, instead of initiation (enthronement) as in conventional interpretations.

Rolf Jacobson also analyzes the psalm from a literary perspective (2014: 65-66). Agreeing with the scholarly consensus that Ps 2 is a royal psalm, Jacobson delineates its structure:

- A The "kings of the earth" rebel, 1-3
- B The divine king enthroned in heaven, 4-6
- B' The Davidic king enthroned on Zion, 7-9
- A' The "kings" are warned, 10-12

A, B and B' each end with a quotation focusing on different characters and implying different locations.

In addition to the psalm's obvious theme, kingship, speech also plays a significant role, as we see in the number of speech related verbs. The kings rebel by using speech and God responds to them with speech. Similarly, the Davidic king answers the challenge with speech and, in the end, the kings are speechless before God's power.

Finally, Jacobson observes a secondary structure that complements the palistrophe. V. 1 introduces a question, this is followed in vv. 2-9 by an indicative description, and the psalm concludes with imperative admonitions in vv. 10-12. This secondary structure related to God's reign implies theological emphases.

These literary-aesthetic observations may delight the critic. However, Jacobson is not content to sit back with his observations. He discusses the psalm's canonical and theological features and content as well.

Canonical Interpretations: Jacobson and Collett

Canonical criticism emerged in the 70s, a method more susceptible to theology. Its rise suggests a dissatisfaction with both the historical and literary approaches void of theology. It does not ignore the tenets of historical criticism, but is mainly literary and theological in method and outlook. Let us see two canonical approaches to the psalm.

Jacobson sets out to establish the psalm's canonical function, which is – along with Ps 1 – to introduce the Psalter (2014: 65). In Pss 1–2, the Psalter's main themes are introduced: Torah obedience and God's messiah.

Jacobson discusses two questions, closely related to the psalm's import: 1) Who reigns? 2) Who is God's son?⁸ As for question 1, the psalm states that only God's power is absolute and human authority is relative. Tyrants rule as they see fit but God's reign compels everyone to acknowledge him.

Regarding the second question, in its original setting as a coronation psalm, the king was seen as God's anointed and son. But long after the Jerusalemite kings' failure to live up to royal ideals and after the monarchy's collapse, in its current canonical setting in the book, Ps 2, in accord with OT prophecies, looks forward to a future, ideal Davidic king. The NT recognizes Jesus as this ideal king and Messiah and summons all rulers to submit to him (70-71).

Clearly, with canonical criticism, authorial intention has become more complex than in conventional historical criticism. It cannot be restricted to the intention of the psalm's original/first author but must include the intention of the editors of the Psalter. In other words, the context of the Psalter becomes significant. The significance of a book's wider context has been recognized in biblical studies in the last 60-70 years, in Psalms studies, however, it has gained ground only since Gerald Wilson's pioneering study in 1985.⁹

Don Collett discusses Pss 1–2 as the introduction to the Psalter. By following Ps 1, one embraces wisdom and avoids God's judgment. In Ps 2, wisdom is further specified: it is the recognition of God's anointed Messiah. This is what Ps 2,11-12 enjoins, "Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Happy are all who take refuge in him." "Happy" in Ps 1,1 and Ps 2,12 forms an inclusio. Torah obedience (Ps 1) and submitting to God's anointed (Ps 2) are linked as the source of God's blessing and protection (2014: 392). This is how the NT appropriates Ps 2. The psalm was only partially fulfilled by David, Christ consummated it in an eternal way. That is why rulers should acknowledge the Messiah's rule (393).

Evaluation

Over the last five centuries, biblical interpretation has gone through an enormous transformation. The concerns of interpretation in the Reformation era are very different to those of the modern or the postmodern one. We have briefly reviewed theological, historical, literary and canonical interpretations of Ps 2.¹⁰ Where is its theology and how are we to "extract" it? These are no easy questions.

Because of the divine kingship concept, any interpretation of Ps 2 is bound to be in some way theological. The theological interpretation represented by the Reformers worked in the pre-modern era. It started to crumble in the modern one which raised historical questions that the pre-modern one had not. Even though most Christians would concur with Luther's and Calvin's theological conclusions such as the Christological claims or Christ's eternal kingdom, apart from die-hard fundamentalists, no contemporary theologian would interpret the psalm in their way.¹¹ Luther and Calvin see the OT as a witness to Christ in general and

this psalm a prophecy in particular. Therefore, theological relevance is a rather straightforward correspondence between the experience of the psalmist and the church's confession of Christ. As in mountaineering, however, so in theology: it is not the destination that counts but the journey.

On a few occasions, Calvin discusses issues of semantics and literary devices, his main concern, however, lies with theology. This is demonstrated by numerous NT references, fifteen, in total. He is concerned not only with right, Christological interpretation and doctrine but is aware of pastoral aspects and keenly and regularly exhorts his readers. For the Reformers, it is theology in the form of right doctrine and pastoral exhortation that authorizes interpretation.

In the modern era, this changed. It is setting and authorial intention that became the foci of interpretation. Briggs's commentary nicely demonstrates this. For him, linguistic and historical issues are of utmost importance, defining the psalm's meaning.

Significantly, Briggs comes to his Christological interpretation right at the beginning of his commentary of the psalm (1906: 13).¹² That is, before starting his analysis of the psalm he suggests his theological interpretation which is in accordance with conventional Christian doctrine but not informed by analysis, so creating a divide between analysis and theological import.¹³

As for the other historical approach, Craigie's interpretation is to be commended for connecting theology with analysis. It seems quite probable that, as he claims, Ps 2 was originally a coronation psalm from the early monarchy. The dramatic reading he proposes provides the psalm with a plausible historical setting and makes it come alive. In this way, Craigie avoids Briggs's hasty claim of congruence between the psalm and the NT. One should be careful not to create incongruities between the intended meaning of the psalm construed from its original setting and message on the one hand and its theological message construed from Christian/NT use, on the other. In other words, authorial intention and theological relevance should be closely related to each other. Craigie does this.

Van Wieringen's own contribution to the psalm's interpretation may not convince everyone but is a good case of a new method being applied. Jacobson helpfully outlines the psalm's palistrophe, main actors and speeches. These elements convey the psalm's rhetorical emphases. His analysis seems to establish more obvious rhetorical features to help readers recognize the psalm's theological intention.

Pss 1–2 are the introduction to the Psalms. Thus, the canonical approach reads the psalm in its context of the Psalter. Jacobson's two questions, *Who reigns?* and, *Who is God's son?* are absolutely theological. Collett reads Ps 2 in relation to Ps 1. In Ps 1 one acquires wisdom. Wisdom becomes more specific in Ps 2 as do God's blessing and protection, referred to in Ps 1,1-3. These analyses and observations by canonical critics are fraught with theology.

Conclusion

Borges's dictum seems to be an apt summary of three eras of interpretation. I have added a fourth approach: canonical. These approaches live on in spirituality, sermons, popular and academic theologies. The concerns of each significantly differ but each is legitimate. My question in this essay was to what extent an approach is theological. I tried to demonstrate that 1) they differ; some like Briggs affirm conventional theological theses but fail to substantiate their theological stance by analysis; 2) those more theological in approach like the Reformers have become outdated: without considering something resembling authorial intention they come close to regarding Scriptures as a collection of proof texts;¹⁴ 3) historical approaches and literary interpretations may provide helpful information but sometimes focus on tiny details; 4) canonical interpretations are prone to be theological and as such are a welcome addition to our exegetical repertoire.

Each approach has its own strength and should be used accordingly. Some approaches produce meagre or questionable theological results and seem to be content with observations and interpretations with no theological relevance. Briggs is a foremost example, but one wonders if van Wieringen's novel interpretation is a good alternative to the conventional interpretation.

So, where is theology? For the Reformers, it is in the psalm's prophetic character predicting Christ's suffering and rule – the OT psalm prophesies Christ. For them, the psalm's theology is available by importing NT concepts into it. Not viewing the psalm as a prophecy, Briggs differs from the Reformers; still, he sees Jesus as the Messianic fulfillment of the psalm's theme. For Briggs, theology, apart from some phrases, is unrelated to the psalm and is to be found in the historical event visible in Christ as the Son of God. For Craigie, it is the psalm's background and

drama adapted in the NT that is the key to its theological reading. Whereas van Wieringen finds the psalm's message or import in the text, i.e., what impact the psalm's text makes on the reader, both Jacobson and Collett study the wider canonical context.

Theology has ever had its *ancillae*, "handmaids". When it comes to biblical interpretation in the context of the church, however, the interpreter should not settle for less than theology. Much as the results of historical, comparative religion, archaeological, linguistic or literary research have contributed to a better understanding of Scripture, mere results are not for church consumption – the church has as its diet theology, even if this diet is prepared by using a historical, literary etc. recipe.

As I mentioned, in Hungary there is recently a discussion about theological interpretation. If my argument has been cogent, biblical scholars in Hungary should have a more nuanced theological focus than they usually do.

References

- 1 For questions of textual criticism and the like consult the commentaries.
- 2 On Luther's interpretation of the psalm and how it developed over time, see Paul 2015.
- 3 Luther refers to the psalmist's "prophetic mouth" (43). In the NT, Acts 4,25-26; 13,33; Rm 1,4; Hebr 1,5; Rev 2,27; 12,5; 19,15 are clear references to Ps 2. There are, however, oblique ones as well. Indeed, it is not possible to count all the NT allusions to the psalm (Ellison 2021: 542).
- 4 Bible quotes are from the NRSV.
- 5 This is not the only instance for Luther to interpret motifs of the psalm allegorically. Interpreting v. 6, he claims that the hill's "declivity and acclivity, may signify the internal warfare of the people of Christ between the flesh and spirit: the flesh tendeth downward to the north the spirit upward to the south. Or, it may represent those two kinds of life, the working and the viewing" (59). Later on too, he often resorts to allegorical interpretations.
- 6 By attributing it to David, Calvin follows tradition, but he may display a naïve awareness of the need of authorial intention too. In the first book of Psalms (Pss. 1-41), only Pss. 1, 2, 10 and 33 do not have a heading (MT). In the LXX, Pss. 9 and 10 constitute one psalm.
- 7 Hebrew *parallelismus membrorum* seems to undermine van Wieringen's position as does the parallel use of "kings" and "rulers" in v. 10, left unexplained by him.
- 8 Ellison (2021: 537) states, "Our concern is in identifying the agent of YHWH. Is he simply a king? Is he merely a Davidic king? Or, is he someone superior?"
- 9 See his study of 1985; see also his 1992.
- 10 Perdue (1994: 19) claims of OT theology of the last 100 years, "The focus, content, and method for doing Old Testament theology derive in the main from new and developing methodologies for biblical study." This holds for biblical interpretation as well.
- 11 In the church, preachers tend to resort to this sort of interpretation though. One of the reasons may be the apparently effortless route from text to one's favorite theology.
- 12 His commentary starts on p. 11 and ends on p. 24.
- 13 In my experience, theologians in Hungary sometimes use Briggs's "approach" by making a divide between historical analysis and background of the text on the one hand and stating conventional theological claims, on the other. The problem arises when there is no bridge between the two.
- 14 As a rule of thumb, a reading that did not make sense to the first audience/author is no valid interpretation. In the case of Ps 2, "first audience" refers, first, to the posited 10-9th century audience but, second and more importantly, to the readers of the canon of the Psalter.

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The History and Present of Devotional Training at Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Abstract

The devotional training program at the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) exemplifies the Reformed synthesis of piety and theological education. Rooted in the Geneva Academy tradition and shaped by Korean Presbyterian spirituality, this formation process integrates historical practices—such as early morning prayer, Bible conferences, and discipleship groups—with contemporary approaches like silent retreats and personal spiritual direction. Since 1998, PUTS has institutionalized a comprehensive program for first-year seminarians that combines residential community life, weekday spiritual routines, and weekend retreats. These practices cultivate both individual spiritual maturity and communal responsibility. Emphasizing prayer, Scripture engagement, self-reflection, and accountability, the program balances classical Reformed devotion with modern Korean society's evolving spiritual needs of ministerial candidates. It reflects the seminary's commitment to producing pastors who are theologically grounded and spiritually formed through habits of devotion. This model of formation, embracing both continuity and contextual adaptation, reaffirms the centrality of piety as an indispensable dimension of theological education and pastoral vocation at PUTS.

I. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of theological education, the pursuit of a harmonious synthesis of piety and knowledge remains of paramount importance. This aspiration finds its expression at the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS), where the motto “*Pietas et Scientia*” (Piety and Knowledge) serves as a beacon guiding the development of students preparing for ministerial service.¹ Grounded in the theological insights of John Calvin, PUTS endeavors to embody the spirit of a “Calvin Academy”² in Korea, drawing inspiration from the educational ideals of the historic Geneva Academy, where piety and knowledge were upheld as the twin pillars of learning.

The Geneva Academy, established in 1559 in Geneva, Switzerland, under the leadership of John Calvin and Theodore Beza, prominent figures of the Reformation, aimed primarily to train ministers and leaders for the burgeoning Reformed churches across Europe. Its educational philosophy emphasized the integration of piety and knowledge, reflecting the seamless union of religious devotion and intellectual inquiry. This approach underscored the cultivation of both spiritual and academic virtues as essential components of holistic education.³

The motto of PUTS, “*Pietas et Scientia*”, encapsulates the ethos of the Geneva Academy and signifies its commitment to nurturing students who are both intellectually proficient and spiritually dedicated. The educational ideals of PUTS are encapsulated in its mission: “the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the realization of the Kingdom of God.” Its overarching educational objective is “to develop citizens of the Kingdom of God and to train leaders and ministers to serve the Church, society, and the nation.” These goals are operationalized through three primary pursuits: “training in godliness, cultivation of scholarship, and the practice of the gospel.”

In alignment with these principles, PUTS has implemented various formative programs centered on godliness. This paper will specifically explore how PUTS educates seminarians to become faithful pastors, with a particular focus on the dimension of “devotional formation” (*pietas*).

II. General Features of Devotional Formation in the Korean Church

To examine the history of devotional education at PUTS, it is essential first to outline the historical development of devotional education within the Korean Presbyterian Church. This approach is necessary not only because PUTS is a theological institution of the Korean Presbyterian Church but also because the devotional training at PUTS aligns closely with the broader devotional practices of the denomination.

The devotional training of the Korean Presbyterian Church inherits and perpetuates the tradition of the Reformed Church. In the Reformed tradition, devotional formation constitutes the core of spiritual development, emphasizing a profound and personal relationship with God fostered through disciplined practices and communal worship. This tradition prioritizes a holistic approach to spiritual growth, integrating prayer, engagement with Scripture, and reflective meditation as foundational elements.

Prayer is central to devotional formation, functioning as a vital means of cultivating a direct and regular communion with God. It involves expressions of gratitude, petitions for guidance, intercessions for others, and moments of spiritual surrender. Alongside prayer, a rigorous engagement with Scripture is emphasized, recognizing the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. Believers are encouraged to immerse themselves in the Scriptures through consistent reading, in-depth study, and meditative reflection, aiming to grasp its teachings and apply them in daily life.

Additionally, devotional training in the Reformed tradition underscores the significance of discipleship and active participation in the life of the church. This includes fostering spiritual accountability, mentorship, and engagement in corporate worship and service. The Korean Presbyterian Church has fully embraced and integrated these principles, continuing the devotional practices of the Reformed tradition in its theological education and congregational life.

By understanding the historical context and devotional framework of the Korean Presbyterian Church, one can better appreciate the continuity and intentionality behind the devotional education offered at PUTS, which reflects the same theological and spiritual priorities.

1. God's Word Training: Bible Conference and Quiet Time Movement

In the early missionary history of the Korean church, emphasis was placed on Bible translation and social services, such as medical care and education.⁴ However, in the realm of faith training, core practices like Bible study, prayer, and evangelism became central to shaping church members' Christian identities. From its inception, the Korean church prioritized Bible study as a cornerstone of faith formation, implementing a systematic approach to baptismal preparation, regular and ad hoc Sunday Bible studies, and the establishment of Bible institutes for leadership training. Among these efforts, the Sakyonghoe (Bible Conference) emerged as a pivotal tool for religious education and leadership development.

The origins of Sakyonghoe can be traced back to 1888 when Horace Underwood recognized the need for intensive religious training in Korea. He initiated the first session by training eight individuals at his home in Seoul for a month.⁵ By 1890, a second group of seven was trained, leading to the institutionalization of Sakyonghoe as a core missionary strategy. Sakyonghoe became an intensive training program spanning five days to two weeks, systematically teaching the Bible and doctrine to selected men for the purpose of developing Korean leaders.⁶

Initially held at central locations, Sakyonghoe evolved in 1894 into a decentralized format, expanding its reach to regional communities. This shift democratized access to training, allowing local congregations to organize one or two conferences annually, often in collaboration with neighboring communities.⁷ By the time provincial Sakyonghoe were established, attendance had grown significantly, with some gatherings attracting 500 to 1,000 participants, and larger events drawing 1,000 to 2,000 attendees.⁸

Leadership development was a consistent focus of Sakyonghoe. Talented individuals identified during these conferences were often sent to seminaries for theological training or called to serve in churches. Many prominent pastors, elders, and teachers emerged from these programs, which also contributed to producing societal leaders beyond the church. Sessions typically included Bible study in the morning, evangelism in the afternoon, and revival meetings in the evening, alongside training in Bible interpretation, worship leadership, church administration, Sunday school, and hymn study.⁹ Although the primary aim of Sakyonghoe was faith training through Bible study, its broader impact

was transformative, inspiring fervent evangelism and fostering church planting through personal and community outreach.¹⁰

The devotional landscape of the Korean church experienced significant evolution during the 20th century. In the 1960s and 70s, large Bible reading events and revival meetings dominated, reflecting a collective focus on church growth. However, the 1980s saw a paradigm shift influenced by growing societal interest in individualism, psychology, and the “self.” Spiritual training became increasingly personalized, epitomized by the rise of the Quiet Time (QT) movement, which emphasized individual meditation on Scripture as a means of personal spiritual growth.

The QT movement, often seen as a Protestant adaptation of the monastic *lectio divina*, emphasized application—integrating insights gained from Scripture into daily life.¹¹ A typical QT sequence includes prayer, Bible reading, meditation, application, and recitation, fostering both reflective and practical engagement with the Word. This focus on personal communion with God marked a departure from traditional collective approaches to religious instruction, such as congregational preaching or scholarly Bible study, to a more intimate, experiential spirituality.

The QT movement in Korea began in 1972 with the establishment of *Scripture Union Korea* by *Scripture Union International*, an organization founded in England in 1867 to promote Bible reading among children. Scripture Union Korea introduced the QT methodology through its *Daily Bible* publication, which provided structured guides for regular Bible study. By the mid-1980s, this movement gained momentum with the publication of devotional materials like *The Bread of Life* (later renamed *Living Life*) by Duranno Publishing House, which further popularized QT practices.

Missionary organizations such as the Jesus Evangelistic Society and educational institutions like Duranno Seowon played significant roles in advancing QT-centered devotional training. The movement’s emphasis on personal communion with God resonated deeply with societal trends prioritizing individual spiritual experience over doctrinal orthodoxy. By shifting the focus from institutional to personal spirituality, QT became a hallmark of the Korean church’s evolving devotional practices, representing a profound desire for individual spiritual growth and intimate encounters with the divine.

2. *Prayer Disciplines*

One of the oldest and most enduring prayer practices in the Korean church is Early Morning Prayer (*Saebyeok Gido*), a communal gathering held daily, often before sunrise, for prayer and worship. This practice is deeply ingrained in Korean Christian life, reflecting a commitment to begin the day by seeking spiritual guidance and strength. Early Morning Prayer typically includes hymn singing, Scripture reading, and communal prayer, providing believers with an opportunity to deepen their relationship with God and set a foundation of faith and devotion for the day ahead.

The origins of Early Morning Prayer in the Korean church have been a subject of debate. The first recorded instance was reported by Missionary Daniel Lyman Gifford at a Presbyterian Missionary Conference. During the winter of 1892 (November 28 to December 25), 16–18 men attending a month-long winter theology course in Seoul gathered daily at dawn to pray together.¹² Another pivotal figure in the development of this practice was Rev. Gil Sun-joo. In 1896, he began incorporating early morning prayer into his spiritual discipline.¹³ By the summer of 1909, he and Park Chi-rok initiated regular dawn prayer meetings at Jangdaehyeon Church in Pyongyang. These meetings initially involved just the two of them but later grew into gatherings of 400–500 participants, marking a significant milestone in the institutionalization of Early Morning Prayer in Korean Christianity. Rev. Gil's dedication to this practice profoundly influenced its adoption and popularization across Korean churches.¹⁴

The 1970s and 1980s saw significant changes in the prayer practices of the Korean church, influenced by the rise of the Spirit of Prophecy movement and an increased emphasis on petitionary prayer for personal problem-solving. Practices such as fasting prayer, vigil prayer, and prayers involving resolutions or vows became widespread in churches and prayer centers. However, these developments also drew criticism for fostering a personalized, sometimes emotionalized, approach to prayer that focused heavily on immediate outcomes.¹⁵

During this period, vocal prayer became a hallmark of Korean Christian spirituality. Vocal prayer involves individuals or groups praying aloud during worship services or prayer meetings. This practice, deeply rooted in the communal and expressive nature of Korean Christianity, often includes praise, confession, intercession, and gratitude. While vocal prayer has been central to the spiritual

life of Korean Christians, it has also been critiqued for overshadowing other forms of prayer, such as meditative and silent prayer.

Since the 2000s, there has been a growing interest in contemplative prayer practices within the Korean church. This shift aligns with broader societal trends emphasizing silence, meditation, and inner exploration. Many pastors and congregants have begun to embrace silent prayer, prayer as conversation, and prayer of communion with God, moving beyond vocal expressions to incorporate more reflective and introspective forms of prayer. These practices emphasize a quieter, more intimate relationship with God, focusing on listening and being present in the divine presence.

This evolution from communal vocal prayer to contemplative practices reflects the Korean church's ongoing exploration of diverse ways to nurture spiritual growth. Early Morning Prayer continues to be a vital tradition, but its integration with newer forms of meditative prayer underscores the dynamic nature of Korean Christianity's prayer life.¹⁶

3. Discipleship: Small Group Spiritual Training

The tradition of small groups in Korean churches finds its origins in the class meeting, a structured gathering of believers aimed at fostering spiritual fellowship, mutual support, and growth in faith. These small groups typically involve regular meetings where members share their spiritual journeys, study the Bible, pray together, and encourage one another in their walk with God. The concept of the class meeting in Korean churches began in 1888 within the Methodist Church, under the leadership of missionary Appenzeller's wife, Mrs. Scranton. She initially organized evening meetings for women in her home, focusing on Bible study and spiritual nurturing. By February 1889, these gatherings evolved into formal class meetings, providing a structured format for ongoing fellowship and discipleship.¹⁷

The Presbyterian Church developed a parallel system through its women's evangelistic societies, established regionally. These societies gradually transformed into district societies, incorporating small class meetings held on Wednesdays and Fridays. While these class meetings initially focused on evangelistic outreach and spiritual growth among women, they laid the

groundwork for broader adoption of small group dynamics within the Korean church.¹⁸

Distinct from traditional class meetings, discipleship small groups are a focused process of faith formation with a clear time frame and specific objectives. Rather than fostering continuous relationships, small discipleship groups emphasize structured mentoring, where trained individuals disciple others to maturity in faith. The emergence of discipleship small groups in the Korean church dates back to the 1970s, originating primarily outside the church through missionary organizations. These groups gained traction within church settings in the 1980s, becoming a formal part of faith formation strategies.¹⁹

The primary aim of discipleship training, both within missionary organizations and local churches, has been to cultivate spiritually healthy Christians. However, a secondary yet critical purpose is the development of leaders. Through small group interactions, potential leaders are identified and provided with higher-level training, equipping them to take on leadership roles in various ministries and organizations. Small groups, whether class meetings or discipleship-focused gatherings, have significantly contributed to leadership development in Korean churches. By fostering close-knit environments for spiritual growth and accountability, these groups serve as platforms for recognizing and nurturing leadership potential. Individuals who demonstrate spiritual maturity, commitment, and aptitude are often encouraged to advance into roles such as ministry leaders, elders, or other organizational positions.

III. History and Present of PUTS' Devotional Training

1. History

Until the 1980s, Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) emphasized devotional training primarily through worship and early morning prayer. Special gatherings such as lectures and the Sakyonghoe Bible conference were integral to fostering piety among students. These methods reflected similar practices in Korean churches, where worship services and congregational prayer meetings formed the foundation of devotional training.

During this period, the seminary curriculum prioritized theoretical education—focusing on Bible studies and theological disciplines—over practical and devotional training. Ministry practice was emphasized in church settings, leading to a dichotomy between academic learning at the seminary and spiritual practice within the church. Students were expected to engage in personal devotional activities such as Bible reading and Bible recitation as a means of cultivating piety outside the academic environment.

By the late 1970s, the need for integrating devotional training into seminary education began to draw attention. In 1979, Professor Jung-woon Seo articulated the importance of devotional training for pastoral candidates, highlighting the unique role seminaries play in shaping both the academic and spiritual lives of future ministers. He asserted that seminaries must go beyond fostering intellectual growth to intentionally cultivate a devout atmosphere for students.

Seo emphasized the symbiotic relationship between academics and godly education, arguing that a robust sense of calling enables students to engage deeply in scholarly pursuits. In his words: “seminaries that focus on training ministers should pay special attention and effort to cultivating the devotion of students in addition to creating a devout atmosphere.”²⁰ His insights underscored the necessity of balancing theological education with spiritual formation, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates academic rigor with the cultivation of personal devotion.²¹ Seo’s call for a more integrated approach to theological education has significant implications for seminary training. It challenges institutions like PUTS to reimagine their curricula, ensuring that academic excellence and spiritual formation are not treated as separate endeavors but as complementary aspects of pastoral preparation. By fostering both theological understanding and personal piety, seminaries can better equip future ministers to meet the spiritual and intellectual demands of their vocation:

1. **Develop Fundamental Qualities for Ministry:** Students must graduate with foundational qualities that prepare them to adapt to all aspects of ministerial life. Among these, a strong basis in piety is particularly essential, as it underpins spiritual resilience and effective pastoral work.
2. **Understand Piety as an Inward, Personal Spirituality:** Piety is fundamentally an inward and personal spiritual quality. It reflects a deep, personal relationship with God and serves as the bedrock of a minister’s spiritual life and pastoral vocation.

3. Foster a Strong Sense of Vocation: A seminarian's journey should be guided by a keen sense of calling or vocation. This sense of divine purpose inspires dedication to both personal spiritual growth and service to others.
4. Cultivate Piety Through Devotional Formation: Since piety is a matter of spiritual strength, it requires intentional cultivation through disciplined practices. Devotional formation provides the structure and focus necessary to nurture spiritual growth.
5. Prioritize Prayer in Devotional Practices: Prayer is the cornerstone of devotional formation. It encompasses personal and group prayer, incorporating elements such as: Singing hymns and worship songs, Meditative prayer, Personal prayer, Intercessory prayer. Other beneficial practices include participation in devotional meetings (e.g., dawn prayer meetings), reading devotional literature, engaging in Bible reading, and practicing spiritual disciplines such as fasting.
6. Utilize Effective Discipleship Methods: The effective application of discipleship training is instrumental in guiding and forming individuals. Discipleship provides a structured approach to mentoring and spiritual development, enabling seminarians to grow in both faith and practice.

With this in mind, PUTS has introduced a <**Godly Life Evaluation System**> for all students since the 1979 academic year. As a result of these concerns, the current form of devotional training was organized in **1998 as a training for first-year seminary students.**

2. Devotional Training from 1998 to the Present

The current structure of devotional training for first-year seminarians at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) was formally introduced in the first semester of 1998. Its development was spearheaded by Professor Hae-Ryong Yoo, who began preparing for this systematic program in 1997 by conducting preliminary training with dormitory students. Appointed as the professor in charge of devotional training and the director of the dormitory in 1997, Prof. Yoo implemented several foundational activities to cultivate a disciplined spiritual environment:

1. Nightly Access Control: Ensuring accountability within the dormitory.
2. Devotional Training for Leadership: Training fraternity and sorority officers in spiritual practices.
3. Dawn Prayers: Daily early morning prayer gatherings for spiritual growth.
4. Intensive Leadership Training: Conducted over five days and six nights during summer and winter vacations to prepare dormitory leaders.

In 1998, the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) launched a comprehensive and systematic piety training program for first-year seminarians, designed to cultivate spiritual maturity and holistic spiritual development. The structure of the program consists of weekday and weekend training components, each emphasizing various aspects of spiritual formation.

The weekday training focuses on communal living and small-group fellowship. Students reside in four-person dormitory rooms, fostering an environment that harmonizes individual spiritual growth with the cultivation of community spirituality. Through shared meals, prayer, and reflective practices, students develop personal discipline and mutual accountability, strengthening both their individual faith and their ability to live in fellowship with others.

The weekend training takes place at Eunseong Monastery, the seminary's piety training center. Initially conducted over three days and three nights (Friday to Monday), the retreats were later adjusted to two days and three nights (Thursday to Saturday) to accommodate concerns about Sunday ministry commitments. These retreats include periods of silent reflection, where students contemplate their life stories in the light of Scripture, and spiritual guidance, where facilitators provide personalized direction to help students deepen their understanding of their spiritual journeys. This combination of weekday and weekend activities creates a balanced approach, integrating individual reflection with community-building experiences.

The purpose of the devotional training program is to cultivate spiritual maturity and piety in seminarians by integrating disciplined practices into their daily lives. Its goals include the development of spiritual discipline through structured practices, the harmonization of individual and communal growth, the fostering of self-reflection and self-awareness through engagement with Scripture, and the preparation of students for ministry by equipping them with the spiritual resilience necessary for pastoral life.

The methods of formation employed in the program are diverse and impactful. They include small-group fellowship, where students interact closely to build accountability and community; daily spiritual practices, such as prayer, Scripture reading, and shared reflections integrated into dormitory life; guided retreats, offering structured periods of silence, Scripture meditation, and spiritual direction; and leadership development, through intensive training programs aimed at preparing student leaders to manage dormitory life and foster community spirit effectively.

This framework provides first-year seminarians with a robust foundation in piety, preparing them to meet the spiritual and communal demands of pastoral ministry. Through its structured and balanced approach, the program equips students to grow in their personal faith while fostering the relational and spiritual skills necessary for an effective ministry.

The meaning and purpose, goals and content, and methods of devotional formation can be described in detail as follows:²²

1. Devotional formation aims to cultivate holistic spirituality that fosters the “wholeness” of the individual and shapes their discipleship in Jesus Christ. It seeks to harmonize personal and community spirituality, balance intellect and emotion, integrate the inner and outer life, and align prayer and action. This process of personal and communal formation strives to make spirituality both internalized and habitual. In alignment with the seminary’s educational mission of “training ministers for the service of the church and the kingdom of God,” devotional formation emphasizes the cultivation of character and the development of a life of discipleship. By reinforcing the candidate’s identity and calling as a (Presbyterian) minister, devotional formation seeks to instill a deep commitment to the discipleship that forms the foundation of ministerial life.
2. Action Plan for Devotional Formation
 - The devotional training program was established to assist first-year seminary students in achieving spiritual maturity and personal growth as pastors. This was accomplished through a harmonious blend of individual and community training, facilitated by mandatory residence in a designated residential center. While the majority of students participated in dormitory-based training, alternative programs were

arranged for those requiring different accommodations, ensuring inclusivity in the formation process.

- The devotional training program emphasized meditation on the Word, prayer, and self-reflection, encouraging students to embrace these practices as essential tools for their future roles as spiritual leaders guiding their congregations. While first-year devotional training was a mandatory course, it remained an optional component of the seminary's curriculum for second- and third-year students, allowing for continued engagement with these formative practices throughout their academic journey.

3. Contents of Devotional Formation

- Morning Prayer: Participate in the school's morning prayer.
- Cleaning: As a service project, students clean the school grounds after morning prayer on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- Community Meeting: The whole community gathers on Tuesday evenings at 9:00 p.m. to worship together and provide guidance for community life.
- Room Worship: Each night from 10:30-11:00 p.m., students who live together in the dorms have small group meetings. At first, they read devotionals together and reflected on their spiritual lives, but now each room is autonomous in worship, prayer, reflection, and sharing. In addition, in the early days, for female students, one second- or third-year seminary senior and three interns lived together in each room, and the senior played a role in leading the spiritual formation, but now only first year students live in the dormitory.
- Restricted access to the dormitory: All activities after 10:30 p.m. are restricted to the dormitory.
- Silent practice: Each Monday through Thursday night, students are required to remain silent from 11:00 p.m. until the 6:00 a.m. dawn service the following morning.
- Self-Check List: Reflect on your daily spirituality and life and record it on a self-check list.
- Weekend Devotional Training: A modern method of spiritual direction in which students reflect on their lives in light of the Word, pray, and receive personal spiritual direction. It is taught one-on-one by spiritual

direction specialists (including professors) with training and years of teaching experience.

- **Alternative Formation:** For married women and those in exceptional circumstances who cannot live in a residence hall, the program includes daily morning prayer and devotions, 36 hours of service, and one morning devotional meeting per week.

3. Reflection on the Devotional Training of PUTS

The Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) devotional training program, introduced in 1998, is designed to nurture the spiritual maturity and personal development of first-year seminary students through a comprehensive and holistic approach to spiritual formation. Unlike traditional intellectual or deductive methods, this program adopts an inductive approach, integrating the lived experiences of students with prayer and engagement with the Word of God. The program aims to create sacred spaces and times where participants can personally encounter God, respond to His guidance, and embody His teachings in their daily lives.

The program sets out four key goals that guide its structure and implementation. First, it seeks to foster community living, encouraging students to internalize regular habits and build meaningful relationships within a shared living environment. Second, it emphasizes a disciplined life of prayer, helping students to engage in self-reflection, achieve inner maturity, and deepen their relationship with God. Third, the program incorporates practical engagement through regular volunteer service, enabling students to live out their faith in actionable ways that benefit the community. Fourth, it aims to instill a balanced spiritual life that integrates active service and meditative reflection, teaching students to harmonize work and prayer in their personal and ministerial lives.

The content of the program is thoughtfully designed to achieve these objectives, including a variety of activities such as dormitory access control, early morning and evening devotional services, community meetings, three-day and two-night weekend retreats, practices of silence and reflection, volunteer service, and self-assessment tools like checklists. These activities are supplemented by optional spirituality classes, which allow students to further deepen their spiritual formation throughout their seminary years.

At its core, the PUTS devotional training program seeks to balance individual and communal formation, integrating inner spiritual growth with outward expressions of service and fellowship. It emphasizes the internalization of spiritual habits, the cultivation of prayerful maturity, and the development of healthy relationships with God and others. This holistic framework ensures that students are well-prepared for the relational and spiritual demands of pastoral ministry, fostering character development alongside theological education.

As ministerial candidates committed to their vocational calling, PUTS students are already expected to pursue spiritual growth and godliness. However, the program highlights the importance of community-based training as a vital complement to individual devotional practices, providing a structured framework for personal and communal discipleship. By integrating these practices into their daily lives, students embark on a lifelong journey of spiritual formation, using the semester-long training as a foundational starting point for ongoing growth.

Recognizing the importance of continual improvement, the program also invites reflection on its current practices and consideration of new methods to enhance its effectiveness. By incorporating such insights into future iterations, the program aims to make the formation of ministerial candidates more meaningful and impactful, equipping them for the spiritual and practical demands of a life dedicated to ministry.

IV. Summary

The Reformed tradition, with its emphasis on right theology and right practice, provides a framework for the spiritual and academic formation of students at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS). Anchored in its motto, "Piety and Knowledge," PUTS aims to cultivate a balanced spiritual discipline grounded in a robust theological foundation. Students are encouraged to engage not merely intellectually, but holistically, as they stand before the Lord in community through prayer, worship, and meditation on the Word, with hearts fully committed to following Jesus Christ. These practices enable students to encounter and experience the Lord, fostering their transformation into Christlike individuals who know and live in a loving relationship with Him, discern His will, and fully embody His ways.

In the late 20th century, the concept of spirituality emerged not only in Christian theology but also in broader cultural and communal movements. This term reflected a growing trend where individuals identified as “spiritual but not religious,” expressing a desire for a relationship with God while rejecting the confines of institutionalized religion. This cultural shift echoes the Reformed tradition’s focus on integrating theological reflection with practical piety and knowledge. Calvin’s theology, in particular, exemplified this integration, positing that theology is an existential and practical knowledge arising from the Creator-creature relationship. For Calvin, theology was not merely speculative but deeply relational, encompassing the love of God born through faith and the life of piety as an expression of godly fear and obedience rooted in that love.

The resurgence of interest in spirituality during this period can be understood as a call to rediscover the original value of piety and to reintegrate piety with academic theology. Spirituality, by definition, emphasizes the relationship with God, aligning closely with the Reformed concept of piety, which seeks to transcend self-centeredness and grow in Christlikeness. Devotional training, as practiced at PUTS, exemplifies this integration, serving as a practical approach to shaping individuals into religious beings faithful to Christian truth and spiritual beings who enjoy a living relationship with God. By blending devotion and academic rigor, PUTS strives to restore the original value of piety, positioning the seminary as a theological venue where devotion and scholarship coexist harmoniously.

Devotional formation at PUTS reflects the seminary’s mission to train theologians and ministers who, like the Lord’s disciples, are shaped by His teaching and transformed in His image. This formation process requires seeking the Lord’s wisdom and mercy, as well as fervently praying for the inner transformation of seminarians. The seminary acts as a place of encounter and transformation, trusting in the Lord’s work to mold and grow each student into His likeness. Through this commitment, PUTS envisions its students not only as scholars and ministers but as Christlike individuals, embodying the unity of piety and knowledge in their lives and ministries.

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Lessons of the Past - Challenges of the Future

Reform Attempts of Hungarian Reformed Theological Education

Abstract

The aim of our study is to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges facing current Hungarian-language Reformed theological education and the reform efforts made in response to them.

In order to provide more insight, the first half of the paper offers a sketchy historical overview of how the current situation came about, and why there are six Hungarian-language Reformed theological training centres in three different countries? The second part of the paper presents the past reforms of the Hungarian Reformed pastoral education. Then we will describe the challenges that most affect the Reformed Church in Hungary and the training of pastors, followed by the synodal initiative in response to these challenges, the *Coetus Theologorum*, a working group of seminary teachers that has been in hiatus for some time.

I.

In order to have a better understanding of the current state of Hungarian Reformed theological education, we must take into account the historical processes that have contributed to the development of the current system.¹

1.1. The Danubian Church District

In Hungary, the 16th-century Reformation appeared almost immediately after its beginnings in Western Europe, first among the German bourgeoisie of the cities. This time period was one of the most trying in Hungarian history.² The Ottoman conquest split the country into three parts. The central areas of the former country were brought under Ottoman administration. In this area, the Catholic ecclesiastical administration had barely survived, and the Ottomans were either indifferent to the spread of Reformation doctrines or even welcomed the religious divisions among Christians, while the oppressed Hungarians showed a spiritual openness to the newly found Gospel of the Reformation.³ All of this favoured the spread of the Reformation in this area, while Ottoman exploitation and constant military activity resulted in a shrinking Hungarian population and a permanent insecurity of existence and rights.⁴ As a result, the congregational schools and colleges established in this area proved to be short-lived.⁵ After the expulsion of the Ottomans at the end of the 17th century, the area reverted to Royal Hungary under the Habsburgs, who pursued strong counter-reformation policies.⁶ As a result, the Danubian Reformed Church District, which had been established in this area (1576), could only plan to establish higher schools and a pastoral training institution after the 1782 Edict of Tolerance. Accordingly, in 1839, a pastor training institute was founded in Kecskemét, which, recognising the strategic importance of pursuing pastoral training in the booming new metropolis, was transferred to Budapest (then Pest-Buda) in 1855.⁷

1.2. Transdanubia

After the Ottoman conquest in the 16th century, the rulers of Royal Hungary, which had receded into the western and northern territories of the former country, became the Habsburgs, who, with the help of the Jesuits, carried out strong counter-reformation activities in their territory. In this area, as in other parts of the Empire, the Lutheran direction of the Reformation spread mainly along the lines of the 'cuius regio, eius religio' principle, until the two Protestant denominations continued their separate paths in the early 17th century.⁸ As a result of the support of the nobility and the early bourgeoisie in this area, a college

was established in Pápa as early as the beginning of the 16th century (1531). During the 17th century, the Jesuits returned most of the landlords of this area to Catholicism, and the Reformed were almost completely dwindling by the time of the Edict of Tolerance.⁹ The College at Pápa also experienced persecution from the Catholic Habsburg authorities and the Jesuits, once having to leave its site for an extended period (1752-1781), but it remained a pastoral training institution in the Transdanubian Reformed Church District of the Western Hungarian area in various forms until its closure by the Communists in 1951.¹⁰

1.3. Transylvania

During the Ottoman conquest of Hungary in the 16th century, a succession struggle broke out after the death of King Louis II at the Battle of Mohács in 1526. As a result, the Habsburgs were able to take the throne of the Kingdom of Hungary and control the western and northern parts of the kingdom. In the eastern territories and in Transylvania, which had previously been a special administrative region, one of the Hungarian lords seized power with royal ambitions, which he passed on to his son, who was forced to reach a compromise agreement with the Habsburgs. This resulted in the Principality of Transylvania, which later became a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire.

Transylvania was traditionally a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic territory, whose relations were determined by the coexistence of the Saxon bourgeoisie, the Hungarian nobility and the growing number of the Vlach (later Romanian) lower population. This background brought with it the coexistence of different denominations: the 1568 Diet of Torda made the Unitarian denomination an established religion alongside the Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic denominations.¹¹ In the 17th century, princes were mainly from Reformed families. By taking advantage of the struggles of European politics, such as the Thirty Years' War, the Transylvanian princes became almost autonomous Protestant and Hungarian political actors, able to support the survival of Protestants in Ottoman and Habsburg lands, while at the same time they were able to establish high-level educational institutions by the assistance of prominent Western European (e.g. Johann Heinrich Alsted, Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, Isaac Basire) or Western-educated (e.g. János Apáczai Csere) professors.¹² Transylvania was returned to the

Kingdom of Hungary after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. In 1872, a state university and in 1895 a Reformed theological academy was opened in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), which underwent an economic and population growth similar to that of Budapest in that period.¹³

1.4. The Cistibiscan Church District and Sárospatak

In the north-eastern part of Hungary, the College of Sárospatak, founded in 1531, was able to survive thanks to the support of the nobility, who were linked to Transylvania. By the support of György Rákóczy I (who became the prince of Transylvania from the captain of this royal territory) and his wife, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, Sárospatak was raised to the level of Western European higher education by the invitation of John Amos Comenius, one of the most important educator of the era. Throughout its challenging history,¹⁴ the seminary of Sárospatak – the “Athens on the Bodrog River” – was an important Protestant theological and Hungarian cultural centre of the north-eastern Hungarian region, which was only interrupted by the abolition of the institution by the communists in 1951 until its reopening after the political changes of 1989.¹⁵

1.5. The Transtibiscan Church District and Debrecen

The turbulence between the Ottoman Empire, Royal Hungary and Transylvania was exploited by the Reformed citizens of Debrecen, located on the border of these territories, who sought for an autonomous city similar to that of the Protestant city-states of the West. By the end of the 16th century, they had achieved the hegemony of the Reformed denomination in their city, earning the term Calvinist Rome, which started as a mockery but later became a sign of denominational pride. Founded in 1538, the College of Debrecen became an institution of outstanding quality, importance and national impact for Reformed education throughout all Hungarian historical periods,¹⁶ and in 1912 it became the theological faculty of the newly founded local state university.¹⁷ In 1951, the communists abolished the theological faculties of state universities,¹⁸ but the seminary of Debrecen was allowed to continue its activities within the church framework.¹⁹

1.6. Distribution of the Reformed population

From the middle of the 16th century until today,²⁰ the majority of Hungarian Reformed were concentrated around Debrecen and Sárospatak, in the eastern and north-eastern regions of Hungary. In the Ottoman areas, the numbers varied in different periods. Originally, the southernmost areas also had large numbers of Protestants. As a result of the Habsburg reconquest and national policy, a large number of Catholic Germans were settled in the depopulated areas. Only from the late 18th century onwards, with the explosive growth of Pest-Buda as a new economic and commercial centre, then as a cultural and political centre, did a strong and self-conscious Reformed presence, similar to that of Debrecen, develop here by the early 20th century.²¹ In the western parts of the country (Transdanubia), the initial weaker numbers were eroded by strong counter-reformation activity.

1.7. The importance of peregrination

It should also be noted that Hungarian clergy had been attending Western European universities even before the Reformation, a trend which only intensified during the Reformation and reached serious proportions in the 17th century. Through the Hungarian Peregrines in the 17th century, the Hungarian Reformed Church was in lively contact with its Western European, especially Dutch, sister churches, and was part of the European theological bloodstream of different eras. The "bloodless counter-reformation"²² of the Habsburg absolutist rulers of the 18th century weakened the Western ties of Hungarian Reformed Church by banning peregrination, but it could not completely eliminate them.²³

1.8. Heterogeneity of the Hungarian Reformed

The above clearly shows the historical basis of the diversity of the Hungarian Reformed pastoral education today. From the Ottoman conquest in the 16th century onwards, the identity, national, political and religious thinking of the Reformed people of the various Hungarian regions of different political fates were

marked by the specific historical, cultural and political conditions of their place of residence. The church-governing structures in the different areas had different nuances. For example, in Transdanubia, opposition to central power gave rise to Presbyterianism. In Transylvania, a more harmonious relationship with the state favoured the development of a centralised kind of Episcopalianism, while in the Transtibiscan area, which had changed political masters at times in its history, church affairs were managed not by a bishop but by a committee of four deans until the mid-18th century. The strong Reformed consciousness of the citizens of Debrecen – as we have heard in Calvinist Rome – resulted in a natural sense of primacy over the Hungarian Reformed²⁴, and the persecution of the Reformed in Transdanubia resulted in their mentality of being loyal to the few. Not to mention the fact that from the mid-19th century onwards, the Danubian Church District, which included the new capital, emerged as a factor of increasing cultural and ecclesiastical power, acting as a kind of melting pot of Reformed identity, growing in parallel with the economic, population and political weight of the Central Hungarian region, and especially the urbanising Budapest.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning of the Reformation in the various Hungarian regions, in all the periods mentioned so far, the Reformed communities of the various regions have constantly sought contact with each other and lived in fraternal communion. Students and teachers of the seminaries visited each other's institutions, and the network of contacts with the Reformed in the West was also a connecting element.

II. Steps towards unified Reformed pastoral training

The need for the unification of Reformed theological education was closely related to the unification of the Reformed Church in Hungary itself. The unification of the Reformed denomination went parallel to the development of Hungary as a nation-state in the 19th century, and was not only an integral complement to it, but also a prerequisite in cultural terms, bearing in mind the indisputable importance of the first Hungarian Reformed Bible translation of 1590 in the development of a unified Hungarian literary language. In any case, it was the 19th century, the emergence of nationalism and the unified Hungarian nation, the ideals of the 1848-49 Revolution and War of Independence, the passive resistance of the

Hungarians after its defeat, and the favourable geopolitical developments that made the Compromise of 1867 and the creation of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy possible²⁵. The regaining of Hungarian internal political autonomy brought radical changes in the life of the Reformed Church and in its perception of itself and its future. Partly, as a result of the remaining rivalry with the majority Catholics, the five historic Reformed church bodies that had emerged in different historical regions were united into a national church in 1881.²⁶

In 1881, the Reformed Church in Hungary had pastoral training institutions in Debrecen, Sárospatak, Pápa, Nagyenyed and Budapest. The different development, mentality and peculiarities of the Reformed Church and its institutions in the different areas have already been discussed. The united church needed a uniform law on the election of pastors, and for this it was necessary that the qualifications for pastors should be valid throughout the country, regardless of the seminary in which the pastor had obtained them.

Interestingly, because of the personal contacts, collegiality and openness of the teaching staff to reform, to follow foreign examples and to raise the quality of education, the curricula of the five seminaries were already quite close to each other from the 1860s onwards, without any central unification plan. However, the ordination examinations regulated by the church district were becoming more and more different in the same period, so that the need for standardisation was greater in relation to these rather than to the seminaries.²⁷ The new *Church Constitution*, in order to settle these differences, gave the *Synod* the power to regulate ordination examinations, in addition to determining the nature of pastoral training. In practice, this right was temporarily exercised, with the agreement of the districts, by the *Universal Convention*, which by 1886 had adopted not only a uniform curriculum for the five academies but also a uniform examination system.²⁸

II.1. The development of a uniform curriculum (1883)

Under the new *Church Constitution*, the executive body for the period between synods was the *Universal Convention*, within which a *Committee on Education* was set up to deal with matters relating to church education. The importance of the matter is shown by the fact that the question of the unification of seminary

education was raised at the first *Convention* meeting after the entry into force of the new *Church Constitution* on 23 January 1883. The five seminaries were then invited to submit their proposals for a uniform curriculum to the *Committee on Education*, which would then draw up common rules with the representatives of the seminaries.²⁹ It is commendable that the *Committee on Education* planned to make the draft available for public consultation, with the help of the church press, before submitting it to the *Convention*. It was clear from the seminar proposals submitted that reform of theological education was already on the agenda everywhere. In three sessions the *Committee on Education* formulated its proposal for a unified seminary curriculum, which was adopted by the *Convention* in September 1883.³⁰

According to the new regulations, all five seminaries were now officially known as *theological academies*. The training period was set at 4 years and the conditions for admission to the seminaries were standardised. The minimum number of hours of lectures were also laid down, while a distinction was made between compulsory and non-compulsory subjects. The subjects covered included theology, the humanities and education, and the need to teach public health and modern languages was also stressed. The employment of five full-time professors for each seminary was recommended. It is noteworthy that biblical studies received the largest number of hours, while also significant innovation was the introduction of compulsory courses in the humanities, biblical theology, public health and modern languages.

In spite of the consensual and smooth acceptance of the new unified theological education code, its application in the seminaries has been implemented with varying degrees of intensity. Budapest opened its academic year the following September with the new regulations in place. In Pápa, no new curriculum was introduced, but the new code has been implemented partially by beginning the teaching of biblical theology in 1884. In Nagyenyed, on the grounds that their own curriculum was very similar to the new one, it was not modified until 1888, and in Sárospatak and Debrecen even later.³¹

11.2. Developing a common examination schedule

The next step towards the establishment of a unified pastoral education in the new united Reformed Church in Hungary was the creation of a unified examination system. As there was already a much greater difference in customs in this area than in seminary curricula, further discussion was necessary. An attempt to standardise ordination had already been made at the end of the 1850s on the initiative of the Cistibiscan Church District. To some extent, this was accepted by the other districts in 1861, but then, the local arrangements of everyday matters distanced the regulations of the different regions from each other step by step. In 1883, the only common feature of the ordination practices of the different districts was that two final examinations were required for full ordination of a pastor.³²

Consultations were carried out in the same way as for the unified curriculum: the *Committee on Education* solicited proposals from the districts and their seminaries, discussed them in a committee with their representatives, and then presented the joint draft to the public in the church press. After these several stages of consultation, the Universal Convention adopted in October 1886 a uniform code of theological examinations, which laid down not only the examinations during seminary training but also the ordination examinations and even the requirements for becoming a professor. The examinations held at the end of the year were replaced by examinations held every six months. To reduce the curriculum of the first ordination examination, a foundation examination was introduced after the first two years of the seminary. The ordination examination had to be taken before an examining board chosen in each district for 4-6 years. The first ordination examination was immediately after the seminary, by which the pastoral candidate gained a valid ministerial authorisation not only in his district but in the whole Hungarian Reformed Church. After one year of service, it became possible to pass the second ordination examination, after which the full status of pastor could be granted. A new feature was that written tests became an integral part of the basic and ordination examinations, instead of the oral tests that had hitherto been the only option.

In the new order, the basic examination, taken after two years, divided the four years of seminary education into two, and required mainly biblical, church-historical and religious studies. The first ordination examination covered the

second half of the seminary education, mainly biblical theology, dogmatics, ethics and rhetoric. The second ordination examination was dominated by practical subjects (homiletics, catechetics, liturgy, practical biblical exegesis), supplemented by the Hungarian part of church history and church law.

II.3. Debate on pastoral training

Tóth-Gyóllai's research rightly points out that while the *Convention* and *Synod* documents of the period between 1886 and 1911 give us the impression that the unified curriculum and examination system settled the issue of the training of Reformed pastors in Hungary without any further questions, the examination of the church press shows quite a different picture.³³ From church leaders to seminary students, pastors and lay people were courageously sharing their opinions and debating the strengths and weaknesses of unified pastoral education and possible further reforms.

One of the most determined critics was the young church historian *Jenő Zoványi*, who demanded a higher standard of theological education, the introduction of more historical subjects, more consistent enforcement of the *Convention's* educational decrees and higher salaries for professors.³⁴ The results of the uniform theological education were defended in vain by the former member of the *Convention's Committee on Education*, Professor *Ödön Kovács* of Nagyenyed.³⁵ In the 1890s, most writings on theological education were critical in tone and closely aligned with the views of Aladár Szabó, a seminary teacher in Budapest, who wrote six articles on the subject between 1893 and 1905.³⁶

Aladár Szabó became a teacher at the *Budapest Seminary* in 1891. He came into closer contact with revival theology in Scotland and became one of its first influential propagators in Hungary.³⁷ In 1893, he wrote his first article on the subject, in which he spoke of a radical reform of pastoral education. He saw the solution to the boring and burnt-out pastoral training in practicality and filling the gaps in biblical knowledge, as did *József Pokoly*, a professor at the *Kolozsvár Seminary*.³⁸

More practice and more knowledge of the Bible: these reform principles were also reflected in the 1907 proposal of the faculty of the *Budapest Seminary*.³⁹ This proposal drew attention to the need for pastoral training to take account

of current challenges and to adapt itself to them. It acknowledges that the 1883 curriculum was intended to meet this need, but that times had changed and the curriculum was ripe for reform.

Pushed by the criticisms from the church public life through the press, the growth of the evangelical movement in Hungary,⁴⁰ but also the realization that after a quarter of a century the time had come to change the uniform curriculum, in 1906, the *Universal Convention* entrusted the president of the *Committee on Education*, Gábor Antal, with the new reform of the pastoral education. Antal followed the method already tried and tested in 1883. He solicited proposals for reform from the seminaries, on the basis of which a committee of six drew up a proposal for a new curriculum, which was sent to the districts and their seminaries for consultation, and to the wider public through the church press.

The beginning of the 20th century, however, was marked by a different tone than the one of a quarter of a century before: the proposal of the six-member committee was harshly criticized, not only by theological teachers, but also by pastors and even young seminary students who did not hide their negative opinions.⁴¹ The critics did not call for a facelift, but a complete structural change: pastoral training should be biblical, evangelical, distinctively Hungarian, practical, and inspiring independent academic work. They also stressed the importance of forming a brotherly community of the seminarians and the means of doing this was to establish dormitories, and have seminary students living together.

The harsh criticisms forced the *Committee on Education* to revise its initial proposal, which was submitted to the *Convention* meeting on 6 April 1910 and whose acceptance was helped by a powerful speech by *István Tisza*, the Chief Elder of the Transdanubian Church District and later prime minister of Hungary. The *Convention* sent the draft of the *Committee on Education*, supplemented with comments by *István Tisza*, *Elek Petri* and *Áron Szilády*, to the seminaries for their opinion, and after its positive reception, it was adopted in April 1911.

II.4. The 1911 reform

Some of the noteworthy elements of the draft for us are: the new regulations made Greek high school grades a requirement for admission – so at this time students entered the seminary with Greek knowledge. It allowed for credit for

courses taken at non-theological universities, which brought seminary education closer to secular university courses, showing the demand for more and more students to take other university courses in parallel with or prior to seminary education. In addition, the draft increased the period of training to 6 years by increasing the period between the two ordination examinations to 2 years. Also a feature of the new curriculum was the increase in the number of hours per week from the previous average of 22-24 to 26-29.⁴² For example, to make the training more biblical, exegesis was taught 18 hours a week instead of 10. The most radical element of the reform was the strong emphasis on practical subjects. Catechetics, Homiletics, Liturgy and Hymnology had already been included in the curricula of some seminaries, but now they were made compulsory with a minimum number of hours, as were the subjects of Home Mission and Pastoral Care. This has meant that the number of hours of practical theological education has tripled, from 9 to 27.⁴³

This strong emphasis on practical theological education has been criticized in Kolozsvár as unnecessarily overburdening students during the seminary years and should be taught during the two-year associate pastoral period between the two ordination exams. In Sárospatak, the courses on Home Mission and Pastoral Care were not even introduced, but the number of hours of the already existing practical theological courses was increased to the number of hours required by the *Convention*. Another problem was that there were not always competent professors available to teach these courses at the increased number of hours, nor were there any Home Mission institutions for the practical training of students.

We can see, that the 1911 reform rightly embraced the need to make pastoral training more practical, but ignored the local specificities and opportunities, and instead of a truly practice-oriented training, which took care to develop competences, it was content to force the theory of practice into an already too theoretical training, overburdening both professors and students.

II.5. The new situation of theological education in Debrecen

In the year after the introduction of the 1911 reform, the Debrecen Seminary continued its activities within the newly founded local state university.⁴⁴ The Kolozsvár Seminary, founded in 1895, was also in cooperation with the state

university of the city, but in the case of Debrecen it was not a mere cooperation: the former seminary continued to function as the theological faculty of the new university.⁴⁵

In connection with the new situation, the *Convention* formed a committee to examine the impact of the Debrecen move on other seminaries, which then gave its opinion, as formulated by *Károly Nagy*, theology professor and later bishop of Kolozsvár. *Nagy* outlined a vision of integrating the other seminaries into a common university as separated departments, which would create a healthy competition between them, whereby they would be able to represent a higher academic standard. *Nagy* was frank about the fact that it was a waste of money to maintain five seminaries – with a great number of teachers and staff members – for so few theological students. In his opinion, it would be enough to maintain 1 or 2 seminaries, and the money saved could be spent on Home Mission institutions.

Although the proposals formulated by *Károly Nagy* were not considered timely by either the *Committee on Education* or the *Convention*, they received a great response in the church press, prompting opinions from people such as *László Ravasz*, *József Pongrácz*, *Sándor Csikész*⁴⁶ and *Imre Révész*,⁴⁷ who two decades later, as church leaders, also became committed to the reform of pastoral education.⁴⁸

II.6. The shock of Trianon

The loss of the WW I., just as the whole life of the Reformed Church was faced with a radically new situation, so too was the training of pastors. Hungary suffered a severe defeat in the World War, resulting in social and political turmoil. At the end of October 1918, the “Chrysanthemum Revolution” dissolved the 900 years old Kingdom of Hungary and formed a social-democratic government. The provisional government proclaimed the Hungarian People’s Republic (16 November 1918), which half a year later (21 March 1919) was overthrown by a Communist coup, establishing the second Soviet Republic of the world after the one in Russia. While the country’s economy was in ruins, the Austro-Hungarian Army dissolved step by step together with the Empire. The surrounding countries took advantage of the situation and occupied the two-thirds of the country to enhance their claims at the forthcoming peace conference. “Red” then “White”

terror raged, the Romanian army occupied Budapest. The chaos concluded in the right-wing autocratic rule of Admiral *Miklós Horthy*, who reestablished the constitutional monarchy and acted as the regent of Hungary. On 4 June 1920, by the Trianon Peace Treaty, Hungary lost 72% of its territory, while three and a half million ethnic Hungarians found themselves separated from their motherland.⁴⁹

The loss of the Reformed Church was also extensive. She lost around 1100 congregations, almost one-million members (916.906)⁵⁰, half of her pastors, and hundreds of schools and teachers. The whole Transylvanian Church District and the Kolozsvár Seminary was lost to Romania, and all the other church districts were torn up by the new state borders and they had to form new church bodies in their new countries.⁵¹

11.7. The 1924 reform

After the social and political situation had calmed down by 1921, the *Universal Convention*, reacting to the radically new situation, on the initiative of the *Committee on Education* and the Sárospatak Seminary, convened the *National Conference of Theological Professors*, which had held only its inaugural meeting since its inception in 1902, but from 1921 until 1940 it met every year. At the conference, held in Budapest on 28-29 December 1921, almost all the teachers of the remaining theological education institutions in Hungary were present (except the teachers of the Debrecen Seminary, which became a faculty in the meantime) and presented a document entitled "Reform of our Pastoral Education" to the *Convention*.

In the new reform proposal, the view that pastoral education is pastoral formation has been given priority. The pastoral formation's important tool is the serious examination of the vocation of the candidates at the time of admission, the monitoring of the spiritual life of the students in the later stages, and the placement of theologians in dormitories in order to strengthen their personal relationships and form their community.

The *National Conference of Theological Professors*, at its meeting of 28 December 1922, drew up a new, unified curriculum and regulations for education and examinations. Its important elements were the possibility of admitting women to seminaries and the extension of the training period to 5 years. The

draft was finalised by the *Conference* on 15 April 1924 and the *Convention* ordered its entry into force, with minor modifications, at the latest from the academic year 1925/26.⁵²

The new regulations did not yet take into account the already heavy workload of theological education and saw the way to reform in the delivery of even more curriculum: the average number of hours per week in 1911 increased from 27 to 31, mainly by increasing the number of hours of biblical (plus 6 hours per week) and practical subjects (plus 2 hours per week). As regards the examinations, the new regulations made the theory of the Home Mission a part of the second ordination examination. A sign of the shift in the nature of training towards university education was the fact that failure to complete one or two subjects caused not a year but only a semester repetition, and a novelty was the possibility of bringing forward the completion of certain courses and thus shortening the duration of training.

The *Convention* adopted the ideas of the *Conference* on the pastoral formation without any changes. It provided for the establishment of dormitories and made the support of the pastoral care of the dormitory supervisor professors a priority for the whole teaching staff. The idea was that the teachers and their students should hold regular worship services, Bible studies and prayer meetings, forming a congregation. The admission process was also made more thorough. Applicants were required to bring a certificate of faith and vocation from their religious education teacher and a motivation letter-style curriculum vitae before an interview with the whole teaching staff. It was also stipulated that only those students who, in the opinion of the faculty, had completed the first year of their studies in a manner worthy of their pastoral vocation would be allowed to continue to the second year.⁵³

The fuller realization of the goals of the 1924 curriculum was hindered by the fact that from 1926, in order to maintain the Reformed elementary schools in the smaller settlements of the economically struggling country with the employment of pastors as teachers, the seminary students had to study pedagogy subjects as well, which further increased their already high workload. The issue led to much debate at the *Convention*. The maintenance of the church school system was obviously a very important issue, but the division of the focus of training and the additional workload on students meant that the majority of graduate pastor-teachers were not adequately prepared for their vocation, either as pastors or as

teachers.

The reform of 1924 continued along the line already begun, by which the Reformed Church made its pastoral training more biblical and practical. This reform understood pastoral training as “pastoral formation”: spiritual formation, deepening of faith and community building among the future pastors.⁵⁴

11.8. The challenges of the 1930s

The 1930s, with the Great Depression and its aftermath, the rise of Nazism in Germany, and the foreshadowing of new war preparations, brought another period of turmoil for Hungarian society, which also increased the frustration of the Church, which was forced to serve in this troubling context.

A constant theme of the variously focused movements and press products of the inter-war period proclaiming church renewal was how the church could better and more authentically carry out its mission, and what role seminary education could play in this. One gets the feeling from these articles that the scapegoat behind the general weakening of the Church’s witness is theological education, and even theological teachers themselves. However, the high number of hours in the curriculum and the corresponding overload of students, but also the lack of financial independence of theological teachers, have also been highlighted. There were calls for more rigorous screening of applicants, including extending the entrance examinations by several days and introducing a ‘probationary period’ of up to a year in charitable institutions before admission. The question arises as to whether it is necessary or even possible to provide both the academic and practical aspects of pastoral training to a high standard. Can the church afford to deny young men of living faith and committed to mission a degree because they cannot meet the academic requirements of university education? In the same way as medical training, the question of the specialisation of pastoral training has also been raised, the need to train ‘types’ of pastors - church leaders, spiritual counsellors, teachers, ‘agitating’ pastors.⁵⁵

The most interesting – even “bold”⁵⁶ – reform plan of the era came from two professors from Debrecen, *Sándor Csikesz* and *Imre Révész* in 1937.⁵⁷ According to them, the unification of the training of Reformed pastors in Hungary would be most fully achieved if each seminary had a role in the training of a pastor.

The students would begin a preparatory year in Pápa, laying the foundation for biblical, confessional and linguistic knowledge. Then they would receive four years of academic training at the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen, part of the state university, aided by the prestigious library there. Finally, there would be two years of practical training in Sárospatak in rural and small-town ministry, and in Budapest in metropolitan and international ministry.⁵⁸

In 1937, in keeping with the spirit of reform, the *Convention* commissioned the *National Conference of Theological Professors* to revise the reform of 1924. The new regulations, which came into force gradually from the 1940/41 academic year, increased the length of training to 10 semesters, introduced a preparatory year and a qualifying examination at the end of the first year. As a sign of the further shift towards practical training, Saturday or Monday was made free of classes so that students could attend church services on those days.

Due to the increased number of congregational practices, the time between the two ordination examinations was reduced to one year and the number of compulsory weekly hours was also reduced from the previous average of 31 to 26. The teaching workload was reduced by combining certain subjects into one year group. As an indication of the more balanced nature of the new curriculum, the Old and New Testament departments were given a teaching load of 12-12 hours, the departments of Church History and Philosophy 11-11 hours, the Department of Systematic Theology 9 hours and the Department of Practical Theology 13 hours. The new regulations also required students to read the Bible on a daily basis, which they were also required to keep a diary. The number of hours for Humanities (from 10 to 7), and even for biblical subjects (from 33 to 24) was further reduced, while practical subjects were again increased by 5 hours (to 34) and new practical theological courses were introduced, such as Home and Foreign Mission, Ecclesiastics and Spiritual Counselling (Poimenika).⁵⁹

The reform of 1940 thus combined the main lines of reform which had been of concern to theological teachers and the church public, who had been concerned about the training of ministers since the beginning of the 20th century. The reform made pastoral training more practical, not at the expense of theoretical education, but by maintaining a balance between the two. It reduced the workload of students and teachers, but by favouring independent work it not only maintained but strengthened the academic character of pastoral education. Also

by reducing the workload, by providing windows for congregational ministry, it has made it possible to reduce the time between two ordination examinations, and has paid close attention to the screening of candidates and to their spiritual and personal formation during their student years, and to the discovery of their pastoral character.

Unfortunately, the potentially beneficial effects of the promising new reform could not be seen in the turbulent years of WW II. that followed. The totalitarian dictatorship that emerged after the War made it impossible for the Reformed Church to play an active role in society. Her assets, which had enabled the church to maintain itself, were taken away, her schools were nationalised, her hospitals and charitable institutions were closed, her missionary associations were banned, the church press was silenced, and the lay ministry of the church in general was restricted and frowned upon. In 1951, the seminaries of Pápa and Sárospatak were abolished by their merger with Budapest and Debrecen.⁶⁰ The new curriculum and examination regulations were set by the *Synod* without consulting the church public.

In 1952, the *Synod* took the rights of the remaining two seminaries away from the church districts and transferred them to the jurisdiction of the *Universal Convention*, but there were also rumours of state intentions to close down the Budapest Seminary. Reformed seminary education underwent a strong centralisation. The *Synod* took over the administration of the two remaining theologies, the regulation of studies, the right to appoint teachers and, from 1964, the right to award doctorates. Teachers were appointed to the seminaries not on the basis of their abilities, skills or academic achievements, but on the basis of their loyalty to church leaders who collaborated with the Communist Party-state. Reformed theological education in Hungary has fallen into a kind of Sleeping Beauty sleep.⁶¹

III. The new era of the Hungarian Reformed pastoral training

The last parliament before the regime change - partly forced to make concessions, partly perhaps also making gestures - adopted two important laws concerning the training of Reformed pastors in Hungary, when it extended the powers of churches in connection with the educational and training activities (§ 17 (1) of the

1990 IV. tv.),⁶² and when the two remaining seminaries of the Reformed Church in Debrecen and Budapest were declared universities as of 1 July 1990 (§ 5 of Act XXIII of 1990).⁶³ The favourable legal regulations and the promise of state support, fuelled by the enthusiasm of the former, still living and active alumni, led to the reopening of the seminaries in Sárospatak (1991) and Pápa (1998) in the following years. With the fall of the Ceausescu regime, relations with the Kolozsvár Seminary were revived, and the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia created a new situation in which the Hungarians in Slovakia were able to (re-)establish their own seminary in Komárom in 1994.⁶⁴

This means that there are currently six institutions providing training for Hungarian-speaking Reformed pastors. As we have seen, the unification of the church was the motivation for the unified training of pastors in the past. European integration has helped the process by which the so called *Hungarian Reformed Church*, which was born in 2009, has been able to include the Hungarian Reformed communities of the territories that were forced to establish separate church bodies in Trianon, together with the Hungarian Reformed communities of the Western Diaspora, in an organisation that promotes unity and common action. Even so, the six theological training centres bear so many unique identities not only in their history but also in their current legal, political and social situation that many questions arise for those who are considering unifying their training.

III.1. Diversity in many aspects of everyday operation

Two of the six institutions were founded in the 19th century, in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca, the growing urban centres of Hungary, which were already facing the challenges of modern religiosity, such as religious indifference and secularization. One of the six seminaries, Komárom, is the product of Hungary's loss of territory after the WW I.. After Czechoslovakia, which annexed the northern territories of Hungary, refused to allow pastors who had graduated in Hungary to work in its territory, the Hungarian Reformed had to found their own seminary in Losonc in 1925.⁶⁵ The Losonc Seminary was allowed to function for 14 years, after which, only after the fall of communism, a new seminary for Hungarian Reformed living in Slovakia was established in Komárom in 1994.⁶⁶ In addition to the Komárom seminary, the Kolozsvár seminary is the only one which, since the WW I., has

been forced to operate in a non-Hungarian state, in Romania, experiencing the difficulties of being a minority.⁶⁷ Of the seminaries founded in Hungary in the 16th century, the Pápa and the Sárospatak seminaries were closed down in 1951 by the Communist state in the name of sustainability, but in reality because of its anti-church ambitions.⁶⁸ They were only allowed to restart after the fall of Communism in the 1990s.

The Hungarian Reformed seminaries are extremely diverse, not only in their historical traditions, but also in their current operation. However, there is no difference in the level of training. At this time, all of them are state-accredited and state-funded, university-level degree-granting institutions. However, two of the six seminaries, Komárom and Kolozsvár, are not located in what is now Hungary: Komárom is governed by the higher education laws of Slovakia and Kolozsvár by the higher education laws of Romania, and their funding depends on these EU Member States. The Hungarian Reformed minorities living in present-day Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine and Austria, does not have their own theological seminary, so the six institutions also provide pastoral training for their congregations.⁶⁹

Two of the six institutions - Budapest and Komárom - are part of a multi-faculty university. Komárom is the theological faculty of the Hungarian-speaking state university of Slovakia, the Selye János University. The Budapest seminary is part of the Károli Gáspár University, which has about 8,000 students and 4 other faculties such as humanities, law, economics and health sciences, and pedagogy. Debrecen is not separated to different faculties, but also has a teacher training institute in addition to pastoral training, meanwhile at Budapest, it is not the seminary but the Faculty of Pedagogy that trains Christian Education teachers. In Kolozsvár, in accordance with Romanian state law, the training Christian Education teachers is provided by the faculty established for this purpose at a state university named Babes-Bolyai. Furthermore, to complete the picture, in Budapest and Debrecen there are also doctoral schools, providing Phd degrees in theology.

The funding of theological education is also varied. As Komárom is part of a state university, its funding comes directly from Slovakian state sources. The other seminaries are church-run. As they provide public service for citizens as universities, their maintainers (the responsible dioceses) merely channel their public funding to them, according to their student number and individual agreements. The large Reformed University in Budapest is maintained by the

national Reformed Church, the Synod, but its theological faculty is subject to the diocese situated around Budapest. Another special feature is that the Kolozsvár seminary welcomes Lutheran and Unitarian students too, who of course study certain theological subjects – like systematics – separately.

In terms of number of theological students, the largest seminaries are those in Debrecen, Budapest and Kolozsvár. They have about 15 to 20 new students each and about 100 to 120 students altogether. The other three seminaries - Pápa, Komárom and Sárospatak - are seriously undermanned. It happens that there are only 1 or 2 students in a grade. They are trying to survive by offering special or correspondence courses.

III.2. Facing modern challenges

This diversity perhaps also illustrates the difficulty of the task of formulating a unified response to the current challenges for Hungarian seminaries.

What are those challenges? After the fall of communism, the first time when Hungarians could be asked about their denomination was during the 2001 census, when 1,622,000 people declared themselves Reformed. However, in the latest census in 2022 only 944,000 people declared themselves Reformed: this means a 42% decrease in 20 years.⁷⁰ The rapid secularization of Western societies is taking place in Hungary and in the surrounding countries as well, and this is having a disproportionate impact on traditional people's churches such as the Hungarian Reformed Church. Accordingly, the congregations are steadily ageing, and young people are either staying away from the church pews or not showing up at all. Small villages are becoming depopulated, people are moving to the more and better job opportunities of Budapest and the larger urban agglomerations. So, while traditional village congregations are ageing and becoming depopulated, there is room for growth and the establishment of new congregations in urban congregations, especially in the agglomerations. This also brings about a change in pastoral methods and lifestyles, which should be reflected on during theological training.

Also characteristic of the Reformed Church in Hungary is the growing importance of church institutions. Following the British and German examples, "desecularization" is taking place in the field of educational and health institutions.

The state, facing with the failure, difficulties and unpopularity of running education and health care prefers to hand over the institutions of these fields to the church, and the Reformed Church, which still vividly remembers being deprived of its institutions by communism, is happy to take them back into its care. However, before the communist nationalization, the church's institutions were financed mainly from the real and monetary assets created and earmarked for this specific purpose - land and property rents, foundations, private investments - while democratic governments after the fall of communism gave institutions but no longer returned the financial means to maintain them independently. Since the maintenance of educational and charitable institutions is a public service, they are subsidized by the state to the extent necessary, but this does not allow the church to run its own affairs, but makes it closely dependent on the state for its finances.⁷¹

Institutions also employ pastors, and the number of pastors in institutions is increasing in relation to the number of pastors in congregations. The seminaries also need to adapt to the training of pastors for these institutions: hospital, school, nursing home chaplains. There seems to be an emerging trend for students to move towards institutional ministry, which offers a more secure livelihood and a more comfortable life, jeopardizing the supply of pastors for congregations, especially in small villages. The current reform of theological education is a stated ambition to reverse this trend and to make congregational ministry attractive again to theological students.

An equally pressing problem is that a third of young pastors leave the ministry within five years after leaving seminary. Finding the causes of this strong drop-out phenomenon is a joint task for seminaries and church authorities. It would also be advisable for seminary education to reflect on this phenomenon and to place emphasis on developing a realistic picture of the challenges and difficulties of church ministry in the student's mind during the seminary years.

Theological education also needs to reflect the age specificities of the current generation of students and the role of social media. In the wake of the COVID closures in 2020, our church, thought to be traditionalist, has moved into the online space with surprising speed, with a good number of pastors and congregations taking advantage of video sharing and social media, and some congregations maintaining their online practices even after the epidemic has passed. Theological education needs to reflect the changes in the way we hear

and preach the Word of God: in many seminaries, online preaching or the making of Christian Education or online worship videos has been incorporated into the curriculum, not to mention the discussion of theological issues raised by online worship, especially the sharing of communion. At the Budapest seminary, also following state guidelines for higher education, teachers are encouraged to involve Artificial Intelligence in their teaching.

III.3. The start of a new reform

In order for theological education to be able to reflect these challenges, the forum of theological educators supplemented by the representatives of the church bodies, the so-called *Coetus Theologorum*, met again in the summer of 2023 on the initiative of the *Synod*. Already almost a year before the meeting, a committee of representatives of the seminaries had begun work on its preparation, producing a food-for-thought paper of some 40 pages. The 2023 *Coetus* has laid down the theological foundations for pastoral formation, which needs to be constantly renewed on the basis of Scripture and the Reformed confessions of faith, so that the Church can continue to carry out its mission as faithfully as possible.⁷²

As the joint statement at the end of the conference testifies, participants believe that pastoral education should seek to educate students to become mature and responsible pastors, rather than merely impart knowledge. "Since the period of theological education is also a period of preparation for pastoral life, the key concept of pastoral training and education is that of a deepened spirituality. The piety of Reformed pastoral candidates should be characterized by a deep personal faith, an active spiritual life, Christian self-awareness, a community outlook, commitment and a willingness to serve. This is a shared responsibility of the faculty, staff and student, as well as the institution, congregations and dioceses."⁷³ Accordingly, formation should be personal and practical, with particular attention to the individual spiritual development and formation of the student, and also to the promotion of his or her involvement in the community. Research on the spiritual life of students and the adaptation of the various theological disciplines to this principle are currently under way as part of the reform.

Summary

To sum up, the Hungarian Reformed Church has been carrying out theological education reforms every 10-20 years since the 1880s. The reform has been always dominated by a more practical approach to theological education and a focus on the practice of personal piety and the promotion of the ability of pastors to work together.

It is certainly a refreshing development that the current generation of theological teachers has also recognized the need to reform of theological education along these traditional principles. It is also clear that it is impossible to fully harmonize the educational activities of the six Hungarian-language Reformed theological training centres and to introduce the same set of courses everywhere, as we have seen from their individual characteristics, historical and political determinants. Consequently, even if full curricular harmonization is not possible, there will be positive benefits from sharing our experiences and thinking together about the right responses for today's challenges.

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One Stage, One Nation

Humble Observations Concerning Korean Reconciliation Based on Reformation Heritage

Abstract

This article focuses upon the idea of Korean reunion from a theological and partly philosophical perspective. It also attempts to elucidate biblical notions of reconciliation, especially καταλλαγή and διαλλαγή, by shedding light on them also via ancient Greek authors like Demosthenes and Marcus Aurelius. The contribution of the Reformers, especially of Calvin concerning Paul the Apostle's message pertaining to reconciliation between God and humankind as well as between humans is employed to show how modern Protestant Korean theologians make use of this to portray the political and other kind of separation between Northern and Southern Korea, including their sharp diagnosis of the situation from a Christian viewpoint. These theologians fundamentally agree that any attempt at a peaceful solution should stem from this biblical understanding of reconciliation, even at the cost of revising and correcting certain attitudes of the Reformers, and that Korean Christians both individually and as ecclesiastical communities have a key mission in championing this spiritual appeasement before and beyond any political resolution. The article offers a few biblical examples (e.g. of Elijah on Mount Carmel, Job etc.) to illustrate different valid attempts at such an outcome, bearing in mind that throughout the entire process, in this earthly life we still "see through a mirror, dimly" (1Corinthians 13:12).

1. Introduction

The notions of reconciliation, healing and unification are indeed vast, challenging and profoundly overwhelming concepts of our existence. Arguably, we humans are the only race upon the face of the earth, who could fully comprehend the depth of these ideas, yet we are the same ones who choose to ignore them ever so often. It is perhaps impossible to determine when the first event of reconciliation took place in the prehistoric age of humankind: did the very early humanoid being already have some vague clue or experience of reconciliation with his/her own kin, or was it a much later occurrence, perhaps connected to the earliest *Homo sapiens*? If so, how was it manifested? What gestures, sentiments, feelings could have accompanied such events? Unfortunately, all the options mentioned above are far beyond my expertise. In a certain sense, the only notion of reconciliation I can relate to with some degree of authority, is a theological one.

Our approach to this idea of reconciliation in the present article targets the worrying developments on the Korean Peninsula. In this respect, even to speak of “North” and “South” Korea may appear insensitive, since for many that would mean the recognition of a painful and arbitrarily imposed political division. Although a few years ago some signs of a less tense relationship were detected to the very extent that the notion of “reunification” could be mentioned, the more recent events remind us of the times when the two halves of the peninsula were engaged in hostile activities against each other. Political reunification is for now off the table, in fact is an anathema in certain circles, whilst even a spiritual unity would require a cessation of physical or verbal hostilities before any kind of reconciliation could be conceived. One of the important questions is how Korean Christians, especially those of Protestant background can make use of their Reformation heritage to be the promoters of this painstakingly long and difficult process.

2. Reconciliation in Antiquity and in the Bible as Seen by Calvin

Although I am primarily concerned with Patristic literature and the Christological debates of the first Christian centuries, I came to realise repeatedly that all these old theologians whom we usually call Early Church Fathers were first and foremost

biblical scholars. Upon encountering a pressing problem, in their attempt to find a suitable solution, they conscientiously turned towards the Word of God. I do not consider myself any wiser or more experienced in whatever manner to justify a different start, so my first instinct was also to seek for an answer inspired by the Holy Spirit. A classical text for a reconciliation comes to mind almost immediately from the Apostle Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians:

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God (2Corinthians 5:18–20).

One can hardly resist the urge to start any discussion concerning reconciliation with the above biblical passage. In a way, that is justifiable, since it involves a clear message of divine intervention, which brought about the restoration of God's relationship with humankind. Indeed, without the work of redemption carried out by Jesus Christ, no reconciliation between humans is conceivable. As the biblical arguments goes, the human sin, greed and ungodliness has so deeply permeated our whole psyche, that without a true deliverance from under such pressures we are simply incapable of welcoming, harbouring and even less professing or practising such sentiments. Moreover, even the closest blood relation, i.e. the genetic connection between siblings is no guarantee for a peaceful resolution of the conflicts. It suffices to mention the biblical examples of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1–16) or the myth concerning the foundation of Rome, i.e. the story of Romulus and Remus, leaving aside the many hundred historical examples of brothers and sisters fighting against each other e.g. for the gain of power to the bitter end.

In the case of Cain and Abel it is important to observe that the biblical text does not offer any clues as to why God looked with favour upon Abel and did not look with favour upon Cain and their respective offerings. The suggestion that Abel being a shepherd and Cain a farmer, thus the conflict merely represents the clash between nomadic and settled cultures could be interesting but does not bring us any closer towards understanding the very nature of the tension, even less to its solution. It is important to observe that the biblical text is purposefully

vague,¹ since it evokes an ever-recurrent human dilemma: once I observe that my brother, my relative, my kin is better off in whatever sense than I am, and the reasons for this are simply unknown to me, I almost immediately feel entitled to turn against him/her. Just as if his or her good fortune would be a direct consequence of my real or alleged misery. Furthermore, I may even be driven to argue that his/her accomplishment is the reason why I am unsuccessful, and that he/she in some inexplicable manner is responsible for my downfall, which appears to be some sort of “payment” for his/her success. Therefore, at least for myself, I appear to be completely justified in “being angry” and my “face to be downcast” like that of Cain. This is how human nature works. It is no wonder that God immediately turns towards Cain and warns him about his anger and his downcast face, giving him also the advice to do what is right and thus become accepted, as well as to pay heed to sin, which is “lurking at the door”, yet Cain must rule over it (Genesis 4:7).

An early and extremely important clarification concerning this exposé needs to be offered. Throughout the entire paper we do not intend and in effect never mean to either identify any biblical place with any parts of Korea, or to liken any biblical figure/group to any person or group who dwell on the entire Korean Peninsula. Such practice, however tempting, would not only be unwarranted and unjust on our part, but could also reveal a considerable ignorance concerning its history as well as the subtleties and challenges of everyday Korean life. The examples we are about to invoke should be seen as humble thoughts of a complete outsider, indeed a dilettante, whose only excuse is his sympathy concerning the harsh and undeserved division of the Korean nation. These feeble attempts towards formulating some ideas are to a certain extent born of my own experience as a Hungarian, a nation which has also been living in at least six different countries of Eastern Europe throughout the past century. Since my Christian identity hardly be separated from my national identity, I am profoundly saddened upon seeing such divisions, but at the same time the apostolic counsel ought to be remembered: “For here we have no enduring city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:14).

In our attempt to formulate some answers, we may seek some clues amongst the writings of the Reformers, especially Calvin, who, whilst commenting Paul’s above-quoted passage to the Corinthians, wrote:

Who had reconciled us. Here there are two leading points — the one relating to the reconciliation of men with God; and the other, to the way in which we may enjoy the benefit of this reconciliation. Now these things correspond admirably with what goes before, for as the Apostle had given the preference to a good conscience above every kind of distinction (2 Corinthians 5:11), he now shows that the whole of the gospel tends to this. He shows, however, at the same time, the dignity of the Apostolical office, that the Corinthians may be instructed as to what they ought to seek in him, whereas they could not distinguish between true and false ministers, for this reason, that nothing but show delighted them. Accordingly, by making mention of this, he stirs them up to make greater proficiency in the doctrine of the gospel. For an absurd admiration of profane persons, who serve their own ambition rather than Christ, originates in our not knowing, what the office of the preaching of the gospel includes, or imports. (Calvin, *Commentary on 2Cor 5:18*)

As Calvin suggests, and indeed elaborates on during the following passages, the agency of ministers and, by extension, of Christians is crucial in the process of reconciliation. Obviously, the process begins with Christ, who reconciles us with God. Without this, no human reconciliation is conceivable. As Christians, we ought to bear in mind that we are primary agents of such reconciliation. The term Paul uses in the above passage (and in Romans 11:15) is *καταλλαγή*, which on the first level meant “exchange”, especially of money, signifying even the money-changer’s profit. This is how Demosthenes (384–322 BC), the famous Athenian orator uses it in one of his speeches.² Nonetheless, we find the very same Demosthenes applying the term to denote a change from enmity to friendship, i.e. a true reconciliation between former opponents.³ The “exchange” happened when the Word of God became man, took on our nature, emptied and humbled Himself, and effected the work of salvation through his death and resurrection. This is the meaning of *καταλλαγή*, i.e. exchange between life and death, the life of the Redeemer being paid for the eternal life of God’s all children, so that we may be reconciled with God – a true starting point for us, Christians, when we move toward the question of reconciliation between ourselves and our neighbours. Another, very similar term appears in Jesus’s famous *Sermon on the Mount*, when he discusses the importance of reconciliation with one’s brother before the usual practice to serve God:

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.

First be reconciled (διαλλάγηθι) to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23–24).

The term used by Jesus is διαλλάγή, which means “interchange”, a much closer idea towards “reconciliation”, because it involves a kind of reciprocity. This message of the Greek text is again aptly summarised by Calvin in his commentary:

Christ declares that even the duties of religion are displeasing to God, and are rejected by him, if we are at variance with each other. When he commands those who have injured any of their brethren, *to be reconciled to him*, before they *offer their gift*, his meaning is, that, so long as a difference with our neighbour is kept up by our fault, we have no access to God. But if the worship, which men render to God, is polluted and corrupted by their resentments, this enables us to conclude, in what estimation he holds mutual agreement among ourselves. (Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew 5:23–24*)

This notion of “mutual agreement”, the reciprocity of the Greek διαλλάγή is at the heart of this passage. In our reconciliatory attempts we are often disillusioned because we tend to think exclusively in a linear sense, i.e. that if I make a positive gesture towards someone, I almost instantly expect a similarly positive action towards myself from the very same person. See for example the many cases of ingratitude towards one’s benefactor. The network of reconciliation, however, does not work that way: we need to think globally to understand it. If I begin to emit positive signs everywhere, it may take quite a while until its effects will be felt, and the similar signs will most likely not come back directly from the people I had initially sent them to, but from elsewhere, sometimes from people I do not even know. This reciprocity, therefore, should be understood not in a linear, but in a global sense. I commence something good towards the right, and it comes back to me from the left: it may have orbited the Earth in the process, and much more people may have benefited from it than I could ever assume. This is how I understand the famous verse in the Lord’s Prayer also: “And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

We may observe that in this best-known prayer the Lord enumerates six requests in total, and all of them are unconditional, or better said: do not involve reciprocity – save for one. I can ask for God’s name to be hallowed, for his kingdom to come, for his will to be done, moreover: I can even ask for our daily bread, for the protection against temptation and for his rescue from the evil

one without promising or pledging anything in return. This is one of the most peculiar characteristics of the Christian faith, since it does not involve a kind of „I give to you that you may give to me“ (Latin: *do ut des*) between God and the human being. Nonetheless, there is one request, which involves this mutuality, this interchange, and therefore carries a lot of weight in our existence: „forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors“. Furthermore, this interchange is also not linear: we ask something of God, i.e. to forgive our debts/sins, and we pledge something in return, which is not aimed right towards Him, like a direct repayment for His forgiveness concerning our trespasses against Him, but rather is addressed towards our neighbours, i.e. we pledge to forgive our human debtors. This is again that global way of viewing reciprocity, and indeed, reconciliation, which Jesus portrays. In the same Gospel, Jesus applies everything we do „to one of the least of his brethren“ onto himself (Matthew 25:40). This is how the circle becomes complete.

3. Reconciling With One's Enemy: Biblical and Stoic Warnings

Jesus' admonition in the continuation of his Sermon on the Mount is quite significant, since he states: "be agreed with your adversary quickly, while you are in on the way with him" (Matthew 5:25). As Calvin observes,

Christ appears to go farther, and to exhort to reconciliation not only those who have injured their brethren, but those also who are unjustly treated. But I interpret the words as having been spoken with another view, to take away occasion for hatred and resentment, and to point out the method of cherishing good-will. For whence come all injuries, but from this, that each person is too tenacious of his own rights, that is, each is too much disposed to consult his own convenience to the disadvantage of others? Almost all are so blinded by a wicked love of themselves, that, even in the worst causes, they flatter themselves that they are in the right. To meet all hatred, enmity, debates, and acts of injustice, Christ reproves that obstinacy, which is the source of these evils, and enjoins his own people to cultivate moderation and justice, and to make some abatement from the highest rigor, that, by such an act of justice, they may purchase for themselves peace and friendship. (Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew 5:25*)

This is obviously one step higher from “the mutual agreement” mentioned above, and brings us closer to Jesus’ interpretation of the love of one’s enemy. A good philosophical refutation of the narrow-minded understanding of linear reciprocity comes from the late Stoics, more precisely from Marcus Aurelius. In the opening section of his *Meditations*, where he enumerates all the people, whom he feels indebted to for various reasons, there is a passage about Rusticus. The author uses the very same notion of διαλλαγή (present in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount), with the added prefix “εὖ” denoting something good, something positive upon describing reconciliation:

From Rusticus I received the impression that my character required improvement and discipline; [...] and with respect to those who have offended me by words, or done me wrong, to be easily disposed to be pacified and reconciled (εὐανακλήτως καὶ εὐδιαλλάκτως), as soon as they have shown a readiness to be reconciled (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1, 7).⁴

Making peace with those who wronged us is quite an important step towards one’s inner calm. The fact that one of the most appreciated Roman emperors did not use the term “reconciliation” superficially can be demonstrated by numerous quotes from his work. We shall recall only one instance, which bears a lesson to Christians as well, both ancient and modern. Marcus Aurelius proclaimed that doing good is to be valued *per se* and should be performed for its own sake, even without any present or future repayment. In his own words,

When you have performed a good deed and someone else profited from it, why do you seek for a third thing besides these, as fools do, that is either to have the credit also of having performed a good deed, or to receive a recompense? (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 7, 73)⁵

These are the moments when Christians should consider learning from such ancient thinkers, who sometimes were ready to offer more (i.e. a good deed for free) for immeasurably much less than we are promised to receive (i.e. a future reward by God’s mercy). One may ask the question in a Korean setting: this is all fine, but how does that apply to us in the present situation? Do we have any debts between ourselves, not only between the North and South, but amongst all inhabitants of this peninsula, our ancient home, the history of which has been

ever so often written with blood, with so many unjust divisions and pains brought about by various powers beyond our control? Are there any debts that we need to forgive amongst ourselves? This is an ever-recurrent dilemma for nations, who lived or continue to live in a rather arbitrarily imposed separation. Questions like “who is better off?” or “who bears more responsibility than the other?” are not as easily answerable as it may appear at first sight and could well depend on one’s concrete situation and viewpoint. These questions on the one hand divert our attention from seeking for the solution, which should remain our focus. On the other hand, they tend to (mis)lead us towards searching for someone (a person, a group) to blame. The latter is always the easier, albeit futile exercise, and hardly offers more than the mere illusion of a solution. These are the key issues under investigation here, especially the manner in which contemporary Korean Protestant theologians make use of the heritage of Reformation, its biblical interpretation and practice.

4. Dealing With the Heritage: Acceptance, Repentance and Revision

At the very outset, i.e. on the first step of the road towards a true reconciliation we are facing a very painful, yet inevitable question to be asked in the mildest manner possible: do all inhabitants of the Korean Peninsula think and feel that they belong together? Are they all fully persuaded by the fact that their temporary separation did not supersede the need for unity in any one of them, a unity, which had been there for more than a millennium before the mid-twentieth century?

As a Hungarian, I do not ask this only on a theoretical level: we had to learn it because of a very painful and somewhat recent experience. The result of a referendum in Hungary in 2004 revealed that not all Hungarians living in Hungary thought that they belonged together with all their fellow Hungarian sisters and brothers who live outside the present borders of Hungary. And the question did not even touch the issue of a political unity, i.e. the territorial reunification of the country, as it had been before 1920, was not even mentioned.

The lesson I learnt from this is the following: never assume that the other person or group thinks exactly in the way I/we think. We need to ask the question (however painful it may be), then must wait for and pay close attention to the

answer, especially if it contains some reasons underlying a rejection. Only in this way we can hope to find out the proportion of those supporting any reconciliation (which is only the first step) as well as of those who thirst for unification. Those who do not desire this are the ones who need our full attention. As we may observe, this potential rejection on anyone's part is the first debt between ourselves, which needs our forgiveness, especially before any persuasion may begin. Of course, a significant role in this process of healing is to be played by Korean Christians. As formulated by Chang Yoon-Jae, a present-day professor of systematic theology,

We Korean Christians believe that the division of the Korean Peninsula and its human costs does contradict God's will for the fullness of life. It is a sin against God and humanity. Therefore, we believe that churches are called to transform themselves and to engage in healing and reconciliation of Jesus Christ. We long for peace, for Christ is peace. As the Church, therefore, we should heal the wounds of the people who suffer from war, longing for genuine peace. (Chang 2019, p. 180)

In line with the above biblical argument, Lim Hee-Kuk, another illustrious representative of modern Korean Christian thought, goes even further, invoking the aspect of repentance for past and present failures to achieve this desired reconciliation:

One of the Korean Church's tasks in this situation is to dissolve the conflict and confrontation between South and North Korea, to realize the reconciliation of the divided nation, and to contribute to the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The gospel of God's kingdom fulfilled in Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace. The Korean Church, however, has thus far failed to practice the gospel of peace, of which many Korean Christians today reflect self-critically and repent. (Lim 2019, p. 135)

At this point one cannot avoid contemplating the harsh reality of brothers and sisters having been forged into enemies. Beyond the need for repentance, the urge to love our enemies (who could be external oppressors, but even our own flesh and blood) practically becomes a Kantian categorical imperative. In the vision of the church historian Sangdo Choi, the commandment to love our enemy "may be a radical way of resistance without making violence in order to open a space of reconciliation between God and human beings who were

in an ungodly status, and among human beings who are in conflict or under oppression” (Choi 2019, p. 75). The same author discusses certain “power practices” amongst Christians during the fourth and fifth centuries, especially the conflicts between brothers and sisters in faith, i.e. “between orthodoxy and heresy such as Donatism, Arianism and Pelagianism” (Choi 2019, p. 70). This is already a negative development since New Testament times and a departure from the admonitions of Jesus, reaching the point where St. Augustine claimed that coercion exercised by the state to force heretics back into the official church was acceptable. Whilst being a Protestant theologian himself and a supporter of the Reformed theological heritage, Choi nonetheless chooses to treat this heritage with healthy criticism, for he writes:

The Reformation period was no exception to the practice of Augustine’s theory of coercion and Thomas Aquinas’ death penalty for heresy. Early Reformers, such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, and later Protestants such as Martin Luther and Jean Calvin and their followers were persecuted and even killed. The persecutors were the Roman Catholic Church and her sponsoring state authorities on the grounds of exterminating heresy for the health of all. However, the Reformers also shifted their position from persecuted lambs to persecuting lions when they obtained power under the aegis of local states and were the majority (Bainton 1935). After 1525, for example, Luther agreed with the use of state-force to remove false religion, that is, Roman Catholics, Jews, and radical reformers such as Anabaptists, from Protestant territories. In Geneva, Calvin accepted the burning of the anti-Trinitarian heretic Michael Servetus in 1541. The list is long on both sides. As Paul Middleton neatly pointed out, “Christians created other Christian martyrs” (Middleton 2006, p. 80) in the Reformation period. (Choi 2019, pp. 70–71)

This is a very powerful memento from a Korean Protestant theologian who shows that those truly insightful explanations concerning the meaning of reconciliation as we find and cherish in Calvin’s biblical commentaries did not always translate into legal and ecclesiastical practice as neatly as one would expect. Such negative examples are needed to avoid repeating past mistakes. Consequently, dealing with one’s heritage involves not only continuation and acceptance, but also repentance, revision and, if necessary, the adequate correction as well. This is very true in the case of Calvin’s legacy, the more so since on the one hand he had provided a beautiful interpretation of the biblical passages concerning reconciliation with our fellow human beings, yet on the other hand, in some

of his other writings, he espoused an entirely different view. For example, in his infamous *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, published both in Latin and French in 1554, i.e. long years after the execution of Servetus, Calvin regrettably became the ringleader of intolerant Protestants. In trying to justify the actions of the magistrate of Geneva against Servetus, he writes:

Our sympathy-mongers, who take such great pleasure in leaving heresies unpunished, now see that their fantasy hardly conforms with God's commandment. Afraid lest the Church be blamed for being too severe, they would allow all kinds of errors to spread freely to secure tolerance for one man. But God does not even allow whole towns and populations to be spared, but will have the walls razed and the memory of the inhabitants destroyed and all things frustrated as a sign of his utter detestation, lest the contagion spread. He even gives us to understand that by concealing a crime one becomes an accomplice. Nor is this to be wondered at, since it is here a question of rejecting God and sane doctrine, which perverts and violates every human and divine right. (Calvin 1554, trans. by T. L. Westow)

The fact that Calvin was not alone with this attitude at the time is confirmed by his colleague and fellow Reformer, Theodore Beza, at the time professor of Greek language at Lausanne, who published his *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis* (i.e. *Concerning the Heretics Being Punishable By the Civil Magistrate*) in the very same year. The work systematically refuted any idea of tolerance towards those whom the author perceived as being persistent in their schismatic views and vigorously argued for the right of the magistrate to punish and even execute such individuals. This attitude of both Reformers has been denounced repeatedly by later illustrious authors (Acton 1907, pp. 177–185; Zweig 1936, p. 168).

Based on his statement above, the Protestant church historian Sangdo Choi chooses to revise and correct this aspect of the heritage of the 16th century, adhering to Calvin the biblical interpreter, yet opposing Calvin the lawyer. In doing this, he is arguably closer to the attitude of some Early Church authors, amongst whom John of Apamea (also called as John the Solitary and occasionally identified with John of Lycopolis), a 5th century Syrian mystic and hermit, who wrote:

Strength of soul, my beloved, is this: on hearing heretical opinions, the soul is not scandalized and does not hate those who affirm the opinions. Now if it hates, this

is weakness of soul, and as the body is wounded by a blow so the soul is weakened by scandal. When gluttony and avarice are mixed with a carnal mentality, one cannot get enough of the misfortunes of others, whereas the natural insatiability of the soul is not satisfied except by the exercise of wisdom. Thirst for spiritual mysteries is the delight of the new life. (John of Apamea, *On the Soul*, p. 192, trans. by Mary T. Hansbury)

This “strength of the soul”, which refuses the sentiment of hate even in the presence of “heretical opinions” could well be the more fruitful tradition one has to uphold whilst seeking to pacify sisters and brothers: both in Christ and in blood. Our German friends can perhaps talk about this with much higher authority, which I would not dare to challenge, yet hope to be permitted to invoke another personal experience. I had and continue to have very good friends, who had been living on both sides of the former Berlin Wall. In the mid-nineties, my East-Berliner friend shared with me his grief upon having witnessed that people from the other side (former West-Berliners) burst out saying that the wall should be rebuilt, moreover, it should be made five times higher and three times thicker than it had been before. They discovered in a sorrowful manner that the wall between them had not been merely physical. It was intended to create two different German nations out of one, also in a spiritual sense. A lot of work was put into it. Despite President John F. Kennedy’s brave and visionary speech with his famous utterance of “ich bin ein Berliner” on 26 June 1963, after the reunification in 1990, sacrifices had to be made: on the one hand, those who arguably were better off, had to leave their comfort-zone to accommodate the arguably “poorer”. On the other hand, those who had been living under dictatorship had to learn in a very short period what it means to live in a democracy. This is easier said than done: having lived under a harsh dictatorship for almost 17 years, I know that besides its terrible effects on your everyday life, there are some advantages to it for the individual on the moral level. For example, you always have someone – a person, a dictator, or a privileged group of people – to blame for all your misfortunes and shortcomings. Most of these grievances are well-founded, but some are not. Especially those, which are connected to one’s morality and the level of our acceptance of a society-wide moral decline.

In my country, Romania, before 1989 a lot of people used to steal prime material or even finished products from the factories. Everything was meant for export, and there was a genuine need for certain things which were simply unavailable.

Consequently, without even realising it, we stopped calling it “stealing” (because almost everyone was doing it) and used formulae like “I acquired this” instead. Now once that regime is over, you find yourself without anyone else to blame, but yourself. And that is a painful awakening, an excruciating process of social and democratic maturation. Anyway, old habits die hard, and you are fed up with being “the poor relative” all the time. Others might find it overwhelming to share the burden, and temporarily diminish their previous life standards, thus becoming angry with the very ones they should become reconciled with. Both parties need to change. An exchange, a *καταλλαγή* and a *διαλλαγή* is needed. Why? Because we all have been changed. We may not be the same nation to the degree which we think, hope or dream that we truly are. Again: why? Because we have been taught so differently about so many things.

5. The Difference Between “Past” and “History”

Take history and the teaching of history for example. As the old Latin proverb says, “history is the teacher of life”. Nonetheless, Cicero, the famous orator, who coined this phrase in 55 BC, conferred a few more qualities to it, affirming that “history is indeed the evidence of time, the light of truth, the life of memory, the teacher/directress of life, the herald of antiquity” (Cicero, *De Oratore ad Quintum Fratrem* II, 9, 35).⁶

Quite an impressive list of qualities, one might think. Yet, as Prof. Larry Hurtado, one of my beloved New Testament teachers in Edinburgh has drawn our attention to it, history is not identical with the past. In his own words, uttered during one of his memorable lectures, “past is what happened; history is what we say about what happened.” What a difference. And exactly this is the difference which one may discover whilst looking at Korea’s very own history from at least two, if not far more perspectives. We should not assume that all Koreans living in both parts of the country have been taught the very same history with the very same focuses and emphases. As one of the contemporary leading Korean Protestant theologians, Jooseop Keum rightly observes,

There is evidence that most Korean history writing, including ecclesiastical history, has served to emphasize the legitimacy and superiority of each one side

over against the other, promoting one of the two systems, or ideologies, and attacking its opposite. Church history written from the perspective of South Korea demonstrates a tendency toward anti-Communism, sometimes resembling McCarthyism. This is used to justify the division of the Korean peninsula and keep the North Korean Church and South Korean Church separate. (Keum 2019, p. 57)

I did not read any history schoolbooks from either part of Korea, so to a certain extent this is merely an outsider's assumption or theory, which needs to be verified or disproven. It is my assumption, therefore, that not only the recent past, i.e. that of the last few decades including the origins and nature of the conflict were presented and taught differently, but even some great figures of much older and commonly shared Korean times are presented in a different light. For example, the whole Kingdom of Great Joseon or the amazing achievements of Admiral Sun-Shin Yi could well be exhibited in completely different contexts to suit quite divergent political and social purposes. The path of North and South towards each other will undoubtedly lead through the rediscovery and common appreciation of this shared history. First, because it is a history that all Koreans can be proud about. Furthermore, it is imperative that the division of the past few decades, however painful and sore it has been, should never have the power to overwrite the much longer and weightier common history, which binds them together. Let this common history be, according to the ancient Roman speaker, the true "evidence of time", the very life of the longer and enduring Korean memory as a nation. We, Christians, already have "the light of truth" as our guide in the person of our Saviour.

So, on the path towards reconciliation and healing, one must remember everything that binds us together, and should take careful note of everything which might separate us. We do not know the full length of either list, but the more we talk to each other, the more we ask and wait for the answer patiently, the more we shall discover the way forward. There will be a lot to forgive on both sides. Korean Christians of all denominations have an even more pressing task at this point: it is their duty to commence forgiveness, to create the possibilities for people to talk, to expose their views, even to speak of their grievances, thus commencing the process of national healing in a loving environment. It is very useful to listen to the elderly: to the generation of your grandfathers, who may still have some personal memories of a united Korean nation. Their words may be simpler, hence wiser, and will undoubtedly come from the heart. We should

remember that it was the biblical task of the old to speak about past times to the younger generation, including God's deliverance (e.g. from Egypt) as well as his commandments concerning the love towards God and one's neighbour: "recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Indeed, forgetfulness, historical amnesia is one of our worst enemies in this whole process: one needs to remember, needs to appeal to our national subconscious. Having visited Korea, having seen the people and the manner how they greet each other, I am deeply convinced that there is something you are fully entitled to call "the Korean soul", "the Korean inner self", "the Korean subconscious". Something that you feel, that is in your bones, and transcends every ideology, every barrier, every militarised or demilitarised zone, however wide or high it may be. In your deepest selves you know those ancient lullabies Korean mothers are currently singing to their babies, right at this moment, in all corners of your country. Remember the words of those lullabies: do not let them be forgotten. The simplest words may bind you together, more than you think, hope, or imagine. Or was it not our Lord who said: "out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?" (Matthew 21:16)

Moving further towards the concept of unification, one ought to bear in mind what the very notion reveals: there are two, in some sense different or differing entities who need unification. In a certain sense, we were grown, nurtured, and taught to be apart: in my own experience, in Romanian history schoolbooks even different terms were used to denote Hungarians living in Romania and in Hungary respectively, to deepen the division. This may not be your case, but attempts might have been made or could be made in the future to define who is "the better", "the more authentic" or "the true" Korean. One must take heed and not follow such tendencies of categorisation: they undoubtedly lead to tragedy, disruption, and even disaster. The authenticity of anyone being "Korean" has nothing to do with their dwelling place or with the things they have been taught. Unification does not and should not mean uniformity: any such attempt is doomed to failure and would cause even deeper divisions than those we encounter at present.

6. The Example of Elijah on Mount Carmel

In a certain sense, we need to change our customary ways to think about unity: instead of considering unification as being merely *a prospective goal* to be achieved some time in the future, which is nonetheless true in the present political environment, one might consider unity as being a matter of course, *something that is already given* in our present here and now – at least in a spiritual sense. Instead of trying to explain it on a theoretical level, let us turn to another biblical example, i.e. the story presented in 1Kings, chapter 18. I shall summarise it nonetheless, for the sake of emphasising my point.

This is a dark time in the history of God's people. It is the middle of the ninth century before Christ, when the nation has already been living in two separate countries. Almost a century before, around 931 BC, Roboam, the son of King Solomon makes a fatal mistake in alienating the northern tribes from himself, and consequently, a new kingdom under the name of Israel is established in the North comprising ten tribes, whilst the South remains under the rule of Solomon's heirs, bearing the name of Judah, consisting of two tribes: Judah and Benjamin. The separation continues not only on a political, but also on the spiritual level: the temple, the only cultic centre of the nation, which had been built by Solomon, was in Jerusalem, i.e. in the south. Therefore, the northern kings sought to replace this with other centres of sacrifice erected in their territory to prevent their subjects from continuing to go to Jerusalem for worship. It is commonplace enough that if you are spiritually connected to a place, your political allegiance may be influenced accordingly. The northern kings considered that they could not afford this risk. To add to the mix, these newly established northern places of cult were raised in the honour of Baal, a strange god, who was not identical with the Lord.

Ahab, the famous or rather infamous king of the north in the ninth century, continued this tradition of spiritual separation by not only furthering the cult of Baal, but by encouraging yet another cult of a female deity, Asherah,⁷ preferred by his wife, Jezebel, a Phoenician princess by origin. This is the moment when Elijah, the true archetype of the Old Testament prophet, appears on the scene. All the Lord's prophets had already been murdered by Ahab: whilst the prophets of Baal numbered 450 in total, Elijah stood alone as the last prophet of the Lord. He nonetheless provokes them to come to Mount Carmel and assemble the people

there. Upon having arrived at the place – Mount Carmel is up in the North, close to the Mediterranean Sea – Elijah addresses the multitude, who gathered there: “How long will you go limping in two separate directions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1Kings 18:21).

At first glance, this appears to be a rather divisive statement. First, because Elijah is in the kingdom of the North, where not the Lord, but Baal is the official divinity. Second, because with this utterance he not only provokes these northerners to follow the Lord, but arguably influences them to adhere to the political system of the southern kingdom of Judah. Or does he? He challenges Baal’s 450 prophets to an interesting duel: they should take one bull for themselves, lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. He pledges to do the same with another bull himself. Both parties should call on the name of their respective god, and the god who answers by fire, is the true God. After Baal’s prophets try unsuccessfully to be heard from morning until early in the evening,

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near me.” So, all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Israel shall be your name”. Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. (1Kings 18:30–32).

We know how the story unfolds: Elijah’s prayer was answered, and the Lord’s fire consumed the burnt offering, even though Elijah had poured twelve jars of water on it, so the people cried out: “the Lord indeed is God”. My current point, however, lies within the above quoted passage, namely, that although the nation of Israel lives in two separate countries – ten tribes in the North, two tribes in the South, and the whole event takes place on Mount Carmel, i.e. in the North – Elijah takes *not ten*, but *twelve stones* to signify the unity of the nation. By this very gesture, Elijah considers the unity of the nation as being a matter of course, not a future goal to be achieved, as I had mentioned above. Indeed, the unity is a spiritual one, and nobody dares to even speak of it in a political sense, especially in Ahab’s presence, but the cohesion, the sentiment of belonging together, the fact that they are not ten, but twelve tribes in total, as signified by the twelve stones, which constitute the altar that had been broken down, is very much there. The northerners appear to have put behind them the many decades of separation –

we are talking almost about a whole century – and embracing again the very old tradition, they return to their true God of whom even the grandfathers of that generation were deprived. The outcry “the Lord indeed is God” is a massive relief: these people realise in an instant that this one prophet is not some southern political agent, not “a troubler of Israel” as Ahab had previously labelled him (1Kings 18:17), but the very voice of their true and inner selves, the sound of a long-forgotten lullaby, the counsel of their elderly.

This is the true and veritable starting point towards any reconciliation, healing, and unification: one needs to be utterly convinced that this unity is already a fact on the spiritual level. You cannot start with, and you cannot settle for anything less. There can hardly be any real success without this paradoxical and apparently ridiculous conviction. Indeed, we need to be as ridiculous in our faith and passion for unity, as Elijah was, standing alone against 450. I am not a mathematician, even less a political analyst, so I do not know whether there are any calculable odds concerning the probability of a Korean reunification. Are the odds about 1:450? Is it more? Is it less? The question to be asked by God’s people is this: does it matter? It is mathematically futile to calculate the odds against the Infinite. As our Lord himself had put it, “with men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

And exactly here is yet another important aspect to be considered, especially by Korean Christians. If we remain at the image of the twelve stones representing the whole of the nation, we must bear in mind that the twelve stones in our case do not represent only the Korean Christians: they illustrate all Koreans. Christians of all denominations, followers of other religions, freely practicing their respective faiths in some parts of the country, whilst being persecuted in various ways in other places, agnostics, and atheists: they are all elements of the same altar. Take out any of them, and you do not have twelve stones anymore. Elijah was also aware that not everyone was a follower of the Lord: yet he still used twelve stones.

This is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the whole exercise for us, Christians: the one thing we cannot afford to do is to be exclusivists. The real chance lies with us, who truly know, who have been taught that with men it is impossible, but not with God. If Christians can be the very mediators of reconciliation and healing, if they can rise to the challenge of not excluding anyone, but by the means permitted by the Saviour embrace everyone in his

name, a miracle might just happen. This could be a truly wonderful Christian mission: the culture of nationwide unconditional acceptance. Something that the above-quoted Korean Protestant theologians clearly envisage in their writings. I would even venture to say that this is a first and unmissable step towards what the Lord had foreseen: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

We do not know how many turned to God after Elijah's triumph on Mount Carmel, and even less how many persisted in their regained faith. There were other kings after Ahab, who also departed from the worship of the Lord. Yet the task put before us is not to try to gather the tares so we might uproot the wheat with them (see Matthew 13:29), but to remind ourselves, each other, and everyone around us, that nobody is superfluous, unessential, or insignificant. This may prove to be the most difficult and foreseeably the most enduring, long-lasting task in this process of national rebuilding: no wonder that it was allotted to us. Christianity is about a lot of things, especially about working against the odds. Some two thousand years ago and in some remote and poor part of the world, twelve men were entrusted with an impossible mission: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Did they ask about the odds? No. And yet, here we are. First, we need to embrace all non-Christian Koreans as our brothers and sisters. Then, in return, some of them, upon seeing us, how we love each other, might embrace us as Christians. All this, however, lies in the hands of our Lord, who had sent us and who has all eternity at his disposal. We cannot rush him, but we can nonetheless trust him. Unconditionally. Remember the Lord's prayer for his disciples on the night of his betrayal: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those, who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one" (John 17:20–21). After all, as quoted at the beginning of this paper, "we are ambassadors for Christ", so we may just as well do our job. It is quite remarkable how some aspects of Korean history are consonant with the biblical story. And again, northern (!) Korean Protestantism plays a significant role. As presented by Jooseop Keum,

Protestant Christianity was introduced to the Korean peninsula through the "northern route". It arrived in a northern Korean society that suffered from economic, social and political discrimination, in relation to Southern Korea, at

the end of the Joseon Dynasty. Against the traditional caste system of the south-centered Confucianism, northern Protestantism engaged in the enlightenment of social equality among the northern *minjung*. 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 *Hangeul*, 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. Korean nationalism thus became an important characteristic of northern Protestantism. When the Japanese imposed *Shinto* shrine worship 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*. (Keum 2019, p. 60)

One almost feels that no further elucidation is necessary. The very example of Christians behaving as they should, can suffice. *Minjung* people, i.e. common people already considered Protestant Christians as models to be followed. Nonetheless, two further biblical examples might assist us. If we accept that the Lord's words "you are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) are applicable to us, Christians, and that "the kingdom of heaven is like yeast" (Matthew 13:33), which is meant to leaven the whole flour, then we simply need to follow the example of these two elements. Has anyone seen a chef making a soup, and instead of putting salt into it, would put a little salt into the empty pot and then pour the soup over it? Or would any baker take a little piece of yeast first, put it in the middle of the table, and only then trying to add the flour to it and mix them together? Do you add the soup to the salt and the flour to the yeast or vice versa? Thus, we cannot afford to sit and wait for our neighbours to join us, unless we intend to become as ridiculous as the salt waiting for the soup to be poured over it, or the yeast sitting alone in one place waiting for the flour to be mixed with it.

A brief, yet not at all insignificant point concerning persecuted Korean Christians must be made. The so-called invisible Church has enormous gifts and spiritual treasures to offer us, more "fortunate", i.e. presently not persecuted Christians. Approaching them requires a highly elevated sense of empathy.

Having lived under such circumstances in my youth, I can still vividly remember our profound astonishment, when after the political changes in 1989, a whole legion of well-intended yet uninformed North-American Christian missionaries came to my country and began “evangelising” us roughly along such lines: “I have come here to speak about someone, whose name you have not heard during the long decades of communism; I came to bear witness in front of you about our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!” Little did our enthusiastic “evangelist” know just to what extent and at what cost did the members of our congregation know and hear about Jesus throughout those decades. Having often been selected as a translator on such occasions, I decided to take the time to prepare and “update” these speakers about the true nature of Christianity under persecution. I am more than certain that such groups exist in a lot of places in the northern part of Korea: they truly deserve our attention, empathy, and respect. We have a lot to learn from them, more than we may realise.

7. Conclusion: Ecclesia Koreana Semper Reformanda

It is perhaps one of the most illustrious examples of how modern Korean Protestant theologians deal with their Reformation heritage when they apply the classic principle of continued reformation onto their own ecclesiastical situation. Jooseop Keum summarises this in the last paragraph of his quoted article, as follows:

There is a principle of ongoing reformation in the Reformed tradition. The northern church, which has generally preserved Korean Reformed tradition, must be reminded that *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est* (Bárczay 1961). The church that is reformed is always in need of being reformed. The origins of this famous slogan are obscure. It does not come from Calvin but a later period (Hesselink 1988, p. 119). Nevertheless, it is an appropriate slogan for use among the anonymous grassroots participants, the *minjung* in Korean conception, in the struggle for ongoing reformation. As church-state relations in North Korea have been developed in diverse paradigms due to changes in the socio-historical context, the current paradigm of church-state relations cannot be regarded as permanent. The only permanent feature is that the church must always identify itself with the suffering *minjung* for the ceaseless reformation of itself, and must continually evaluate and reshape its relationship with the state accordingly (Keum 2019, p. 68)

The message is quite clear: the church is not allowed to betray or abandon the *minjung*, i.e. “the least of the Lord’s brethren” (Matthew 25:40). Again, without expressly stating it, Keum conscientiously distances himself from the problematic legacy of Luther’s pamphlet *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants*. Instead, he applies the same principle inherited from the Reformed tradition, that the Church, the visible and invisible body of Christ upon Earth, needs a continuous Reformation, represented by the consistent reinterpretation and reapplication of the Gospel truth upon the all-time contemporary reality.

I would like to conclude with a modest observation, which derives partly from a personal experience. During one of my visits to the southern part of Korea I was also given the opportunity to spend some time in the so-called demilitarised zone. At a certain point, somebody invited me to the telescopes, through which one could take a glance over “to the other side”. I must admit, I could not resist the temptation, and leaned towards the lens of the telescope. In the next moment, however, my first 17 years came to haunt my mind and made me take a step back: what if someone had or could have been watching me and my family like this in the 1980s? Just as if we were actors on some giant stage, whilst we were trying to live our lives in the way we could? How would I have reacted to it? Could I have accepted it or would rather have considered it an unwelcome intrusion into my life? Am I just an actor on stage, a Transylvanian *minjung* playing willy-nilly for those who are simply curious? And the image of the stage brought back one philosophical, one literary as well as a biblical memory. I will share them here.

Epictetus (ca. 55–135 AD), the famous Stoic philosopher and the contemporary to the second and third generation of Christians, once wrote in his *Enchiridion*:

Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the author pleases to make it. If short, of a short one; if long, of a long one. If it is his pleasure, you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, to act well the character assigned to you; but to choose it is another’s. (Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 17, trans. by Elizabeth Carter)

As the old wise man had put it, we are all actors in a drama, staged by an Author, who is greater than us. He has the exclusive right to cast us: we do not have a choice concerning our role, only to act it naturally. There are no bench seats, no designated parterre, no galleys, no balcony boxes, or loges, so there is no

place for an audience in this dazzling theatre of God's glory, which is our world according to John Calvin,⁸ so we cannot be the spectators of the lives of others. One cannot simply come off the stage and behold his/her neighbour from the position of an outsider, even less as an Orwellian "bigger brother". As William Shakespeare, perhaps having been influenced by Epictetus, wrote:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.⁹

Thus, there is no place for us off-stage: we should not attempt to have one. Our brothers and sisters do not have the commodity to take a glance at us: we should respect them by refraining to do it from our position. There is but one stage of Korea, not two: not a stage in the North and a galley or a balcony in the South or vice versa. The whole country is one stage, albeit cut in half as in some modern dramas. Only one biblical parallel comes to mind, and that is of Job: in that book we also find a stage cut in half, but the two parts are not side by side, but on top of each other. On Job's level (the lower part of the stage) a lot of misfortunes happen; events that he is unable to decipher, unable to understand their cause. His only answer is to cling to his faith even during harshest times, when there is no possible reason to do it, when every conceivable rationale, and indeed his own wife would urge him "to curse God and die" (Job 2:9). The other, upper part of the stage, which Job is unable to see, is the place of God's encounter with Satan, i.e. an event, which could assist Job in understanding and accepting his predicament: but the whole point is that it is hidden from him. He is left with literally nothing, only his totally irrational faith in his Lord.

We, the readers of the Book of Job, are the audience on the balcony, because this theatre, the theatre of the book of Job can accommodate an audience: we can see both the lower and the upper part of the stage simultaneously and may well reflect about the inexplicable events in our lives and our ability or inability to deal with them relying exclusively on our faith. But on our own stage, which is our life on the Korean peninsula, there are neither elevated seats, nor privileged positions: there is only the hope, the faith, the conviction that this stage whose director and sole arbiter is our Lord Himself, may once be whole, and all the actors may realise that they belong to the same, reunited "theatre company".

Then we shall also marvel at the fact that there are ambassadors of Christ on both sides of the stage, and the reconciliation with God is the very guarantee of a true healing and joyful union. To quote Charlie Chaplin, one of the greatest actors and directors of all time, "life is a tragedy when seen in closeup, but a comedy in long-shot" (Kramer 1972, col. 7). This is true even if we are aware that in this earthly life we still "see through a mirror, dimly" (1Corinthians 13:12). The perspective of the eternal One, however, outshines this dimness.

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- 1 See Genesis 4:4–5: “The Lord looked with favour upon Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.”
- 2 See Demosthenes, Oration 50 (Against Polycles), 30: ἡ τιμὴ τίς ἦν καὶ νόμισμα ποδαπὸν, καὶ ὅπου ἡ καταλλαγὴ ἦν τῷ ἀργυρίῳ (“what the price was, in the coinage of what country the payment was made, and what the loss in exchange was”) ed. by W. Rennie 1931, trans. by A. T. Murray 1939.
- 3 See Demosthenes, Oration 1 (Olynthiac 1), 4: πρὸς δὲ τὰς καταλλαγάς, ἃς ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιήσται ἄσμενος πρὸς Ὀλυνθίους, ἐναντίως ἔχει (“but when it comes to a reconciliation such as he [i.e. Philip] would gladly make with Olynthus, the tables are turned”) ed. by S. H. Butcher 1903.
- 4 Παρὰ Ρουστίκου τὸ λαβεῖν φαντασίαν τοῦ χρήζειν διορθώσεως καὶ θεραπείας τοῦ ἥθους: [...] καὶ τὸ πρὸς τοὺς χαλεπήναντας καὶ πλημμελήσαντας εὐανακλήτως καὶ εὐδιαλλάκτως, ἐπειδὴν τάχιστα αὐτοὶ ἐπανελθεῖν ἐθελήσωσι, διακεῖσθαι. (translated by George Long).
- 5 Ὅταν σὺ εἴς πεποιηκὸς ᾖ καὶ ἄλλος εἴς πεπονθὼς, τί ἔτι ζητεῖς τρίτον παρὰ ταῦτα, ὥσπερ οἱ μωροί, τὸ καὶ δόξαι εἴς πεποιηκέναι ἢ τὸ ἀμοιβῆς τυχεῖν; (translated by István Pásztori-Kupán).
- 6 “Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis.” <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/oratore2.shtml> (accessed: 29.01.2024).
- 7 This female deity was worshipped under various names including Astarte, Asherah, Ashtaroth, Ishtar, Isis etc., signifying the goddess of love, fertility, and motherhood. From the perspective of the Greek and Roman Pantheon Asherah might be regarded as being a combination of Hera and Aphrodite, i.e., of Juno and Venus, respectively.
- 8 See John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* I, 5, 8: “As the greater part of mankind, enslaved by error, walk blindfold in this glorious theatre, he [the Psalmist] exclaims that it is a rare and singular wisdom to meditate carefully on these works of God, which many, who seem most sharp-sighted in other respects, behold without profit. It is indeed true, that the brightest manifestation of divine glory finds not one genuine spectator among a hundred. Still, neither his power nor his wisdom is shrouded in darkness” (trans. by Henry Beveridge).
- 9 William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7.

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PART II

*Diaspora, Mission,
and Ecumenism*

History and Characteristics of Early Korean Diaspora Churches

Abstract

This study examines the history and characteristics of early Korean diaspora churches before Korea's liberation in 1945. It focuses on Korean Christian communities established in Manchuria, Japan, Russia, Hawaii, Mexico, Cuba, Shanghai, and Nanjing. These churches emerged amid forced migration, political oppression, and economic hardship, often becoming centers of both spiritual life and nationalist activity. Korean diaspora Christians embraced Christianity voluntarily, seeking both religious freedom and cultural preservation. They founded schools, built churches, and participated in Bible translation and local evangelism. Despite limited support from the homeland church, they maintained strong networks and displayed ecumenical cooperation across denominations. These churches also played significant roles in the Korean independence movement and helped preserve Korean identity abroad. The paper highlights their unique character shaped by displacement, resilience, and missional commitment in unfamiliar and often hostile environments.

I. Introduction

The phenomenon of diaspora has been a long-standing and global occurrence in human history. Particularly today, with the advancement of information communication technology and the globalization of neoliberal economies, the exchange between nations and the movement of goods and capital have accelerated. As a result, the diaspora phenomenon has become more diversified and its pace has quickened. According to statistics from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of migrants living abroad amounted to 173.2 million (2.8%) in the year 2000, 220.1 million (3.2%) in 2010, and currently stands at 286 million (3.6%) in 2020.¹

The number of migrant workers alone reaches 164 million.

Since the late 20th century, scholarly research on “diaspora” has flourished across various disciplines including cultural anthropology, sociology, political science, history, education, literature, and religious studies.

In the case of South Korea, the influx of foreign labor began in the late 1980s, and interest in immigrants within Korean churches heightened with the arrival of North Korean defectors in 1998. Academic interest in overseas Korean churches has expanded notably in the 21st century.²

This study is to briefly mention existing academic achievements regarding the Korean diaspora and to compare the characteristics of Korean churches in pre-liberation Manchuria (West and North Kando), Shanghai, Nanjing. The Korean diaspora was scattered not only to neighboring countries such as China, Japan and Russia, but also to Hawaii, the mainland United States, Mexico, and Cuba before liberation from Japan in 1945.

Most existing research on overseas Korean churches has been described from missionary and nationalist perspectives. Korean diaspora Christians formed deep relationships with foreign local churches, evangelized their fellow Koreans, supported independence movements, and implemented nationalist education to preserve ethnic identity. However, research on overseas Korean churches needs both a macroscopic perspective, considering changes in international relations occurring locally, and a microscopic perspective, understanding the lives of individuals living as migrants. The aspect of migrants’ lives will be examined through the contents of the General Assembly reports and Presbytery reports.

II. Definition of Diaspora

1. Biblical definition

The Greek term “διασπορά” is derived from the verb “διασπείρω,” which is a compound of the prefix “δια-” indicating direction and movement, and “σπείρω” meaning “to sow” or “to scatter.” For ancient Greeks, “diaspora” signified the process of destruction and the dispersal of objects.³

Those who attributed theological significance to “diaspora” were Jewish rabbis who translated the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, around 250 BCE in Alexandria. They exclusively used “διασπορά” when translating terms like “גולה” (golah) and “גלות” (galut) which are related to the Babylonian exile.

Golah: Captives taken to Babylon (Jeremiah 28:6, 29:1, 4, 16, 20, 31), Captive (Ezekiel 1:2).

Galut: Judean exile (Jeremiah 24:5, 28:4, 29:22, 40:1), Captivity (Jeremiah 52:31, Ezekiel 1:1, 33:21, 40:1).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel emphasized the missionary significance that the Babylonian exile of the Jews was not just God’s punishment and judgment, but rather a means to restore Israel to achieve cosmic shalom and life. This diasporic theology is well illustrated in the “the Letter of Jeremiah” sent to the Babylonian exiles (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

The term “diaspora” used in the Septuagint reflects this Jeremiah’s theology.⁴ It encompasses both punishment and grace for the Jews. The New Testament uses “diaspora” for “scattered Jews” (John 7:35, James 1:1) and “Jewish Christians” (1 Peter 1:1), while it employs “diaspeíro” for Jewish and Gentile Christians (Acts 8:1,

4; 11:19). The New Testament transcends racial distinctions to use “diaspora” in a fully missional sense. Therefore, examining the characteristics of Korean diaspora churches from a missional perspective is biblically grounded.

2. General Definition

According to William Safran’s definition,

The Diaspora had a very specific meaning; the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands, signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation implying by that dispersion. ... Today diaspora and more specifically diaspora community seems increasingly to be used as metaphoric designations for several category of people— expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities.”⁵

International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines diaspora as follows,

Diasporas are broadly defined as individuals and members or networks, associations and communities, who have left their country of origin, but maintain links with their homelands. This concept covers more settled expatriate communities, migrant workers based abroad temporarily, expatriates with the nationality of the host country, dual nationals, and second-third generation migrants.⁶

Choi In-bŏm defines five characteristics found in diaspora:⁷

1. Dispersal from the homeland to two or more foreign countries.
2. Involuntary and coercive departure from the native land due to political, economic, and other pressures.
3. Conscious and proactive efforts to maintain unique ethnic culture and identity.
4. Attachment and solidarity with dispersed compatriots in foreign countries, attempting to form transnational networks for exchange and communication.
5. Efforts to uphold various forms of explicit and implicit ties with the homeland.

His definitions align well with the experience of the Jewish diaspora depicted in Psalm 137:1-4.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

"The rivers of Babylon," "a foreign land," "our captors," and "our tormentors" signify the diaspora being forcibly brought, corresponding to Choi In-bŏm's definition (1) and (2). "We sat and wept" and "How can we sing the songs of the LORD" reveal their efforts to maintain cultural identity, corresponding to (3). "One of the songs of Zion" and "our harps" demonstrate not only identity and cultural empathy but also solidarity, corresponding to (3) and (4). "We remembered Zion" showcases their strong national nostalgia, representing a collective effort to maintain the connection with the homeland, corresponding to (5).

Robin Cohen classified diaspora into six types, which greatly helps in explaining the types of the Korean diaspora.⁸

Table 1.2 A six-fold typology of diasporas

Type	Main examples in this book	Also mentioned and notes
Victim	Jews, Africans, Armenians, Irish and Palestinians	Many contemporary refugee groups are incipient victim diasporas, but time has to pass to see whether they return to their homelands, assimilate or creolize in their host lands, or mobilize as a diaspora.
Labour	Indentured Indians	Also discussed are Chinese, Japanese, Turks, Italians, and North Africans. Many others could be included. Another synonymous expression is 'proletarian diaspora'.
Imperial	British	Also discussed are Russians, and colonial powers other than Britain. Other synonymous expressions are 'settler' or 'colonial' diasporas.
Trade	Lebanese, Chinese	Also discussed are Venetians, business and professional Indians, Chinese and Japanese. Note also the auxiliary elements discussed in Chapter 5.
Deterritorialized	Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis	Also discussed are Romani, Muslims and other religious diasporas. The expressions 'hybrid', 'cultural' and 'post-colonial' also are linked to the idea of deterritorialization without being synonymous.
Incipient	Afghans	Also discussed are Gulf workers, Turks in Germany and many refugee groups.

In the late period of the former Korean dynasty, Koreans fled to Manchuria and Siberia to escape famine, poverty, and exploitation by officials, similar to the Irish victim type. During the Japanese colonial era, peasants who had deprived of their land migrated en masse to Manchuria and Siberia, similar to the Palestinian refugee type. Additionally, migration to Manchuria, Siberia, and China for independence movements constituted the political diaspora type. Moreover, labor immigration to Hawaii and Mexico in the early 20th century, as well as forced labor to Japan, Manchuria, Sakhalin, etc., falls under the laborer type. Moving to North Kando (in Eastern Manchuria) to establish religious freedom and ideal villages is categorized as religious diaspora type. Imperial and trade types are not found within the pre-liberation Korean diaspora.

III. Formation and Characteristics of Pre-Liberation Korean Diaspora Churches

The establishment of overseas Korean churches is closely related to the history of Korean immigration and is shaped by the unique characteristics of Korean diaspora's historical, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, let us briefly examine the history of Korean immigration.

1. History of the Korean diaspora

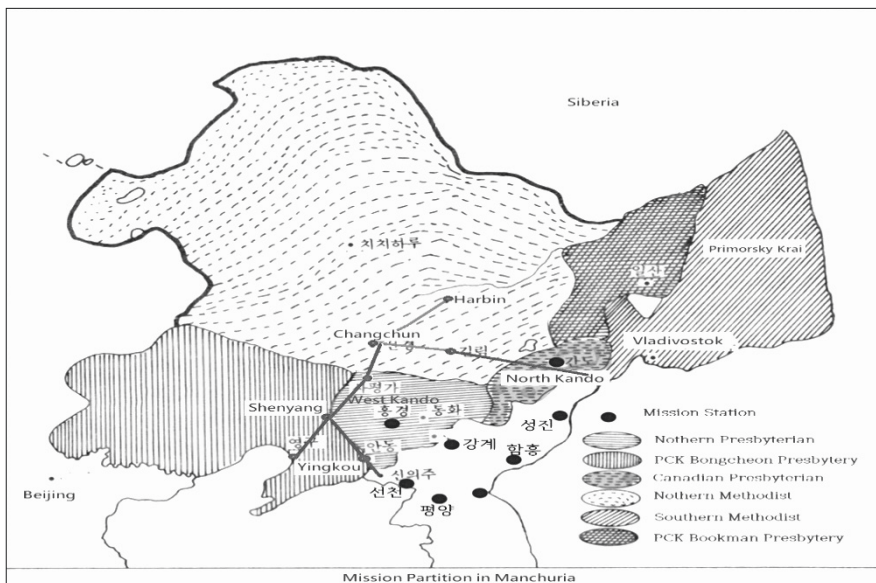
The history of the Korean diaspora can be divided into four stages: Late Joseon Dynasty (1860s-1910), Japanese Colonial Period (1910-1945), Post-liberation Period (1945-1962), Planned Immigration Period (1962-present)

1) Late Joseon Dynasty (1860s-1910)

During this period, farmers and laborers immigrated to China, Russia, Hawaii, Mexico, and Cuba to escape droughts, famines, epidemics, poverty, and oppression.

(1) Manchuria

In 1861, the Qing Dynasty of China opened Yingkou(營口), and in 1875, they implemented a policy to strengthen the northeastern border through immigration to Manchuria and increase revenue through land development. Alongside the migration of Chinese individuals, Koreans from Pyeongan Province and Hamgyŏng Province formed settlements across the Yalu River and Tumen River in the areas known as West Kando and North Kando. Subsequently, they gradually expanded their settlements to encompass the entire regions of Liaoning Province, Jilin Province, and Heilongjiang Province.



2) Primorsky Krai

In 1860, Russia received the transfer of sovereignty over the Maritime Province from Qing China and pursued an immigration policy with the aim of developing the Far East, increasing naval power, and securing a foothold in the region. By 1882, out of the total population of the Maritime Province (92,708), Koreans numbered 10,137 (11%), surpassing the 8,385 (9%) Russians.⁹

Korean migration formed settlements in the southern regions of the Maritime Province, border areas of the three countries - Korea, China, and Russia - such as Khasan, Posyet, Vladivostok, and Ussuriysk, and gradually spread to northern areas such as Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, and Chita.¹⁰

They worked as economic migrants, reclaiming land for agriculture. The Korean population increased to 27,880 in 1900 and 54,076 in 1910. Many Koreans emigrated between 1917-1923, during the Russian Revolution and Korea's March 1st Independence Movement.

3) Hawaii

Due to the need for immigration to Hawaii by the US government, missionary Allen, persuaded Emperor Gojong to recruit agricultural immigrants, but failed to obtain applicants. Methodist missionary George Jones persuaded Korean Christians in Incheon, resulting in 20 immigrants. In January 1903, 103 Koreans arrived at a sugarcane plantation in Honolulu, Hawaii. By August 1905, 7,400 Koreans had immigrated to 65 farms, many of whom were Christians. Over 80% of the immigrants were single men in their 20s. Korean laborers worked like prisoners, laboring for 10 hours a day under the whip. Until 1924, about 1,000 "picture brides" went to Hawaii and formed families.¹¹ From 1903 to 1915, a total of 1,087 Koreans immigrated to the US mainland. Among them, 1,000 returned home, and 2,000 moved to the US mainland.

4) Mexico and Cuba

The Korean immigration to Mexico began as a fraudulent immigration scheme by Japanese and British individuals. In 1905, 1,033 Koreans arrived on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and worked as contract laborers on the Henequen farms, enduring exploitative conditions similar to slavery. Contrary to their initial promises, they faced long hours of labor and low wages. Korean Christians in San Francisco informed churches and the government in Korea of these circumstances.

Pastor Jeon Dŏk-gi from Sangdong Church dispatched an investigation team, and the Korean government sent Yun Chi-ho to the scene. However, the investigation team could not reach Yucatan. Since Korea had lost diplomatic rights to Japan, the government could not assist the immigrants. In 1909, the Korean National Association in the United States attempted to facilitate the immigration of Korean immigrants in Mexico to Hawaii, but it failed due to opposition from Japan and the United States. In 1921, over 300 Koreans immigrated to Cuba to escape economic hardship.¹²



2) Japanese Colonial Period (1910-1945)

During this period, peasants and workers who had lost their land and means of production migrated to Manchuria and Japan. Additionally, political refugees and patriots crossed over to China, Russia, and the United States with the aim of conducting national movements for independence.

(1) Japan, Manchuria, Sakhalin

During the First World War, Korean migration to Japan was driven by Japan's economic boom, with Koreans moving to mining areas such as Fukuoka and industrial cities like Osaka. However, during the Chinese-Japanese War in 1937 and the Pacific War in 1941, large numbers of Koreans were involuntarily mobilized to mines and battlefields. Before liberation, around 2.3 million Koreans resided in Japan, but after liberation, only 598,507 remained by 1947.

Following the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan aimed to develop Manchuria and thus massively relocated Koreans there. The Korean population rose from 600,000 in 1930 to 1.45 million in 1940.

Korean migration to Sakhalin occurred after the enactment of the National Mobilization Law in 1939, involving recruitment, government arrangements, and forced conscription. They were assigned to mining areas to support the resource development needed for the war effort. Approximately 150,000 Koreans were mobilized, but many were later redeployed to mainland Japan. After the war, about 43,000 Koreans were left stateless and detained in Sakhalin.

(2) Central Asia

In 1937, Stalin, driven by military concerns and economic ambitions to develop the underdeveloped regions of Central Asia, forcibly resettled 171,781 Koreans to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, located 6,000km away. Many Koreans perished or suffered during this process.¹³ They resettled in neighboring regions such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and southern Russia, forming new settlements. They gained freedom of movement in 1956 and began to migrate back to their birthplace, Primorsky Krai, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

2. Korean Diaspora Churches

Organizing the history of Korean diaspora churches remains a significant task in Korean church history. Due to limitations in resources and space, this paper will examine the history of representative Korean diaspora churches established before liberation, aiming to identify the characteristics of early Korean diaspora churches.

1) West Kando

Korean immigrants to Manchuria were unable to own land unless they naturalized as Chinese citizens, thus they worked as tenant farmers under Chinese landlords. Initially, Koreans were welcomed by the Chinese due to their expertise in rice farming. However, following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, Japan established the Kwantung (關東) Governor-General's Office in Liaoning Province and constructed railways, deploying the Kwantung Army. Additionally, in 1907, a police station was established in Yongjŏng in North Kando. Japanese police exercised jurisdiction over Koreans, obtaining information about Manchuria while undermining Qing sovereignty. Japan planned to invade China under the guise of protecting Koreans. With the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan established the puppet state of Manchukuo, seizing control of Manchuria.

Koreans, perceived as the main targets of Japanese aggression in China, became subjects of pressure from the Chinese government, exploitation by landlords, and victims of plundering and massacres by defeated Chinese soldiers and bandits. Furthermore, due to the presence of Korean independence army in

Manchuria, Korean diaspora communities and Korean churches became targets of suppression and massacres by the Japanese military. As Koreans did not easily assimilate into Chinese culture and operated their schools for national education, the local Chinese authorities hindered the growth of Korean schools through educational laws.

In 1882, the Korean translation of Luke was published in Shenyang by Scottish Presbyterian missionary John Ross by the help of a few Koreans, John Ross' helper, Kim Chŏng-song, spread the gospel in his hometown Jian in West Kandgo. In November 1884, John Ross visited Jian and baptized 75 people in four Korean villages. Subsequently, from 1901 onwards, the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) and the Northern Presbyterian Mission dispatched Korean missionaries to West Kango to look after Koreans.

After the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, the number of Koreans immigrating to Manchuria surged. Around 100,000 Koreans were residing in West Kando by 1915, with 53 churches, 2,739 church members, and 12 primary schools established. Korean Churches established farms to assist the settlement of newly immigrated Koreans. In 1921, the Northern Presbyterian Mission established a mission station in Xinbin. the NPM trained lay leaders through male and female Bible schools. Korean churches independently operated primary schools, educating their children in the Korean language and history, occasionally including military training in physical education. However, as children completed primary school, they were unable to advance to Chinese schools, prompting a request to the NPM to establish secondary schools. However, due to financial constraints, the Mission could not fulfill this demand, choosing to focus on church planting and nurturing. In 1926, a secondary school was established, but due to the Chinese government's policy of ousting Koreans, the secondary school could not be sustained. Korean churches faced ongoing difficulties due to the abduction and ransom demands by Chinese bandits, persecution, and even killings of Christians by communist forces. By 1931, there were 46 churches, 5,480 church members, 9 pastors, and 2 American missionaries. However, In 1932 immediately after the Manchurian Incident, only 14 churches, 2,289 members, 2 pastors, and 2 missionaries remained. This illustrates the significant impact the Manchurian Incident had on Korean churches.

2) North Kando

In 1906, Robert G. Grierson, a Canadian Presbyterian missionary, along with two Koreans, came to Yongjŏng and preached, leading to the establishment of a Korean church in 1907. This is the first Korean church in North Kando.

The motivations for Koreans migrating to North Kando were primarily economic difficulties leading to agricultural immigration, political immigration aimed at establishing independence movement bases, and immigration to establish religious freedom and ideal villages.

For instance, Kim Yak-yŏn (32 years old) led 142 immigrants from six families to North Kando in 1899. He had a dream of establishing an ideal village and educating young leaders, so they reclaimed wasteland and established Myŏngdong village in 1905. He founded Myŏngdong School in 1908, and subsequently, all villagers agreed to convert to Christianity. The village became the cradle of national education. Kim Yak-yŏn was a leader of the independence movement and became a pastor in 1929. The Canadian Presbyterian Mission established a mission station in Yongjŏng in 1912, and from 1916, conducted medical missions, establishing Je Chang Hospital (1918), Eunjin Middle School (1920), and Myŏngshin Girls' School (1922).

In 1920, Japan launched extensive attacks on Korean villages across Manchuria to suppress Korean independence army. In North Kando, 5,058 Koreans were arrested, and over 3,500 were killed, with 28 churches and 36 schools burned or destroyed. By 1925, the Korean population in North Kando was 347,000, with 106 Korean churches (26 organized, 80 unorganized), 6 pastors, 6,049 church members, 37 primary schools, and one each for boys' and girls' middle schools. Unlike West Kando, Korean churches experienced growth in the late 1930s in North Kando. By 1938, there were 82 churches (41 organized, 41 unorganized), 13 pastors, 9 missionaries (3 male, 6 female), and 10,173 church members.

3) Vladivostok

In 1909, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) sent Pastor Choi Gwan-heul to Vladivostok to care for the Korean community there. Pastor Choi obtained permission from the Vladivostok authorities to conduct Presbyterian worship and was allocated a site for a worship hall. By 1911, the congregation had grown to 765 members with 30 worship locations and 2 churches. The growth of the Korean Presbyterian Church in Vladivostok was influenced by resentment

towards the incompetence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the policies of the Russian government favoring Japan.

However, interference from the Russian Orthodox Church led to Pastor Choi Gwan-heul and other Korean evangelists being ordered to leave Russia in 1912. In May 1912, Pastor Choi proselytized to the Russian Orthodox Church to protect and effectively minister to the Korean community, causing a significant shock to the PCK General Assembly. With the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, Pastor Choi achieved significant success among the Korean community while holding the qualifications of a minister of doctrine. In September 1916, the General Assembly of the PCK dismissed Choi from his pastorate. After returning to Korea, in 1922, the PCK acknowledged Choi Gwan-hol's missionary work and reinstated him as a pastor. By 1922, the Presbyterian Church in Vladivostok had grown to 32 churches, with 1,935 members, 5 pastors, 9 elders, 5 elementary schools, 35 evening classes and established the Siberian Presbytery. However, due to Communist oppression, the Siberian Presbytery was abolished in 1925, and missionary activities ceased by 1929.

4) Japan

After the reform measures of the Korean government in 1894, the number of Korean students studying in Japan increased, and among them, Christians emerged. In August 1906, Kim Jōng-sik, a leader of the YMCA, established a Korean YMCA in Tokyo. Around 1908, Korean students requested the sending of Korean pastor for the PCK. In October 1909, Pastor Han Sōk-jin stayed in Tokyo for three months and founded a Korean church. In 1911, Korean Christians in Japan, feeling ashamed of establishing Presbyterian and Methodist churches separately, decided to establish an inter-denominational united church. In August 1912, the "Korean Union Church in Tokyo" was established, and The Presbyterian and Methodist churches alternately sent Korean pastors for 2-3 years each.

In 1917, evangelism among Korean workers began in the Kansai region, where many Korean laborers resided. Korean seminary students in Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe evangelized to compatriots and established Korean churches. In 1926, the PCK sent Korean missionaries to the southern Kyushu region. By 1935, there were 49 Korean churches and 23 prayer places established in Japan. Twelve pastors and seven foreign missionaries were active for Korean denominations, with a total of 3,192 church members. Korean churches in Japan served as spaces to

maintain the Korean language and traditional culture and became places for spiritual rejuvenation.¹⁴

5) Shanghai and Nanjing

After the annexation in 1910, many political refugees and independence activists flocked to the international city of Shanghai. From 1913, Koreans centered around Korean YMCA exiles began worship services with the help and support of Shanghai YMCA, and in November 1914, an official Korean church was formally established.

In 1915, approximately 200 Koreans resided in Shanghai, intending to study abroad in the United States or seek political asylum. Among them, half were Christians. The Korean churches in Shanghai typically gathered 40-70 people for worship services.

In 1918, following President Wilson's principle of self-determination, young leaders gathered around Korean churches saw an opportunity for the Korean independence movement and planned large-scale demonstrations in Korea and proposed Korean independence at the Paris Peace Conference. From March to May 1919, nationwide protests demanding independence occurred, followed by brutal suppression by Japanese military and police. In April, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established in Shanghai, with the majority of its members being congregants of Shanghai's Korean churches. After Japan's interference following the Manchurian Incident in 1931, the Provisional Government relocated from Shanghai, leading to a significant weakening of the Korean church in Shanghai.

The Nanjing Korean church was primarily founded by Korean Christian students. In 1914, independence activist Kim Gyu-sik enrolled at Jinling University (now Nanjing University), followed by Hyun Chang-woon, Yeo Un-yŏng, Kim Hyŏn-sik and Kim Soon-ae. They held worship services at the residence of Phillip Gillet, who had been the first secretary of the Korean YMCA, and expelled by Japanese.

Subsequently, the church weakened due to a decrease in Korean students. However, after the March 1st Movement and the establishment of the Provisional Government in Shanghai (1919), the number of Korean church members increased. In 1922, out of 102 Koreans in Nanjing, 96 were church members, and that year, a worship place was established. From 1927 to 1933, due to the Chinese

Civil War, most Korean students left Nanjing, leading to the dissolution of the Korean church in 1928.

The Korean churches in Shanghai and Nanjing requested Korean pastors to be sent from the PCK. However, as there were many Korean diaspora congregants in Manchuria and the adjacent areas, the nearby regional presbyteries took on the responsibility of support. In the case of Shanghai and Nanjing, where the number of resident Koreans was small and there were no presbyteries capable of bearing the financial burden, and considering the fear of church persecution by Japan immediately after the March 1st Movement, it was difficult to fulfill such requests.

6) Hawaii

Upon arriving in Hawaii, among Korean workers, the Methodist Church members held worship services at the sugarcane plantations in Honolulu. They established the Korean Mission Society in November 1903 and organized an official church in 1905. Rev. Hong Seung-ha, who arrived in 1904, was the first Korean minister. By late 1905, there were 19 Korean Methodist churches with 9 ministers, and more than 10% of the 5,500 Korean residents attended worship, constituting 64% of all Methodist worshippers in Hawaii. By 1913, there were 18 Korean Methodist churches with 1,390 members. As agricultural immigration ceased, Koreans in Hawaii either returned to Korea or moved to the mainland United States, particularly California.

Among Korean immigrants, Anglican believers initially worshiped with the Methodist Church in 1904, but from 1907, they gathered separately at a Chinese Anglican Church and established their own church building in 1925. The Honolulu Korean Methodist Church established a boarding school for second-generation Koreans in 1906, and in 1913, Yi Seung-man was appointed as its second principal. Korean Christians in Hawaii supported the provisional government and sent relief funds to Koreans in the mainland.

7) Cuba

Many Korean immigrants who migrated from Mexico to Cuba were members of the Methodist and the Seventh-day Adventist Churches. In 1921, they organized the Independent Korean Mission Society. In 1926, with support from the United States Methodist Church Mission Board, they established the Korean Methodist

Church in Cuba. The community of Matanzas Korean Village maintained its ethnic identity centered around the Minseong Korean School and the Methodist church.

VI. Conclusion

Diaspora theology begins with the Jewish Babylonian Diaspora from the Old Testament era. In the New Testament period, the church, while overcoming the racial boundaries, clearly identified “diaspora” as the identity of all scattered people of God responsible for God’s mission. With the late 20th-century globalization and the development of information communication, many of the world’s population now live as migrants. The UN, nations, and various academic fields have recognized the importance and significance of the diaspora, focusing their attention on it. Particularly in the fields of biblical studies and missiology, the church has advanced research on the diaspora. Unfortunately, the Korean church has overlooked the significance and importance of the diaspora, despite its origin in the diaspora and its missionary responsibilities through Korean diaspora churches worldwide.

The Early Korean diaspora in Manchuria accepted the gospel and participated in translating the Bible and spreading the Gospel, laying the foundation for the Korean Protestant church. Northern Presbyterian and Canadian Presbyterian Missions initiated missions among the Korean diaspora in Manchuria. Some Korean diaspora members sought to escape the corrupt society of Joseon and established ideal villages to realize their dream of national education, embracing Christianity by forsaking traditional Confucianism. They had to adapt to new environments and were dreamers of a new world, hence their faith was voluntary and proactive.

Korean diaspora churches tend to form ecumenical cooperation, transcending denominational boundaries. This was evident in the establishment of churches in North Kando, and a Korean diaspora union church in Japan. Especially in Vladivostok, the case of Rev. Choi Gwan-hol proselytizing to Russia Orthodox Church for the benefit of Korean believers is a notable example. However, the motherland church found it difficult to understand these diaspora characteristics.

Korean diaspora churches became strongholds of independence movements due to their strong nationalist sentiments. The Korean YMCA in Japan became a driving force for the establishment of Korean churches and the focal point of the independence movement. Korean churches in Hawaii, Shanghai, and Nanjing also exhibited similar characteristics. Korean diaspora churches often requested Korean pastors from the motherland church. However, The PCK did not promptly respond to the demands from the churches with strong nationalist movements.

The first official Korean immigrants were primarily from Methodist congregations. Korean diaspora members established churches wherever they went, and the tradition of the diaspora churches being the center of Korean society abroad began here. Korean diaspora members had a remarkably high rate of conversion to Christianity, and Korean diaspora churches contributed to local missions.

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Different Colours of Gospel: Missionaries and Korean Christians

“Missionaries Go Home!”¹

Abstract

This paper explores the theological and political tensions between Western Protestant missionaries and Korean Christians during the Japanese colonial rule. While missionaries advocated an apolitical Gospel in line with Japanese imperial interests, Korean Christians interpreted the Gospel as a source of national liberation and ecclesiastical autonomy. These diverging interpretations culminated in an anti-missionary movement during the 1920s, which was rooted not only in ethical scandals and cultural arrogance but in the missionaries' reluctance to transfer authority to the maturing Korean Church. The study argues that the conflict reveals two competing visions of Christian mission: one emphasizing spiritual neutrality and foreign control, the other seeking contextualized self-governance. Drawing from archival sources and contemporary Korean voices, the paper highlights how nationalism, ecclesiology, and colonial dynamics intertwined in shaping Korean Protestantism. Ultimately, it contends that the anti-missionary movement represented a dual struggle for national and ecclesial sovereignty, reflecting deeper questions of power, identity, and theological ownership.

Introduction

The arrival of Protestant missionaries in Korea coincided with a national crisis, leading Korean Christians to intertwine their faith with the quest for national independence. The Gospel brought by the missionaries was perceived by Korean Christians not merely as a spiritual message but as a potential means to resist Japanese domination and reclaim their sovereignty. However, this understanding of the Gospel starkly contrasted with the missionaries' intentions.

Missionaries, who adhered to an apolitical stance, sought to separate religious work from the political aspirations of the Korean people. They believed in spreading a Gospel that was spiritually transformative but politically neutral, aligning their mission with the colonial policies of the Japanese government. This position led to significant tensions as Korean Christians, who saw the Church as both a spiritual refuge and a foundation for national liberation, increasingly viewed the missionaries as complicit in their oppression.

During 1920s the first dispute between missionaries and Korean Christians was hitting the ground running. At the time Korea was under the Japanese rule. Thus, the indigenous Korean Christians struggled to obtain the independence of their country. For example, the March First Movement in 1919 was mostly led by Christians and the network of Churches. This therefore means that since the 1905 Protectorate Treaty² and the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, Korean Christianity had been connected to nationalism. However, the missionaries proclaimed the 'apolitical' stance under the Japanese rule. These opposing attitudes about the nation's fate were the first point of conflict between the indigenous Christians and missionaries. Furthermore, the missionaries' racism and claims of cultural superiority deepened the conflict.

Therefore, to undertake this study, the complex power struggles among Korean Christians, missionaries, and Japanese politicians will be considered. To the Korean Christians, this power struggle was to gain self-government and self-support from missionaries; while to the missionaries, it was to sustain their authority in the mission field; and to the Japanese politicians, their aim was to make Korean Christians a pro-Japanese group by breaking their nationalism.

In view of these complex situations, this paper will seek to find the meaning of this power struggle and argue that Korean Christians strongly desired not only to form an autonomous Church by themselves but also to overcome their

nation's crisis through the Church. It will delve into the intricate power struggles and theological conflicts between Western Protestant missionaries and Korean native Christians during the Japanese colonial period in Korea, focusing on the concept of "different colours of Gospel" between the missionaries as the givers and the Korean Christians as the receivers arguing that the anti-missionary movement was not merely a reaction to individual incidents but a profound assertion of the Korean Christians' desire for self-governance and their own interpretation of the Gospel, one that aligned with their nationalistic aspirations. The missionaries' version of the Gospel, which emphasized spiritual salvation devoid of political engagement, clashed with the Korean Christians' vision of a Gospel that encompassed both spiritual and national liberation.

This study will also highlight how the differing perceptions of the Gospel between the missionaries and Korean Christians were not just theological disagreements but were deeply rooted in the socio-political contexts of the time. The "different colours of Gospel" thus become a central theme in the evolving relationship between the two groups, reflecting broader questions of power, authority, and the right to interpret and live out the Christian faith in a context of colonial domination. The paper, therefore, will conclude by emphasizing that the anti-missionary movement was emblematic of a broader struggle for both national and ecclesiastical sovereignty, positioning the Church as a critical site of resistance against both colonial and missionary authority.

1. Japanese Colonial Policy towards Korean Christians

Protestant Christianity in Korea was started and developed during the national crisis of Korea. It is therefore inevitable that under the Japanese rule, "Korean nationalism functioned as a touchstone of legitimacy, such that in order for a foreign religion or ideology to be accepted and have a chance of success there, it had to be identified with that sentiment."³ In fact, most early Korean Christians desired to overcome national crisis through the Church. Especially, after the Protectorate Treaty in 1905 by Japan the churches and mission schools became a core place of the national movement to obtain their independence from Japan. The organization of the Epworth League at Sangdong Methodist Church in 1905 to resist Japanese rule over Korea; the organization of the New People's

Association (*Shinminhoe*) in 1907, the strongest Korean nationalist organization at that time, whose promoters were Korean Christians; the Association for Redemption of the National Debt in 1907, which was spread by most Korean Christians to launch a campaign to repay the immense amounts of debt from Japan; the faithful Korean Christian Jang In-Hwan's assassination of Durham W. Stevens, who praised the record of the Japanese Residency-General in Korea as foreign affairs adviser in 1908; the March First Movement in 1919, and so on. Under the Japanese rule, Protestantism in Korea and Korean nationalism had positively and closely associated each other.

In the view of the Japanese government, however, it meant that the Korean Church which worked as headquarters of national liberation was the first obstruction to encroach and rule upon Korea. Recognizing this, the Japanese government undertook varieties of suppression and persecution to destroy the nationalism of Korean Christians.

The most representative persecution was so-called the Case of the One Hundred Five, the Korean Conspiracy Trial in 1910. This Case was blatantly fabricated by Akashi Kenjiro (明石元二郎) in accordance with the Japanese Governor-General's instruction whose aim was not only the removal of Korean Christian power which was closely associated with nationalism but to exile missionaries who did not cooperate with the rule of the General. By that Case 123 Koreans were indicted, and among those indicted one hundred and five were convicted. Among those indicted ninety-two were Korean Christian and twenty-four missionaries were involved in that Case.⁴ This means that the most difficult category of people to put under the Japanese control at that time was Korean Christians who were equipped with nationalism.

Even though twenty four missionaries were involved in that Case most of the U. S. denominations' Foreign Mission Boards, especially that of the Northern Presbyterian Church, showed an angle that the Case was basically acknowledged as a persecution towards Christianity in Korea, but that it was just committed not by the Japanese Government's instruction but by the local gendarmerie police forces.⁵ In addition, they notified that the American Foreign Mission Board would not have a part in Japanese politics.⁶ As to the apolitical attitude of the Foreign Mission Board, Terauchi Masatake (寺内正毅), the first Japanese Governor-General in Korea, suggested the special friendship and cooperation between Japan and missionaries who would work 'appropriately' in the religious

field in Korea.⁷ Therefore the co-work relationship was rather strengthened between them: having controlled Korea, politics were the General's work; the evangelization and enlightenment in spirit were the business of missionaries. This amicable relation between them was also maintained during 1919 when the March First Movement occurred.

After the March First Movement, being careful with the public opinion of the world, the Japanese government concentrated her efforts to conduct the conciliatory policy over the missionaries, and Japanese Governor-General tried to rule or control the Korean Christians only through the missionaries. Therefore, the Korean Christians was barely able to dialogue with Japanese Governor-General through the missionaries. In a word, the missionaries worked as the single window of dialogue to the Korean Christians. This reflects that Korean Christians were thoroughly isolated, and still identified as the objection of observation and suppression by the Japanese governor since the annexation in 1910.

Though most early missionaries also were gravely concerned because of the contradictory phases and political aspects of Korean Christians against Japanese colonial policy, they still stood on the road of the friendly relationship with the Japanese government in accordance with their nation's policy for Japan at that time. The apolitical or noncommittal and neutral policy which had been proclaimed in 1901 was not only held by the missionaries themselves, but they also taught the Korean Christian to act likewise. In the eyes of Korean Christians, therefore, this came across as a very pro-Japanese policy.⁸ It subsequently became a cause of the progressing anti-missionary movement in 1920s.

2. Missionaries' attitude towards Japanese policy: Apolitical stance

The fact, that the Korean Christians were closely associated with Korean nationalism under the Japanese rule, also reflected that most early Koreans converted to Christianity not because of the religious reason but on the basis of the social expectation that the church would be able to lead them to independence. In a word, the churches were filled with non-faithful Koreans who were expecting the church's role as a shelter of the politically or economically oppressed under the Japanese coercive rule. This abnormal phenomenon made the missionaries so

embarrassed that they felt the necessity to identify their point of view about how the Church should be. In that situation in Korea mission field, subsequently, they proclaimed their apolitical position in September 1901, and that manifesto was circulated to the Korean churches and Christians as a pastoral letter.⁹

In the meantime, the Japanese government carried out a two-pronged policy towards the missionaries in Korea: the conciliation policy for the purpose of disruption and the regulation for a suppressive purpose. The Japanese government used both methods in accordance with the domestic and international situation: in the 1910s the regulation policy was carried out to lay the foundation for the colonial reign, in the 1920s the conciliation policy was executed to recover their international condition which was damaged by the March First Movement, in the 1930s once again the regulation policy was carried out because the relationship with the U. S. had become worse, and in the early 1940s, before and after the Pacific War, the Japanese government exiled the missionaries from Korea.

However, the missionaries generally kept the apolitical stance, which was truly deteriorated to the collusion with the Japanese government, during the Japanese colonial period over Korea. As far as the Japanese policy did not threaten or interfere with the missionaries' works, they kept their apolitical stance. Even when Christianity in Korea was persecuted by the Japanese government such as the Case of One Hundred Five and the March First Movement, the missionaries especially their leaders were not against the main stream of their apolitical stance but merely censured Japanese government and insisted their irrelevancy.¹⁰ In fact, the Japanese government pointed out that missionaries were behind the March First Movement in 1919 because of the thirty-three signatories of the Declaration of Independence, sixteen were Protestant Christians,¹¹ and the church's national network and local leadership worked as a communicator and organizer of the movement, which spread so quickly and cohesively.¹² Thus the movement could be a pan-Korean movement to defy their Japanese colonizers and to demonstrate to the world their fervent desire for independence. The missionaries, however, persisted that they had no connection with that movement since the measure of that movement was entirely Korean not westernized; furthermore, they never heard an advance notice about it.¹³

Therefore, many Korean Christians who had national consciousness left the church and condemned the missionaries' pro-Japanese attitude. Since then, a

few missionaries were assaulted in the street and even their lives were threatened by a few Koreans.¹⁴

After the March First Movement in 1919, Japan's colonial policy was changed from the gendarmerie police forces policy (*Mudan Jeongchi*) to the enlightened administration (*Munhwa Jeongchi*).¹⁵ On the surface, this policy seems to be more relaxed towards the control of Korea than the former policy. It was, however, no more than a superficial and deceptive moderation of its former policy of forceful repression.

Nevertheless, the missionaries' apolitical stance which was proclaimed in 1901 were still and strongly kept; even the leaders of missionaries expected the 'co-operation' and 'co-work' with the new Governor-General Saito who ensured the security of mission works in Korea to the missionaries.

The greatest hope, however, which the situation holds is in the genial, democratic, and sincere character of the Governor-General, Baron Saito. With the authority committed to his hands in the scheme of the Japanese Empire and with the backing which he seems to have from the present cabinet and others strong in political influence, his presence warrants not merely an attitude of watchful waiting, but an attitude of hopeful expectation..... The attitude of us Christians to the Japanese, whether official or private, should be at least as kindly, as frank, and as brotherly as we expect from the Japanese to the Koreans..... With a dignified, serious, and friendly gaze we should look at the Japanese officials as those with whom we stand on a level, with whom we seek to cooperate in any good thing which they may plan, and of whom we seek to prove ourselves helpers rather than mere critics.¹⁶

Indeed, those missionaries' attitude towards Japanese officers might be enough to be condemned and worried by Korean Christians who were under the Japanese rule. To the Korean Christian the apolitical proclamation was recognized as an obstruction of their independence. Therefore, the conflicts between missionaries and the Korean Christians were foreseeable and evitable on the basis of those contradictory stances.

3. Anti-missionary movement of Korean Christians

Since the middle of the 1920s, the anti-missionary movement among the mission schools, churches, and even in non-Christian society was set to rising because of two ostensible reasons. First is that the irregularities and scandals of a few missionaries was repeatedly reported in newspapers: illegal confinement of *Gwanglim* school's girl students in Jinju city by the Australian missionary Allen in January 1923, an attempted disgraceful conduct to a Korean schoolgirl by anonymous missionary at Solae summer resort in August 1925, the Haysmer accident in July 1926, an assault and battery on a Korean student by the Austrian Presbyterian missionary Rev. F. Macrae's wife in February 1927, a beating on a Korean by Canadian missionary Rev. R. Grierson in January 1930, and so on.¹⁷ A second reason for the anti-missionary movement is that the most missionaries strictly adhered to maintain their superiority over the Korean Church which was already grown to self-government at the time: the complication of the Salvation Army in November 1926,¹⁸ and the entanglement of the Korean Holiness Church's General Assembly between missionaries and Korean Christians in March 1936.¹⁹

Most of all, the representative incident which attracts public attention was so-called 'Haysmer accident'.²⁰

This case was committed by C. A. Haysmer who arrived in Korea in spring, 1925 as a medical missionary of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. While he ran a mission hospital at Sunan, southern Pyeongan province of North Korea, a young Korean child picked an apple from his private fruit garden and ate in summer 1925. At the time, the missionary Haysmer caught him, and then carved two Korean letters which meant thief into the young child's face with nitric acid.²¹ The whole picture of this incident was uncovered by a Japanese prosecutor and reported in newspapers (Choson and Donga Daily) in July 1926 after one year.²² Through these reports, the anti-missionary movement was regularized among Koreans. C. A. Haysmer was sentenced to three months in prison with two years' suspension of sentence. Though this case was ended when he returned to his country after he issued an apology to the young child, his family and all Koreans in a newspaper,²³ this case obviously presented the missionaries' attitude of racism and cultural superiority over the people of the mission field.

To hold the superior stance to control the Korean Church most missionaries took coercive or dictatorial measures against the Korean Christians who claimed

the improvement of indigenous Christians' labour condition. The representative case of that struggle between Korean Christians and missionaries was the complication of the Salvation Army in 1926.

When Bramwell Booth, the second General of the Salvation Army, visited in Korea on 4th November 1926, some Korean Salvation Army officers (Yun Soo-Man, Heo Gon, Kim Gyoung-Seon, Jeon Si-Hyeong, Kweon Yong-Jun, and so on) tried to present a petition about the improvement of their treatment by the General. However, it failed to achieve their claims by blocking of the missionary officers of Salvation Army, and then they all were excommunicated from the Salvation Army. The petition contained twenty terms desired which were categorized into four: (1) to widen Korean officers' suffrage in Church politics, (2) to eliminate the discrimination of salary and promotion between western missionaries, Japanese, and Korean officers, (3) to open the Salvation Army's financial condition and mission policy to the public, (4) to discharge the foreign missionary officers who ignored the Koreans with barbarism.²⁴ While this case was shown as a disobedience of Korean officers in the missionary's aspect, in fact, this was a concrete and essential resistance against the missionary's abuse of power in a side view of the Korean Salvation Army officers.

Under the tense atmosphere of the anti-missionary movement during the middle of the 1920s, Yi Sang-Choi, 'one of the oldest and most honoured and useful of Korean Christians,'²⁵ addressed to fifty new missionaries who arrived in Korea in 1923 to warn the vandalism of pride of nationality:

The first thing to do is to forget that you are Americans who are working among Koreans, and to be fully persuaded that we are all from the same homeland, some of us having arrived in Korea and some in America..... As Christians we are one. Our Heavenly Kingdom is above any earthly boundaries. Let us, therefore, not allow pride of nationality to be a hindrance to us in performing the work of the Kingdom. Even the Heavenly Kingdom must be militant and progressive, but its purpose is not to subject and to destroy others, but rather to bring help and salvation to all.²⁶

Though some missionaries asserted the new relationship with the Korean Church under the discord between them,²⁷ yet they still kept their vested rights in the basis of their meritorious deeds for the organization and growth of Korean Church.

When the missionaries first came to Korea the Korean people were not asked whether they wanted them or not..... Now the question is, should the Korean Church be asked whether or not they want missionaries, and if so what kind of missionaries? Undoubtedly so. It may not be the best way to do it officially, but at least the opinions of representative Koreans should be ascertained. Even though the opinion is not always favourable, it does not follow that missionaries should not come or should return. The presence of the missionaries here now does not depend *entirely* upon the wishes and sometimes upon the whims of the people among whom we work. The missionaries are here because they are called of God.²⁸

In that statement H. A. Rhodes, the Presbyterian missionary, stressed the unique identity of missionaries who 'were called of God.' That self-understanding of missionaries was a cause of the anti-missionary movement.

To solve those complications between missionaries and Korean Christians during the 1920s, the Mott Conference was held in Seoul during the visiting period of J. R. Mott in December 1925. Gathering sixty-two representatives (thirty-one of each) in that conference they discussed overall mission works; faith, education, social work and their relationship as well.²⁹ A. W. Wasson, who participated in that conference as one of the missionary representatives, depicted the significance of this Conference as follows:

The early missionaries and the first converts were in intimate personal contact. They were bound together by strong personal affection and mutual dependence. With the later missionaries the situation has changed. Preconceived ideas gained from reading out-of-date descriptions of Korean conditions, the self-contained activities of the larger missionary community, and the greater complexity of the work are barriers to a mutual understanding. The wish was expressed that the missionaries become more Koreanized, following the example of Paul, who became all things to all men.³⁰

In spite of these efforts, there were still complications between them. The ownership and authority for the Korean Church by first generation of missionaries, who arrived and set up the mission works in Korea before 1920, and additionally the lack of understanding about Korean cultures of the second generation who arrived in Korea after 1920s led to controversy between missionaries and the Korean Church. Indeed, those conflicts had hindered the development of the Korean Church.

Furthermore, as the Japanese colonial policy whose aim was destroy Korean Christians' nationalism, and exile the missionaries who supported the independence of Korea cut into the complication between the missionaries and Korean nationalistic Christians, the anti-missionary movement was faced with much complexity. In the late 1930s on the pretext of 'the establishment of an Oriental Christianity' the Japanese government carried on an expulsion agitation of Western Christianity and missionaries jumping on the anti-missionary movement of Korean Christians. In 1940s they finally annexed the Korean Church to the Japanese Church. Since then, the missionaries were scorned by both the Japanese government and pro-Japanese Korean Church leaders. Subsequently, all American missionaries left Korea in June 1942 in accordance with the evacuation order of G. Marsh, the U. S. Consul-General in Tokyo.³¹

Conclusion

Under the Japanese rule the anti-missionary movement in the middle of 1920s was ostensibly caused by a few missionaries' racial discrimination, ethical irregularities or scandals.

However, a basic cause of that movement might be dated back to 1901 when the missionaries proclaimed their 'apolitical stance' toward the Japanese. Having experienced their nation's ruinous fate Korean people strongly relied on Christianity in Korea,³² regarding the church not only as their spiritual shelter but also as the foundation to overcome nation's crisis. However, unfortunately, the missionaries' apolitical attitude toward the suppressive and persecuting policy of Japanese Governor-General over Korean made many Korean Christians who were closely associated with nationalism turn their backs on the missionaries. To the Korean nationalistic Christians, the missionaries had seemed to be a pro-Japanese group, and the missionaries' apolitical policy was 'not noncommittal, but definitely committal, even partisan.'³³ Therefore, on one hand, the missionaries' apolitical stance, which was conflicted with Korean Christians' nationalism, aroused the anti-missionary movement.

On the other hand, the missionaries' power abusing to sustain their vested rights or authority over the Korean Church provoked the Korean nationalistic church leaders who strongly desired to obtain the self-government and self-

support of their Church. At the Mott Conference in December 1925, in the presence of the senior missionaries (S. A. Moffett, A. L. Becker, A. R. Appenzeller, J. Z. Moore, R. S. Hall, W. A. Noble, J. S. Gale, and so on) who worked over 30 years in Korea, Rev. Han Seok-Jin, one of the first Presbyterian Pastors who ordained in 1907, proclaimed that:

“To success mission works effectively it is better that the missionaries may leave the mission field handing over the authority of mission works to the indigenous Christians when the church of mission field is established. If the missionaries stay in the same mission field for long time, they will feel superior to native, and then practise power with the ownership for the schools and churches which are set up by them. Indeed, this runs counter to the spirit of the Gospel, as well as hinder the growth of the Church.”³⁴

At the time, Korean church was already developed to carry out self-government: In 1907 the first Korean Presbytery was organized and ordained the first group of seven native pastors, and in 1912 the first General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church with seven Presbyteries was held and erected the first Moderator. In 1930 the first General Conference of the Korean Methodist Church (*Kidokgyo Josun Gamreehoe*), which was the union of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was held and elected the first Korean Bishop. Nevertheless, the missionaries did not want to hand over their authority to the Korean Christians as seen in the case of the complication of the Salvation Army in 1926 and the entanglement of Korean Holiness Church's General Assembly between missionaries and Korean Christians in March 1936. This indeed means that the anti-missionary movement was to reflect Korean indigenous Christians' pressing demand of autonomy for the Church.

Sure enough, the anti-missionary movement of the Korean Christians who were under the Japanese rule was the very struggle to gain not only the independence of the nation from Japan but also the self-government of the Church from the missionaries.

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The Possibilities and Limits of Ecumenism in Light of the Leuenberg Agreement in the Hungarian Reformed Church (Ecclesiological) Context

Abstract

This paper examines the potentials and limitations of ecumenism in the Hungarian Reformed context through the lens of the Leuenberg Agreement. Integrating historical, theological, and sociological perspectives, the study retraces the evolution of Protestant dialogue from the turbulence of the twentieth century to contemporary challenges. It highlights the differentiated consensus approach that enables diverse doctrinal traditions to coexist while emphasizing core principles such as justification and the proper administration of sacraments. To elaborate on this theme, the paper first analyzes the content and methodology of the Leuenberg Agreement, then examines key sociological trends affecting Hungarian church communities, and finally presents contextual reflections on these dynamics prior to a final synthesis. The exploration not only underscores the agreement's significance as a milestone in Protestant cooperation but also invites further reflection on the future of ecclesiastical identity and collaborative practice in an increasingly secularized society. Through a detailed examination of historical legacies and modern interpretive strategies, the study offers fresh insights into fostering unity amid ongoing cultural and ecclesial transformations.

Historical and Theological Foundations of the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue Leading to the Leuenberg Agreement (1973)¹

The Leuenberg Agreement (LA) represents a pivotal milestone in the ecumenical partnership between Lutheran and Reformed churches, situated within the complex and intense historical context of the twentieth century. This period was marked by ideological conflicts, such as those that led to the Barmen Declaration of 1934 – a significant theological statement opposing Nazism and affirming a unified Christian witness amidst the totalitarian pressures of the time. This declaration became a key symbol of resistance and unity, laying the groundwork for further ecumenical efforts.

The Barmen Declaration was not merely a theological statement but also a bold act of resistance against the Nazi regime's attempt to co-opt Christianity. Drafted primarily by Karl Barth, it rejected Nazi ideology and the 'German Christian' movement, which sought to align Christianity with Aryan nationalism. The declaration affirmed that Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all aspects of life and rejected any subordination of church doctrine to political ideologies. This foundational act of defiance laid the groundwork for ecumenical unity by emphasizing the primacy of the Gospel over cultural or political influences.²

Formal international dialogue between the Lutheran and Reformed churches commenced during the 1960s. These discussions, driven by a desire for greater unity and mutual recognition, produced a series of significant theological reports. One of the most consequential outcomes of this process was the drafting of the Leuenberg Agreement, the product of nearly two decades of negotiations that began in the 1950s. The agreement was officially adopted in 1973 at the Preparatory Assembly for the Agreement between the Reformation Churches in Europe, held in Leuenberg, Switzerland. Churches participating in the process were subsequently invited to indicate their formal assent in writing, thereby enabling church fellowship to come into effect on October 1, 1974, among those that had provided their approval. Today, more than one hundred churches across Europe and beyond have signed the Agreement, underscoring its broad ecumenical impact.

The LA's influence extended beyond Europe, inspiring similar agreements such as the 'Formula of Agreement' (1997) in North America between Lutheran

and Reformed churches. These agreements demonstrate how shared theological principles can overcome centuries-old divisions, enabling churches to collaborate in mission and ministry while respecting their unique traditions.³

The Agreement was designed to foster communion by affirming a common understanding of key doctrines, particularly justification, the sacraments, and church fellowship, while respecting differences in church traditions. Unlike earlier ecumenical approaches that often demanded strict doctrinal uniformity, the LA embraced a “differentiated consensus” model⁴, which sought to reconcile diversity within a shared theological framework.

The concept of differentiated consensus, as later seen in agreements like the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999), allows for theological differences in language and emphasis while affirming a shared understanding of core truths. In the case of the LA, this method enabled Lutheran and Reformed churches to recognize each other’s ministries and sacraments without requiring complete doctrinal uniformity. This approach reflects a shift from divisive polemics to constructive dialogue, fostering unity amidst diversity.⁵

Despite these achievements, the ongoing Lutheran-Reformed dialogue following the adoption of the LA was relatively modest compared to other ecumenical efforts, particularly those between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. One challenge has been addressing unresolved theological differences, such as varying interpretations of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. While some progress has been made through doctrinal conversations like those documented in *Toward Church Fellowship* (1989), these issues highlight the need for continued dialogue. Additionally, some critics have expressed concerns about potential erosion of confessional identities within participating churches.⁶

The publication of *Toward Church Fellowship*⁷ in 1989 was a noteworthy step in the continued dialogue, aiming to address unresolved theological questions and assess global Lutheran-Reformed relationships. The report offered theological affirmations, recommendations, and a critical evaluation of how churches could further strengthen their fellowship through deeper mutual understanding.

This historical trajectory highlights both the potential and the challenges of ecumenical dialogue, especially within the broader context of evolving societal, cultural, and theological landscapes. The Leuenberg Agreement remains a significant reference point for ongoing efforts to articulate a vision of Christian unity that honors both shared heritage and theological diversity.

Some Considerable Methodological and Theological Aspects of the Leuenberg Agreement and Ecumenical Theology

The Leuenberg Agreement (LA) is structured as a theological and ecclesial framework designed to foster Protestant unity while navigating the historical complexities of doctrinal division. It consists of two main sections: the procedural and the doctrinal.

The first part (A) sets the procedural foundation by addressing the participating churches. It opens with a historical overview (§ 1–5), outlining the theological and ecumenical developments that led to the agreement. It then details the process by which churches can formally express their assent and enter into communion (§ 6–8). While this procedural clarity ensures transparency, one could argue that the agreement assumes a level of institutional readiness among the churches that may not always reflect ecclesial realities, particularly regarding divergent theological emphases within Protestant traditions.⁸

The second part (B) forms the doctrinal core of the LA. Following a brief introduction (§ 1–2), it unfolds in four sections. The first, “The Road to Fellowship” (§ 3–6), revisits the common theological heritage of the Reformation (§ 4) and acknowledges ecclesial shifts since that period (§ 5). While this historical reflection provides a necessary foundation, the LA largely presupposes that these shifts have moved in a direction conducive to unity, potentially underestimating the depth of confessional differences that persist.⁹

The second section, “Common Understanding of the Gospel” (§ 7–15), articulates justification by grace through faith (§ 7–12) as the central theological commitment, expressed through Word and Sacrament (§ 13–15). This formulation, while seeking a unifying core, raises questions about whether it sufficiently accounts for the nuanced understandings of justification present within the Reformation traditions. The relative brevity of this section may leave room for ambiguity, particularly regarding the interplay between justification and sanctification, a point of historical divergence between Lutheran and Reformed theological trajectories.¹⁰

The third section, “Accord in Respect of the Doctrinal Condemnations of the Reformation Era” (§ 18–28), addresses past theological disputes concerning the Lord’s Supper (§ 18–20), Christology (§ 21–23), and Predestination (§ 24–26). The agreement concludes that these condemnations are no longer applicable (§ 27–28). While this represents a significant ecumenical step, it raises the question of whether doctrinal reconciliation can be achieved simply by declaring past divisions obsolete. Some critics argue that the agreement risks downplaying the theological weight of these historical controversies, potentially substituting pragmatic unity for a deeper, more engaged theological resolution.¹¹

The final section, “The Declaration and Realization of Church Fellowship” (§ 30–49), presents the LA as an instrument of unity (§ 30–34). It describes the implications of this fellowship for witness and service (§ 36), the necessity of ongoing theological dialogue (§ 37–41), and the structural and organizational consequences of this new relationship (§ 42–45). The ecumenical dimension (§ 46–49) underscores the agreement’s outward-looking vision, though some may question whether the LA sufficiently addresses the ecclesiological differences that continue to shape inter-Protestant relations. The emphasis on theological consensus may not fully engage the lived, institutional realities of participating churches, where differing liturgical practices and ecclesiastical structures remain significant.¹²

The Leuenberg Agreement represents a remarkable ecumenical achievement, offering a pathway toward reconciliation without demanding strict confessional uniformity. However, its effectiveness depends on how participating churches navigate the tensions between historical theological commitments and the practical realities of ecclesial unity. While it reconfigures doctrinal distinctions within a framework of mutual recognition, it leaves open the question of whether these theological resolutions are robust enough to sustain long-term ecclesial cohesion. The principle of unity in reconciled diversity is compelling, but its practical outworking remains a challenge that the LA alone cannot fully resolve.

Remarks regarding the content of the Agreement:

1. The central theological claim of the Leuenberg Agreement is its common understanding of the gospel, articulated most explicitly in § 7. The agreement establishes that the right teaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for the unity of the church (§ 2). This formulation draws a distinction between the core (the gospel itself) and peripheral elements that may vary without compromising church fellowship. The agreement thus operates with a minimum consensus approach, which, while effective in facilitating theological convergence, raises concerns regarding the depth of doctrinal engagement.¹³
2. The principle of differentiated consensus, which allows for agreement on fundamental theological positions while tolerating diversity in secondary matters, underlies much of the agreement's methodology. However, by opting for a minimalist framework, the LA largely avoids addressing substantial theological disputes at the heart of Reformation divisions, particularly concerning the relationship between justification, sanctification, and ecclesiology.¹⁴ This omission invites the question of whether the agreement fosters a genuine resolution of theological tensions or merely postpones them in favor of pragmatic ecclesial unity.
3. The agreement presents the mediation of Christ in terms of his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and eschatological coming (§ 7). At the core of this mediation lies Christ's act of taking upon himself God's judgment, thereby manifesting divine love toward sinners.¹⁵ This penitential framework becomes particularly evident in its soteriological application: the believer is assured of righteousness, liberated from accusation, and established in service to God. The description of Christ as Judge and Savior reflects a tension between divine judgment and reconciliation, echoing Pauline theology (Romans 5:1–11; 2 Corinthians 5:19). While this articulation resonates with both Lutheran and Reformed soteriological traditions,¹⁶ the agreement's lack of an explicit engagement with differing theological emphases—such as forensic justification in Lutheran thought

versus the transformative aspects emphasized by Reformed theology—raises the question of whether the agreement sufficiently integrates the distinct perspectives it seeks to reconcile.

4. The message of justification, as the agreement's foundational theological claim, is presented without explicit reference to the church's role in the economy of salvation (§ 7–12). Justification is understood as a universal offer, with no direct ecclesiological mediation of grace.¹⁷ The church is referenced only insofar as the doctrine of justification serves as the criterion for all preaching and sacramental practice. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are recognized as means by which justification is imparted, yet the agreement remains ambiguous regarding the church's active role in the believer's reception of grace. This omission has been subject to theological critique, particularly from traditions that emphasize the sacramental and communal dimensions of salvation. By largely restricting its ecclesiological claims to preaching and sacramental administration, the LA runs the risk of separating soteriology from the visible church, thus diminishing the role of corporate worship, ecclesial authority, and the community of faith in shaping Christian life.
5. Justification serves as the organizing principle for salvation throughout the agreement. It is presented as the true understanding of the gospel and the paramount expression of God's free grace (§ 7). The LA does not provide an argument for the primacy of justification beyond reference to the Reformation fathers, leaving it theologically assumed rather than demonstrably established. Furthermore, the agreement adopts a broader interpretation of justification, incorporating aspects traditionally associated with sanctification.¹⁸ This inclusivity is reflected in its discussion of service to others, daily renewal, and the transformation of life in the present world—themes that, in other ecumenical dialogues (e.g., the Edinburgh Agreement), have been categorized under sanctification. While this broad understanding aligns with certain strands of Reformed theology, particularly Calvin's emphasis on the inseparability of justification and sanctification, it also risks conflating distinct theological categories. The implicit integration of sanctification

within justification could be interpreted as an attempt to bridge Lutheran and Reformed soteriologies, but it also invites critical reflection on whether the agreement adequately distinguishes between declarative and transformative dimensions of salvation.

6. While the Leuenberg Agreement does not provide a fully developed doctrine of the church, its implicit ecclesiology suggests a functional, rather than ontological, understanding of church unity. The church is not defined by hierarchical structures, historical continuity, or a sacramental ontology, but rather by a shared commitment to the right preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments (§ 2).¹⁹ This Reformation-rooted ecclesiology aligns with Protestant concerns about the sufficiency of the gospel in defining the true church. However, it also raises the problem of ecclesial visibility: can a fellowship that lacks a shared confession beyond the agreement itself genuinely function as a recognizable and sustainable ecclesial body? The LA implicitly assumes a relational model of unity, where churches recognize each other's ministries and sacramental practices without creating new institutional structures. While this provides an innovative framework for post-Reformation ecumenism, it leaves unresolved the deeper ecclesiological questions of authority, mission, and governance, which continue to differentiate participating traditions.
7. The agreement's emphasis on justification and sacramental administration as the foundation for unity (§ 7–15) allows for a broad consensus, but its theological formulations remain intentionally concise and non-exhaustive. While this approach facilitates agreement across Protestant traditions, it also lacks doctrinal specificity in key areas. The statement that doctrinal condemnations are no longer applicable (§ 27–28) effectively sets aside historical theological disputes rather than resolving them. This raises the question: does the agreement achieve genuine doctrinal reconciliation, or does it merely redefine unity in terms of pragmatic ecclesial cooperation? Some theologians have criticized the LA for being more of a political or strategic accord than a theological resolution, as it does not require churches to revisit or reinterpret the

historical disputes that originally led to division. The lack of detailed engagement with theological concepts such as sanctification, ecclesial authority, or the nature of Christ's presence in the Eucharist suggests that the agreement prioritizes unity over doctrinal depth.

8. Recognizing the open-ended nature of theological dialogue, the LA acknowledges the necessity of continued reflection (§ 37–41). However, the question remains how participating churches will engage in this ongoing theological process. The agreement does not outline a formalized mechanism for resolving theological disagreements that may emerge within the fellowship.²⁰ This raises concerns that, rather than fostering genuine theological development, the LA could lead to doctrinal stagnation, where the shared theological foundation remains static rather than dynamic. Additionally, while the LA establishes a framework for theological dialogue, it does not specify how disagreements should be mediated or what authority such discussions would hold within the participating churches. The lack of a binding doctrinal or decision-making structure means that theological engagement remains largely voluntary, leaving the risk that churches will remain in a state of permanent theological negotiation without ever achieving deeper doctrinal consensus.
9. The LA represents a significant shift in Protestant ecumenism, yet its implications extend beyond intra-Protestant relations. The document's reception within broader ecumenical circles—particularly in dialogue with Catholic and Orthodox traditions—has been mixed. On the one hand, the agreement models an alternative approach to Christian unity, demonstrating that doctrinal reconciliation does not necessarily require strict confessional uniformity. On the other hand, the lack of an explicit treatment of apostolic succession, ordained ministry, or sacramental theology in relation to church unity creates challenges for dialogue with traditions that see these elements as essential, rather than secondary, to ecclesial communion.²¹ Furthermore, the agreement's rejection of past doctrinal condemnations without an explicit process of theological re-evaluation (§ 27–28) contrasts with other ecumenical efforts, such as

Catholic-Lutheran dialogues, which often seek to reinterpret historical disagreements rather than dismiss them outright.²² The LA's approach may be seen as a pragmatic and constructive step within the Protestant world, yet it remains theologically insufficient for traditions that require a more developed doctrinal and ecclesiological framework for unity.

Reading and studying the Leuenberg Agreement, it becomes evident that its ecumenical-theological approach does not seek to establish a fixed dogmatic synthesis but rather to create a discursive space where doctrinal positions can engage in ongoing dialogue. Instead of presenting a systematic theological resolution, the LA facilitates a dynamic process in which theological traditions mutually interpret each other through carefully crafted diplomatic language formulas. This methodological openness distinguishes the LA from classical confessional documents, as it does not function as a creed in the traditional sense. Consequently, the (post-)Leuenbergians cannot regard it as constitutive of a specific denominational identity but rather as an instrument fostering a relational and dialogical understanding of church fellowship.

Rather than defining doctrinal boundaries, the LA navigates between various dogmatic frameworks, integrating theological, philosophical, and even aesthetic and cultural elements. This approach reflects a deliberate departure from static doctrinal formulations, engaging instead with the experiential and contextual dimensions of faith. While some may view this lack of doctrinal precision as a theological deficit or a deliberate avoidance of doctrinal confrontation, others interpret it as a breakthrough in intra-Protestant ecumenism—a paradigm shift that transcends the historical model of *status confessionis*. The question remains, however, whether this methodological fluidity genuinely facilitates deeper theological reconciliation or whether it primarily serves to accommodate pluralism without addressing foundational doctrinal tensions. To explore this further, we turn to Hendrik Munsonius's concept of the *pathos* formula, George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model, and Alister McGrath's critique, each of which provides a distinct lens through which to examine the implications of the LA's approach to theological language and consensus.

The “Pathos” Formula – Hendrik Munsonius

The Leuenberg Agreement marks a shift in the ecumenical handling of theological ambiguity by providing a space for interpretation that accommodates multiple doctrinal perspectives. Rather than offering a definitive resolution to theological differences, it establishes a framework in which diverse traditions can engage in dialogue while maintaining their distinct identities. This approach allows for an ongoing process of interpretation and mutual understanding within a shared theological framework.

From the perspective of Hendrik Munsonius’s rhetorical theory, the Leuenberg Agreement can be analyzed through the concept of the *pathos formula*, a rhetorical strategy in which key theological statements are presented in a condensed form, allowing for multiple readings. This formulation does not prescribe a singular interpretation but enables a range of understandings, making it a flexible instrument within ecumenical discourse. In this way, the LA functions not as a doctrinally binding statement but as a structured framework that facilitates interaction and communication among different theological traditions.

The Leuenberg Agreement introduces a distinct approach to ambiguity within ecumenical discourse by creating a framework for interpretation that acknowledges and accommodates multiple theological perspectives. Rather than seeking to resolve doctrinal differences through definitive formulations, it establishes a space where diverse understandings can coexist within a shared structure of theological dialogue.

In light of Hendrik Munsonius’s rhetorical theory, the Leuenberg Agreement can be examined through the lens of his concept of the “*pathos formula*”²³ – a rhetorical device in which key theological statements are presented in a condensed and flexible manner, allowing for multiple readings. This approach enables the agreement to function as a means of facilitating theological interaction while maintaining an openness to interpretative plurality.

Munsonius employs the concept of the “*pathos formula*” to illustrate the unique rhetorical and stylistic characteristics of ecumenical agreements. Within this framework, key theological statements are expressed in a *condensed composition* (*verdichtete Form*), allowing them to accommodate multiple interpretations. This stylistic approach enables such formulations to operate in both integrative and

polarizing ways – they facilitate theological cohesion by providing a common reference point for diverse traditions while simultaneously leaving doctrinal ambiguities unresolved.²⁴

As a result, these formulations become critical markers in shaping religious communities' theological and ecclesial self-understanding. However, their openness to interpretation also entails the risk of obscuring deeper theological and social tensions²⁵, which must be unpacked and analyzed for the agreement to function effectively. Unlike legally binding doctrinal statements, which establish fixed expectations, pathos formulas introduce an element of uncertainty into the theological discourse. This intentional openness reflects indecision and serves as a mechanism for sustained dialogue and reinterpretation, ensuring that ecumenical conversations remain dynamic and adaptable to evolving theological and ecclesial contexts.²⁶

The Leuenberg Agreement, in this light, creates a paradoxical space of ambiguity, where theological formulations are deliberately structured to remain open to multiple readings. This interpretative openness facilitates ongoing engagement among traditions with distinct theological emphases, fostering a diplomatic understanding through interaction rather than doctrinal conformity.²⁷ While this methodological approach enables ecumenical partners to maintain dialogue, it also raises critical questions about the long-term theological coherence of such an agreement.

From a critical perspective, the strength of this approach lies in its flexibility – by avoiding rigid doctrinal formulations, it accommodates traditions that may otherwise struggle to find common ground.²⁸ However, its primary weakness is the potential for doctrinal stagnation. If ambiguity is not eventually clarified through theological development, the agreement risks becoming a framework of coexistence rather than a pathway to deeper unity. As Munsonius notes, an ecumenical discourse “full of tensions, contradictory, even paradoxical” can prevent premature resolutions and encourage continued reflection;²⁹ yet the absence of clearly articulated doctrinal commitments may also leave fundamental theological differences unresolved indefinitely.

This raises a significant theoretical and practical challenge: to what extent can an ecumenical agreement rely on interpretative openness without sacrificing

the integrity of theological commitments? If ambiguity remains a permanent feature rather than a temporary phase of theological discernment, it may hinder the possibility of doctrinal consensus.³⁰ At the same time, the flexibility of such an approach ensures that theological dialogue remains dynamic, continually revisiting and clarifying key issues in ecclesial life.³¹ This allows unresolved differences to function not as barriers but as catalysts for deeper mutual understanding – provided that the process leads to substantive theological engagement. While the Leuenberg Agreement successfully prevents the ossification of doctrinal divisions, it does so at the risk of allowing specific theological issues to remain permanently unsettled. Therefore, the long-term success of this model depends on whether the interpretative space it creates continues to foster deeper theological reflection or whether it ultimately functions only as a diplomatic mechanism that sustains dialogue without leading to meaningful doctrinal resolution.

The church fellowship established by the Leuenberg Agreement can only be regarded as an ecumenical success where all participating traditions remain committed to engaging in dialogue, seeking compromise, or embracing a pluralist framework of theological coexistence. The agreement operates within a model of transconfessionalism, in which each denominational tradition must reconsider and, to some extent, relinquish aspects of its distinct confessional identity in the interest of fostering unity. This process highlights a fundamental tension: while Christian unity cannot be equated with uniformity, the extent to which confessional distinctives can be reinterpreted or set aside without undermining theological integrity remains an open question.

Methodologically and in its outcome, the LA exemplifies a differentiated consensus – an attempt to reconcile diversity within a shared theological space. The unity it proposes is one of reconciled diversity, where theological commitments are not abandoned but subjected to reinterpretation within an ecumenical framework. However, this approach relies on a crucial assumption: that consensus is not merely the acceptance of another party's theological position but rather an emergent feature of the ongoing dialogue itself. This necessitates a continuous re-reading of confessional commitments, particularly those historically regarded as defining points of division.

At the same time, the scope and limits of this consensus must be carefully considered. The success of such an ecumenical model depends on how well the agreement relates its shared theological commitments to the distinct theological “horizons” of the participating traditions. If the process of re-reading confessions results in an open-ended and indefinitely flexible theological space, the LA risks reducing confessional identity to a negotiable category rather than a historically and doctrinally grounded reality.

This challenge is further underscored by the internal theological logic of Christianity, which necessitates unity for coherence. Since there is only one Christ, the Christian faith cannot be fragmented into multiple, independent “Christianities” without undermining its foundational claim to truth. The earliest Christian writers already recognized this tension and warned against both internal and trans-local schisms, emphasizing that while differences may arise, division is never absolute³². Even separated churches share a common theological language, historical commitments, and cultural heritage, which serve as a basis for mutual recognition and potential reconciliation. The question remains whether the Leuenberg Agreement truly builds upon this shared foundation in a way that fosters theological depth, or whether it primarily facilitates institutional cooperation without adequately addressing doctrinal divergence.

Ultimately, while the agreement provides a framework for sustaining dialogue and fostering mutual recognition, its long-term viability depends on whether it can maintain a meaningful balance between doctrinal flexibility and theological depth. If it merely accommodates theological pluralism without clarifying the foundations of Christian unity, it risks becoming a diplomatic tool rather than a theological model capable of sustaining ecumenical integrity. Reconciled diversity can only serve as a meaningful expression of unity if it is grounded in the shared theological and historical reality of the church, ensuring that reconciliation does not come at the cost of substantive theological coherence.

George Lindbeck approach to doctrinal questions

The differences that arise within ecumenical discourse can be examined through distinct categorical frameworks, each shaping the way theological commitments are understood and negotiated. George Lindbeck’s categorical distinctions

provide a useful perspective for analyzing these variations, particularly in the context of how doctrines are perceived and function within religious traditions.

One such category is cognitive propositionalism³³, which asserts that doctrines are true because they correspond to objective theological realities. In this framework, church doctrine serves as a set of informative propositions that describe immutable truths about God, salvation, and the nature of the church. This approach presupposes that theological claims are not merely expressions of communal identity or religious experience but statements about reality that hold universal validity.

However, Lindbeck also highlights a growing cultural shift in which contemporary individuals are increasingly disconnected from denominational traditions and theological frameworks. In a cultural landscape where religious affiliation is often fluid and doctrinal literacy is in decline, many people struggle to engage with *theological propositions* in their traditional cognitive sense.³⁴ This disconnection raises a crucial challenge for ecumenical agreements such as the Leuenberg Agreement, which rely on theological discourse as the foundation for unity. If the cognitive engagement with doctrine diminishes, then the very concept of theological consensus itself may be subject to reinterpretation, shifting from a truth-based model toward a more relational or experiential form of agreement.³⁵

This raises further questions about the long-term stability of differentiated consensus within ecumenical dialogues. If doctrines are no longer universally perceived as binding truths but instead as historically contingent expressions of faith, then theological unity risks becoming a matter of negotiated coherence rather than a reflection of shared truth claims. In this context, the challenge is not merely to establish an ecumenical framework that accommodates plural understandings but to ensure that the theological content of these agreements remains intelligible and meaningful within contemporary *religious and cultural realities*.

Lindbeck's other category, experiential expressivism, views doctrines as cultural and historical expressions of a universal human transcendent experience.³⁶ In this framework, dogmas do not function as definitive theological propositions but as symbolic representations of inner emotions, attitudes, or existential orientations. Theology in the Western cultural context, particularly over the past century, has increasingly reflected this expressivist tendency rather than

adhering to the cognitive propositionalist model. Lindbeck's observations align with contemporary shifts in religious engagement, where faith is often perceived as a private matter and shaped by individual experience rather than institutional doctrine. As a result, individuals may approach theology through an experiential-expressivist lens, integrating theological thought into various discourses without necessarily engaging in formal theological reasoning. While Lindbeck does not explicitly state whether this model should be transcended, his analysis suggests a preference for moving beyond its limitations.³⁷

To address the challenges of theological interpretation and ecumenical discourse, Lindbeck introduces his post-liberal or cultural-linguistic model. This framework seeks to explain how Christian faith can assert objective truth claims while also acknowledging historical context and the reconciliation of apparent doctrinal contradictions. According to Lindbeck, meaningful ecumenical consensus must operate on two levels: the sociological and the theological. These dimensions provide a foundation for dialogue among different denominational traditions, allowing for joint reflection without necessitating uniformity.

Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model offers a compelling explanation of the ecumenical process. It suggests that what were once considered church-dividing differences may, in retrospect, be understood as variations within a shared Christian heritage, with no fundamental change in doctrine required. He argues that doctrine functions as the language of the Christian community, shaping the way theological meaning is conveyed and understood. This perspective implies that theology, as the grammar of Christian discourse, shifts attention away from discussions of God as an independent reality and instead focuses on how doctrinal statements regulate religious expression.

A key implication of this approach is that any theological reconciliation between differing Christian traditions will only have a lasting impact if it extends beyond doctrinal formulations to influence the broader sociological and ecclesial structures in which theological language operates. Lindbeck's model provides a framework for understanding the relationship between spiritual truth, doctrinal consensus, and the practical function of theology, emphasizing that ecumenical unity must be grounded not only in shared theological claims but also in the way these claims are integrated into the lived reality of the Christian community.

Alister McGrath critical contributions

Alister McGrath's perspective offers an important extension to the discussion of ecumenical consensus and doctrinal interpretation, particularly in contrast to George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model and Hendrik Munsonius's rhetorical theory of ambiguity. In his critique of Lindbeck, McGrath proposes four theses that highlight the dual nature of doctrine as both a historical phenomenon and a concept shaped by socially constructed frameworks. His four key insights are:

- Doctrine serves as a social demarcator, distinguishing one religious tradition from another by establishing identity and boundaries.
- Doctrine is generated by and interprets the Christian narrative, functioning as an interpretive framework through which believers understand their faith within historical and theological contexts.
- Doctrine plays a role in interpreting religious experience, giving structure and meaning to spiritual and ecclesial life.
- Doctrine makes truth claims, asserting propositional statements that describe theological realities rather than merely expressing subjective beliefs.³⁸

McGrath's description aligns with aspects of Lindbeck's model, yet introduces a fundamental distinction regarding the role of doctrine in theological discourse. While Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model sees doctrine primarily as the "grammar" of religious language – regulating Christian discourse rather than necessarily referring to an objective metaphysical reality – McGrath insists that doctrine also serves as a means of making substantive truth claims. This difference has significant implications for the understanding of ecumenical dialogue. Whereas Lindbeck's framework allows for doctrinal differences to be seen as variations within a shared linguistic and cultural tradition, McGrath's approach emphasizes that doctrine cannot be reduced to a set of historically contingent symbols; it must also engage with theological truths that transcend linguistic and cultural particularities.³⁹

This tension between historically contingent interpretation and enduring doctrinal truth is further complicated when viewed alongside Munsonius's rhetorical theory of ambiguity. Munsonius highlights the pathos formula, a

rhetorical strategy within ecumenical agreements that allows key theological statements to be expressed in a condensed and flexible manner, enabling multiple readings. This technique fosters inclusivity and dialogue, but it also risks obscuring fundamental doctrinal commitments.⁴⁰ Lindbeck's model, in a similar way, allows for differentiated consensus by reinterpreting theological differences as linguistic and cultural variations rather than absolute doctrinal contradictions. McGrath's critique challenges both approaches by arguing that theological dialogue must move beyond linguistic accommodation and rhetorical flexibility toward a substantive engagement with doctrine as a bearer of truth.

From an ecumenical standpoint, this debate raises a crucial question about the nature and limits of consensus. If doctrinal formulations are seen primarily as flexible and adaptable, as suggested by Lindbeck and reinforced through Munsonius's rhetorical analysis, then ecumenical agreements such as the Leuenberg Agreement can function as open-ended frameworks that foster ongoing reinterpretation. However, McGrath's perspective warns against allowing doctrinal consensus to become an exercise in negotiated coherence rather than a reflection of shared theological convictions.⁴¹ The strength of Lindbeck's and Munsonius's models lies in their ability to sustain dialogue and accommodate diversity, but their limitation is the potential erosion of doctrinal clarity.

The ecumenical movement, particularly within the Reformed tradition, is ultimately centered on the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a mission shared across denominational lines. This unity is expressed through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, forming a witnessing and serving community that embodies the body of Christ. However, if the ecumenical process is to move beyond mere rhetorical accommodation, it must ensure that unity is not achieved at the cost of doctrinal integrity. A balanced approach would require maintaining the flexibility necessary for dialogue while safeguarding the theological substance that gives doctrine its meaning and coherence. This is the fundamental challenge for any ecumenical project that seeks to uphold both the diversity of Christian traditions and the foundational truth claims that define them.⁴²

The Tendencies of the Protestant Churches in the Hungarian Context regarding LA

The Hungarian Protestant churches' engagement with the Leuenberg Agreement must be understood within the broader social, cultural, and theological transitions that have shaped both Hungarian society and the churches' self-understanding in the post-communist era. Over the past three decades, the shifting political landscape, the unresolved confrontation with historical legacies, and the transformation of social and religious identities have profoundly influenced ecclesiastical life. While discussions on reconciliation and historical accountability have been present, they have often remained partial, politicized, or instrumentalized, rather than serving as genuine processes of theological reflection and communal renewal. This hesitation and lack of clarity have directly impacted the credibility of the church and its fundamental mission—the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins received in Christ.

The Crisis of Religious Identity and Social Fragmentation

The declining role of institutionalized Christianity in Hungary is part of a larger cultural and spiritual transformation affecting European societies. Religious affiliation has weakened as secularization and individualization reshape faith as a private, personal search rather than a communal or ecclesial reality. This transition has led to a disintegration of shared spiritual meaning, resulting in a society where the absence of religious frameworks contributes to a loss of cultural cohesion and a fractured moral landscape. The traditional social functions of the church – ritual affirmation, moral guidance, education, solidarity, and communal belonging – have been significantly eroded. The disappearance of a unified Christian worldview has created a situation in which faith communities struggle to maintain their role as mediators of transcendent meaning in an increasingly pluralistic and fragmented context.⁴³

This transformation aligns with Charles Taylor's analysis of post-Christian societies⁴⁴, where belief in God has shifted from being an unquestioned assumption to one option among many competing worldviews. The increasing pluralization of religious identity means that even within Christian communities,

theological commitments are no longer experienced as binding confessional truths but as adaptable, fluid elements of personal belief systems. In such an environment, the Leuenberg Agreement's approach to unity through reconciled diversity reflects not only a theological decision but also an adaptation to broader cultural shifts, where consensus is often based on negotiated coexistence rather than shared doctrinal convictions.

The Theological and Ecclesial Challenge of the Leuenberg Agreement

Against this backdrop, the Leuenberg Agreement attempts to provide a common theological ground for Hungarian Protestant churches, particularly in fostering pulpit and sacramental fellowship between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. This initiative draws on the Reformation heritage, particularly the *solus* principles, emphasizing scripture as the soul of theology. The agreement presupposes that the study of scripture, understood as *verbum Dei*, forms the foundation for theological consensus, guiding the churches toward a shared ecclesial identity beyond traditional confessional divisions.

However, the effectiveness of this vision raises several critical theological questions. One of the central issues concerns whether Christian communities, as a whole, can reclaim a classical mode of scriptural interpretation, where the unity of faith is not merely a matter of historical convergence but a biblically-informed *consensus fidelium*. The theological traditions that emerged from the Reformation emphasize the communal discernment of scripture through the work of the Spirit, yet the diversity of confessional hermeneutics continues to challenge the formation of genuine unity. The unresolved doctrinal differences in the understanding of the Eucharist, the nature of real presence, and the sacrificial aspect of communion illustrate the limitations of theological consensus as envisioned by the LA.

In this regard, the contrast between George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model and Alister McGrath's doctrinal realism is particularly relevant. Lindbeck's framework suggests that doctrinal differences should be reinterpreted within a shared theological discourse, allowing for a differentiated consensus without requiring uniformity in metaphysical claims. McGrath, however, argues

that doctrine must maintain its function as a bearer of theological truth, rather than merely serving as a construct of religious language. The Hungarian Protestant churches, in their engagement with the LA, must navigate this tension: should the agreement be understood as a pragmatic theological instrument that facilitates cooperation, or does it demand a deeper reexamination of doctrinal commitments to establish a more enduring unity?

The Broader Ecclesiological Implications

The Hungarian Protestant churches' engagement with the LA also reflects a broader ecclesiological dilemma: how should churches define their unity in an era when the traditional structures of ecclesial authority and doctrinal confession are weakening? The LA provides a model for overcoming historical divisions, yet it also raises the question of whether ecclesial identity should be determined by historical doctrinal formulations or by contemporary theological dialogue. The Protestant tradition, particularly in its Hungarian expression, has historically emphasized the provisional and reformable nature of ecclesiastical structures. Protestant confessions have functioned not as *ius divinum* but as *ius positivum*, meaning that they remain subject to reinterpretation and contextual application. However, if doctrinal consensus is subject to continuous renegotiation, the challenge remains how to maintain theological integrity while adapting to contemporary ecumenical realities.

Furthermore, Hendrik Munsonius's concept of the pathos formula provides a crucial lens for evaluating the impact of the LA. The agreement, by its nature, embodies the rhetorical strategy of ambiguity, where theological statements are formulated in ways that accommodate multiple interpretations. This approach fosters theological dialogue but also leaves unresolved tensions, potentially weakening the clarity of doctrinal commitments. If the unity envisioned by the LA remains structurally dependent on theological fluidity, the question arises as to whether this unity can provide a stable foundation for future ecclesial cooperation.

The Future of Protestant Unity in Hungary

Looking ahead, the Hungarian Protestant churches must critically assess the trajectory of their ecumenical engagement. The LA has undoubtedly established a new paradigm for Protestant cooperation, but the extent to which it transforms confessional identity, theological self-understanding, and ecclesial structures remains open to further reflection. The success of this model will depend on whether it fosters deeper theological engagement or remains a pragmatic mechanism for denominational coexistence.

One of the most pressing challenges is whether the LA's vision of reconciled diversity can sustain itself in a rapidly secularizing society, where theological literacy is in decline and confessional commitments are increasingly fluid. If Protestant unity is to be more than a negotiated theological arrangement, it must also be a renewed ecclesial reality, grounded not only in historical agreements but in a lived theological identity that resonates within the contemporary Hungarian context.

The post-communist period has demonstrated that mere institutional survival is not enough; the churches must redefine their role in a society where religion is no longer a dominant cultural force. The LA offers a framework for engagement, but the Hungarian churches must determine whether this framework is sufficient to address the deeper questions of faith, doctrine, and community formation in a rapidly changing religious landscape. The ultimate question is not merely whether the LA can function as a bridge between denominational traditions, but whether it can serve as a foundation for a revitalized Protestant witness in an era of increasing theological and cultural pluralism.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this work underscores the multifaceted nature of ecumenical dialogue, particularly within the framework of the Leuenberg Agreement as applied to the Hungarian Reformed context. Throughout the study, the historical, theological, and sociological dimensions have been intertwined to offer a comprehensive understanding of both the potential and the challenges inherent in fostering unity among Protestant communities.

Historically, the development of the Leuenberg Agreement is situated within a turbulent 20th century marked by intense ideological conflicts and significant ecclesiastical shifts. This background provides a crucial context for evaluating the agreement's impact. By referencing seminal events such as the Barmen Declaration, the work illustrates how resistant ecclesiastical voices laid the groundwork for later attempts at unity. The agreement's evolution from early discussions in the 1950s to its eventual formulation in the early 1970s illustrates a painstaking yet determined process of overcoming historical divisions through dialogue, rather than through mere political convenience. This historical perspective not only legitimizes the agreement but also demonstrates that unity is attainable even under complex and often adverse conditions.

In the theological domain, the study unpacks how the Leuenberg Agreement seeks to navigate profound doctrinal differences through a "differentiated consensus" approach. This model allows various Protestant traditions to maintain their distinct identities while embracing a common understanding of key doctrinal elements such as justification and the proper administration of sacraments. The analysis highlights that, while the agreement succeeds in identifying and articulating core unifying principles, it does so at the cost of glossing over more contentious issues. For example, differences in the understanding of the Eucharist or the relationship between justification and sanctification remain only partially addressed. This tension illustrates the inherent difficulty in achieving doctrinal clarity while simultaneously accommodating diversity. Nonetheless, the consensus achieved is valuable, as it provides a foundation upon which ongoing theological dialogue can continue and evolve, preventing stagnation and promoting continual reformation of ecclesiastical practice.

From a sociological perspective, the work emphasizes the contemporary challenges facing Hungarian Protestant churches. The post-communist shift, coupled with broader secularization trends, has led to significant alterations in religious identity and community cohesion. In this context, the Leuenberg Agreement is not merely an abstract theological document but a practical roadmap aimed at revitalizing church life and reasserting the social functions of the church in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. The study makes it clear that unity in this sense goes beyond doctrinal statements; it encapsulates the

need for a renewed ecclesial identity that can address issues such as declining membership, increasing individualism, and the erosion of traditional community bonds.

Moreover, the work critically examines the methodological underpinnings of the agreement, drawing on theoretical perspectives such as Munsonius's "pathos formula," Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model, and McGrath's emphasis on doctrinal truth. These perspectives provide a rich analytical framework that elucidates the strengths and limitations of a consensus built on both historical heritage and modern interpretative strategies. On one hand, the flexible language of the agreement allows diverse viewpoints to coexist, fostering an environment where continued dialogue is possible. On the other hand, this very flexibility may leave unresolved tensions that could undermine long-term doctrinal integrity.

In sum, the Leuenberg Agreement stands as a significant, though not flawless, milestone in the pursuit of Protestant unity. It encapsulates the delicate balance between tradition and reform, between rigorous doctrinal precision and the practical needs of a dynamic ecclesial community. As this work has shown, the ultimate success of the agreement will depend on the willingness of participating churches to engage in continuous dialogue, to reexamine their own confessional commitments, and to find innovative ways to bridge the gaps between historical doctrine and contemporary ecclesial realities.

This comprehensive study invites readers to reflect on the enduring question of how Christian communities can remain united in diversity, emphasizing that the journey towards unity is an ongoing process, rich with both challenges and opportunities. The work encourages further exploration into how the principles of the Leuenberg Agreement can be operationalized to foster a robust, living church that is both true to its past and adaptive to the demands of the present and future.

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Evangelism to Generation Alpha in the Emergence of New Technologies

Abstract

This paper explores the challenge and opportunity of evangelizing Generation Alpha—those born from the early 2010s onward—within the context of rapidly evolving digital technologies. Raised as “digital only” natives, Generation Alpha engages with the world through screens, artificial intelligence, and immersive digital environments. The study examines how these technologies shape their values, behaviors, and expectations, and how the Church might respond through personalized, experiential, and ethically grounded evangelism strategies. It highlights the theological risks of idolizing technology, the digital divide, and the erosion of traditional authority structures. The paper proposes an integrated evangelistic approach that balances virtual and in-person interaction, leverages AI and multimedia storytelling, and fosters digital faith communities. It argues that engaging Generation Alpha requires not only technological adaptation, but a theological reimagining of the Church’s mission in a digitized world.

I. Introduction

Australian demographer Mark McCrindle has shown interest in the naming conventions of different generations during his studies on generational research.¹ With the naming conventions reaching up to Generation Z, he recognized the next generation as the first distinct group of the 21st century, coining the term 'Generation Alpha' by utilizing the first letter of the Greek alphabet.² This generation typically encompasses those born from the early 2010s to the mid-2020s, a time following the widespread adoption of smartphones. Notably, 2010 marked the release of the iPad, the launch of Instagram, and the year the word 'app' was selected as the word of the year by experts in the United States, further emphasizing the relationship between the emergence of a new generation and new technologies. McCrindle predicts that Generation Alpha will pass through their teenage years into adulthood over the next decade. Despite their youth, this generation is already influencing the purchasing decisions of Millennial families and is considered early adopters of technology born in the 21st century. Moreover, they are poised to become the largest generation ever during the shift to the Asian century. By the mid-2030s, when the youngest of Generation Alpha become adults, the largest middle class will originate from Asia, which McCrindle points out as significant.³ Therefore, the emergence of Generation Alpha is not only a global phenomenon but also has relevance to the Korean church in Asia. Especially considering the rapid decline of the next generation, it is imperative for Korean Christianity to take proactive measures.⁴

In South Korean society, Generation Alpha has been significantly affected by low birth rates and slow economic growth. The future demographic structure of Generation Alpha is notable for its substantially reduced population compared to previous generations. The year 2015 saw the highest number of births within this generation, approximately 438,000. Generation Alpha is growing up in a social atmosphere where marriage and childbirth are considered options, with those born after 2017 experiencing an even stronger emphasis on this trend. As the low birth rate issue intensifies, it is expected that by 2029, when Generation Alpha enters elementary and middle school, there will be 1.07 million fewer students than there were in 2022, the time when Generation Z and Alpha were of school age. Additionally, Generation Alpha was born during a period when South Korea's economic growth rate was recording a slow growth of around

2%. This suggests that they are likely to develop values distinct from those of previous generations. Unlike the MZ generation, Generation Alpha may prefer to refrain from luxury goods consumption, such as designer brands, travel, and high-end cars, indicating a higher likelihood of favoring a more rational and frugal consumption culture.

Regarding research on Generation Alpha, studies are still in the nascent stages, with a few papers published in the fields of education and economics both domestically and internationally.⁵ By 2023, the oldest members of Generation Alpha would be in the sixth grade of elementary school, marking a point where educational research has somewhat commenced.⁶ Furthermore, research on the economic future due to Generation Alpha's purchasing power and influence is also underway. For instance, Generation Alpha has been nicknamed '8-pockets' or '10-pockets', reflecting the high consumer influence of this generation due to the support they receive from parents, grandparents, and other relatives in an era of low birth rates, including single and DINK (Dual Income, No Kids) demographics.⁷

The observation that research on Generation Alpha remains scant within the realm of theological studies, particularly in missiology, highlights a significant gap in understanding how this emerging generation interacts with and impacts religious practices and beliefs. While there has been active research on previous generations, such as the Millennials and Generation Z, the lack of focused studies on Generation Alpha in notable theological and missiological journals in Korea—such as *Theology of Mission* by the Korean Society of Mission Studies, *Evangelical Missiology* by Korea Evangelical Missiological Society, *University and Mission* by the Korean Association of University Mission Studies, *Mission and Theology* by Center for World Mission at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and *Theology and Praxis* by the Korean Society for Practical Theology—indicates a need for the scholarly community to turn its attention to understanding how this generation will shape the future of the church and its mission.⁸

Just as research on the MZ generation is being conducted and utilized across various aspects of Korean society, research on the upcoming Generation Alpha is also needed. As time progresses, the range of generational change is widening, and the intervals between generations are shortening.⁹ Therefore, in the same way society and humanities are responding, within Christian theology, it becomes an urgent task in the fields of practical theology, including Christian

education and evangelism theology, to take an interest in research on the next generation. The interrelation between generational changes and technological advancement is crucial in preparing for the future of the church. However, it is risky to perceive technology merely as a tool due to its profound impact on individuals and society. "Digital culture is not a fictional world existing only in human imagination or thoughts but a real world that penetrates, structures, and changes the overall life world where humans physically live."¹⁰ Heidi Campbell advocates against viewing the impact of new media and digital technology on people's values and community activities through technological determinism. Instead, she supports the concept of the "social shaping of technology" from a religious perspective. Furthermore, she argues that technology is always subject to change and negotiation depending on the context of the users, emphasizing that how religion approaches technology is more critical.¹¹

This study aims to shed light on the rapid development of technology in contemporary society and its connection to the lives of Generation Alpha. By doing so, it seeks to highlight the necessity for and alternatives to evangelism methods that effectively communicate the gospel to this generation. "How can Christian evangelism effectively engage Generation Alpha, considering their native digital environment and the rapid advancement of new technologies?" This question aims to explore the intersection of digital technology and religious engagement, particularly focusing on the unique characteristics of Generation Alpha. It prompts an investigation into how the Church can adapt its evangelism strategies to remain relevant and impactful in a digital and technologically advanced context. Additionally, it encourages exploration of the potential benefits and challenges associated with using new digital tools and platforms for evangelism purposes, as well as considering ethical considerations and the development of personalized and experiential evangelism methods tailored to Generation Alpha's expectations and digital fluency.

Given the current lack of research on Generation Alpha, this study limits its scope to examining the relationship between Generation Alpha and technology as a means to explore the possibilities for evangelism. It intends to serve as a precursor, hoping that its findings will prompt further theological examination beyond its scope in subsequent research.

II. Generation Alpha's Characteristics and Technological Environment

Understanding the characteristics of Generation Alpha requires a comparative analysis with previous generations. Each generation, shaped by its unique historical, social, and technological context, exhibits distinctive attitudes, behaviors, and values. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) emerged during a time of post-World War II population growth and economic prosperity, emphasizing family and community values. Generation X (1965-1979) is described as being "a hybrid of traditional, structural and analogue approaches combined with the adaptive, collaborative and digital thinking of today."¹² Millennials or Generation Y (1980-1994) reached adulthood around the new millennium, are proficient with the latest technology, and grew up during a global economic boom. Generation Z (1995-2009) has been influenced by cultural diversity, global brands, social media, and the digital world. For Generation Alpha (2010-2024), Millennials are their parents, Generation Z their siblings, Generation X their relatives, and Baby Boomers their grandparents. To traditional and analog-familiar populations like Generation X and the Baby Boomers, the distinction between Generation Z and Alpha may not be as clear. However, since those born around 2010 have not experienced a culture without smartphones, they are classified as Generation Alpha. This era, including a transitional "Zalpha Generation," signifies a blend between Generations Z and Alpha, who are distinct yet closely related. Generation Z is considered digital natives, raised by Generation X parents, learned in a mobile environment during their developmental years, and primarily consumers of content. Influenced by their parents, they have a vertical perception of success and have partially experienced analog culture. Generation Alpha, born to Millennial parents, has been immersed in a digital environment from birth, making them "digital only" natives. They are unique in their ability to consume and simultaneously produce content. Generation Alpha's parents prioritize their children's happiness over traditional measures of success. This delineation illustrates how Generation Alpha represents "the first generation to have been born and fully shaped in the twenty-first century."¹³

	Millennials (M Generation)	Generation Z	Generation Alpha
Birth Years	1980~1994	1995~2009	2010 or later
Age in 2024	30~44	15~29	0~14
Preferred Media	Internet	Mobile	Mobile, AI Speaker
Key Identifier	Digital Nomad	Digital Native	Digital Only
Communication Plat- forms	Cyworld Facebook Instagram	Instagram YouTube TikTok	TikTok Zepeto Roblox
Psychological Traits	Globalization Empiricism	Realism Ethics-oriented	Interest, Fun, Reward Intuitive Gratification

TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS, GENERATION Z, AND GENERATION ALPHA IN 2024¹⁴

Indeed, Generation Alpha distinguishes itself as the first true digital natives, differentiating significantly from previous generations like X, Y/M, and Z. From birth, they have been immersed in technology, naturally navigating a digital environment that shapes their cultural and social perspectives. Understanding the interplay between Generation Alpha and the digital technological environment is crucial for effective evangelism and communication.

Mark McCrindle characterizes Generation Alpha with five key attributes: digital, social, global, mobile, and visual.¹⁵ First, Generation Alpha is a digital native: Generation Alpha stands out as the most accustomed to the digital and virtual world from birth. Digital technology is an integral part of their lives, shaping their understanding, relationships, and communication with the world. Unlike Generation Z, who were introduced to digital devices only in late childhood, Generation Alpha has been exposed to digital devices from a very young age, replacing traditional toys and sometimes even acting as a digital pacifier. This early and pervasive exposure has enhanced their digital literacy but has also raised concerns about the decline in traditional social skills. Fortunately, Alpha’s parents are not entirely naive about digital technology and face unique challenges in managing screen time and digital exposure. For Generation Alpha, digital technology is not just a tool but an essential part of education. Tablets and educational apps are commonly used in schools, and this generation frequently learns through interactive digital experiences from an early age.

Second, Generation Alpha maintains an unprecedented level of hyper-connectivity, thanks in large part to social networking sites (SNS) like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which keep them connected 24/7 across social, geographical,

cultural, and generational boundaries. This connectivity extends beyond family and friends to online influencers, from whom they seek advice and information. For them, social media, instant messaging, and video calls are standard modes of communication. This constant connectivity shapes their social interactions and relationships, making hyper-connectivity a central characteristic of how Generation Alpha communicates in the digital age. They not only access existing information in response to issues but also express their own voices, sharing and reproducing content in digital spaces with others. This role as both content consumers and producers differentiates them from previous generations and dilutes the power of traditional authorities and norms, creating new rules and orders. This hyper-connectivity, while fostering open communication styles to which they are accustomed, also allows for the possibility of social isolation since connections can be unilaterally blocked. The early 2020s, a period marked by the prolonged Covid-19 pandemic, has witnessed potential downsides to this lifestyle, including declines in social skills and educational quality. "Though they are globally connected through their devices, they appear less socially engaged."¹⁶ The side effects of selective connectivity include fostering short attention spans in Generation Alpha, who have grown up in a world overflowing with instant gratification and bite-sized content.

Third, the digital and social characteristics of Generation Alpha endow them with a global perspective, making them quick to catch on to and influence worldwide trends. For instance, phenomena like the Pokémon Go craze became a global sensation. Through news outlets, Generation Alpha shows a heightened interest in environ-

mental issues, often receiving education on climate change and sustainability from a young age, and many are passionate about environmental activism. Events like the rapid global response to the Australian bushfires of 2019 illustrate how Generation Alpha acts in a global manner. Their high engagement with social issues, such as participating in "cancel culture" -- withdrawing support for individuals or companies making offensive remarks or actions -- reflects this. Global awareness means Generation Alpha is exposed to more diversity in terms of culture, race, and gender from an early age, naturally growing up in a world that is increasingly diverse and inclusive.

Fourth, Generation Alpha possesses mobility. They are the first generation directly influenced by the ubiquity of smartphones and a ubiquitous society.

Their characteristic hyper-connectivity enhances mobility. As communication has shifted to wireless, it has become more liberated, marking a complete departure from the wired era (TV, telephone) where parents controlled their children's access to information. Moreover, with the diversification of education, careers, travel, and living arrangements, and these cycles becoming shorter compared to previous generations, there is an increase in mobility throughout their life cycles and leisure activities. The traditional concept of a lifelong job has disappeared, leading to multiple career paths, including post-retirement engagements. "The World Economic Forum predicts that 65 per cent of Generation Alphas entering primary school today will end up working in entirely new job types that don't yet exist,"¹⁷ highlighting the fluidity and adaptability required in Generation Alpha's future careers.

Fifth, Generation Alpha is biased towards visual elements. While previous generations were characterized by text-based communication, Alpha's traits lean significantly more towards image-centric visual elements. They were manipulating tablet PCs even before learning to speak, and during the Covid-19 pandemic, they became accustomed to image-based rather than text-based communication due to the predominance of remote interactions over face-to-face ones. A look at the evolution of social networks like Facebook (now Meta), Twitter (now X), and Instagram reveals a shift from the middle-aged to the younger generation, accompanied by a decreasing allowance for the number of characters in posts. The social networks consumed by Generation Alpha have moved from Instagram to TikTok, where content is even shorter, almost devoid of text, and primarily visual.

In summary, Generation Alpha stands out as digital natives with hyper-connectivity and exposure to a diverse and globalized world from a very young age. This has increased their mobility and familiarity with visual-centric communication. These unique sociocultural aspects differentiate them from previous generations and are likely to shape their worldview and interactions with society in the future.

III. The Emergence of New Technologies and the Opportunities and Challenges for Evangelism

Generation Alpha is defined by technological devices such as smartphones, tablets, video games, self-driving trains, autonomous cars, and smart AI speakers. These technologies were developed within the lifetime of Generation Alpha and represent the entirety of their technological experience to date. Not only has the advent of new technologies occurred, but their adoption by people has been faster than at any previous time. It took 38 years for radio to reach 50 million users, whereas television took 13 years, the iPod took 4 years, the internet 3 years, Facebook just 19 days, and the Pokémon Go craze also spread globally within 19 days. Living in an era of unprecedented change and rapid technological advancement, Generation Alpha has grown up with screens serving as toys, entertainment, and educational aids right from their early years, leading to a significant impact due to screen saturation. From shortened attention spans to the gamification of education, increased digital literacy, and potential social development issues, this era has influenced us all, but it has brought about even more significant changes for Generation Alpha, growing up as a generation that 'manages screens' much more than any static screen could have allowed in the past. It is nearly impossible to separate them from the devices that have been central to their lives since birth. Because children have been using these devices even before they could speak, the full impact of their interaction with screens is yet unknown. New technologies will undoubtedly present unique challenges along with opportunities for evangelism.

For church members belonging to older generations who are tasked with conveying the Gospel to Generation Alpha, new technologies present both opportunities and challenges. "Contemporary Christianity has traditionally harbored a predominantly negative perception of technology. This stance is rooted in the Cold War era's zenith of human-made technology, characterized by a fear of nuclear weapons and the subsequent critique of technology based on the loss of humanity and alienation it engendered."¹⁸ Not only is there a technological disillusionment found in historical facts, but older church members also struggle to keep pace with today's rapidly advancing technologies. In traditional societies, the elderly, who possessed extensive experience, could monopolize knowledge and decision-making, thus holding authority. Today's

new technologies are shaking up these dynamics of authority. With Generation Alpha being proficient in digital technology and the older generations less so, it is often the younger generation that assists the older one. Thus, the digital environment is altering and expanding the structure of authority. While the emergence of new technologies may be disconcerting for the older generation, it is not entirely negative.¹⁹ Throughout the history of missions, the emergence of new technologies has provided the impetus for spreading the Gospel and expanding the Kingdom of God. The printing of the Bible through Gutenberg's press and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the invention of the steamship and the commencement of overseas missions, the development of electricity/telegraphy and inland missions, and the information age ushered in by the personal computer and the unreached tribes are examples of this. Therefore, in the digital age and virtual world, the Church must find methods for evangelism and prepare theological responses. "Today's technologically critical perspective, which often negates technology, fails to grasp the essence of modern digital era technology, which has become the foundation of modern existence and a way of life, indicating a need for a technological theology that can unfold an alternative discourse."²⁰

Evangelizing Generation Alpha through new technologies presents challenges and ethical considerations. Firstly, there are issues of digital divide and technology accessibility. Even within Generation Alpha, disparities in technology access exist, sometimes due to parents who limit media access for educational reasons. Economic, political, geographical, and cultural diversities lead to inequalities in digital technology access, along with economic, racial, and linguistic segregation in cyberspace.²¹ Ironically, seeking solutions to mitigate the digital divide could also present opportunities for evangelism. Secondly, the issue of privacy protection in online evangelism activities is critical. Churches play a vital role in spreading faith and providing support through online platforms, necessitating careful attention to privacy. Churches must obtain explicit consent when collecting personal information online and ensure the data's security to prevent unauthorized access, leaks, or misuse. Utilizing secure data storage and encryption technologies and educating church members about privacy protection are essential. Evangelism activities through social media and online platforms must respect users' privacy and provide options for opt-out to effectively carry out online evangelism while prioritizing privacy protection. Safe data management, transparency, and a

respectful approach to user rights can facilitate the spread of faith in the online environment. Thirdly, increased reliance on technology can lead to spiritual challenges. “In the era of technology, especially the age of artificial intelligence, one of the greatest threats to modern people’s mental health is the potential for humans to betray their dignity by blindly trusting in AI and delegating their freedom to it. In theological terms, this poses a risk of idolatry, where AI is trusted more than God.”²² Thus, as a digital-only generation, Generation Alpha faces the risk of idolizing technology. Additionally, being exposed to a digital world that intersects various generations, cultures, and religions can expose them to a mix of religious and spiritual beliefs, criticisms, and opinions. Christianity faces the risk of distortion through fake news or teachings from heretical groups. It is crucial to address these risks, provide accurate Christian teachings, and create channels for correct faith communication. Furthermore, information overload through digital media can lead to scattered attention and loss of spiritual focus. Therefore, the church needs to develop new strategies to actively utilize digital media and technology to convey spiritual messages.

IV. Changing Evangelism Methodologies

Considering the link between Generation Alpha and the emergence of new technologies, several digital elements to consider when devising evangelism methodologies include artificial intelligence (AI), big data, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR). Firstly, AI and big data play crucial roles in developing more effective and personalized evangelism strategies. Big data allows for the collection, storage, and analysis of vast amounts of data to derive useful information and insights. It helps in acquiring basic information about the behaviors, interests, and tendencies of potential evangelism targets or groups. AI algorithms understand users’ inclinations and interests, aiding in propagating the Gospel optimally. The necessity for customized evangelism that understands diversity of Generation Alpha is significant for the church. Traditional evangelism methods can be costly and time-consuming, with difficulties in achieving certain outcomes and goals. Customized evangelism efficiently uses data obtained through AI and big data, delivering personalized messages to individuals, thereby facilitating more effective evangelism. For instance, customized evangelism could

be centered around social media. AI technology enables effective advertising campaigns on social media platforms and provides opportunities for interaction with prospective converts through customized incentives. In other words, AI and big data possess immense potential as powerful tools for evangelists to effectively conduct their activities in modern society.

Moreover, evangelizing Generation Alpha involves utilizing VR and AR to enable experiential evangelism. VR and AR offer unique opportunities to simulate realistic religious experiences.²³ Generation Alpha, with a strong inclination towards experiences for better understanding and connection, can thus benefit from more effective evangelism through VR and AR. These technologies can offer customized faith experiences considering users' interests. Virtual or augmented experiences designed according to users' preferences and situations enhance the personalization of evangelism messages, expecting more positive responses from users. Such digital environments facilitate interaction, serving as platforms for religious discussions and dialogues. Users can communicate with others in virtual spaces, respond to religious questions, and share opinions, providing experiential learning. This helps in understanding and remembering abstract concepts through actual experiences. Religious doctrines or histories can be conveyed more clearly through these technologies, making religious experiences accessible to users regardless of geographical location or physical constraints. Thus, evangelism can reach more people, and churches and religious organizations can expand their evangelism targets more broadly.

With an understanding of this digital environment, it is possible to establish digital faith communities for Generation Alpha. Although Generation Alpha is forming in a different era and connected to the surrounding world in ways different from previous generations, it is essential to remember that they are humans first and foremost. "Generation Alpha have the same intrinsic human needs we all have: to be accepted, to being and to be part of a community."²⁴ Digital online churches can serve as a new realm that complements local churches by fostering faith, spiritual experiences, and social interactions rather than replacing communal values traditional churches possess. "Rather than dismantling the communal values of traditional churches, it could transform or enhance religious practices or appeals to meet contemporary demands."²⁵ Digital communities and online churches act as platforms for forming and strengthening relationships with individuals of Generation Alpha. Personalized

communication allows sharing and interacting faith. The network connecting individuals to individuals and communities to communities, transcending time and space, is quite similar to the characteristics of the Kingdom of God.²⁶ Online churches can offer leadership opportunities to Generation Alpha, increasing participation and attachment. By building online communities, they provide spaces for sharing and discussing religious beliefs, helping users maintain their religious identities. The digital world allows Generation Alpha to have a clearer experience of faith. Compared to traditional analog churches, digital online churches are more advantageous in collecting and analyzing data, evaluating, and improving the effectiveness of evangelism.

Communicating the Gospel to Generation Alpha within digital environments and through the formation of online communities necessitates consideration of the distinct characteristics of Alpha's communication style. Generation Alpha displays a divergence in interests and literacy from older generations. Firstly, there is a tendency to prioritize personal happiness and individuality over academic elitism. This shift suggests a potential de-emphasis on the overheated college admission and university education, pivotal in Korean society, possibly influenced by Generation Y/M parents who did not experience commensurate social rewards post-university. Consequently, Generation Alpha's parents may eschew traditional educational and successful metrics in favor of raising their children with different values. Secondly, Generation Alpha is accustomed to image-centric rather than text-based communication. From a young age, before even learning to read, they have been interacting with digital images on screens, developing a sense of communication through visuals. The direct impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has made Generation Alpha particularly comfortable with online and remote communication, contrasting with older generations whose literacy was more text-centric. However, Generation Alpha boasts superior screen literacy compared to any previous generation. When exploring evangelism methodologies based on the characteristics of Generation Alpha's interests and literacy, it becomes crucial to present the Gospel in a way that engages them with enjoyable and personalized experiences. Such approaches can captivate their attention, fostering a deeper understanding and acceptance of faith. This entails leveraging digital media and technology that resonate with their preferences for visual content and interactive experiences, thus creating a more relevant and appealing context for Gospel communication.

Firstly, the use of interactive AI and gamified educational approaches is pertinent. Generation Alpha, constantly connected to digital technologies, consumes and interacts with information through devices like smartphones, tablets, and computers. They prefer portability, speed, and personalization over traditional education methods. Interactive AI can engage in natural conversations, answering questions and providing information, which can be utilized to answer religious questions and stimulate faith discussions. AI can guide religious activities such as bible interpretation, prayer, and worship, offering content tailored to each individual's learning style and level. Gamified learning appeals to Generation Alpha, motivating them and enhancing skills like problem-solving, collaboration, and decision-making. Religious content presented through games can help users experience and apply their faith more practically. Games that include religious quizzes or collaborative missions based on shared beliefs can offer opportunities to acquire religious knowledge and connect with others, allowing users to apply faith in various scenarios and deepen their understanding. Secondly, integrating multimedia and storytelling is another effective method. Both powerful in their own right, multimedia offers visual, auditory, and interactive content, while storytelling creates emotional connections and effectively conveys messages through narratives.²⁷ Combining multimedia with storytelling into visual storytelling can convey powerful narratives using images, graphics, videos, and animations, offering users the opportunity to directly participate and experience. For instance, VR can immerse users in biblical scenes for interactive experiences, enhancing learning and growth through personal religious experiences. Sharing and discussing faith stories on social media and community platforms can connect users and encourage religious identity. Thirdly, a balanced approach between remote and in-person evangelism methodologies is crucial. Remote evangelism leverages digital age features, offering advantages in accessibility and overcoming geographical limitations. It allows faith sharing and education from any location, catering to Generation Alpha's preference for exploring faith at their convenience. Although remote evangelism is effective, the value of in-person evangelism, which forms real relationships and allows for deeper faith sharing through actual interactions, is also significant. In-person evangelism plays a key role in forming and strengthening local churches and faith communities. "In the endless connections, there is a need for moments of disconnection and solitude before God. Pastors should not overlook this inner need, emphasizing

that true recognition and self-discovery lie in encounters and conversations with God.”²⁸ Developing and utilizing a strategy that integrates remote and in-person evangelism, complementing each other, is essential for effectively communicating and nurturing faith in Generation Alpha. This flexible approach allows for sharing and evolving faith, catering to the situation and preferences of the users. For example, an evangelist can use remote evangelism to form initial interest and relationships with Alpha Generation non-believers who may feel intimidated by attending in-person gatherings.²⁹ Subsequently, an invitation to attend in-person gatherings and form relationships with existing believers can be extended. Moreover, by integrating remote and in-person evangelism to create digital communities, in-person gatherings can be supplemented and supported mutually. For evangelizing the Alpha Generation, it is beneficial to flexibly utilize both remote and in-person evangelism, tailored to the situation and user preferences, to share and continuously develop faith.

V. Conclusion

The Korean Church is progressing from an aged to a super-aged institution. Within the faith community, the proportion of the next generation continues to decline, suggesting an expanding generational gap between the Church and Generation Alpha and subsequent generations. Without adequate preparation for communication in evangelism, especially considering the emergence and development of new technologies, the aging Korean Church may find it increasingly difficult to catch up and even develop a sense of resistance. Faced with the significant challenges of Generation Alpha and new technologies, the Church must proactively understand and communicate with the field of evangelism and its subjects. “Over the next decade, understanding and engaging with Generation Alpha will be essential for organisations, not only for their relevance but for their very existence.”³⁰ Additionally, extremes of technological optimism or anti-technology sentiments should be avoided.³¹ While the rapid development of technologies like artificial intelligence may be perceived as a daunting challenge,³² a collaborative understanding in seeking evangelism theology and methodology is necessary.³³

It is crucial for the Church to understand and communicate effectively with Generation Alpha when utilizing digital technologies to spread the Gospel. Generation Alpha, having accessed online information and created digital content from a young age, possesses an entrepreneurial spirit and a DIY mindset. Thus, expressing one's own voice, making decisions, and taking action comes naturally. However, traditional churches still suffer from "an imbalance of voice."³⁴ The centralized decision-making power can cause problems in traditional methods of communication with Generation Alpha, accustomed to the horizontal and open structures of online communities.³⁵ Simultaneously, focusing solely on Generation Alpha's tendencies, influenced by technology in education, religion, and media, might not be advisable as it forces traditional institutions to adapt to the demands of tech-savvy generations. Immediate efforts should begin to bridge the gap between Generation Alpha and older generations through dialogue. Ultimately, traditional church communities need to cultivate 'apostolic digerati' fluent in digital technologies for online evangelism, even if it takes time.³⁶

In a rapidly digitalizing world, the Church must prepare biblical, theological responses to the digital divide, technology accessibility, privacy and safety in online spaces, and spiritual challenges due to increased technology dependence. Moreover, considering the implications for 21st-century missions, evangelism, and forming new faith communities requires contemplation on immersive digital experiences provided by technology. Innovations in evangelism methodologies due to the emergence of digital technologies are crucial but must be balanced with thoughtful consideration of spiritual challenges in developing approaches to engage and communicate with Generation Alpha on faith issues. This background is vital in preparing creative and adaptable evangelism methods that resonate with the digital-native mindset of Generation Alpha.

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- 4 Sung-Hyuk Nam, "A Study on the Transition to the Missional Church in the Age of the Demographic Cliff: Qualitative Analysis through the Church 3.0 Model," *Theology and Praxis* 64(2019): 286-87. "While it is clear that the decrease in population has impacted the reduction of Sunday school attendees, the rate of decline in Sunday school members significantly outpaces the decrease in the population under 18 in Korean society, suggesting that relying solely on quantitative statistics of low birth rates for explanation is insufficient. The decline of the next generation indicates that qualitative issues in Sunday school education cannot be overlooked."
- 5 A search for 'Generation Alpha' in the Korea Citation Index (KCI) listed journals on the Academic Research Information Service (riss.kr) yields 20 papers, the majority of which pertain to education and consumer economics, as of January 1, 2024.
- 6 Marc R. Prensky, *Teaching Digital Natives: Partnering for Real Learning*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2010), 3. Indeed, integrating digital technology into education poses significant challenges. While it's crucial for teachers to become proficient in digital technologies, educating students on how to use these technologies effectively is another hurdle. "All teachers today know that digital technology is becoming an important part of students' education. But just how to use it in school is not yet completely clear, and most educators are at some stage of figuring out (or worrying about) how to use technology meaningfully for teaching. And these teachers are right to be concerned, since depending on how it is used, technology can either help or hinder the educational process."
- 7 Ji-Hyun Kim, "Kids-Tech Targeted at Generation Alpha," *Hana Financial Management Research Institute Report*, 12/23(2022): 4-7. It illustrates the considerable consumer influence of Generation Alpha, which is significantly higher than that of previous generations.
- 8 On the other hand, the consistent publication of papers related to technological advancement in the context of mission and evangelism across these academic journals shows an awareness of the critical role that technology plays in shaping societal changes and religious engagement. The numbers of papers found in *Theology of Mission* (5 papers), *Evangelical Missiology* (4 papers), *University and Mission* (8 papers), *Mission and Theology* (10 papers), and *Theology and Praxis* (28 papers) that discuss the future society and advanced technology. Accessed on January 1, 2024.
- 9 Mark McCrindle, *Understanding Generation Alpha*, 26-27. Mark McCrindle describes the older segment of Generation Alpha as 'up-agers' and 'tweendom.' 'Up-agers' refers to children born around the year 2010 or in the early 2010s within this generation. His use of such terms indicates that even within Generation Alpha, different stages of development and characteristics can emerge, with the older members having distinct traits and experiences from the younger ones within the same generation. 'Tweendom' refers to the phase of children between early childhood and adolescence (ages 8-12), typically showcasing unique characteristics and interests. They are becoming more independent and beginning to form

their identities, yet they are not fully adolescents. These terms aid in understanding the diversity and developmental stages even within Generation Alpha, taking into account the generation's upbringing in a digitalized and rapidly changing world.

- 10 Junghyung Kim, "A Creation-Theological Reflection on the Emergence of the Digital World," *Korean Journal of Systematic Theology* 63(2021): 165.
- 11 Heidi A. Campbell and Alessandra Vitullo, "Accessing Change in the Study of Religious Communities in Digital Religion Studies," *Church, Communication and Culture* 1(2016): 79-81.
- 12 Mark McCrindle, *Understanding Generation Alpha*, 23.
- 13 Ibid., 25.
- 14 Yeongah Kim and Jungyeob Han, "A Case Study on the Formative Arts Education for Alpha Generation Based on Metaverse and the Utilization Plan," *Journal of Korea Institute of Spatial Design* 17/7(2022): 276. Based on the information provided and reconstructing for the context of 2024.
- 15 Mark McCrindle, *Understanding Generation Alpha*, 46-58.
- 16 Ibid., 49-50.
- 17 Ibid., 56.
- 18 Un Hey Kim, "Theological Tasks in the Age of Advanced Technology - A New Theological Imagination Regarding the Relationship Between Humans and Technology," *HTSN Newsletter* (December 2023): 4.
- 19 Narae Park, "Living with Artificial Intelligence Here and Now," *HTSN Newsletter* (January 2024): 13. "In the traditional and industrial societies, expertise in technology was gained through long experience, typically taught by older to younger generations. However, in today's rapidly evolving technological society, where new technologies emerge overnight, it is often the youth who adapt more quickly and are more skilled. Moreover, given the extended lifespan and the era of living up to 100 years, assuming one will participate in social life for another 30-40 years after retirement at 60, adopting a proactive attitude towards technology is essential for a vibrant life."
- 20 Un Hey Kim, "Theological Tasks in the Age of Advanced Technology - A New Theological Imagination Regarding the Relationship Between Humans and Technology," *HTSN Newsletter* (December 2023): 6.
- 21 Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 22 Junghyung Kim, "Mental Health and Theology in the Age of Technology," *HTSN Newsletter* (August 2023): 12.
- 23 Un Hye Kim, "Theological Tasks in the Age of Advanced Technology," 8. "A biblical interpretation of all creation signifies that the created world and everything in it are not merely spaces for human activity, ownership, and consumption but are venues for divine revelation through human creativity, invention, and interaction with technological objects."
- 24 Mark McCrindle, *Understanding Generation Alpha*, 61.
- 25 Seung-Hwan Kim, "A Study of Digital Religion and Online Church," *Theology and Praxis* 79(2022): 766.

- 26 Heidi A. Campbell, Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016): 13.
- 27 Young-Hoon Yoon, "Joyfully, Beautifully, Freely: Theological Examination of Christian Culture," *HTSN Newsletter* (October 2023): 7, "Biblical content requires realistic reconstruction and storytelling capability. Bible stories act as cultural archetypes for numerous contents today, allowing Christian culture to transcend doctrinal limits. However, when utilizing biblical content, it is essential to consider the continuity and discontinuity between the biblical world and the real world. By reinterpreting and freshly reconstructing Christian truths in today's cultural context, it becomes universally appealing to a broader audience."
- 28 Sung-Soo Hong, "Theological and Pastoral Examination of MZ Generation Culture," *HTSN Newsletter* (October 2023): 3.
- 29 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), xii. "These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time... We fear the risks and disappointments of relationships with our fellow humans. We expect more from technology and less from each other."
- 30 Mark McCrindle, *Understanding Generation Alpha*, 45.
- 31 Un Hye Kim, "Theological Tasks in the Age of Advanced Technology," 7, "In the salvation history of the Bible, humans are not isolated; the history always includes humans, nature, and objects in a network, with both human and non-human entities, such as the ark and the sea, the tabernacle and the wilderness, representing various cooperative beings that form the narrative of salvation."
- 32 Eun-young Hwang, "Secularity and Society in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," *HTSN Newsletter* (September 2023): 5. "AI is not an intelligence that mirrors or surpasses ours. However, along with its wide-reaching impact, the development of AI brings not only numerous opportunities and innovations but also entails risks such as mass unemployment economically, domination by algorithms politically, a decline in human cultural creation and appreciation culturally, and the dangers of personifying and idealizing AI religiously. The Church is tasked with engaging in political participation and relief efforts, advocating for victims of algorithmic control, fostering and enjoying a religious culture, and maintaining a critical distance from AI. Within the framework of secular culture and institutions shaped by AI, the Church must transcend to realize transcendent values."
- 33 Un Hye Kim, "Theological Tasks in the Age of Advanced Technology," 9. "Ultimately, the collaborative perspective between humanity and technology emphasizes that technological advancement is not merely a product of autonomous innovation but results from the combination of human creativity and invention endowed by God. This recognition underscores the necessity for theology to actively participate in public discourse, ensuring that regardless of the rapid pace of technological change, such advancements progress in directions beneficial for both the Earth and humanity. This underscores the imperative for theology to engage in guiding technology's evolution to ensure its development serves the global community and aligns with divine intentions."
- 34 Sung-Soo Hong, "Theological and Pastoral Examination of MZ Generation Culture," 3.
- 35 Sung-Soo Hong, "Theological and Pastoral Examination of MZ Generation Culture," 2. "In the church, there is a tendency to view self-expression negatively, dominated by narratives

like 'without a name, without limelight,' 'even if no one knows, God does,' 'Not by my works, but solely by God's grace.' However, rather than interpreting these as entirely opposed to self-expression and the pursuit of recognition, it is necessary to recontextualize the spiritual values embedded within these traditional narratives."

- 36 Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 225.

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PART III

*Justice, Creation, and
Community:
Ethical and Ecological
Engagements*

Take Homo Sacer Down from the Cross

Biopolitics and Reproductive Justice in the Korean¹

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of biopolitics, reproductive justice, and religion in South Korea, with a focus on the complicity of Korean Protestant churches in state-led population control policies. It challenges the dominant pro-life vs. pro-choice binary by examining how women's reproductive rights are shaped by multilayered patriarchal traditions—including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity—and national biopolitical agendas. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* and Hannah Arendt's theory of natality, the author argues that South Korean Christian women are rendered politically invisible, stripped of agency in both public and private spheres. Through historical analysis and theological reflection, the paper critiques the shifting alignment of Korean Protestant churches with changing state policies and emphasizes the need to reclaim reproductive agency as both a moral and political act. It concludes by calling for a "broadly pro-life" framework that transcends ideological binaries and affirms women's rights, dignity, and ethical capacity for decision-making.

I. Introduction

Extreme Conservatism is on the rise around the world. In South Korea, Yoon's government has become increasing far right, and in the United States, Trump is seeking to return to power. In Russia, Putin has paved the way to maintain his power forever in office by amending the constitution. Le Pen's surge in France is remaining vigilant, even though she has fallen short of a majority. In this era of far right, we can expect increased sexism and regression of women's rights. *Roe v. Wade* already been overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 2019 the Constitutional Court of South Korea ruled an abortion ban unconstitutional. However, many Korean Protestant churches are still reluctant to admit women's reproductive rights. This is because they are trapped in the rhetoric of a pro-life versus pro-choice binary in mainstream media and are blind to the concrete and urgent truths about women's real situations. To move beyond this rhetorical framework, we need, feminist theologians argue, to be aware that women have their right to abortion and that becoming a mother is deliberate moral decision. However, South Korean Christian women often feel that asserting their reproductive rights is violation of their Christian identity. As a Christian, the South Korean woman has been trained to value sacrifice. She naturally comes to believe that asserting her rights is inconsistent with her Christian identity. This appears similar to western Christian women, but there is a different religious layer for a South Korean woman: Confucianism and Buddhism. Thus, a South Korean Christian woman must break through an old and heavy multilayered ceiling to claim her reproductive rights.

This paper introduces a struggling story of South Korea's decriminalization of abortion and the remaining tasks for churches and theologians of South Korea. This story also provides life-giving energy to other Christians around the world who are struggling for women's reproductive rights in an age of the far right. For these it demonstrates the multilayered patriarchal symbols of birth and maternity for South Korean Christians. Thus, it makes it clear why an individualistic approach to reproductive issues is insufficient, and a structural and intersectional approach is required in South Korea. To go beyond an individualized approach, we must situate the discussion of women's reproductive rights within the larger context of biopolitics, where birth itself is controlled by state and religious power. This

paper then describes the history of the state biopolitics in South Korea and how Korean Protestant churches have conspired with this biopolitics. Additionally, the paper states how and why the South Korea's feminist camp succeeded in the campaigns of decriminalization of abortion. In the conclusion, this paper suggests that the theological task is of taking *homo sacer* down from the cross. It helps us build a "broadly pro-life framework."²

II. The Reality of Reproduction in South Korea

1. *Honesty toward Reality and Homo Sacer*

In November 2012, a 19-year-old female teenager, 23 weeks pregnant, dies during a procedure at a maternity hospital. The young woman, who had not told anyone about her pregnancy until after she had completed her CSAT, was unable to find a hospital for the procedure. Even after telling her mother, she had to search online to find one. She died of hypovolemic shock due to a perforated uterus caused by a doctor who failed to perform even basic tests.³ This shocking incident occurred as the Pro-life Doctors' Associations was organizing a campaign to prosecute hospitals that perform abortions. Nayoung argues that "while the Pro-life Doctors' Associations were encouraged by Cardinal Jinseok Jeong to 'resolutely oppose all acts that threaten the dignity of human life,' women were being pushed into situations that further jeopardized their lives."⁴

According to Nayoung, there are many women around the world who are put at risk 'in the name of God.' Jon Sobrino argues that when we react to a tragedy we need "honesty toward reality." We need to be "hearing the cry of reality."⁵ Patriarchal states and religions claim to be for both women and fetus, but they manipulate reality to subjugate women's bodies to their authority. The very act of trying to choose between life and choice is a false choice of and a strategy of hiding, distorting, and falsifying reality. When we see that abortion rates are lower in countries where abortion remains legal.⁶ We should always "letting reality to be what it is."⁷

If we are looking through reality 'to be what it is', we can capture a glimpse of a Crucified people, *Homo Sacer*, who resides in the "state of exception."⁸ A pregnant woman can be called *Homo Sacer* because she is deprived of her political life by the State. Jon Sobrino says that "this world [El Salvador] is one gigantic cross for millions of innocent people who die at the hands of executioners."⁹ Based on Sobrino, the task of theology is to bring them down from the cross.

2. *Stolen Birth and the Insufficiency of Individualistic Approach*

To honestly face reality, we should go beyond the pro-life versus pro-choice binary. This binary is built on ideal of individualism, "the liberal definition of freedom."¹⁰ In the movie, *Under the Same Moon*, Carlitos, a 9-year-old boy, crosses the US/Mexican border to find his mom. She works as an undocumented laborer in US to send money to her mother and son. On his journey to find his mom, Carlitos complained about his mom leaving him behind. His fellow traveler, Enrique, scolded him and said to him that some people do it because they have no choice but to live that way, not because they want to. Ivone Gebara argues that the liberal understanding of freedom cannot adequately capture a poor woman's reality. For some women there are no options to choose. The word 'choice' masks the diverse situations in which women terminate pregnancies--such as the lack of material resources to support and raise a baby. Gebara mentions that in this context, we cannot resolve this problem by emphasis on 'personal morality' which particular Evangelicals seek.

Likewise, suggesting that we should move from the "framework of justification" to the "framework of reproductive justice," Rebecca T. Peters argues for intersectional and structural approaches.¹¹ According to Peters, in a patriarchal society, women must validate their decision for abortion, forcing women to fit into a binary framework of pro-life versus pro-choice. This results in an erasure of the complex, concrete lives of pregnant women, leaving only the abstract question of whether abortion is right or wrong. Peters indicates this occurs within the framework of justification based on an individual ethics. Instead, learning from women of color, she insists on a need to analyze "combined issues of race, class, and gender contributed to reproductive oppression."¹² She describes the breeding of the enslaved to increase the labor force, the promotion of white women's fertility,

and the forced sterilization of women deemed unfit to reproduce. By looking back at the history of control and repression of the lives of people with disabilities, migrants, non-white people, refugees, and people in camps, we become aware that the liberal individualistic approach of 'it's my body, I'm in charge' can lead to the illusion that women can make reproductive decisions.

I agree with Peters, but in the case of South Korea, except that besides race, class, and gender, there is one more factor that must be analyzed.¹³ This is religion. Throughout history, religion and patriarchy has infected and reinforced with each other. South Korea is a multi-religious country and thus, it has strong patriarchalism. Thus, it is not easy for a South Korean Christian woman to break through the patriarchalism of symbols related to reproductive rights such as birth and maternity. There is a line in Cheol Jeong's poem that goes something like this. "My father begat me, and my mother nourished me." Jeong, a politician and poet of Joseon Dynasty (1536-1594), borrowed this line from the Book of Odes, one of Confucian Scriptures. Confucianism, the state ideology of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) has reinforced and influenced patriarchy in South Korea even up to present day. Before the introduction of Confucianism, we regarded *samsinhalmeoni* (old woman of amnion) as Goddess of childbirth in Shamanism and Buddhism (which was already in South Korea). Confucian patriarchy sought to skew birth in an androcentric direction and delete the Goddess of childbirth. This kind of notion of birth is exactly founded in the Scripture: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" (Ps 2:7, Acts 13:33, cf. Heb 1:5, 5:5 NRSV). This biblical notion of birth formed in Jewish patriarchal tradition and interpreted in Christian and western patriarchal traditions, was easily incorporated into and compromised with this Korean patriarchal religious notion of birth. In Plato's *Symposium*, the priestess Diotima teaches Socrates the wisdom of escaping the limits of mortality and speaks of male procreation: a man sexually unites with a woman's body to produce a child who will carry on his name and memory.¹⁴ Adriana Cavarero calls this an act of "expropriation," critiquing it for turning a woman's experience into a male procreation.¹⁵

Outside of this expropriation in Confucianism, the fact that Koreans have a more collectivist identity is important for women's reproductive rights--although we are admittedly getting more westernized and individualized. South Korean women tend to make decisions not for themselves but for family, community, and nation. Moreover, in Confucianism, *ren*, the ethical principle of moral virtue

makes it less easy to get an abortion. Mencius explains that *ren* is the compassion that all human being has when a suckling baby is about to fall into a well (*yuja-ibjeong*). The object of *ren* could be extended to potential human life and it leads to being reluctant to have an abortion. Confucianism also emphasizes prenatal education that Confucianism considers the fetus to be a person. Additionally, in Confucianism, personally practicing *ren* practices filial love (*xiao*). In Confucianism, the closest blood relatives are more important to love than distant neighbors, and the first object of *ren* is one's parents. When they were alive, people were expected to take good care of their parents, follow their wishes, and when they died, honor their wishes by offering sacrifices, and have offspring to ensure that the sacrifices would continue. Confucian society is basically pro-birth, although preferring sons over daughters. Finally, we should not forget Buddhism's ahimsa (nonviolence) in South Korea. It extends its effect to issues of birth and maternity; we must not kill any life including a potential human life.

Under this multilayered patriarchalism of religious traditions, female agency is erased from the outset of birth and procreation. Thus, we have learned empirically that individualistic approaches to positioning women as moral agents are less effective. Under this oppressive culture to women, we necessarily ask the questions: who makes reproductive decisions, whose reproduction is welcomed and whose reproduction is socially problematic?¹⁶ To approach reproduction rights structurally, the next section of this paper traces the history of state's biopolitics and the Korean Protestant churches' conspiracy with it. Depending on the state's biopolitics, they change their policies on reproductive rights: they did not always take the side of pro-life.

III. Biopolitics and Reproductive Justice

1. *Biopolitics of South Korea and Conspiracy of the Korean Church*

Michel Foucault explains biopolitics by tracing the changed meaning of political power. In the classical age, there was sovereign power which 'takes' life or lets live. It was complemented by biopower which 'makes' live and lets die in the

modern age. Biopower, then, was developed into two kinds in the modern age. In the 17th and 18th centuries, biopower disciplined the bodies of individuals—this was called “anatomy-politics”, the technology of discipline.¹⁷ But in the late 18th century it shifted to control and regularize “living man,” “man-as-species,” which is called “biopolitics of the human race”, the technology of regularization.¹⁸ After seizing power over individual bodies, the state began to control all the life- process and phenomena such as “the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on.”¹⁹ In sum biopolitics is the State’s control and management of all life process.

It is easy to assume that the Korean Protestant churches have always denied women’s reproductive rights and defended the life of the unborn. However, they did not always take the pro-life position. Depending upon the state’s biopolitics, they took different policies towards reproduction. South Korea’s biopolitics of reproduction is tied to following two factors: ‘the rivalry between the divided South and North’ and ‘the issue of ultra-low birthrates.’ First, the competition between the divided nations infected the population policy of the nation. In the 1950s, South Korea suffered from the aftermath of the Korean War. Because of dead or injured men, women’s roles shifted, and they had to provide a livelihood and take care of their family financially. The reality faced by women was not easy, and abortion became desperately necessary. However, President Syngman Rhee wanted population growth to defeat North Korea if a general election was held.²⁰ For this reason, in 1953 Abortion as a Criminal Act (Articles 269 and 270) was enacted.²¹

On May 16, 1961, President Chung-hee Park came into power in a coup. He desperately wanted his regime to be legitimately recognized, and in doing so, make South Korea richer than North Korea. The rapid growth of the population (total fertility rate of 6.3 and annual population growth rate of 3%), then, was not good news. Abortion was used as part of the population control policy. A family planning program was initiated in 1962. Due to this policy, the country received international aid for economic development. In fact, the Korean Protestant churches had already founded the “Korean Christian Family Life Committee” to support state’s family planning program, but in 1970 they began to participate in it in earnest.²² The most important reason for their participation was that the Protestants, armed with a strong anti-communist ideology, agreed that economic development was the key to competing with communist society and chose family planning as a short-term strategy.

At that time, the government retained the crime of abortion in the Criminal Act while it enacted a special law, the Maternal and Child Health Act (1973, 1974, 1976) which allowed for the effect of abortion. Abortion was allowed in: ① a eugenic or genetic disorder; ② an infectious disease; ③ pregnancy by rape; ④ pregnancy between relatives prohibited by law; ⑤ or when the mother's health was threatened by pregnancy. This dual legal structure shows how the government shifted responsibility onto women and acquired the effect of nationalistic control of reproduction.²³ Since then, demands for amendments to the abortion law continued because there was a big gap between the reality and the law. Despite the abortion law, every day we experienced and heard cases of abortion including economic reasons, unwanted pregnancy, family issues, etc. However, in 1987 and 1995 the amendments failed to pass.

Meanwhile, things have changed: there has been an ongoing low birthrate and an increase of the aging population. In the 2000s, the birth rate rapidly decreased (total fertility rate in 2021 was 0.88%). It is the second factor that infected Korea's biopolitics of reproduction. The basic condition of the population completely changed to promote a population growth policy emphasizing abortion prevention. Protestant churches ran programs to support state's pro-life policy such as the "Happy Camp to encourage women of childbearing age to give birth."²⁴ At that time, a conservative government came into power. President Myong-bak Lee was an elder of a presbyterian church and he stuck to keeping abortion a criminal offense. In 2009 the Pro-life Doctors' Association declared a suspension of illegal abortions. Meanwhile, after 2000, the number of the Korean Protestant churches began to decline rapidly. The churches, then, took on fundamentalism as a survival strategy. They used abortion to promote their identity and consolidate their power. But to the contrary, this period reached social democratization and increased gender sensitivity outside of the church, which led to a movement to abolish in the society. The Korean Church has fallen behind Korean society in human rights awareness.

What is impressive is that we forgot the history of the Korean Protestant churches' collaboration with state biopolitics and instead pretend that they have always been against pro-choice. However, we cannot deny that the State was actively involved in the process of population control and life-selection and that the churches conspired with it. Additionally, churches have been theologically and ethically influenced by U.S. Christian fundamentalists.

The U.S. fundamentalism of Protestant churches began in late 1800s. It was formed by people whose previous ways of life and values were shaken by modern industrialization and urbanization. They resisted the pluralized complexity of society and regarded new social and cultural changes as threatening to their identities, beliefs, and values and thus, heretical. They thought that modernism contaminated their purity.²⁵ To make matters worse, the Reagan camp used fundamentalist Christianity for their presidential campaign.²⁶ Since then, the conservative parties in the U.S. have colluded with fundamentalist Christianity in every election. This collusion between conservative party and fundamentalist Christianity was imitated and repeated in South Korea.²⁷ For example, fundamentalist Christians supported Myong-bak Lee's presidential campaign, and he was elected. During his government, when the Pro-life Doctors' Associations (formed in 2009 and also imported by the U.S.), an anti-abortion organization, accused hospitals of abortions. This momentum helped fundamentalist Christianity pressure law makers to uphold abortion law. In the aftermath, the Constitutional Court ruled that the criminal abortion law was constitutional in 2012.

Before we turn to the next section, it would be interesting to check out how the Korean Protestant churches interpreted the Bible verses for their own ends. For example, in colonial times, the text "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) was interpreted to mean that birth control was a rebellion against God.²⁸ However, after the family planning programs of the 1960s, the text was interpreted to mean qualitative growth rather than quantitative growth: "multiply" does not mean "numbers" but "the offspring of faith."²⁹ Depending on the country's biopolitical policy, the biblical text was sometimes interpreted to support pro-choice and sometimes to support pro-life.

In sum, South Korea has controlled fertility for economic reasons in order to be a richer country than North Korea and to keep that wealth by providing labor force in the age of low birth rates. The Korean Protestant churches then have colluded in the state's biopolitics. In this process, some lives are selected to live, but the others are not.

2. *From Pro-Life versus Pro-choice to the Government versus Women*

Up to this point, I explored how the political, economic, and religious conditions in South Korea have affected reproductive justice issues and how Korean Protestant churches changed their positions in response to these national political and economic policies. Through this, we learned that the pro-life versus pro-choice binary based on an individualistic premise, cannot cover the complicated and multi-layered reality of women. To improve reproductive justice, the shift in the framework is needed. The following section describes South Korea's campaigns success in decriminalizing abortion and why it was effective.

There were two big campaigns for the decriminalization of abortion in South Korea. First, as mentioned before, during Lee's government (after the Pro-Life Doctor's Association, formed in 2009), an anti-abortion campaign began in public and earnest. As a response to it, progressive civil society including feminist camps (led by the Network for Women's Right to Decide Pregnancy and Delivery) campaigned for the decriminalization of abortion. Unfortunately, in 2012, the Constitutional Court decided the abortion ban was constitutional, and the campaign failed.

Since 2012 the first campaign failed, Korean feminists have taken part in 'black protest'³⁰ movements, gaining momentum for abortion rights. This second campaign was initiated by Women with Disabilities Empathy in 2015 which was extended to and renamed the Joint Action for Reproductive Justice (Joint Action) in 2017. They realized that without mentioning the forced sterilizations and abortions of women with disabilities, they could not resolve the problem of women's reproductive rights. They deemed the loss of the 2012 movement as failure of a framework-change. Thus, they shifted the framework from 'pro-life versus pro-choice' to 'the government versus women'. They changed their attention from individual rights towards social justice.³¹ At last, on April 11, 2019, the Korean Constitutional Court ruled the abortion ban unconstitutional. The decision came 66 years after abortion was criminalized in 1953. Turning their attention to biopolitics was effective.

As mentioned above, the second Korean campaign for the decriminalization of abortion in South Korea began to consider the biopolitics of the state. It led to a change of the framework of campaign and in turn gained public support. Public people who are reluctant to recognize women's reproductive rights were

persuaded, looking at in the issue within the state's biopolitics: someone's life is selected but the other's life is abandoned. They understood that reproductive rights are not only women's issues, but also all of life's issues. The Joint Action introduced concrete examples of 'bare life' in South Korea to the public as part of the reproductive movement. For example, there is the National Sorokdo Hospital which the state established for the purpose of separating people with Hansen's disease from society in Japanese colonial era. It forced the sterilization and abortion of Hansen people by early 1990s. The author points out that the state selected those who should not reproduce, and then controlled their sexuality and reproductive rights. She adds that this is directly related to the contrary of the bio-politics of states that criminalize abortion and talk about protecting "unborn life" as if it were all of it, while pre-selecting those who should not be born.³²

It is beyond our individual free choice. Under biopolitics, a person may be placed in a situation where they are unable to choose. Giorgio Agamben calls these people *homo sacer* (sacred human), bare life. In Roman law, *homo sacer* could not be a sacrifice to God but the killer of *homo sacer* was exonerated from the crime of murder. They resided in a double exclusion zone and were protected by neither divine law nor human law. According to Agamben, as for where biopolitics occurs, Foucault just envisioned a place like a prison which is supported by legal structures. Agamben argues that this is inadequate as it does not consider exceptional situations—like a camp—which exists outside the reach of normal legal order. Could we then call a pregnant woman 'bare life' under the state's biopolitics? The next section deals with *Homo Sacer* from a perspective of reproductive rights based on Hannah Arendt's concept of biopolitics.

3. *Reclaiming Neither Zoe nor Bios but Both Zoe and Bios*

Diprose and Ziarek claim that a woman who cannot claim her reproductive rights, is put in a state of exception by state biopolitics.³³ According to Agamben, Arendt is the first thinker of biopolitics. Based on Arendt, they claim that a woman in a state of exception becomes the "abstract naked" or "animal laborans" (laboring animal).³⁴ Arendt argues that a fundamental deprivation of human rights means being deprived of a place in the world that makes words and actions meaningful.³⁵

In order to discuss women's reproductive rights through the lens of Arendt's biopolitical thought, it is necessary to examine her unique concept of 'natality'. Natality means birth, a neologism coined by Arendt as an alternative concept to mortality. Critiquing the Western intellectual tradition's obsession with death and the afterlife, Jantzen argues that underlying this death impulse is an unrecognized foundation that underpins this notion: the material, maternal foundation of what Arendt calls natality. We are neither thrown into this world as Heidegger and other male philosophers say, nor "come from nothing" as Christian theologians say about *ex nihilo*, but are born from our mothers.³⁶

Moreover, in the midst of struggling with a totalitarian regime which imposed uniformity and dehumanized people, Arendt came up with a way to build a democratic society for her whole life. She suggests natality as the human condition. In *the Human Condition*, she suggests that it is natality which starts a new world against totalitarian nation. Although Arendt, a Jew, was neither a Christian nor a Christian theologian, her thought is permeated with Augustine's ideas. What Arendt draws attention to is Augustine view that 'human creation by God' is 'the introduction of newness, a new beginning.' Before Augustine, in the Neoplatonist view of eternity, there was no room for change or renewal. They believed that everything was always circular. "Since created things have come into existence, they change and alter. Their coming into existence was the first change, from non-being into being, and thus the law of change will from then on preside over their destinies."³⁷ Human birth brings a new dimension to time, which breaks the cyclical movement of the universe, bringing radical newness, contingency, and invention, which is the foundation of freedom.³⁸

Natality then brings three basic activities which humans perform: labor, work, and action.³⁹ There is labor performed for one's own and species' survival. Labor is a cyclic activity like metabolism and is constantly in and out of existence. There is also work which produces artifacts through material. It creates a relatively permanent artificial world. Finally, there is action, that is political activity which is the creation of a permanent identity through speech and action. Accepting these two kinds of life, *zoe* and *bios* Aristotle distinguishes, Arendt seems to presuppose that among these three activities, labor and work belong to *zoe* (natural and biological life) in *oikos*, the private sphere and action belongs to *bios* (political life) in *polis*, public sphere.⁴⁰ Among them, Arendt draws attention to the *bios* in public sphere because what makes us human is to be liberated from

the cyclical labor of organisms for necessity, their needs, and desires. They then need to engage in the act of freedom, that is, political activity. As in the ancient Greece, slaves and women were not allowed to enter the polis, only those who were free from labor for survival could join political activities. Some feminists criticize Arendt for insisting on keeping male at the centered of thought and a private-public binary.⁴¹ From a feminist perspective, if this binary is maintained, what happens in the household (oikos), is in the private sphere and the people who work in it can be excluded and discriminated against. For example, victims of domestic violence cannot be discussed in the political sphere because it is a private matter.

However, Mary Diez argues that feminist reading of Arendt's texts transmutes Arendt's triplet category of labor, work, and action into just doublet category of private-public in which gender binary is inscribed.⁴² Diez is aware that Arendt's three activities are rooted in natality which initiates something new and is foundation of freedom. Arendt's original intention was to expose the modern fallacy of fixing the category of private-public binary based on gender binary and to displace it through action with concept of politics.⁴³

Additionally, natality is inextricable from worldliness. "Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers."⁴⁴ Labor and work prepare the world for new persons (possessing the capacity of beginning something new) born into the world. Action (which the newcomer performs), brings something new into the world. The person who has already begun, can do something new with their life and through something new, he or she becomes a human being in the world. Thus, there are two kinds of birth: the first birth is our physical appearance in the world, while the second birth is the process of becoming human in the world. What is important here is that human birth has both natural life and political life.

In this sense, for Arendt's natality, birth does not simply seem to be in *zoe* but also *bios* because all three activities of labor, work, and action coming from birth, are interwoven with the world from the start. Thus, natality is penetrable and porous between natural life and political life. It spans two areas; *zoe* and *bios* and it does not maintain private-public dichotomy. For these reasons, her natality is never only located in the private sphere, but always presupposes the political

sphere, and thus has an inherent dynamism and permeability that allows it to deconstruct the rigid public-private dichotomy that feminists criticize. Natality provides for the reproduction of the species, but it also concerns the realm of action, where the species becomes truly human. Natality always takes place in the world and towards the world. In the same vein, women's reproduction has both public and political significance, and women who give birth are therefore political agents capable of making ethical decisions.⁴⁵ It shows that concept of birth has a dual meaning: both the physical labor of the mother in the production of a species, and also political action. Thus, a mother has an ethical agency to decide the matter of reproductive right. What the state or church control to make live or let die not only denies women political agency, but also undermines democracy, the mechanism of a plural society which finds and welcomes newcomers who are born into the world and subsequently become human beings. The pro-life movement's persistent opposition to the right to choose, by locking human life at the point of conception, reduces human beings to organic life and perpetuates the perception of women and motherhood as animal labor or biological life forms that lack agency. It is not really pro-life- just pro-birth.

Thus, a pregnant woman under the state's biopolitics is deprived of her political life and remains in the realm of private life, the naked abstract, the *homo sacer*. Korean Protestant churches should learn from the second campaign for the decriminalization of abortion in South Korea and pay attention to South Korean women's actual reality under state's biopolitics--actively supported by multi religious patriarchalism. If we would learn this, we could engage in the task of theology: to take *homo sacer* down from the cross.

IV. Conclusion: Ever after; Towards Broadly Pro-life

After the Constitutional Court ruled abortion ban unconstitutional, it ordered that the relevant provisions of the law be amended by December 31, 2020. The government recommended that after the 22nd week of pregnancy, abortion remains criminal because at that week of gestation the fetus can survive independently outside the mother's body. However feminist camps did not accept this government adjudication. They want complete freedom for

women to have abortions. Their lack of trust in the government is due to the fact that the nation has historically used abortion for economic reasons and as a means of population policy, not for women's right to self-determination for reproduction. The amendment failed to pass due to oppositions from many pro-lifers: the Pro-life (a successor to the Pro-life Doctor's Association and the Anti-abortion Coalition), Roman Catholics, and many fundamentalist Protestants. The legislation has been delayed for five years until the present day. Meanwhile many Protestant churches do not want to get involved in this delicate issue or simply take sides with the pro-life camps.

Since 2018, a year before ruling abortion ban unconstitutional in South Korea, I have investigated the theme of reproductive justice. In the context of teaching, giving a sermon, and pastoring, I have experienced a deep sense of helplessness regarding my ability to persuade my students and church members towards reproductive rights. Once I talk about the right to abortion, I fear I have been stigmatized. I have come up against an iron wall of the 'prolife versus prochoice' which cannot simply be knocked down. One of reasons why this wall in South Korea seems to be thicker than any other western societies, seems to be patriarchalism of religions. I believe that Christian women in South Korea, living in multi layered patriarchal culture mediated by religions, are like *homo sacer*. They live in *zoe*, natural life, depriving of *bios*, political life which guarantees their right to self-determination. They are stuck in the 'prolife and prochoice binary' and cannot get out of it.

From the pulpit of a church, women who do not give birth to children are often accused of being selfish and of not fulfilling God's mission. Today, South Korea has entered an ultra-low birthrate society. The total fertility rate of 2023 is around 0.6 children. From the pulpit, one more accusation is added: not giving birth is unpatriotic. *Homo sacer* is not only deprived of political life but also accused of being a traitor. Jeong Heejin suggests that the underlying fear of low birthrates stems from the early modern notion of population as national power. However, she continues that deliberately increasing birthrates is not the right answer, given the reality of the Nordic countries (which have small populations but are doing relatively well), or the problem of youth unemployment.⁴⁶ She also adds that a low birthrate is also a commitment to not bequeathing a dehumanizing competitive society to future generations. In prior sections, we identified how much the biopolitics of South Korea has selected life and produced *homo*

sacer for economic reasons. As Agamben said, quoting Foucault, capitalism has developed through “docile bodies.”⁴⁷ Capitalism is parasitic on women’s body and nature. It lives by mining women’s bodies and nature.

It’s natural for organisms to be self-preserving by not having children when they can’t support them. In *Mother Nature*, Sarah B. Hrdy tries to understand maternal instinct not based on romanticized natural law but based on scientific investigation.⁴⁸ Analyzing not only animal societies, but also human groups across cultures, she argues that all mothers make trade-offs between survival and reproduction. It may seem like a heartless act that goes against her maternal instincts, but she is doing what is best for her child. Things like spacing out births or letting the oldest eat the food of the weaker youngest, are all, finally, for the flourishing of her children.

Likewise, to live in age of low growth and shrinkonomics (economics for decreasing population and an aging society), we need to think outside the box. Hyun-jae Lee maintains that when population policy is viewed as a matter of raising or lowering birth rates for the sake of “the economy” or “growth,” it can lead to the objectification of women’s bodies and a failure to consider the position of minorities. Therefore, population policy must now be designed with the recognition that the economy is built on social reproduction such as care, education, gender relations, and intimacy.⁴⁹

Of course, we can reinterpret patriarchal traditions of religion from a feminist perspective. For example, ahimsa of Buddhism which originally comes from Jainism, can be read to save both the dead and the slain who suffers from it. Daehaeng, a famous Buddhist monk in South Korea said to a man who earns his living by catching chickens; the one who dies is pitiful and the one who kills is pitiful, and that both should be saved, not one or the other. If we were to establish it as a sin, then word would become law, and we should be weighed down with a heavy burden all our life. It is against Buddha’s compassion.⁵⁰ Thus, we should understand that karma is caused by the law of cause and effect, but also to realize that karma is not real. Therefore, the important thing is to dissolve karma, not to impose it on someone.

In the same vein, Sesoría Kim, a feminist Confucian philosopher argues that ignoring the conditions under which women who choose abortion have no choice but to do so, and by judicially condemning them, it cuts them off from the essentially Christian ethical process of saving (not condemning) life through

forgiveness of the sinner to freedom, repentance, and maturity.⁵¹ Reformed feminist theologian. Serene Jones also claims that the discourse of sin should serve to strengthen Christian faith, not weaken it. It needs to be designed not “to harm people to break their spirits, to marginalize them, to destroy their sense of beloved-ness, or to -constrain the conditions of their flourishing.”⁵²

However, this paper focuses on frame change to take *homo sacer* from the cross. Considering state’s biopolitics and *homo sacer*, it helps us move the debate over women’s reproductive rights from a binary, myopic paradigm of choosing between the right to life and the right to choose a three-dimensional, macro-paradigm that promotes inter-relational freedom and pluralism in our shared world. We can call this a “broadly pro-life framework,” neither a pro-birth nor just pro-life.⁵³ It is a rich system that includes not only birth but also the meaningful care of children that respects life so that no one is rendered naked by state power; one that does not stigmatize women who choose to terminate their pregnancies for a variety of reasons. If we are truly pro-life Christians, we must work to end war and we must work to strengthen and expand the web of life.

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Women in the Hungarian Reformed Church in the Twentieth Century

Abstract

The study explores the multifaceted role of women in the Hungarian Reformed Church throughout the 20th century, highlighting both their spiritual commitment and institutional marginalization. It traces the evolving perception and participation of women—from supportive congregational roles and the significant contribution of pastors' wives to the eventual ordination of female pastors. The analysis reveals how theological, societal, and political transformations shaped women's ecclesial involvement. Key milestones include the hesitant acceptance of women's theological education, the impact of post-war social shifts, and the gradual legal recognition of women in ministry after 1981. Despite legal equality, structural barriers and cultural stereotypes persist, limiting women's leadership opportunities. The study also presents the Reformed Women's Association as a vital grassroots movement fostering community and spiritual life. Ultimately, the paper reflects on how women's presence—through teaching, caregiving, preaching, and public witness—quietly yet profoundly reshapes the Hungarian Reformed Church in the face of enduring institutional asymmetries.

Introduction

In the Hungarian Reformed Church the role of women appears in various areas. This mainly includes female pastors who were ordained as pastors for the first time a few decades ago. Another important factor is that most of the members of the congregations are women, so they play an important role in congregational and church service, both at the local and national level. Their prominent organization is the Reformed Women's Association, who organize regular meetings to unite the female members of the Reformed churches.

Women in the Reformed Church

When analyzing the church discourse on women, the first question that arises is whether to whom the concept of the Reformed woman was applied. In the reformed tradition it included a group of women who were born into it and socialized in it.

In Hungarian tradition, those would consider themselves as a reformed person, who are devoted Christians, following the Reformed or Calvinist traditions, and at the same time they have a great sense of patriotism or national feeling. The confessional and demonstrative undertaking of belonging to the Reformed denomination became an expectation, which is an active participation in church life. The followers of the internal mission are primarily "Christian women". They used this term, and with this they wanted to indicate that they did not consider themselves to belong to the denomination as primary, but to "reborn life."¹

In the period between the two world wars, the church counted on women in many areas. Even then, the Reformed press expressed opinions that the future of the entire church depended on them and their activities. The argument was a common topos from the 19th century on, on one hand because of their deeper religiosity than men, and on the other hand, they were expected to educate the future generation, including the „defense of the nation". They hoped that the participation of women would lead to a revival of religious life and the rise of moral purity. Arguments in this regard often equated church life with family life and portrayed women's role as mothers in this framework - both in the church and at home.² As bishop László Ravasz put it: "The church is a mother, motherhood

is a secret, a heart made for motherhood understands the motherhood of the church, the great secret that motherhood is: to believe, to love, to serve.”³

Women’s service was therefore considered essential for the survival of the church. In the examined era, the most important task in this regard was the unification and coordination of women’s church work. More and more people thought that the association’s work in its current form is no longer effective: the changed circumstances, the general crisis, require the “gathering of women into one camp”. The organization of the Women’s Camp aimed at this task. The frequent mention of the women’s “camp” or women’s “army” in the Reformed press (the former is also found in the Catholic Church) suggested that the church was fighting against hostile “armies” (depraved morals, modernism, etc.). In this struggle, women were expected to play the role of a „common soldier or guardian angel”, and a strong representation of the Reformed values was expected from most of them - also from those Reformed women who until then passively or did not practice their religion. In church work, a sharp line was drawn between women’s and men’s work.⁴ According to bishop László Ravasz, “However, in the church, Christianity differentiates between men and women. Just as in the family God appoints the head of the family out of the sovereignty of his creator and he must decide in some matters how the woman bears the name of the man, so in the church God has entrusted the service of God’s sovereignty, the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and church governance to the man. The woman is there in the church, in the prayer, in witnessing, in a thousand ways of service of love.”⁵

For a long time, the role of pastors’ wives was particularly important, as they had specific tasks and performed them almost full-time, supporting their pastor husbands. The most important task is work with children and youth, especially young girls. They held children’s activities and talked with the girls after the service, and the Sunday sermon was also discussed in the girls’ group or circle. The other designated work area was the leadership of the women of the congregation, which included evangelisation among them. This was considered an important missionary service, as it served to transmit national and church values.

The girls’ circle work included helping the poor, visiting and caring for the sick and elderly, and distributing reformed newspapers. The girls had to be introduced to the life and example of the Hungarian grand women, so that

through the role models, in addition to the values of the Hungarian culture, they would fall in love with everything that is ancient and Hungarian. This included the knowledge and mastery of folk art, folk poetry, and folk dances in the hope that they might be able to protect the girls against the phenomena of modern life that are considered worthless and dangerous.⁶

Female Pastors in the Hungarian Reformed Church

The question of women's theological training was of crucial importance in the assessment of the role of women in the church and their rise to prominence. In the process that started in the last third of the 19th century, which opened up different levels of church publicity for women, the emergence of the problem of whether or not women could be allowed to become ministers was an important stage. The introduction of female clergy was on the one hand a theological issue, and on the other hand it would have affected the entire church structure. Until then, women were given opportunities in fields traditionally associated with their femininity, but the career of a pastor seemed unacceptable in this framework of interpretation. Letting them into the official management of church life would have meant that they would have crossed the line that sharply separated the areas of operation of the two genders in all respects. All of this would have called into question the basic conception of female and male roles constructed and derived from divine decree. The discourse appearing in the press, but mainly the legislative dilemma surrounding women's theological training, indicates that, despite everything, the rejection of this possibility was not clear and unanimous. From 1895, women appeared at Hungarian universities as regular students in the humanities, medicine and pharmacy majors. Their opportunities gradually expanded, i.e. the number of university and college faculties where women could also study increased. The possibility of women's theological training also fit into this process. In 1917, two female students enrolled for the first time at the Reformed Theological University in Budapest, named Olga Novák and Viktória Katona.⁷

After the First World War, however, the male population was decimated, and with this, women also gained a foothold in certain professions. Even then, women could actively participate in the diaconal service, but after that they gained

more and more space in religious education as well. However, according to a 1933 church law, they could not undertake a liturgical service. After the Second World War, the employment of women in the secular sectors also changed in the country, which once again suffered a huge loss of blood. Socialism gained ground, whose ideological base was opposed to religiosity, so the institutions and occupations related to it were degraded. According to the author, this is also the reason why the number of male pastors has decreased. By that time, theological universities in Pápa and Sáropatak had already been banned, so there was not enough supply either. The lack of priests and the rise of women in traditionally male professions may also have played a role in the fact that in the Act of 1967, article III on church servants and their employment. according to the law, women could already be assigned pastors and assistant pastors, but at that time they could not administer the sacraments, nor perform wedding, confirmation and funeral ceremonies. Only men were allowed to wear cloaks by synod law. But the fact that the church gave some space to women's service may have happened because more and more women applied for theology, even though they knew they could not become full-fledged ministers with robes - which ultimately meant that they were not able to serve as church ministers. they could not even hope for a secure livelihood. They would have been satisfied if they could join the church service as an assistant pastor or pastor's wife, but they did not care about not obtaining the highest level of theological preparation for their ministry, as the lines of the first theologians quoted above show. They began their studies with a calling from God, and the church could not waste this treasure, this intellectual and spiritual capital.⁸

From the mid-seventies, a debate broke out in the church press. Both men and women argued in favor of female spirituality. Some also felt that quite a few of the women pastors already in service are already doing the same work as the men, but the paper legalization of this would be experienced by many within the church as a loss of position. Women were often assigned to the Diocese of Baranya, which has the biggest shortage of priests. Many men were reluctant to take up the priesthood here, so women were allowed to perform the services that were otherwise only permitted for men. Klára Lenkeyné Semsey, the first female professor of theology, in 1981 herself restarted the discussion about women's spirituality in the columns of the *Reformatusok Lapja*. In his writings and statements, he usually made theological arguments in favor of

female spirituality. Just like Eszter Karsay, the first woman to be elected pastor of a church in the capital. The synodal study committee established in 1979 to study issues related to women's church service also put forward theological arguments, and based on its preparatory work, the Synod amended the 1967 law at its meeting on November 11, 1981. Pursuant to the amendment to the law, women who graduated in theology and obtained a pastor's qualification could not only be assigned pastors, but also full-fledged, optional pastors. From this point on, women with ministerial qualifications can administer the sacraments, perform weddings, confirmations and funerals, and wear robes.⁹

In Europe, women were allowed to pursue theological studies in most countries from the early 20th century, but it was only gradually and partially that they became involved in pastoral ministry. Although, from the 1940s onward, more and more churches decided to ordain women, it was only from the 1970s onward that the ordination of women became a widely accepted practice without any restrictions or distinctions, thus establishing full equality. In Hungary, the timeframe for women's emancipation in the ministry was similar. The Lutheran Church ordained its first female pastor in 1972. In the Reformed Church, women were allowed to become assistant pastors from the 1960s, to serve the sacraments from 1981, and finally, after 1985, women were ordained without any restrictions.¹⁰

Although there is equality in clergy between men and women legally, still women's opportunities in churches are far from equal: female pastors find it more difficult to obtain suitable work or are given lower-status jobs, and there are disproportionately fewer women in leadership positions in churches. Moreover, they are invariably less likely than men to be in independent congregational leadership pastoral positions. After roughly half a century of ordination being open to women and a steadily rising proportion of female clergy, more and more women are breaking through the stained-glass ceiling everywhere. While the emergence of women leaders is a clear sign of a shift toward equal participation, their lower number indicates that inequalities still exist. In light of their success, the remaining gaps may appear to be the result of individual choices while, in fact, they are the result of systemic processes. This token position perpetuates the perception of the just and meritocratic functioning of the system and thereby increases the acceptance of a hierarchy that disadvantages women. However, even these 'tokens' are largely absent in Hungarian churches: compared to

Western Protestant churches, women leaders are much less present. In examining this finding, it should be taken into account that after the fall of communism, Hungarian churches tried to rely on the traditions of pre-communist times. As a result, at the level of everyday church functioning, more traditional ways of thinking.¹¹

Gendered perceptions and interpretations regarding their calling, promotion prospects, and pastoral roles play a crucial part in the different career paths of women and men in the church. Career decisions in ecclesial careers cannot be examined in the same way as in secular occupations because here, specific considerations—essentially those related to a religious ‘calling’—may override secular career considerations. It is precisely as a result of the Reformation that the concept of calling (in the form of ‘vocation’) has acquired a secular meaning: it was then understood as a specific attitude to work in which those concerned are willing to set aside, to a considerable extent, those career-choice aspects that prioritize self-fulfillment and personal gain and, instead, interpret their work primarily in terms of impersonal social utility and a sense of duty. These considerations also play a defining role in the pastoral vocation, but here, the focus is on fulfilling the God-ordained calling. Although, for both men and women, the call of God is the main motivation for pastoral work, for women, a calling bears even more significance because it proves that despite their unequal position in the church and the difficulties that they face, they are qualified for ministerial work in the same way as men. This can reinforce their commitment in a context where their role as ministers is still questioned. Experiencing a call strengthens women pastors’ willingness to accept difficulties and it also enhances their ability to cope with them.¹²

In the case of Hungarian female pastors, these interpretations often reflect and preserve traditional gender-based cultural beliefs and, thus, make it difficult for women to aspire to and achieve leadership positions. There are still stereotypical beliefs, even among church members, that women in general are less suited to leadership—although they often indicate that there are exceptions. They are mostly cautious in their criticism of gender inequalities, often explicitly emphasizing that they themselves hold conservative views on this topic. They perceive their ministry as serving, emphasizing its role in helping others, building relationships, and supporting communities. Thus, through their pastoral and leadership manifestations, or by their involvement in the public sphere of the

church, women are also—partly unintentionally—shaping these churches and expanding their own and women’s possibilities in the ministry.¹³

Reformed Women’s Association

In 1943–1944, the leadership of the Reformed Church faced with the historical situation, the women trusting in their strength, relying on them, a women’s union movement launched, the purpose of which is to prepare the social base of the church for the inevitable changes. Two appointed female leaders in the person of Klára Zsindelyné Tüdős and Mária Pilder, who credibly conveyed the goals of the Hungarian Reformed Church (MRE) and, due to their popularity, were able to appeal to Reformed women from the most diverse social strata.¹⁴ Their personal testimony and commitment to the Christian faith and the Reformed Church and morality inspired thousands of women throughout the 20th century. Many of their essays and devotions were published, the distribution of which also helped and strengthened many women in their faith.¹⁵

The national women’s association was re-established in 1992 after socialism. The women’s associations were formed at different times in the different churches, there are women’s associations that have existed since the beginning of the twentieth century with more or less gaps, but new groups are constantly being formed. National and parish meetings and conferences are organized annually. They are active in various mission activities, both at the local and national level, such as visiting and supporting the sick, supporting mission work, making and offering handicraft products, as well as organizing and conducting the annual Secular Day, in many cases the activities of women’s associations also fall under the scope of activities.

Summary

In summary, it can be stated that the role of women is undoubtedly important in the Hungarian Reformed Church. Both female pastors and female church members contribute greatly to the functioning of the congregations and the church, from teaching and educational work to preaching or missionary activities.

It can be seen that even though decades have passed since male and female pastors can be considered legally equal, discrimination still exists on a smaller and larger community level. Let us hope that this will change in the future, and the level of acceptance of female pastors will only move in a positive direction.

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Rethinking Diakonia in the Korean Protestant Church in the 21st Century

Abstract

This paper critically examines the decline of diaconal authenticity in the Korean Protestant Church since 2000. Despite visible expansion in social welfare activities, public trust has declined, largely due to perceptions of instrumentalization, administrative failures, and a disconnect from community needs. Through historical and theological analysis, the paper argues for a reorientation of Diakonia as a theological imperative rooted in the church's identity, not as a means of institutional growth. Emphasizing collaboration, public engagement, and a balance between Kerygma, Diakonia, and Koinonia, it calls for a renewed diaconal practice that responds to the complexities of a post-industrial, pluralistic Korean society with integrity and humility.

I. Introduction

This paper analyzes diaconal practices within the Korean Protestant Church after 2000 through statistical analysis, aiming to critically evaluate and reorient contemporary diaconal praxis. The Greek word *διακονία*, meaning 'service' or 'support', as well as the associated ecclesiastical offices, has been foundational

to Christian tradition.¹ This concept's historical manifestation is evidenced in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6:1-6), where the appointment of seven deacons for food distribution exemplifies the early church's commitment to addressing practical community needs while focusing on spiritual leadership. It is well known that the theological underpinning of Diakonia rests upon the dual imperative of divine and neighborly love, commonly termed the 'double commandment.' This theological construct, according to Michael Schibilsky and Heinz Schmidt, establishes an intrinsic symbiosis between these two dimensions of love, where each component operates in a mutually reinforcing dynamic.² The manifestation of service to others emerges as a natural consequence of divine transformation, suggesting theological anthropology where human agency is intimately connected to divine grace.³ This understanding is further reinforced by biblical mandates, particularly Jesus Christ's teachings regarding service to the needy (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Protestant reformers, inheriting the biblical tradition, argued that the church's purpose was to glorify God and fulfill the mission of loving one's neighbor, challenging the medieval church's view that was oriented toward administering various sacraments. According to Ok-Sun Kim, John Calvin believed that the church's core identity is found in mirroring Christ, who exemplified servanthood. He also considered Diakonia the essence of the expression of faith.⁴ In his view, it is a vital principle that strengthens the church's fabric, promoting unity that reflects the communal nature of the Trinity itself. Through His life and teachings, Christ exemplified this service, entrusting the church with the mission to ensure that grace is not only inwardly received but also outwardly extended through acts of service. In the *Ordonnances Ecclesiastiques* (1541), Calvin outlined four responsibilities decreed by the Lord for the governance of His church, deriving four roles from the Scripture: pastor, teacher, elder, and deacon.⁵ He explained that these duties are meant to aid individuals in knowing God, serving Him, and placing their faith in His unparalleled salvation. Regarding deacons in particular, he stated that through their service, deacons demonstrate [through action] that Christ Himself showed compassion for our physical suffering and poverty, attending to our earthly hardships.

John Calvin's thoughts on Diakonia ministry significantly impacted the subsequent Protestant Church. Throughout the history of the Protestant Church, Diakonia has inspired countless charitable acts, the founding of hospitals,

schools, and other institutions serving the public interest, as well as various forms of social justice and advocacy work. In the Korean Presbyterian churches, which were established on the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, charitable work has continued to be a core element, highlighting the church's mission to engage with the world through compassionate service. Despite the church's extensive involvement in social welfare activities, as seen below, these efforts frequently encounter limited societal recognition and appreciation. Thus, this paper delves into the paradox of the Korean Presbyterian Church's significant contributions to social welfare contrasted with its struggle for social acknowledgment. It then seeks to identify the underlying factors contributing to this disparity by exploring historical and social dynamics. This paper argues for a paradigmatic shift in the Diakonia practices of the Korean Church, emphasizing the need to rediscover Diakonia's authentic essence and increasing responsiveness to the evolving demands of a post-industrial society.

II. The Korean Protestant Church and Diakonia: A Statistical Exploration

In its formative years, the Korean Church actively embraced the practice of diakonia, engaging in missionary and educational initiatives, establishing hospitals, treating lepers, and combating cholera, thereby spreading the Gospel through tangible acts of service. During the Japanese occupation of Korea, the harsh colonial administration led to economic exploitation and social unrest, disproportionately affecting peasants and expanding the labor force. The Korean Church faced difficulties in responding to these societal changes, underscoring the need for diaconal engagement and practical responses to the era's challenges.⁶ Beyond meeting basic needs, the Church actively participated in resistance against colonial oppression and supported independence movements, marking a significant period of social involvement and advocacy for community welfare.

After liberation, Korea encountered historic adversities, including the Korean War, military dictatorship, industrialization, and economic crises, which presented considerable challenges to the nation. The socio-economic and political instability resulted in an increase in orphans, widows, and the impoverished, with the Korean government heavily reliant on foreign aid. Korean churches collaborated

with international aid organizations to effectively implement welfare projects, playing a pivotal role in developing social welfare practices in Korea.⁷ However, such Diakonia efforts often depended on external support, focusing on facility-based projects rather than comprehensive social welfare strategies. This reliance fostered a tradition of establishing isolated residential facilities for marginalized groups (ex, orphanages, homeless shelters, etc.).

After the 1960s, spurred by rapid economic growth, foreign aid began to diminish. Concurrently, the Korean Church shifted its focus towards congregational expansion, sidelining social work activities that had been centered on relief aid. This period witnessed the Korean Church prioritizing competitive membership expansion, leading to notable growth and significant investment in church construction. As a result of this inward focus on self-maintenance and expansion, the practice of Diakonia within the Korean Church grew more distant. Consequently, while the Korean Church experienced external growth, its commitment to Diakonia saw a rapid decline.⁸ However, during the economic boom and social instability of the 1970s, the Church again began to emerge as a supportive ally by engaging in various welfare activities as part of its social mission work. This trend continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The Church experienced a heightened awareness of social issues and underwent a reassessment of its social responsibilities, leading to increased investment in social welfare programs. This era marked a pivotal shift towards more active social participation and responsibility, aiming to lay the foundation for comprehensive diakonia practice in response to Korea’s evolving societal needs.⁹

The population of Korea, which stood at 46.14 million in the year 2000, reached its peak in 2020 at 51.83 million and has decreased slightly to an estimated 51.75 million in 2024. Alongside this demographic shift, the religious population in Korea has exhibited a declining trend since 2000, as shown in the *Religion in Korea* 1984-2021 report conducted by Korea Gallup (www.gallup.co.kr), documenting changes in the number of religious adherents over the past 20 years:¹⁰

Category Year	Total Population	Protestantism	Buddhism	Catholicism
2004	48.08 million	10.1 million11(21%)	11.54 million (24%)	3.37 million (7%)
2014	50.75 million	10.66 million (21%)	11.17 million (22%)	3.55 million (7%)
2021	51.77 million	8.8 million (17%)	8.28 million (16%)	3.11 million (6%)

The data clearly indicate that since 2004, the populations of Protestants, Buddhists, and Catholics have experienced slight declines. However, it is noteworthy that the social welfare organizations associated with each of these religions have seen substantial expansion during the same period. This trend is supported by a survey conducted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (MCST, 문화체육관광부), providing detailed insights into the growth of religious social welfare corporations and organizations:

Category Year	Protestantism	Buddhism	Catholicism	Won Buddhism	Others	Total
200212	39	41	31	1	3	115
200813	194	104	58	14	2	372
201814	259	152	97	14	7	529

Although it is a quantitative calculation, Korea's religious population has continuously declined since 2004. However, the number of social welfare organizations affiliated with each religion has increased by 4.6 times. Within Christianity, the number of social welfare corporations and organizations dramatically rose from only 39 in 2002 to 259 by 2018, which represents a remarkable 6.6-fold increase. This significant growth since the year 2000 indicates that churches are playing an increasingly vital role in Korean society's overall social service sector.

The Report on Social Services of Korean Churches 2009, published by the Christian Ethics Movement of Korea (CEMK),¹⁵ provides a comprehensive overview of the involvement of various religious organizations in social services within South Korea, with a particular focus on the contributions of the Korean Protestant churches. The report outlines the operation of general welfare centers (종합사회복지관), homeless shelter facilities (노숙인복지시설), and local child-care centers (지역아동센터), revealing the significant participation of Protestant denominations in these sectors.¹⁶ In specific, Protestant churches are responsible for operating 45% (188) of general welfare centers throughout the country (414), a higher percentage than any other religious group (Catholic 12%, Buddhism 12%, Won Buddhism 3%), underscoring their pivotal role in social welfare. Furthermore, in the realm of homeless shelter facilities, they manage 62.8% (54)

of these establishments (88), further highlighting their leadership. In the sector of local child-care centers, Protestant denominations account for over half of the operations, with a 53.1% participation rate. These figures not only demonstrate the substantial involvement of Protestant denominations in social services compared to other religious organizations such as Buddhism and Catholicism, but also emphasize the crucial role these denominations play in addressing various social welfare needs across South Korea.

Even though Korean churches have played a significant role in modern society of South Korea, their efforts in social service have not been properly acknowledged, according to the CEMK's Report on Public Opinion Survey of Social Trust of Korean Churches 2023. The results for the question, "Which religion do you believe is most actively involved in social welfare and charitable activities?" are as follows:¹⁷

Category Year	Christianity	Buddhism	Catholicism	Others	None/ No Response
2010	42.1%	11.6%	39.3%	1.0%	6.0%
2017	36.2%	7.8%	34.8%	0.9%	20.3%
2020	35.7%	10.2%	32.9%	2.0%	19.2%
2023	20.6%	6.8%	29.4%	3.4%	39.8%

This perception is similarly reflected in the question asking which religion performs the most beneficial social services to our society, with Catholicism (26.7%) seen as contributing the most, followed by Christianity (19.8%) and Buddhism (9.8%).¹⁸ So far, it is noticed that the data on public perception regarding the social contributions of various religions reveals significant disparities between actual engagement and public recognition. While Protestantism may be more active in providing social services compared to Catholicism, the public tends to perceive Catholicism as making more substantial contributions to society.

III. Rethinking the Korean Church's Approach to Diakonia

In his analysis of the CEMK's Report on Public Opinion Survey of Social Trust of Korean Churches 2023, Jae Young Jung identifies three critical factors that

create a disparity between the churches' actual engagement and their public recognition. The first is the perceived instrumentalization of charitable services for evangelistic purposes. The public increasingly views these charitable activities not as genuine expressions of community care but as strategic tools for church membership expansion and religious conversion. This perception has been reinforced by the explicit integration of evangelical messages into service delivery. Another significant factor is the ephemeral nature of Protestant church social engagement. Instead of establishing sustained, long-term community support systems, many churches focus on high-visibility, one-time charitable events. This approach reveals a troubling prioritization of immediate public recognition over meaningful and transformative community development, which finally undermines public confidence in the churches' authentic commitment to social welfare. The last contributing factor involves systematic operational deficiencies in church-managed facilities. Numerous documented cases of financial impropriety, deliberate misrepresentation of program outcomes for funding purposes, and general mismanagement have significantly eroded public trust. These operational failures go beyond mere administrative oversight and fundamentally challenge the credibility of Protestant churches as legitimate social service providers. The cumulative effect of these scandals has fostered persistent skepticism regarding the churches' capacity and genuine commitment to community welfare.¹⁹

Moreover, Ji-Hyun Lee also identifies four reasons for the discrepancy between Korean churches' Diakonia services and their public perception. First, many Korean churches use these services primarily to drive growth within their congregations. They engage in social services mainly to attract new members and expand their congregations. This approach undermines the perception of genuine altruism and breeds community distrust, as their actions are often seen as self-serving rather than sincere expressions of care and compassion.²⁰ Second, they adopt a benefactor-centered approach to diakonia. Churches frequently adopt a hierarchical service model, positioning themselves as benefactors and viewing the community as passive recipients. When they provide material aid without fostering meaningful relationships or understanding the community's needs, this can come across as demeaning and foster unhealthy dependencies.²¹ Third, their focus on church-centered priorities often overshadows collaboration with other social organizations. Korean churches often focus on their own

programs, assuming exclusive responsibility for community welfare. This narrow focus leads to inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and missed opportunities for broader impact through partnerships and collaborative initiatives.²² Finally, the religious churches struggle to adapt to the evolving needs of their communities. The social service focus of current Korean churches tends to prioritize immediate relief—such as food and shelter—over sustainable development. There is often a lack of initiatives aimed at community development, capacity building, and empowerment, which are essential for contemporary social welfare.²³

Jae Young Jung and Ji-Hyun Lee highlight significant problems in the approach of traditional Korean churches to social welfare activities. They argue that churches have often treated social services primarily as tools for church growth, leading to a superficial engagement with welfare and an emphasis on church-centered priorities. This approach has overshadowed opportunities for collaboration with public organizations and has not provided a genuine Christian witness in modern society. Contemporary Korean Protestant churches should find themselves at a critical juncture that necessitates a fundamental reevaluation of their diaconal ministry. To address these challenges, a paradigm shift is essential. Korean churches must move beyond conventional practices and develop a more theologically grounded understanding of Diakonia. This transformation requires a comprehensive understanding of Diakonia to reconstruct the church's identity and redefine its role within the broader social context.

1. Rethinking the Church's Identity

The Korean church should first reconsider the true essence of Diakonia in the context of the Church. As the embodiment of Christ, the church community is essentially an organically connected community. However, in modern times, there have been tendencies to overly individualize faith-based preaching within various church communities and among believers. This organizational shift has transformed religious institutions into administrative entities, creating a disconnect between spiritual practices and daily experiences. The traditional pastoral role has become increasingly bureaucratized, distancing congregants from their fundamental faith connections. As Dorothee Sölle emphasizes, Kerygma (proclamation), Diakonia, and Koinonia (fellowship) are crucial for a

vibrant church. Nonetheless, the current focus on Kerygma, especially in the Korean Protestant Church, should not overlook the critical roles of Diakonia and Koinonia. Integrating these three aspects is vital for the church to truly embody Christ and serve as a living testament to God's kingdom.²⁴

It is important here to remind that Diakonia serves not as a means of Church growth and expansion, but as a bridge between the church and the world by providing selfless service and compassionate ministry, mirroring Christ's teachings and life (John 13:1-17; Matthew 20:25-28), and recognizing every human's inherent dignity as created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). In other words, Diakonia transcends the church's expansion or power goals, focusing instead on serving "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40) and addressing the needs of society's marginalized (Luke 4:16-21). And it embodies the church's mission through actions that reflect Christ's humble love, aimed at promoting restorative justice and repairing broken relationships (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24). Furthermore, Diakonia is not just an external act, but signifies the church's broader witness to the world, demonstrating the heavenly kingdom's values of righteousness, peace, and justice (1 Peter 2:9-12; Matthew 6:10; Revelation 21:1-4).

However, from a historical perspective, Korean churches have tended to utilize charitable works as instruments for institutional expansion rather than fulfilling their foundational mission of fostering community welfare based on the spirit of the Bible. This approach has led to perceptions outside the church that view the church's Diakonia not as an act of neighborly love, but as an action taken for the church's own benefit, resulting in increased distrust in diakonia.²⁵ Initially, the Church played a pivotal role in social reform and advocacy for human rights and equality, benefiting the socially disadvantaged. It led not only literacy campaigns but also efforts to promote national identity through education, significantly contributing to the March 1st Independence Movement during the Japanese colonial period.²⁶ Post-liberation, amid the devastation of the Korean War, the church provided care to war victims through foreign voluntary agencies, reflecting its mission of service towards the marginalized in the society. This dedication facilitated societal transformation, garnering respect and trust.²⁷

As previously discussed, beginning in the 1970s, Korean churches embarked on a competitive trajectory of congregation expansion, concurrent with South Korea's rapid economic development. This period witnessed substantial growth within Korean churches, prompting considerable investment in the construction

of church facilities. Amidst this rapid expansion and the focus on maintaining and enlarging church organizations, the practice of charitable ministry, which had once been a central concern of the church, gradually faded into the background. Moreover, when Diakonia was practiced, it unfortunately became reduced to a tool for church growth and evangelism.²⁸ Although some contemporary Korean churches now strive to reclaim the essence of diakonia to practice God's love, many more still use it primarily as a tool to grow their congregations under the pretext of spreading the gospel. As viewed by residents outside the church, particularly non-believers, these efforts are not perceived as genuine acts of neighborly love but as strategies aimed at church growth.²⁹ Such a viewpoint has led to increased skepticism regarding the church's social service activities, considered more strategic tools than sincere gestures of kindness.³⁰

So, it is now imperative for the Church to recognize and realign with the true essence of Diakonia. As a bridge between divine love and human need, Diakonia should serve as a conduit through which God's transformative grace flows into the world. In this situation, the Korean Church should first understand Diakonia not merely as a tool for church growth but as a fundamental mission to practice God's love. This mission extends beyond simply providing facility-based welfare services; it involves embodying the values of God's kingdom through organic relationships with local communities. Furthermore, Diakonia in the Korean Church must be practiced in balance with Kerygma and Koinonia. Service without the proclamation of the Word and community spirit may lose its essential meaning, while proclamation and fellowship without service can undermine the practical dimension of faith. By harmoniously practicing these three elements, the Korean Church can restore social trust and truly represent the body of Christ.

Rethinking the Church Role in Public Society

Second, Korean churches should engage in Diakonia ministries with an ecumenical spirit that keeps pace with changing times. While churches possess human and material resources unmatched by other civic groups or institutions, they often fail to leverage these resources collectively due to their focus on individual congregational ministries. This church-centered approach, as Ji-Hyun Lee notes, overshadows potential collaboration with other social organizations. By focusing

exclusively on their programs and assuming sole responsibility for community welfare, churches create inefficiencies, duplicate efforts, and miss opportunities for broader impact through partnerships and collaborative initiatives. This situation reflects a broader paradox: while believers, as Jesus' disciples, express lofty aspirations to serve and transform the world in Christ's likeness, they often hesitate to enact the bold changes needed within their communities to foster cooperative ministry for God's kingdom. Therefore, churches must now overcome internal and foundational barriers that inhibit unity among different denominations, as well as between the church and broader society.

By collaborating across a diverse array of churches and organizations, they can more fully live out their missional calling to serve the world (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Especially, an activation of cooperation and networking at the local and regional level, based on an ecumenical spirit, is necessary. Following the biblical model of the early church (Acts 2:42-47), interdenominational church unions should first be formed in each region, and (going a step further) cooperative social service and welfare efforts should be considered in partnership with local municipal governments. If there is a willingness, it would be possible to jointly operate welfare facilities or projects through volunteer efforts, financial support, and contracted operations by establishing collaborative networks with local municipalities within their communities.

This collaboration with public social organizations will help Korean churches adapt to the changing needs of their communities. Contemporary Korean churches primarily focus on supporting the basic survival needs of the underprivileged through activities such as food distribution, senior programs, and assistance with living expenses,³¹ This approach is similar to the efforts of local governments through the Emergency Welfare Support System.³² Church leaders must recognize that, as society has evolved, social risks and needs have transformed significantly. In the past, social risks stemming from industrialization mainly affected male earners, with welfare policies centered on offsetting income loss through cash benefits. However, post-industrial society - characterized by a shift from manufacturing to services and increased female labor participation - faces new challenges: family structure instability due to low birth rates, aging populations, rising divorce rates, and the prevalence of part-time and contract work. The primary risk bearers are now young and elderly individuals, women, and low-skilled workers, necessitating enhanced social and structural support

systems for these groups.³³ Contemporary social welfare has shifted to emphasize regional development, community-centered activities, and resident capability enhancement. Yet church-based diakonia activities have remained largely unchanged, lacking initiatives for community development and broader social engagement. This disconnect between church endeavors and current societal demands can be bridged through collaboration among diverse churches and organizations based on an ecumenical spirit.

IV. Final Remarks

Due to misaligned priorities and outdated approaches, the Korean Protestant Church faces significant challenges in its diaconal ministry. These challenges are evident in two key areas: the church's self-understanding and its role in public society. The analysis indicates that Korean churches have often used Diakonia as a means for church growth, adopted hierarchical service models, and struggled to collaborate effectively with other organizations, while failing to adapt to society's changing needs. To address these issues, this paper proposes two essential shifts. First, Korean churches should reclaim a genuine theological understanding of Diakonia as an integral part of their identity, alongside Kerygma and Koinonia. This means moving beyond the view of Diakonia as merely a tool for evangelism and instead embracing it as a true expression of God's love and the church's mission in the world. Second, churches must adopt an ecumenical approach that encourages collaboration among denominations and with public institutions. This cooperative framework would enable churches to leverage their resources more effectively and respond more appropriately to contemporary social challenges. The path forward requires Korean churches to embrace these transformative changes while maintaining their distinct Christian identity. By integrating authentic Diakonia with effective public engagement, churches can rebuild public trust and make meaningful contributions to social welfare. This renewal of diaconal ministry will not only enhance the church's relevance in modern society but also more faithfully reflect its calling as the body of Christ in the world.

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The Diaconal Work from a Hungarian Reformed Minority Perspective

Abstract

This study explores the renewal of diaconal work within the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, focusing on its development after the fall of communism. As a religious and national minority, Hungarian Reformed communities faced limited resources, yet gradually established local and institutional forms of diakonia. The paper highlights how biblical foundations, Reformed identity, and ecumenical cooperation shaped this ministry, addressing poverty, elderly care, addiction, and marginalized youth. The emergence of professional diaconal institutions emphasized a Christian profile rooted in service and dignity. By examining local initiatives and flagship programs, the study reveals diakonia as both a theological calling and a cultural witness in a multiethnic, post-communist society.

Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, the change of the political climate emerged and challenged the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania for restarting or reinventing the Christian diaconal work among church-members and the whole society. As a minority in nationality (Hungarians) and confession (reformed

Christians) the beginning of diaconal work showed a slow path with full of struggle for the Church. The missing funds, the lack of trained, faithful co-workers, the so-long abandoned diaconal territories inside and outside of the church obstructed the process. The two Hungarian Reformed Church-districts in Romania: the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania and "The King's Pass" Hungarian Reformed Church District founded two separate College for educating and training diaconal social workers. Since Hungarian reformed high schools also been reestablished, several students joined the program, but at the end of their studies they have faced the problem: diaconal and social workers are underpaid in Eastern Europe at the end of the 20th century. Many of them left the poorly financialized field.

Beside the official church aspiration and effort which started the diaconal work, several church-members gathered in foundations and diaconal work opened the door for abandoned children, poor families, drug/alcohol and other dependents, home care for the elderly, retirement homes etc. These were small, but very important steps in the way of organized diaconal work. The programs were supported financially from different western European country's (Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom) protestant Churches and Christian foundations, and the focus was intentionally held not only on Hungarian Christians, but also on the majority (Romanian) population of the country, and on another minority: Roma (Gipsy) communities.

The past three and half decades brought the possibility for diaconal work to became well organized in every level of the Church-districts and also institutionally. The local churches rediscovered diakonia by the lead of committed pastors, and volunteers were trained to fulfill the sending of Christ in the fields of diakonia. Several institutions were founded where full-time and part-time specialists are bringing their knowledge and dedication in diakonia with commitment to help wherever and whenever the need is real. The diaconal work of the Hungarian Reformed Churches operates in Romania alongside other Christian denominations, such as Orthodox, Roman and Greek Catholics, Pentecostal, Baptist and alongside the official state and particular social work. Serving to others in a diaconal way is not a competition, so the relations between these different Christian denominations are rather ecumenical, complementing each other's diaconal work.¹

The roots of biblical diakonia in the Hungarian Reformed local churches

After the collapse of communism in the Eastern European Block, Christianity found an open door in the field of diaconal work. The artificially forgotten principle of Christianity – to care and help for each other as Christ thought – became again a core part of the everyday-life of the local churches. The shaping of helping actions were emerged by several biblical studies in the domain of diakonia and based on the cultural heritage among Hungarians: the tradition of taking care and be responsible for the household, relatives and for the whole nation. This heritage is rooted so deeply in the Hungarian soul that is probably earlier than the Christianization a thousand years ago. On Bible studies has been explored that Old and New Testament are relevant meaningful in diaconal attitude. Both the Hebrew and the Greek biblical tradition mainly mentions the elderly, the widows, orphans and generally the poor as needing protection. To feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, clothe to the naked, to visit the sick can be understood not only a duty defined by national tradition, but it's a Christian act. The Bible speaks about diseases and disabilities, such as blindness, paralysis, muteness, deafmuteness, and many on this Bible studies were affected with concrete cases in their own families. The commandment to love one's neighbour from Leviticus 19:18b revisited by Jesus as the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:39) ringed the bell in many hearts and lead to the conclusion of responsibility in a Christian way.²

On the other part, understanding the urge of diakonia was brought by the New Testament meaning of the word. In the New Testament, diakonia is regarded as a concept of justice to rendered to all. With regard to Jesus, justice is to be accepted and understood in the sense of acceptance and caring for all who suffer is society. These aspects can be understood even more, as Jesus himself did, in the Golden Rule, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). Jesus was concerned with preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and healing the sick as a sign to show that the gospel is both in the doing of the word and the preaching of the deed (Mark 4:23-24). It is through the advent of Christ that the Good News is announced to the poor and captives, healing for the blind and delivering the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). This Good News includes a

holistic understanding of all human enterprise as understood in connection with the consideration of God's grace of righteousness in the Old Testament (ex. Isaiah 61:12) which calls people to uphold a corresponding praxis because faith in the God of Torah is active and effective in love and service of human beings and care for creation.³

Diakonia became a motive for interpersonal relationship. Every person is made in the image of God and therefore each will only reach fulfilment intended by their Creator when all are living in right relationship with their neighbours.⁴ Apostol Paul in his teachings encourages Christians to take care of the need of others as to strengthen interpersonal relationships (Romans 12:13). This is due to the fact that Paul understood the church as community (*koinonia*) in which the needs of one member are to be carried by all and privileges of one care to be enjoyed by all. As Apostol Peter wrote: "If anyone claims to serve, let it be as by a command received from God" (1 Peter 4:11-12).⁵

Diakonia been understood as a means of poverty eradication. The New Testament shows that Jesus' priority in his mission was to turn his attention to the poor. Jesus insisted that each and everybody should feel responsible for others to overcome poverty. He urged His followers not to be concerned only for their immediate neighbours, normally members of their own ethnic or religious group. Instead, he commands His followers to imitate God, who cares for everyone.⁶

Diakonia has taken different forms in local churches determined by their own rural or urban environment. In rural environments dominates the effect of the local church in general, but sometimes we can find specific initiatives, such as institutionalized homecare, retirement home, children programme, foodbank, or simply sharing locally made bread every day for free for the needy. The leaders of these diaconal work are the local pastors, their wife, or churchmembers as dedicated volunteers.

Multiethnic ambiance is a general characteristic both in rural and urban environment, but its more emerging and challenging in the cities. Institutional diakonia is a necessity in such situations, but the range of this institutions ends at the local area of the churches, or the cityborders. In these initiations the focus is on afterschool children programme, homecare for elders and for disabled peoples and children's home. The major cities are the places, where the highly educated, graduated specialists in Christian diakonia finds their living, and their work is put to good use. These are the places, where ecumenical diakonia can be fulfilled,

where working together sometimes from different Christian denominations could be a real blessing for a wide community. Cities are also places, where the social work meets diakonia, philanthropy and secular social commitment with Christian graciousness. But social workers and Christian deacons are not competitors, but rather challenging each other for more commitment in their working field. In many cases, the diaconal work of a local church defines how the society knows about their existence. This is a wide road how can they introduce themselves in the public consciousness and establish their reputation through passion for serving faithfully.⁷

Rediscovering the joy of diakonia by the local churches has brought back them to another basic root of their identity: reformation. Remembering the reformed fundamentals of Christian faith was also a necessity for the whole Church. Diaconal ecclesiology, within the protestant tradition, responds to fundamental positions of Reformed theology, like the hermeneutical principles of *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*, committing itself to clarifying the faith-base of diaconal action and at the same time to the principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda*, asking how the church should live according to God's call in its life and work in today's world. The reformers underlined that humankind's good deeds are a part of their Christian faith for the sake of one's neighbour, not for God's sake.⁸

Diakonia is a permanent obligation of the church, it's a spiritual and not just a materialbased charity-act. Diakonia belongs to the Church's being and identity.⁹ Is unfolded in every Christian's life, as a call to serve God, one's fellow human beings and as stewards of God's creation. Diakonia intrinsically belongs to the life of Christian congregations and implies service to local communities and wider societies. God's call was to be Church *in* the world, not *apart* from the world, so the theology of reformation emphasizes that Christians are not only Christians within the Church's worship and faith, or "God's realm", but they are called to live as responsible citizens in their respective societies, the so-called "worldly realm". Good deeds, service to the world is not only a practice within the Christian community, but, based on creation, belonging to the world. Diakonia never should be an instrument of conversion but has its own value and contributes to the witness about the good news in Christ through transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment.

Jürgen Moltmann emerged the holistic mission of the church: any separation between mission and diakonia would contradict the unity that is expressed in the mission of Jesus, which implies walking as he did, embracing the poor and the sick, and bringing them healing, salvation, hope and a future.¹⁰

I interviewed some reformed pastors about their experience of diaconal work with the local church-members both in rural and urban environment. One of my questions was: which biblical text gave the most influence and inspiration in the local church where they are serving about diakonia? The typical answer was *the parable of the Good Samaritan*. One of the pastors gave explanation how the local church-members understood the message of this parable. He took the parable from a perspective of diaconal management, so the Samaritan can rightly be considered as the first diaconic manager in the teaching of Jesus. He perceives his situation correctly and does rightly: he is touched by the brokenness and suffering of the victim, he reacts and organizes support. The Good Samaritan is even taking on the role of the financial controller. He brings the injured man to the inn; he gives money to the innkeeper and indicates that he will come to see whether there is more need of his assistance. So, the conclusion was the need for professional organization of diakonia.

Another interesting answer came from a very different approach according to the Bible passage, which was Exodus 18, the story of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses. And the lesson what they have learned from this bible-study was that Jethro's advice to Moses provides concrete steps to resolving the people's problems. According to verse 16, Moses is helping people to solve their problems. In the original Hebrew text, the word *shaphat* means *to judge*, which refers to Moses' role of making a decision to solve disputes. The somewhat loose use of the word here implies the sense of mediating to arrive at an acceptable solution to the issue at hand. Jethro's advice are: Moses continues to stand between God and the people (literally being "for the people before God") in the sense of being mediator or deacon (v. 19); a set of guidelines indicating the people's ethical duties and responsibilities to be formulated (v. 20); organize a leadership structure by identifying leaders for a small group of ten to a large group of a thousand (v. 21), who shall decide on minor cases (v. 22). Moses will then only have to deal with larger issues; this way his burden could be minimized. The result of which, according to Jethro, would be an experience of peace for the people (v. 23). As a result, they came to the conclusion that text tells the story of unity between faith and organization.

The institutional diaconal work of the Hungarian Reformed Church-Districts

The institutional diaconal work was established to work with professional and welltrained graduates in several geographical areas of the country with the try to cover all parts of diakonia. The reality what became from this endurance are major diaconal centers in the most population density cities. The benefit of this organizational act was the differentiation of Christian diaconal work. One of the results in institutional diaconal work is the foundation some kind of diaconal culture. By understanding Christian diaconal work as a culture, Christian values such as mercy and justice are strengthened, attitude is shaped by empathy, and introduces the idea not only of helping people in need, but also of influencing society and contemporary culture as a whole. These institutions have faced a number of challenges which came to people's life after the collapse of communism: liberalization of the economy, globalization, and demographic change. The changes in the economy have increased the risk of poverty for the socially disadvantaged, and an ageing population founded itself in need for some help. As the contemporary society slowly became a postmodern one in Eastern European countries, Christian diaconal work contributes significantly to the image of the Church. Christian social engagement is becoming increasingly important for the visibility of the church. As an idealistic goal would be for these institutions to contribute both to social cohesion and to the preservation of the Christian roots of the modern welfare state.

Understandably, at the institutional level of Christian diaconal work we met the parallel, the secular social work financed by the state or by donations of individuals. Soon, at the institutional level, the Church needed a special diaconal profile by which can be distinguished from social work. There were voices who claimed that there is no need for that, and because the Hungarian Reformed Church is a minority in nationality and confession, probably would better to give the whole space to the social work, which is a bit easier financially supported. Others were arguing next to the uniqueness of Christian diaconal work. There were two standpoints in this discussion among church-leaders, pastors, and church-members. Some sad that there is no specific Christian way of helping, the help is Christian in and of itself and does not need any "baptism", because it is human to help others. In a secular society, Christian values, like respect, dignity,

and the unique value of each human life, have become common standards for social work and health care. Representatives of this position pointed out that there is no specific Christian professionalism.

The opposite position argued for a specific Christian profile of Christian diaconal institutions. There are very different methods of describing this: descriptions of central ethical standards such as the mercy of God, by which quality of diaconal action should be characterized, or of dimensions of the Christian anthropology that should shape diaconal action. A basic pillar of ensuring a Christian profile in diaconal institutions is the personal attachment of employees to the Christian faith. Being a deacon or deaconess means to dedicate the whole life for serving God in a very particular way, it's a lifestyle, and the connection between professional help and faithful motivation it's a primary thing. But what they have faced with their opinion is that the demographic change and the declining numbers of active membership in the Church make it increasingly difficult to hire only church members in the diaconal institutions. They came to the conclusion of shifting the focus on organizational identity by having Christian staff members to a focus on aspects of organizational identity by having a Christian organizational culture.

Such a 'diaconal corporate culture' is rooted in Christian faith and Christian ethics, it is expressed in Christian guidelines and mission statements, and it is lived out in daily routines and practices. It includes the way members interact with each other and encounter those who seek help and advice, how they create rituals, the symbols they employ, the way they deal with limitations, the rites of passage they use in case of clients or employees, the way they decorate elder homes or children's houses, and how they celebrate Sundays and Christian holydays. As a basic management task in diaconal institutions is to enable such a diaconal profile and to involve the employees in the responsibility to create a vivid diaconal culture.¹¹

One of the employees from an elder home confessed, that the most important aspect is that the leaders serve as a model. If they do not model, then the profile is not authentic. Others mention the need for 'anchor persons.' Christian diaconal organizational culture is anchored in the professional practice of this person. From them a morning devotion, a prayer at the bedside of a sick person or a blessing for a dying person is an authentic part of their spirituality. Thereby, they provide a model for others and orientation in how to perform these rituals.

However, it is important that these anchor persons can confess why they do what they do. There needs to be a personal story and witness why it is helpful to work this way.¹²

It is also a challenge for Christian diaconal institutions the secular social work-system. They clearly influenced by secular values in social care and welfare such as human rights, equal treatment, user involvement etc. This led to a discussion between the biblical and theological foundations on the one hand and the secular social care values on the other hand. The upcoming times will give an answer in these debates. Maybe a good diaconal profile is about a constant reflection and communication work and not about finding and implementing the right diaconal profile.

The flagship institution of the Hungarian Reformed Church is *Diakonia Christian Foundation*. The origins come from the main German institution. Their mission is to improve the quality of life of people living in disadvantaged circumstances and to provide social and spiritual support to those in vulnerable situations. They run home care for the elderly, retirement home and children's programme. Home care for the elderly includes rental of caregiving equipment, social integration, spiritual support, prayer, Bible reading, advice to family members on home care methods, basic care at home, such as general personal hygiene, community services, accompanying the elderly to the doctor and pharmacy, assistance, and supervision in home treatments. They are present in nine cities, where the population represent Hungarian minorities too. Children's programme includes a day center for Roma and socially disadvantaged children. The main aim of the project is social-educational inclusion. The impact is improved school results, better behavior, clean appearance, consciousness of the importance of hygiene, awareness of rules, participation of the parents, acceptance by the school and the local community.¹³

The *Bonus Pastor Foundation* since its 1993 foundation exists to help those seeking rescue and recovery from addiction, including alcohol, drug, gambling, and sexual addictions, their families, and dependents. Christian faith is at the heart of how they address through their five main initiatives: prevention, therapy, aftercare, professional training, and spiritual growth. They view addiction as a problem that affects the whole family, so they strongly encourage family members to participate in the therapy programs. Their purpose to share Christian faith with the clients but do not make faith in Christ a pre-requisite

for participation in any of the therapy programs. Anyone who asks help with problems related to addiction is welcomed into the programs. In the recovery from addiction, they are focusing on the personal growth and responsibility of the client. Working with addicts with a multidimensional intervention based on the needs of the individual and the severity of their problem: in some cases, outpatient care, in other situations they offer short or long residential care in the therapy programs. In both cases the professional staff uses a variety of methods: addiction counseling, psychotherapy, individual, parental, or family therapy, and therapeutic community. Therapy programs are supplemented by aftercare and prevention activities.¹⁴

One of the oldest associations among Hungarian Reformed Christians is *Christian Endeavor* or *Bethany Alliance*. Influences came from the awaking movements in the United States at the end of the 19th century.¹⁵ Since then, Bethany Alliance is represented by a strong fellowship and working as a closed community with their own operating rules. The Alliance raises sometimes criticism over the official Church-leading and emerging the conversion and the spiritual rebirth of every Church-member. They can only accept the conversion of a Christian by their own methodology and proclaim a Church which is rather confessional than national.

Several projects are running under the umbrella of the Alliance, such as: granny club, which is open to everyone who wishes to hear the Word of God, since the main purpose of the clubs is sharing the Gospel. The clubs often include sport activities, cooking, baking, trips. As a volunteer, it's possible to adopt a granny. The project offers monthly visit to elderly people who have a small pension and are in need of regular spiritual and financial support and food aid. The purpose of the project is to take Gods' Word to the houses of the Grannies, to offer them consolation and to listen to them. The project includes Bible reading, prayer, monthly food package, regular blood pressure and blood sugar measurements, house-cleaning, administrative issues, winter help (wood, gas, or electricity bill support).

The Onesimus project's aim is to promote and support the socialization of young people (integration into society and into a Christian community), to develop self-knowledge and selfesteem. The target group of the project is socially disadvantaged young people. The Dorcas Home is for educate orphaned, half-orphaned and socially disadvantaged children in a Christian family atmosphere.¹⁶

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Korean Socioecological Ethics in Mudeung Theology

Focusing on Hyun-Phil Lee's Barefoot Spirituality

Abstract

This paper explores the theological and ethical foundations of *Mudeung Theology* as a distinctive expression of Korean socioecological ethics. Rooted in the spirituality of Hyun-Phil Lee – known as the “Barefoot Spiritualist” – this tradition integrates self-emptying (kenosis) and social service (diakonia), shaped by Reformed faith, local culture, and ecological awareness. Against the backdrop of Korea’s rapid industrialization and ecological degradation, the study engages John Hart’s concept of socioecological ethics, emphasizing the interconnectedness of creation and society. By retrieving indigenous Christian expressions in Jeolla Province, *Mudeung Theology* emerges as a contextual theology addressing both ecological and social injustice. The paper highlights how spiritual figures like Lee embodied a creation-centered consciousness through radical humility, solidarity with the poor, and care for the more-than-human world. It argues that *Mudeung Theology* offers a meaningful theological response to the climate crisis and invites Korean churches to reimagine discipleship, justice, and sustainability in light of their own theological and cultural heritage.

Introduction

South Korea has experienced remarkable economic growth over the past few decades, propelling it into the ranks of global industrialized nations. However, this progress has come at a cost, with ecological degradation and social inequality becoming serious issues. For example, according to a 2021 survey by the International Energy Agency (IEA) published by the British newspaper *The Guardian*, the top 10% of income earners in each country emitted the most carbon per year, with the United States as the top emitter at 56.5 tons per year, and South Korea as the second largest at 40 tons per year. Furthermore, the carbon emissions from the purchases of the top 10 percent of South Korea's population amounted to about 13.7 tons of carbon per person per year, surpassing the United States. In contrast, the lowest 10% of South Korea's income earners emitted about 0.6 tons per person per year, a 23-fold difference from the top 10%.¹ Socioecological ethics, a theological system that emphasizes the interconnectedness of society and ecosystems, provides a lens through which to analyze and address this polarization.

Climate crisis is the most central threat to the sustainability of human societies and global ecosystems today, but knowledge of the scale and impacts of these changes remains uncertain. At the local level in particular, uncertainty is exacerbated by the interaction of variable ecosystems with other drivers of change, which can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities of marginalized local communities. Climate uncertainty is particularly acute in countries in regions such as South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, where extreme events such as cold snaps, heat waves, droughts, floods, wildfires, and typhoons intersect with the unequal impacts of capitalist expansion, demonstrating that ecological and socio-ethical issues are closely linked.

This shows that while global disasters seem to be universal, the damage they cause is discriminatory. Climate disruption amplifies all other injustices.² Therefore, its response and resolution will also need to be approached differently, considering the social dimensions of each region. To properly communicate the message of climate crisis, civil society needs to be approached in a way that is appropriate to their areas of concern, considering their sensibilities and priorities.³ For Christian communities and individuals, creation-centered consciousness approach seems particularly effective. This is because narratives in the biblical

tradition touch the hearts and minds of Christians. This, combined with the narratives of local communities, can be a powerful force for change.

One of them, Mudeung Theology is a concept that analyzes and organizes representative Christian faith traditions centered in Gwangju and Jeolla Province using the method of constructive theology⁴ to systematize the region's unique indigenous spirituality, which is characterized by self-emptying (kenosis) and social service (diakonia). The word "Mudeung" is also the name of a mountain that forms a national park in the center of Gwangju. Its etymological origin has a special meaning. As the word's meaning can be inferred from the Chinese characters, it refers to "a state of complete equality, in which there is no discrimination or class conflict, and even the concept of equality has disappeared."⁵

The relationship with society that has emerged through the Christian faith can be thought of in terms of two criteria: identity, represented by church ethics, and communication, which is the main concern of public theology. Mudeung Theology is a harmony between the monastic spirituality of kenosis (self-emptying), which emphasizes the former, and the participatory spirituality of diakonia (sharing, service, or social work), which emphasizes the latter. Throughout the history of Christianity, the church has remained vibrant when it has balanced a continual affirmation and strengthening of identity through times of solitude and prayer, modeled after the life and practice of Jesus, with good works of service and care for the marginalized and vulnerable in the world. It emphasized "theology-in-context," a hallmark of socioecological ethics that highlights mutuality and solidarity across boundaries and divides of race, gender, rich and poor, occupation, class, region, age, and so on. The key figures who shaped Mudeung Theology also shared a common Christian identity and a lifelong commitment to the public dimensions of faith.

How, then, can Mudeung Theology represent a current of theology that reflects the circumstances of the region? Regionally, Gwangju and Jeolla Province have a rich and diverse heritage of Christian mission and indigenization. It is a land where American southern Presbyterian missionaries sowed the seeds of sacrifice and service as they combined their professional ministries in healthcare and education to bring the gospel of the Reformed tradition to the region. And the result has been a committed participatory faith of local pastors and congregations. At the same time, a distinctive movement of spontaneous spirituality emerged, of which Hyun-Phil Lee, known as the barefoot spiritualist, was a prominent figure,

and whose work has been passed down through Donggwangwon, Korea's first Reformed Church monastic community, and Guilwon, the region's leading social welfare organization.

Hyun-Phil Lee was born on January 28, 1913, in Yonghari, Doam-myeon, Hwasun-gun, Southern Jeolla Province, the second son of a farmer, and lived until March 18, 1964. His barefoot walk, a symbol of his poverty, led people to call him the "Barefoot Saint" or "Korean Francis" in later years. He lived a life of absolute faith, faithfully following the teachings of the Bible, humbling himself, and loving his neighbors, a life that went largely unnoticed at the time, even being accused of a "mountain sect" heretic, until the publication of his biography titled *Barefoot Saint, Hyun-Phil Lee* in 1978, written by Rev. Doo-Sub Uhm. Jong-Soon Cha and Jae-Hyun Kim also conducted research on him, mainly excavating and organizing the primary sources that remained in Donggwangwon. Through the process of collecting Lee's letters, diaries, sermons, personal confessions, and handwritten notes and categorizing them thematically and chronologically, the researchers confess that they saw in him the possibility of revitalizing the Korean Church, which was losing its spiritual power.⁶

The spirituality that emerges from the life of Hyun-Phil Lee, as analyzed in my book, *Mudeung Theology: A Spirituality of Self-Emptying and Social Service*, involves voluntary participation, ascetic discipline, and the ethical practices of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in the spirit of a committed disciples of Jesus. It is also characterized by an emphasis on individual spiritual experience and a caution against spiritual pride. In addition, Korean socioecological ethics is characterized by the formation of communities for the purpose of relief and sharing to help various marginalized groups of society, and solidarity with various institutions such as churches and hospitals in a local community.⁷

This paper will serve as a journey through the historical and cultural terrain of Korea to unravel the elaborate formation process of socioecological ethics. Starting from the unique narrative of Korea's own theological traditions and assets, it will examine the foundations that have shaped the ethical considerations that theologically define the relationship between Koreans and creation. This constructive theological journey goes beyond mere historical analysis and seeks to discern the distinctive spiritual characteristics that were shaped by the early missionary encounters with the gospel and the process of conflict and collision. Through this tracing process, we hope to see how the Korean version

of socioecological ethics, in which social and ecological ethics are closely linked, has influenced the Christian commitment to preserving the sanctity of creation.

However, this research is not limited to retrospectives. Rather, the goal of this paper is to move toward a future-oriented discourse as we contemplate new challenges that have captured our attention. In doing so, we will consider theological and ethical solutions for creating a sustainable future. This is a call to theological reflection and ethical discernment, with the intention of providing a theological roadmap for navigating the nuanced interplay between social justice, ecological justice, and our divine mandate as responsible caretakers of the earth. To this end, this paper will examine the emphasis of socioecological ethics and its relevance to Mudeung Theology as a Korean application; the origins and formation of Mudeung Theology and its meaning as a localized theology; the life and spirituality of Mudeung Theology's main figure, Hyun-Phil Lee, and his theological practice; and finally, the contemporary significance of Mudeung Theology as a Korean socioecological ethics and its theological implications for Korean churches.

Exploration of Korean Socioecological Ethics

Highlighting of Socioecological Ethics

From a Christian ethical standpoint, socioecological ethics is an ethical approach that exemplifies the inseparable relationship between social and ecological justice. John Hart, professor emeritus of Christian ethics at Boston University, was one of the first scholars to introduce and develop this branch of the discipline. In his book *Cosmic Commons: Spirit, Science & Space*, Hart describes the place of socioecological ethics in his own academic journey as follows.

I conceived and developed the terms and concepts "socioecology," "socioecological," and "socioecological ethics" several years ago to integrate my lifelong interest and involvement, as an activist and then as an activist teacher-scholar, in issues of social justice and eco-justice. I have used socioecological

ethics over the years, in my university courses and in public lectures that I have presented in diverse venues. Several of my doctoral students at Boston University have incorporated the theory and practice of socioecological ethics into their respective doctoral dissertations, with appropriate attribution, and into their writing, public lectures and sermons, professional work in academic settings, and contextual community engagement. The elaboration of both concepts in *Cosmic Commons* provides for one and all a written source to stimulate consideration of the concept and its use to promote the well-being of the planet (including biotic and abiotic constituents thereof) and people.⁸

To develop this concept, Hart begins with an explanation of socioecology, which he defines as the study of the interdependent and integrated relationships within a particular human community: its relationships with other human communities in time and place, across time and generations, with distant human communities locally or globally, and with diverse biological communities in the context of a planet that provides common ground and shared biological habitats and landscapes. Socioecology considers the social complexity and dynamics of human communities within the dynamics of biological communities and the dynamics of the global ecosystem shared by all species.⁹ The socioecology he describes is different from Murry Bookchin's social ecology, also known as eco-commune-ism. It is less radical, focusing on peace and reconciliation, and more centered on the relationship between humans and biological communities.

Hart goes on to explain the term socioecological. It focuses on and considers the holistic context, the interrelatedness of human communities interacting with each other in different social and ecological contexts, and the development of ecological relationships between humans and other species. It also integrates the interactions between humans and the Earth's ecosystems in an ongoing effort to ensure ecological justice for species while promoting the well-being of humans and the Earth's ecosystems.¹⁰ This emphasizes interrelatedness and justice more than the description of socioecology and is well-suited to the practicalities of promoting both social and ecological justice.

In his subsequent conceptualization of socioecological ethics, Hart describes it as the simultaneous implementation of social and ecological ethics through humanly responsible practices and projects for the well-being of society and the planet. It offers a dynamic theory and praxis that is dialogically integrated and dynamic within social and ecological contexts.¹¹ It provides a relational,

theoretical, and rhetorical foundation for human right action that interrelates and integrates social justice for human communities, ecological justice for all living things, and well-being for the Earth. Socioecological ethics aims to provide a way to ensure the common good, responsible use of commons goods, and redistribution of common goods based on the common good to meet the needs of all segments of society.¹² According to him, it emphasizes the careful treatment of air, water, soil, forests, wetlands, oceans, and so on as commons that exist through God's act of creation and that all living beings have the right to use equally without discrimination, by moving away from materialistic thinking and considering the wonders of creation.

While humans seem to name and value the material entities in creation, it is necessary to clarify who is doing the valuing in light of the Christian faith of creation. The idea that all beings in an ecosystem have instrumental value for humans is certainly different from biblical teaching and comes from anthropocentrism based on utilitarianism. Christian perspective, on the other hand, requires recognizing that all beings in an ecosystem have an inherent value given to them by the Creator. This is different from the intrinsic value emphasized by ecocentrism and is closer to the traditional Christian understanding of the universe, the sacramental commons.

In Larry Rasmussen's summary assessment, God, as expressed in various ideas in the Reformed tradition, has been disconnected from much of nature and reinserted into human history. Similarly, human beings have been increasingly disconnected from non-human beings and reinserted into history, a dominant mode of "destructive dualism" that has shrunk the sphere of salvation by separating non-human creatures from salvation.¹³ As a remedy, he invokes and applies the ancient tradition of seeing the earth as a sacrament, revealing God's presence through visible and tangible signs, just as the water used in the Lord's Supper or baptism, or the water in a river, is the same substance.¹⁴

Hart utilizes the concept of sacramental commons as a theological foundation for socioecological ethics. He emphasizes the role of creation in connecting humans to God, saying that through the sacraments, the Spirit of creation, the Holy Spirit, leads humans into "moments filled with grace by an elevated awareness of God's presence and participation."¹⁵ In contemplating Christ, he writes, "God became incarnate on earth (among all creatures), experiencing both his humanity as a creature made primarily by his hands and his divinity as

Creator. God's spirit permeates the earth because God has embraced the finite earth within his infinite being."¹⁶ As such, his socioecological ethics is a creation-centered consciousness that emphasizes the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of creation.

It also provides a premise for promoting the common good of human beings and the common good of creation through dialogue among diverse cultures that differ in concept and context. Socioecological ethics activates both care for creation and care for community. It is a process of commitment to building community that brings about both consciousness and behavioral change in each context, Hart explains.¹⁷ As such, it is an integrative discipline that combines the transformative nature of sociology, the relationality of ecology, and the analytical methods of ethics, and is capable of embracing both the transcendent and the immanent, the universal and the particular.

Socioecological ethics is a branch of study that explores the relationship between humans and ecosystems, premised on the broader interdisciplinary study of theology, ethics, and ecology. The field can encompass a variety of disciplines, including sociology, economics, biology, and even areas of study in the arts. It is an effort to move away from traditional self-centered justice and toward creation-centered justice, which is a holistic way of studying human wisdom to achieve both sustainable and just societies and healthy ecosystems. As Rasmussen points out, it asks us to overcome "the failure of reciprocity that is a major flaw of modern life,"¹⁸ and to struggle in solidarity for the survival of the inclusive community of life. In Korean context, I think this approach is particularly applicable when people want to understand Korean culture and religious traditions.

Relevance to Mudeung Theology

While traditional values are still influential, South Korea's rapid modernization has brought about a shift in values, with economic success often taking precedence over issues of ecological degradation. However, growing awareness of the importance of sustainability is calling for a reexamination of these priorities, and contemporary socio-political and economic dynamics have brought new challenges to the church and theology in South Korea. Rapid industrialization

and urbanization have led to the destruction of ecosystems, pollution, and the loss of wildlife habitat, sparking calls for sustainable development and ecological conservation. In response, grassroots movements, environmental civil society organizations, and policy initiatives have emerged in Korean society to promote ecological sustainability and ecological justice.

Nevertheless, ecological concern for creation has yet to fully permeate the foundational theological discourse of contemporary Korean religions, including Christianity. Efforts to collect and reconstruct socioecological spiritual traditions through the methods of constructive theology also seem to be challenging in the specific life contexts and church realities of Korea. However, the current generation is facing unprecedented challenges to the global ecosystem, urging us to move beyond superficial gestures such as encouraging recycling, including occasional prayers for the earth in worship, turning church gardens into bird sanctuaries, or sporadic discussions of the ecological interconnectedness of creation. If we are serious about addressing this issue, it may require a critique and reassessment of our entrenched consciousness and behaviors.¹⁹

How, then, can the formulation of Mudeung Theology through socioecological reflection build a common platform for a sustained and committed movement for the restoration of creation within Korea's unique spirituality system and the creation-centered realm of Christianity? This question is one of the key challenges for Christian theology in the ecological context of Korea, especially in light of criticisms that suggest that certain strains of Western Christianity are responsible for ecological culpability.

With this perspective in mind, *Mudeung Theology* focuses on the mid-nineteenth century, from the emergence of Donghak in 1860 to the late twentieth century, represented by the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Movement in 1980, as the formative period of Mudeung Theology.²⁰ This period was the starting point of Korea's modernization, when the crisis of Western imperialist aggression and colonial domination rooted in the capitalist system was intensified. It was also a period when the demand for human rights was at its peak as economic growth became the mainstay of the country's development, and therefore, social and ecological justice issues were raised simultaneously. Under these circumstances, Christian gospel, which offers salvation that encompasses both spiritual and material realms, met with Korea's diverse faith traditions. Through a process of collision, confrontation, and reconciliation, Christianity was indigenized and

laid a groundwork for the formation of an indigenous spiritual tradition that advocated equality and liberation, centered in Gwangju and Jeolla Province. In addition, socioecological ethics, which emphasizes ethics-in-context, served as an important theological principle in the formation of Mudeung Theology, and although the sites of theological formation were different, their theological orientation was found to be quite similar.

Socioecological Ethics in Mudeung Theology

The Origins and Formation of Mudeung Theology

The church's view of the world is shaped in largely by the theological emphases that have guided Christian behavior throughout the ages. However, theology should not be confined within a single overarching doctrine or principle, nor should it be limited to the emphases of biblical times. To maintain its essence as a practical discipline for pastoral application, theology must continually embrace diverse perspectives and evolve with sensitivity to the context of the situation. Only with this foundational understanding can we construct a theology that is relevant to the times, and proceed with sound theologizing in a way that is conducive to achieving the vibrant church and Christian life that theology seeks. At the same time, theology must remain grounded and in constant engagement with its context to be historically and culturally illuminating as it fulfills its sacred responsibility to care for creation.

As mentioned earlier, I have limited the period of formation of Mudeung theology to 120 years from the mid-19th century, which can be considered the beginning of Korean modernization, to the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Movement, which is considered a symbol of democratization. To briefly summarize the spirit of faith and life shared by missionaries of the Southern Presbyterian Church of USA, Korean pastors, and homegrown spiritualists who were active in Gwangju and Jeolla Province during this period, we can say that self-emptying (kenosis) and social service (diakonia) are the two most important aspects of their faith and work. The crucifixion of Jesus exemplifies the convergence of these

two fundamental elements: total self-emptying through death, and universal salvation through the love of sharing and service to all creation.

Philippians 2:7, 9 says that "... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human," but "God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name," which is implicit in the gospel. This constitutes the core of the gospel and is celebrated forever wherever Christ's salvation is proclaimed and lived out in the love of sharing, serving, and giving. These words sound more unrealistic and courageous than ever for modern people today, but they call us to step outside of our current cultural framework and look at creation in a new way. They can be expressed concretely in the following questions. Can we really look beyond our own interests to the interests of others? How can we empty ourselves so that the whole creation can thrive, not just our own world? These are questions of salvation and liberation that we will work out in the future, but we are not alone in this endeavor, and we are encouraged by the experience of Christians who have gone before us in thinking about and practicing them.

In times of trial and challenge, including Japanese occupation, Korean War, and military dictatorship, Korean churches have been a beacon of resistance against injustice and oppression, guiding the nation toward a nation of peace where "justice rolls down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). The spirit of Mudeung, deeply rooted in Gwangju and Jeolla provinces, is one of those currents, as it strives to bring about the kingdom of peace and liberation by leading to greater equality in the face of discrimination, hatred, exclusion, and injustice. Tracing back to its origins, we find a tradition of Christian practical spirituality represented by figures such as Young-Mo You, Se-Jong Lee, Heung-Jong Choi, Sun-Myung Kang, and Hyun-Phil Lee. What they have in common is their efforts to reconcile Christianity with Korean sentiment and local circumstances, and their practical expressions of it, which helped transform the gospel into a Korean faith.

For example, during the Japanese occupation, leaders like Heung-Jong Choi and Sun-Myung Kang actively resisted colonial oppression and advocated for justice and equality within the Korean church. Similarly, during the Korean War, Hyun-Phil Lee's spirit of peace and love of life inspired countless Christians in the region to exercise their capacity for self-sacrifice and reconciliation in the face of adversity. These examples illustrate how the Korean church has demonstrated its

practical faith in difficult times, seamlessly weaving the essence of Christianity into the fabric of Korean society, enriching both faith and culture.

Born in 1880, Se-Jong Lee, Hyun-Phil Lee's teacher, embraced Christian faith at the relatively late age of 40. His extraordinary spiritual discipline of extreme penance, austerity, and penitence, coupled with his firm belief in the teachings of the Bible, greatly influenced the spiritual currents that comprise Mudeung Theology and touched the lives of many. As a young man, he lived in Dengwang-ri, Doam-myeon, Hwasun-gun, Jeollanam-do, not far from Gwangju, and accumulated considerable wealth through his diligent labor and wise management of various businesses in neighboring villages. After converting to Christianity, Se-Jong felt compelled to align his life with the teachings of the Bible, and he gave up all his possessions and forgave debts to help those in need. He then retreated to a remote mountain, sustained himself on wormwood and flour, and devoted himself to studying and reciting the Bible.²¹

Particularly emphasized in his teaching was a spirit of altruism that echoed the biblical principles of relief and sharing. "Relief can truly embody its essence when it is given out of one's own means," he preached. It is only when one lacks the means to support oneself that giving is truly worthwhile. Lee's behavior contrasts with the story of the rich man who was instructed by Jesus to sell all his possessions and give to the poor (Mark 10:17-31). Like the prophet Elijah, who relied on God's help with meager provisions during his hermitage in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:1-16), Lee trusted in God's providence even as he lived frugally. His teachings are consistent with Jesus' words on almsgiving in Matthew 6:1-4, where Jesus emphasizes giving in secret and not seeking recognition. Lee embodied self-emptying faith and selfless devotion based on biblical teachings through his life.

He never received any formal religious instruction or consulted any books; he developed his spirituality by reading the Bible and praying deeply. Although he didn't know Francis of Assisi, Se-Jong Lee nevertheless emulated his spirit, treating all living things, from animals and plants to insects, with deep love and overflowing compassion. Many anecdotes tell of him gently stroking grass and trees along the way, engaging in affectionate conversations with nature. "Human greed has threatened your existence many times, but God's mercy has preserved you, so you should be grateful for the grace of your Creator," he would say while caressing the blades of grass.²²

He was known for his ecological empathy, noting that if he saw an arrowroot or grass blocking his path, he would not step on it, but instead replant it, and if it was accidentally damaged, he would express deep regret. He recognized the threat of venomous snakes and centipedes because of human behavior and would carefully move them. He believed it was humanity's duty to guide these creatures to safe places away from human influence rather than eliminate them. Se-Jong's actions reveal his deep awareness of the suffering of creatures caused by human transgressions and his deep creation-centered consciousness that emphasizes humanity's responsibility to reduce such harm.²³

Barefoot Spiritualist, Hyun-Phil Lee

Inheriting and developing the faith of his teacher, Se-Jong Lee, Hyun-Phil Lee developed a comprehensive understanding of the teachings of neighborly love along with an awareness of creation, saying, "All things are parts of my body, and humankind and my neighbors are my body."²⁴ He rejected worldly respect and praise, preferring to be called "worn-out shoes," and strongly refused to be called "teacher" when his students called him. He considered himself a sinner and refused to eat at the table when offered food, preferring to eat on the floor.²⁵ He never wore woolen clothing throughout his life, instead weaving his own clothes. He fasted frequently, and when he did eat, he ate only one meal a day and avoided eating in public. He held the Word of God in the highest regard, and his life revolved around obedience to God. It is said that when he discerned God's will during prayer and meditation, he would immediately put it into action.²⁶

His time in prayer had a profound effect on those who met him, as if he had received inspiration and revelation from God. When he climbed mountains to pray, he would take off his shoes and often walk barefoot, and if someone came to mind while he was praying, he would walk barefoot, even in winter, through the snow, to visit them without delay and give them what little food he had. Living in the cold with only one garment, without heat, and subsisting mainly on wormwood, grass roots, flour, and water, he shared the abundant love and joy of walking with Christ even in sickness and infirmity.²⁷

His steadfast obedience to God's Word drew his students and others to listen to him. His ascetic spirituality and dedication to obedience and practice

were inseparable from the challenges of his time. He was active during times of national turmoil, including the Japanese occupation, the Yeosoon People's Rebellion following the division of North and South Korea, and the Korean War, and considered caring for the weak and marginalized to be the most important way to live out the love of Jesus. This spirit formed the essence of Mudeung Theology.²⁸

"Farming is the work of those who know God and nature," Hyun-Phil said, and he regarded it as a divine command from God. He followed natural farming methods and did not use any chemical fertilizers, and he considered farming as a prayer to God by uniting with nature. He confessed "Labor is prayer, and prayer is sincere when it comes from labor. Eating is a prayer, and digging is a prayer to hear the voice of God."²⁹ He recommended that farming be done with love and not greed, therein an insight that came from his careful observation of nature. The following quotes reflect Hyun-Phil Lee's love for animals and plants.

We can see how much nature changes when we leave it alone. Plants should be treated without greed; what is done with greed is ugly to look at; they do well if left alone, so how much better will they do if done with true love? If you do it out of greed, it looks bad, but if you do it out of love, it will be as good as if you did it out of love. Love requires true compassion and understanding, and people mistake greed for love, thinking it's love when it's just trying to get a lot. They think they're only keeping the animals because they love them, but when they get sick, they don't know what the cause is. You're just raising the animals.... Farming is the work of someone who has no self, no world, and knows only nature and God. Farmers should know the nature of plants according to the providence of God, so that they can receive the favor of nature, and they should never disturb the nature of plants in creation.³⁰

He practiced and taught the love of life that he had learned from his teacher's behavior. He never killed insects; if he saw a snake while traveling with his followers, he would pick it up with a stick and carry it away; if a mouse entered his house, he would open the door and let it out; if he had lice on his body, he would turn his clothes inside out and shake them off. He also walked slowly to avoid stepping on ants or earthworms on the side of the road, and if there were arrowroot vines growing in the direction of the road, he would move them so that they would not be crushed by people or animals as they passed by.³¹ He

considered all beings in creation to be connected to God. He established a Korean version of socioecological ethics based on creation-centered consciousness.

Doo-Sub Uhm, who studied lives and practices of Se-Jong Lee and Hyun-Phil Lee, introduced them to Korean churches. He characterizes their unique indigenous spirituality as a unified faith that is both immanent and transcendent. However, rapid economic growth, the influence of the Western prosperity gospel, and the subsequent development of a faith that seeks only temporal well-being have weakened the spiritual capacity of the Korean church, gradually leading to a dualization of faith and life. He explained that "Korean spirituality" was formed through people who devoted themselves to religious life, like searching for hidden treasure in a field, and recounted his own long journey to fulfill his spiritual longings.³² Reflecting on Hyun-Phil's reality-centered faith, he shared the following anecdote with his disciples.

"The only miracle greater than the resurrection of Jesus is that I now believe the Word," Lee said. "The blood that was shed on Calvary in Judea two thousand years ago cannot save me. It is only the blood that drips down on my sins, which I cannot control, that saves me." When one of the students asked in excitement, "How can I see that blood?" he said, "I can only see it if I give my blood and my flesh for the Lord," he said, sitting back down with a serious look on his face.³³

This led to his thorough sense of sinfulness, which was not a recognition of the bondage of sin, but of human nature, which is the realization of human weakness before God.³⁴ Hyun-Phil Lee considered himself a sinner and wore beggar's clothes all his life, went barefoot even in winter, and even on his deathbed he said, "I am a sinner; do not put my body in a coffin, but let it be laid out on the road where many people walk."

All his instruction for his disciples was not just preaching, but concrete, real-life examples of how to live their lives, sometimes involving them in service, such as sharing foods, farming, and nursing the sick. Doo-Sub Uhm pointed out that "Only by practicing and living this much can we cry out to society and make an impact. There is a bloody path left behind by Hyun-Phil Lee..., and this path is silently calling for repentance among Korean Protestants."³⁵

Jong-Soon Cha, who followed Doo-Sub Uhm in studying Lee's spirituality, found a unique feature of Honam Christian faith in his research on Christian spiritualists from Gwangju and Jeolla Province, which he summarized as "the

unity of faith and works.” According to him, Hyun-Phil Lee’s life itself was the gospel and the word. To preach the gospel is to demonstrate the word of truth with one’s own life. He introduced Hyun-Phil as a person who realized the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and showed it as a person.³⁶

He also explained that the spirituality of the region is ecumenical, transcending denominations, and is characterized by the harmony of spirituality and life practice. Jong-Soon Cha singled out Hyun-Phil Lee as a representative figure among them, recognizing how he pursued a broad spirituality without staying in the institutional church, and how he actively engaged in social service based on his deep sense of sin and repentance. In fact, Hyun-Phil had close relationships with Shepping and Florence Root, who were missionaries sent by the Southern PC of USA at the time, and cooperated with Korean pastors Heung-Jong Choi and Soon-Myung Kang to help Hansen’s disease patients, tuberculosis patients, and orphans, and actively practiced Christ’s love in solidarity with everyone.³⁷

While researching the spirituality of Se-Jong Lee and Hyun-Phil Lee, Jae-Hyun Kim attempted to re-systematize the primary materials of Hyun-Phil Lee stored in Donggwangwon, along with the materials of Doo-Sub Uhm and Jong-Soon Cha, and published *Hyun-Phil Lee, Spiritual Teacher Revisited in the Age of Abundance*. According to him, Hyun-Phil’s teachings could be categorized into four main parts: “the love and character of Jesus,” “the ideas of poverty, asceticism, and chastity,” “relief and educational work,” and “confession of repentance and humility.”³⁸ Although his categorization is based on the content of various traces of Lee’s writings, it can be used as a source for discovering the characteristics of kenosis and diakonia that underlie Mudeung Theology.

To summarize some of the characteristics that can be found in Hyun-Phil Lee, a representative figure of Korean socioecological ethics practice, are as follows. A creation-centered spirituality that closely resembles Francis of Assisi’s, as he followed the teachings of his teacher, Se-Jong Lee, had an intimacy with God’s heart to love and respect all life in creation. He urged his disciples to keep their funerals and tombs simple until the last moment of their lives, wary of any personal righteousness or merit that might be revealed through active acts of love and sacrificial service. This was the Diakonian realization of the self-emptying and humbling that is the essence of the Christian faith, a life that sought only to imitate Jesus and exalt him alone.³⁹

Conclusion

At a time when we speak of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and look forward to the creativity of science and technology driven by generative artificial intelligence, why do we pay attention to a century-old figure, the barefoot spiritualist Hyun-Phil Lee? Furthermore, where is the resonance of his teachings and life in the current society that warns of multiple disasters due to climate crisis and ecological destruction? It has been many years since we began to sound the alarm over the quantitative and qualitative degeneration of the Korean church, calling for a spiritual awakening of humility and penance out of a sense of urgency in the face of the crisis, but we are drifting adrift, having lost our faith compass due to our inability to discern the times and desensitization. Although he comes from a rural background with no public education, his pure passion for Christ, "digging deep and keeping on digging,"⁴⁰ is timeless and makes him a role model for all.

Socioecological ethics presents a new form of ethics for us in the post-covid era to move away from selfish and anthropocentric ethics and restore creation-centered consciousness for symbiosis and coexistence.⁴¹ As can be seen in Doo-Sub Uhm's evaluation of Hyun-Phil, socioecological ethics is an ethical consciousness that connects with the life of Hyun-Phil Lee, who can be said to be a Korean spiritualist who fuses transcendence and immanence. Therefore, Mudeung Theology is a representative example of Korean socioecological ethics.

If the role of theology is to discover the grounds for hope in the current emergency that threatens not only human society but also God's creation, Mudeung Theology holds ample promise. This is because it has a clear orientation toward facing harsh realities, evaluating their implications theologically, and pursuing the kingdom of God based on love for God and our neighbor, including creation. As stated in the introduction to *Mudeung Theology*, the process of shaping Mudeung Theology through the academic process of constructive theology, based on missional church theory and ethnographic methods, has a firm goal of becoming "a new stream of theology and ethics that actively responds to the challenges of climate crisis and looming ecological collapse brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic."⁴²

If theology is to move beyond theory and move away from anthropocentrism to serve as a kind of guide for the common good of future generations and

ecosystems, grounded in the biblical faith of creation, it must turn its attention to selfless, self-emptying living, following Jesus' teaching that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). We also need to return to the practice of active hospitality and sharing, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12), a teaching shared by most religions. This is possible when we embrace the spirit of Mudeung, where there is no place for discrimination (Colossians 3:11).

The church needs to re-evaluate the signs of the times considering God's Word at this time. We are not seeking utopia that exists only in the realm of imagination, but rather, as Mudeung Theology seeks, a real kingdom of "righteousness, peace, and joy" (Romans 14:17). Many churches in the West and Korean churches need to reflect on how they have been deceived by materialism and neglected to care for the marginalized and God's creation and strive to make the Lord's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. As Rachel Carson points out, "If we remain silent, there will be no peace [in the global church] Life is a miracle beyond human comprehension.... We must not lose our sense of awe.... What we need now is humility."⁴³

The fact that some churches and Christians are socially problematic cannot be a reason for our religious laxity. There are still pastors and Christians today who share the heart of Christ in a lowly, unassuming way, like giving a bowl of cold water to the least of these. Evidence is not far away that the wisdom and courage to overcome hopeless situations without blaming others, without getting caught up in negative thinking, comes only through the Holy Spirit.

Our common human crisis may be an opportunity to unite humanity, transcending religion and culture. I believe that God's beautiful dream for the universe in the beginning can be manifested as a new dream through humanity in God's image. I look forward to seeing more people like Hyun-Phil Lee, who walked barefoot and silently on the path of love to practice the life of Christ through word and prayer in one region of the Korean peninsula, so that the imagination of a creation-centered kingdom of God where social and ecological justice are harmoniously achieved can be realized.

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- 2 Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change* (MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 124.
- 3 Hyo-Jae Cho, *The End of the Carbon Society* (Kyongki-do: 21st Century Books, 2020), 40. Framing the ecological crisis in terms of human rights, the author challenges the "indiscriminate spraying of a single message to an imagined public" and proposes an effective way to find "channels of communication that recognize human empathy and are responsive to differences in experience." For Christians, this is where indigenous spirituality, with its biblical traditions and the unique stories of local churches, can play an effective role.
- 4 Constructive theology refers to the redefinition or reconceptualization of what has historically been known as systematic theology. The rationale for this reevaluation stems from the idea that in systematic theology, theologians seek to develop a coherent theory that encompasses the various doctrines within a tradition (e.g., Christology, eschatology, creationism, etc.). A potential problem underlying such work is that when constructing a theological system, certain elements are "forced" into the presuppositional structure or omitted entirely in order to maintain coherence throughout the system. In response to this perceived problem, some contemporary theologians, particularly Christian feminist scholars such as Sallie McFague and Catherine Keller believe that the term systematic theology is no longer accurate for theology. However, there is disagreement among systematic theologians as to whether to reject the term systematic theology altogether. Karl Barth did not endorse the language of systematic theology, but he did advocate the practice of systematizing theology and building a coherent system with a philosophical foundation outside of the inner workings of theology itself. Constructive theology tends to be interdisciplinary, imaginative, open-ended, popular, lay-centered, and practical, and it is closely related to Christian ethics because it engages with a wide range of ethical issues. The term began to be used in the 1980s. For more information, see following reference. Serene Jones & Paul Lakeland, *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes* (New York: Fortress Press, 2005).
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A Hungarian Reformed View on Ecology

Our Responsibility as Stewardship

Abstract

Ecological responsibility is approached here from a Hungarian Reformed perspective, shaped by the lived legacy of communism and post-communist transformation. While Western societies often view themselves as pioneers of environmental awareness, this reflection recalls practices of reuse and restraint under socialism. These were later swept aside by consumer capitalism after 1990, bringing new ecological challenges. Drawing on Calvinist covenant theology, the text argues for stewardship rooted not in control but in gratitude and care. Responsibility for creation transcends East-West divisions: churches, particularly in Hungary and Korea, are called to nurture faith-based ecological awareness. Rather than blame, the emphasis lies on shared human failure – and a shared calling to protect what has been entrusted to us.

1. The Janus face of human beings. “...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.:23)

1.1. Cold War and Post-communist Perceptions of Nature. The superiority of the Western World. Having a Higher Moral and Better Ecological Awareness?

This work is a reflection on the ecological awareness of Christians in East-Central Europe as it has been experienced in the past decades and seeks to explore possibilities for a responsible, ethical behaviour towards the nature given to us by God, the creator. It does not claim to focus on all ecological issues. Rather it shall point out some of the Janus-faced nature of Western, and Eastern European countries and offer some suggestions for Christians to work responsibly for a better future as true stewards of God.

It is often assumed that the Western European world has always been better in all regards including care for the environment and nature than Eastern Europe, which I label as a Second World, or the developing Third World.¹ It is not my intention to list proofs as evidence for a Western European belief in the superiority of all areas of life, including moral, ethical, economic or political systems. I only cite one example which is mentioned by David Hallman. “Environmentally polluting industrialisation has not been limited to Western, capitalist countries. The socialist countries of the former Soviet Union (one may add Eastern European communist states too) were even less attentive to the ecological consequences of their exploitation of natural resources and fossil fuel-based economies”.² Although Hallman is an excellent scholar, yet he subconsciously falls into the trap of portraying the other, the Communist countries as less caring than the Western countries.

This view was propagated especially during the Cold War period by politicians, scholars and public figures as if the Western World was not as much responsible for the current ecological crisis. Communist regimes were often portrayed as ignorant of nature and polluting the world far more than the technically advanced West. However, the question arises whether this grossly generalised picture is really correct. Do we see here, in such claims, the Western World’s superiority being expressed and mirrored? Is it not a kind of self-bragging Orientalism which exhibits itself in relation to Eastern Europe that we see here? The underlying

question is which was and is the more wicked, destructive social-political-economic system regarding nature, Western European democracy or the former East European antidemocratic Communism.

It is argued that this mentality has lingered on as post-Soviet countries of the former communist Eastern block have joined the 'more civilised' West. People in the region were made to believe that Western Europe is in all regards ahead of Eastern Europe. This perspective was of course subconsciously supported by the economic advance of the West that led many people to believe that Western Europeans are ahead of their Eastern European peers in all areas such as democracy, private enterprise, creating better communities and having a far more responsible attitude towards Nature. Nonetheless, this picture may well be challenged as we shall see. Let me refer here to some personal experiences.

It is not my intention to justify any side but to reveal that the situation was far more complex during the Cold War and it has been so too in the past 34 years since the collapse of Communism.

I have never thought that I would ever appreciate things in communism due to the inhuman face of the ideology. Here I have the manifold atrocities of Communism in mind like experimenting with nuclear weapons over their own populations, the exploitation of workers, the cruel confiscations and creating of forced agricultural communities. Or, by putting this list aside, it would be enough to remember how little human life was valued during the Chernobyl catastrophe. Yet, there were always people, who lived under Communist regimes who showed a very humane face or actions that were deeply concerned about people and even nature.

1.1.1 Communism and Care for the Environment. A Mirror to the Western Democracies. A world with much less. The Case of - Newspapers, Metal, and Coke Recycling

As a Christian I was brought up with the mindset that Communism is entirely evil. To say the least, it was true to some degree, especially if it was viewed from the much persecuted perspective of evangelical Christians. The Marxist ideology put into practice as Eastern European communism was far away from the armchair idealist day dreaming mentality of top Western European philosophers and

thinkers. Arthur Koestler's book "Darkness at noon" well represents the failure of some parts of the leftist elite in the West to realise the inner evil nature of the Soviet system.³ It is still puzzling for me how even such theologians as Karl Barth,⁴ or Hungarian revivalist leaders, some of whom became even bishops (Albert Bereckzy, Jenő Békefi and alike in the Reformed Church were not only misled by that ideology but moulded evangelical Christianity by forming a "'theology' of service" to facilitate one-party rule in a former democratic country in Hungary from 1948 onwards. This dead-end kind of theology of service has been critically assessed by István Bogárdi Szabó,⁵ Szilveszter Füsti-Molnár⁶ and László Gonda⁷ in their fine respective works. Perhaps it is fair to raise the question here: What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? In other words: what does Marxism in its applied form called Communism have to do with Christian faith?⁸

It is indeed a historical fact that Marx regarded atheism as a necessity for the victory of the Proletariat. He claimed: "Marxism is atheist, especially in its realised form, Communism of the Socialist countries. "Communism begins from the outset with atheism; but atheism is at first far from being communism; that atheism is still mostly an abstraction. The philanthropy of atheism is therefore at first only philosophical, abstract philanthropy, and that of communism is at once real and directly bent on action."⁹ Communism in Eastern Europe sought not only to uproot Christianity (perceived as a competing ideology) but eradicate it completely once and for all. Lenin wrote the following top secret letter to the Political Committee (Politburo), the leadership of the political police, the People's Commissariat of Justice and the revolutionary tribunals: "The more representatives of the reactionary clergy are shot [under the pretext of retaliation for protesting against confiscation], the better. Now is the time to teach this public a lesson so that they will not even dare to think of any resistance for a few decades. 19 March 1922 V. Ulyanov (Lenin), Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars."¹⁰ This diabolical fight took many forms and it was bloody and cruel to varying degrees in all former Communist states including Hungary.¹¹ I personally experienced some of the 'soft' persecutions due to the confessional faith of my parents and really felt what it meant to live on the peripheries being marginalised. The embodiment of Marxist ideology in Communism was a very negative experience in many ways. However, life is more complex than perceiving it black and white as I may have seen in the 1970s and 1980s. I discovered throughout decades, often subconsciously that not only is there a Christian rainbow but colours, even black and white have "many shades".

Here I would like to share two personal experiences from the Marxist Communism era in Hungary. The first one concerns the selective collecting of waste materials, the second is about the reuse of glass bottles and at the same time there being no place for artificial materials like plastic bottles that destroy nature as they never break down.

When we reflect on how nature was treated by the Communists, to do justice to a fuller picture next to the Chernobyl kind of case, the good initiatives of the dark communist regime must be appreciated, or at least acknowledged. One of the very positive childhood memories of mine is that we, as teenagers as 'pioneers', a body of pupils in upper Elementary school, were 'encouraged' by the local party leader of the school to care for our immediate environment. This action orientated initiative meant that we collected used newspapers selectively and carried them in small carriages to MÉH (*Melléktermék és Hulladék Egyesülés* 1950, that is By-product and Waste Association). Likewise, we were told to collect unused iron waste for reuse by the Soviet industry in Hungary. To encourage pupils to work eagerly, I recall, that we also received a small sum of money for such collections.

Therefore, a group of four pupils was very happy to do the collection of either papers or metal and iron waste for reuse. It was a community event, no education on those particular days and a fun adventure for kids. In this way the Hungarian communists instilled care and love for nature and our immediate environment. This story shows that even an evil system cannot be seen only as being entirely black or white. Life is far more complex and there is the love of humans for each other in communities and even for nature.

I cannot remember whether this action was perceived by the Party as an intentional move for creating environmental awareness. Perhaps it was, perhaps it was not. What matters is that the 'puritan' like Communist quasi-religion¹² very purposefully and usefully educated teenagers to care for their environment. This educational aspect was really beneficial to society, the individual and the environment. Young adults started to learn responsibility.

Although it was an obligatory action for all pupils to do the collections of waste across the country, it did serve a very good purpose. I cannot recall anything similar in our modernised, Westernised Hungary today. We are too individualistic like the West. No obligations, definitely no forced or 'required' community activities are initiated by the government for all. We live in a free liberal democracy, or

perhaps often in a society where libertinism or/and autocracy latently exist. Let us leave these issues apart and focus on the beneficial aspect of community action described above during the times of Communist regimes.

Such collection of waste executed during Communist times had other positive impacts apart from care for nature. It also strengthened communal ties since we needed to work in a group and, at the same time, the environment was taken care of. The latter even proved to be a double success. On the one hand, the physical environment became cleaner. There were less newspapers thrown away in streets or fields. The environment became much cleaner. Similarly, the pollution caused by iron/metal part of cars, bicycles left behind and such like was considerably reduced. On the other hand, the purpose driven collection resulted in recycling materials for use. Let me come back to the statement that the Western world is always a role model for the Eastern Europeans. I wonder if it is correct to portray the other as entirely hopeless or less civilised while at the same time being boastful about environmental sensitivity as Westerners often did.

Today, the civilised West, and EU bureaucrats boast about achievements such as a small monetary compensation being introduced for each plastic bottle that is returned for recycling. It is being introduced into EU societies and 'advertised' as a great achievement. No doubt it is a very fine achievement. I was pleased to discover it when I was at the IRTI conference in Amsterdam last year and received a little money after returning a plastic bottle.¹³ There, a thought flashed across my mind all of a sudden.

Were the Communists not at least as sensitive to environmental issues before 1990 as the 'civilised' West 34 years later in 2024? Were they more progressive in their approaches to nature than the West with its mass consumption and exploitation of natural resources? I doubt it. Both societal systems, whether driven by dialectical materialism resulting in atheism as a 'form a quasi-religion', or by the so-called capitalist ideologies. In my opinion both may fall, and often fell into the trap of ruthless exploitation of nature. Perhaps Western companies paid more attention to covering their wrongdoings, while Communist states did not care as much. Perhaps. Nonetheless, it is discernible that Western theologians, scientists and public figures tend to have a better view of themselves portraying the 'civilised' West as a better, more sensitive social-economical-political system

then the rest of the world, be it Chinese, Indian, African civilisations or Eastern European Communism. While David G. Hallman in his otherwise thoughtful essay makes a number of good points, his remarks reveal a typical Western patronising attitude, perhaps subconsciously “The socialist countries of the former Soviet Union were even less attentive to the ecological consequences of their exploitation of natural resources and fossil fuel-based economies”.¹⁴

Another side of a fuller picture is that the pollution caused by many factories that the Communists built in Hungary (or other countries) within a short period of time did not pay enough attention to the immediate environment. Nature was hurt. However, there were always good things in a (Communist) environment like the kind of care for nature I have referred to with the collection stories. I say so despite of the aforementioned fact and personal experience that was *extremely* hostile to Christians. Equally Western Europeans or Americans did explode nuclear weapons in the Pacific Ocean destroying many lives and nature that they are silent about. In sum, both ideological structures to form and organise a society, be it communism or capitalism have good and bad faces at the very same time.

Please notice what I regard as a very good endeavour/intention/ agenda of Western European liberalism introduced recently by the EU, for instance, the example which I mentioned, the collection of glass and plastic bottles in the Netherlands is not a novelty. It had already been put into practice 4-5 *decades* ago by the communists of Hungary and probably other countries in Central Europe.

Therefore, one must endeavour to have a more delicate picture when looking at the responsibility of human beings for the Earth, Nature and the immediate environment. It is imperative to refrain from playing one's own cultural-civilisational stance to put oneself on a pedestal as Western civilisation did. It should make Westerners think of their own wrong-doings towards nature that it is not them who are always ahead in initiating good things, including all aspects of caring for Nature. The case-study story shows that, it possible to claim that the Communists of the Eastern block in this particular case, were ahead of what we perceive as a *great result* today in the Western Europe dominated by the EU.¹⁵

So far, I have talked about two great examples of the looked-down upon, secondary civilisation that Communism may have embodied from an

environmental perspective to Westerners. Now, I turn my attention to the freedom from Capitalist exploitation of nature and come to The Second World, namely the Eastern European former Communist states. There is no doubt that it is better to live in a democracy than the single party ruled tyranny that the Marxist madness of realised dialectical materialism produced in our part of the world. Yet, let me underline that not all aspects of Communism are to be disregarded as bad. Rather, as it has been demonstrated there were some good aspects for community and people. However, with the aforementioned two examples my aim was to form a reflective mirror for Westerners to encourage them towards more thorough self-criticism.

When freedom was ushered into the Eastern Block in 1990, post-communist countries, like Hungary, enjoyed it to the degree that no one cared for the environment to any degree. People jokingly refer now to the era between 1990 and 2005 as the Wild East, a parallel to the Wild West image in the history of the USA, when outlaws controlled society to an unprecedented degree in a time of transition. What mattered for most of Hungarian people, and I am careful to state perhaps to millions of citizens of Eastern Europe, was to become richer, or to say, have a much higher quality of life. It meant an incredible eagerness to obtain more material goods like having a new fridge, TV, telephone and car. Yes, cars.

1.2. After the Collapse of Communism. The Eastern European Experience and 'contribution' to the Western hemisphere's pollution

1.2.1. Luxury or necessity? Having a car: an explosion of extreme use of petrol and gas and the damage to nature

This brings me to another observation. I believe that the freedom of the former communist block cost our Globe, the EARTH a great deal. In the vast territories controlled by the Communists from Eastern Europe through Lithuanian Vilnius, the western post of the Soviet Union to Vladivostok, down south through China to Vietnam and Cambodia, probably more than 40 percent of the then population of the World lived. Cars, which do pollute the environment, were rare. Indeed, to own a car was a luxury. In Hungary people had to wait for long years after they

prepaid for their ownership of a car like Lada, Skoda, Dacia, Polski Fiat and such like. Of course, not Western made cars were available in the closed market of Comecon.¹⁶

In Hungary in a larger village where for instance 1000 persons lived, there were only 1-2 cars in the 1970s! And, probably there were only 4-5 cars in the 1980s shortly before the collapse of Communism (1990). By the late 1990s, this had increased considerably and probably there were at least 100 cars in the same community. As a percentage this shows an almost 90% increase. No doubt more pollution was inflicted on nature only by the sheer increase in the spread of using a car as a daily '*necessity*'. Other aspects of pollution created by the 'freedom change' are not mentioned in this essay. To highlight this one aspect of how car emissions contributed to global warming let me refer to a further observation. Margaret A. Walls rightly observed in 1993 that "Compared with motor vehicles in the United States, motor vehicles in Central and Eastern Europe are much more polluting, but they are also fewer in number and less used. As a result, both total and per capita motor vehicle emissions of carbon monoxide (CO), hydrocarbons (HCs), and nitrogen oxides (NOx) are lower in Central and Eastern Europe than they are in the United States. Estimates of motor vehicle emission levels in several Central and Eastern European countries in the near future indicate that these levels may not change substantially relative to population."¹⁷ It is also worth mentioning that Eastern Europe functioned as a rubbish bin for used Western European cars for decades and it is still happening. Although, most of the cars are dumped now in Africa and other developing countries. Therefore, to boast about high quality air in Western Europe is a kind of hypocrisy if it is viewed from this particular point of view too.¹⁸

Another personal experience of mine is also very shocking and telling. When visiting Beijing, the capital city of China, as a young tourist, I could not believe how many bicycles were in the main streets. In the summer of 1990, I saw only millions of bicycles in the 4-5 lanes *in each direction* of streets of that huge city. What a shock, but a pleasant one, it was! Today, I believe we see mostly cars! The sudden use of a billion cars by the people of post-communist countries, or the still Marxist China, not to mention swiftly developing India means that perhaps more than half of the World's entire population has begun to have cars and it has had a devastating impact on Nature. The privilege of the Western world to have cars in almost every household has been extended to an unprecedented degree. Only

this aspect of global political-economic change is enough to cause a shocking result. This is an enormous change that contributes to the pollution of the Earth. I believe this, of course together with many other factors, is also responsible for the fact that in Hungary for the past 25 years there has been no snow during the winter lasting more than a week. In my childhood up until the late 1980s, we had snow for months constantly. The first generation of Hungarians are being brought up without seeing a proper winter. This is a clear indication of how we, human beings, are destroying nature to an unprecedented degree which has never happened so fast in the history of humankind.

1.2.2. Heating and Air conditioning – Luxury or necessity result in a pollution

Next to waste and plastic bottle pollution, as well as emissions caused by cars, I have chosen another issue to highlight the flipside of global warming. Summers are getting extremely warm in Central Europe too. To have degrees over 40 Celsius, like there is in the Sahara, Africa, are becoming, unfortunately, a commonplace experience that was unheard of, and not experienced in our history in Hungary. Hungarian people traditionally used to build their houses from mud/clay and hay and erected an adobe house. It had several advantages. During summer the house was cooler naturally whereas during winter time it was warmer. Today we use artificial materials to cover our houses to protect from the cold which is not as freezing cold as it was 40-50 years ago during communism. Owing to the exploitation of nature, like the by-product of use of cars, the average temperature has risen significantly. Therefore, in summer time more and more Hungarian households have air conditioning. There has been an increase in *electronic Air conditioners* from 1 % to 56% from 1990 to 2024. No need to say the heat produced by those air conditioning machines also contributes to local warming that has a very negative and an accumulative impact on global warming. Having given some examples of how human behaviour exploits nature and throws light on our particular context, I would briefly mention very different attitudes to nature in the Middle east and in Asia. Of course, the examples are selective and subjective.

1.2.3. Littering – negligent or very conscious caring behaviours

Littering is one of the most irresponsible ways to pollute nature. Either it is done on an individual level, or by cooperatives, industries and national as well as international organisations, all doing harm to our commonly shared Earth, Nature on which we *all rely*. When I visited Syria in 2025, I was shocked at how many plastic bags were blown by the wind and scattered in the desert. However, I had to remind myself quickly that next to train tracks there has always been a lot of rubbish in Hungary. And, unfortunately it is still the same. In contrast I was highly impressed by the cleanness of streets and underground stations in Seoul. This metropolis with 10 million people residing in it was a refreshing example for me. I saw hardly any rubbish in the streets of the capital city in 2014. This could be seen as a positive, exemplary model for many cities and people around the world.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it always amazes me and also scares me that we, human beings never learn from history. I really find Hegel's observation about human nature telling: "*History teaches us that we do not learn from history.*"²⁰ To demonstrate his point, I briefly allude to some historical examples.

1.2.4. A Sketchy Summary. The Result of Exploitation or Improper Use of Resources on Nature: Devastation, Famine, Hunger and Disasters Caused by Human Intervention

I recall my studies about ancient civilisations when I did my MA in History at the University of Debrecen in the early 1990s. We were told that the end of Sumerian civilisation was not brought about by conquest but by natural disaster. Over-irrigation by water canals, and improper use of land all contributed to the deadly end of a beautiful ancient civilisation which emerged slowly at the beginning but resulted in sudden hit causing the disappearance of a civilisation like New York and the string of states along the east coast of the United States. One contemplates whether we are speedily approaching a similar natural disaster, a situation which may occur soon, but which we do not care much about or feel threatened by.

To see a very similar process, I refer to another case from Europe. Some years ago, we visited the Shetland Islands. There again an archaeologist told us a similar

story to that of the Middle East. The exploitation of a small liveable piece of land led to the complete collapse of a wonderful Nordic civilization. Apart from such issues, of course, there are other factors, that influence our lives and the climate but we must assess a situation by examining *what causes the* climate change. It is us, human beings or natural forces that are outside our control. What can we learn from the childhood memories of some of us Hungarians also participating in this conference? I believe two things must be clearly stated. First, neither Western nor Eastern European countries and people are better or worse in their attitude towards nature. This is also true for Arab or Asian countries. Therefore, we are all the same. Then, comes the question if that is accepted why it is so. This leads me to the second observation. The Bible teaches that the innate sinful nature of human beings corrupted not only the hearts of people but also the world. The notion of and belief in original sin as it has been articulated by Augustine and Calvin places all of us into the same spiritual context of biblical reality. All human beings are inclined to destroy nature which God has created regardless of race, colour, religious belief and socio-political-economic systems.

2. Stewardship or Becoming Gods? The Charm of Knowledge, or Selfishness Exploiting Nature? How about Unseen Consequences?

Human beings have always struggled with the question of to what degree it is possible to intervene, make use of or in the worst case, exploit nature. The line to answer properly these questions is very thin. I shall leave this discussion aside here. However, on my way to the Hun Han Theological Forum in Gwangju I encountered some news from a Muslim country that made me think that whether Christians, Muslims, other followers of different world religions or just secular people we essentially seem to be the same, and struggle with similar ethical and moral questions and face similar temptations. While preparing for this paper, I encountered the boastfulness of a buoyant and thriving country that showed what money and wealth may achieve, a country that moved from extreme poverty to being one of the richest nations within a short period of time. On youtube, the scientists of a country prided themselves on how humans

can create rainfall in an extremely dry land, one of the biggest deserts of the world. While it is undoubtably an incredible achievement for human beings to create rainfall where it does not naturally occur often at all. This intervention in the forces of Nature is admirable as well as scary. No one can predict its consequences, especially if other countries will do the same. That may easily turn to the sophisticated balance of the meteorological systems, climate areas and regions of the world. The possible domino effect may well be unseen and not favourable as such experiment and exploitation will continue.

While I was pondering the usefulness and necessity of such scientific inventions, on my way to Seoul, on Al-Jazeera and BBC I saw a disaster that may well have been the result of such interventions and probably other encroachment into the divine order of Nature. A flood occurred in United Arab Emirates such as its people had never seen before. Aeroplanes could not fly for days, roads were flooded, and life was abnormal.²¹ Secondly, just to refer to a Hungarian example, whose leadership perceives itself as Christian and thinks it is one of the last bastions of Christendom (not Christianity) in an increasingly secular Europe, agricultural corporations use systems of blowing clouds that may gather and cause rainfall from April to August that might produce hail, therefore, destroying agricultural plantations. Such interventions into the normal process of nature by human beings are questionable and fiercely debated. It is not my task here to argue *pro or contra* for its usefulness or its destructive features but to draw attention to the fact the we all, Christians and non-Christians alike are stewards of the Earth regardless of whether we are aware of it or acknowledge it and whatever philosophical or theological grounds we build our attitude towards nature on.

3. Theological Foundation of Our Ethical Behaviour

3.1. Stewardship

- One of the major questions for us is what the Christian faith entails regarding our attitude to Creation? In other words, what is the theological foundation of our actions? Of course, it is assumed that Christians have

an ecological awareness. As a Christian, I believe if our faith is based on appreciation of God's gift (life, earth with its natural resources) and covenant (trust in God's special dealing with human beings) that may create a responsible attitude towards nature and the environment. Out of such a deeply held spiritually motivated stance we may begin to reflect on our faith based theology. I propose that the Calvinist Covenant theology could be the cornerstone of serious contemplation when thinking about how to relate to Nature, our immediate environment and to all living beings in it. The Holy Scripture speaks of a covenant from generation to generation. It could be argued that first 'covenant' was made in the Garden of Eden even before the Fall. Although human beings failed, God's unfailing mercy always renewed it. The content of the covenant is the salvation of the soul and world, the promise of a new soul which is attainable through the work of the Holy Spirit through the acceptance of the salvific act of Jesus on the Cross and also the promise of the New World at the end of times. Therefore, a person and the created world may be seen under the promise of God's providence. More specifically, while our journey lasts on earth the "land" is promised to us with its multi-layered meaning. "The land, in particular, is to be held as a trust for future generations."²² Ian G. Barbour is right that this realisation "derives from that sense of history as an ongoing family and social life, as well as accountability to a God who spans the generations".²³ It is proposed that the covenant theology implies three aspects of responsibility. These faith realisations may inform the sustainability of natural resources that have been entrusted to human being as stewards. Therefore, the kind of understanding of responsibility of the steward connects to three crucial theological themes that have gained a prominent place in Calvinism. These topics are:

- Providence and provider, care taker (realisation)
- Manifest destiny - exceptionalism elected²⁴ (activist mentality)
- Election, (a Vocation, a being sent) mentality with a purpose to make the world a better one (mental strength) under the careful vigilance of the already and not yet eschatological aspect of being able to realise the Kingdom of God within the self and in the world.

First of all, I may start with some critical points of *theological* observation that even such theology based on the Bible, that underlines stewardship, election and a vocation to make the world a better place, and endeavour to seek sanctification has been used improperly in history.

David G. Hallman's succinct observation describes the religious fervour of Christians, I would say it is very much applicable for Calvinism (especially Calvinists of North America and South Africa), who felt that "God was beckoning" (them) to use all "intelligence to usher in a new day of enlightenment and prosperity".²⁵ I agree that amongst many Christian theologians, scientists and economists there was a 'genuine conviction' that God's will was being realised in their efforts".²⁶ Calvinists were in particular keen on establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, which is, of course, theologically a misreading of the Bible, yet it had been a historical reality. It is enough to think of the Godly commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell's achievements, or the Puritans of North America, not to mention the Dutch Reformed people's 'experiments' in South Africa.

Richard Tarnas seems to be right in stating "With Calvin, a Christian's worldly vocation was to be pursued with spiritual and more fervour in order to realise the Kingdom of God on earth".²⁷ Needless to say the flaw in interpreting is not typical only to Calvinism. Hallman gives two examples of how the WCC Assembly stated in 1961 that "the Christian should welcome scientific discoveries as new steps in *man's domination of nature*".²⁸ Similarly, the Roman Catholic view expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* during the II. Vatican Council shows that it endorsed a Christian theology based value system that is really prevailing in mainstream theologies regardless of denominational affiliation. It proclaims: "human beings "created in God's image, received a *mandate to subject* (my underlining) (to themselves) the earth and all that it contains... thus, by the *subjugation of all things* to ((humanity), the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth".²⁹ What is alarming here is that in both citations from vital documents of two eminent Christian traditions, there is the lack of mention of humble stewardship in the texts cited. It is imperative to talk about a Christian faith in relation to nature which is serving, caring and sustaining. Rather the language chosen in those documents insinuates the right of conquest, dominance and rule sanctioned by a Divine Being. It is an unfortunate interpretation of stewardship.

Proper Christian stewardship entails three vital aspects.³⁰ First, *preaservatio mundi* that calls for an awareness of nature and the environment. This may be called sustainability. Second, *consensus*, that could mean the care coming from human beings which may be built into God's providential plan for the Earth and the World meaning space! (A warning is essential for us so as not to confuse ourself

subconsciously with the Creator, God when we, as humans, created beings achieve any scientific discoveries or great result. Third, *gubernatio* (governance) is given to human beings by the Creator. However, it is not a victorious conquering rule that Protestant Christianity, especially jubilant Calvinism as a *secular ideology too* exhibited. It is not meant to be a despotic rule. Rather, it is a kind of serving rule under God's vigilant eyes and 'running' the Earth *together with other living beings*. These realisations lead us to two beneficial and beautiful theological concepts: shalom (thankfulness) and creation justice (observing the covenant).

3.2. *Shalom*

Let us look briefly at shalom, peace on earth that entails living in peace with all creatures on Earth. Hallman writes: "Shalom is an Old Testament word which refers to the restfulness, contentment, beauty, and harmony of a life lived in perfect obedience to God's will. Shalom is a condition in which everyone and everything is in right relationship all the time"³¹ This realisation may be summed up in three words: observing, appreciating, and cultivating an awareness of being transformed by the Holy Spirit to establish God's kingdom on earth, in us and amongst us. Needless to say, there is a difficulty in applying this Christian theological message to our lives. We face the eschatological challenge of the "already yes and not yet". In other words, Christians may endeavour to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and seek to create a society, a community of believers who allow the reign of Jesus Christ in their heart, out of which, in our particular case of interest, a responsible attitude to Creation may arise, yet we must be aware of the fact that we cannot achieve the 'ideally' imagined, desired kingdom of God on earth due to our sinful nature. It is a reality of the world, that this cannot be realised on earth not even amongst Christians, there is also the fact that there are many people holding onto other beliefs such as world religions, worldviews and ideologies that cannot be forced, and should not be relegated under the umbrella of Christian faith, Christendom, or Christian based culture. Thus, it is vital to state that the Kingdom of God, a just kingdom where nature of protected in the most ideal way under Christ's rule is a desire rather than a reality. Yet the acknowledgement and realisation of this fact should not discourage Christians from *endeavouring to do* God's will to spread the good

news of salvation through Christ's atonement and also gratefulness for the gifts and wonders of Nature given to us by the Creator on earth. Human sin, as we have seen is visible by Western Europeans using the rest of the world as a rubbish dump to get rid of their overused materials (cars, electric products etc.). Nonetheless, those on the receiving end cannot hide behind this kind of fact. They also need to take care of their environment when they pollute the environment with a careless attitude that damages Nature. In such situations the issue of justice applicable to all of us must be humbly considered.

3.3. Creation Justice. What does taking care of something mean? Protect and Nourish

Christians believe in justice in Christ which has many faces (social, political and economic justice are the most well-known themes). However, one of the crucial issues in our discussion is "creation justice". It means protecting, restoring, and rightly sharing God's creation. It seeks justice for all of God's creation, including the human beings who live in it. This approach to creation justice is informed by respect and love for our Creator. This is an active move to put one's faith into practice. Based on faith that God gave us this Earth as a gift with a thankful heart we may practice shalom and Creation care.

4. Ethics and Education

Once those realisations are accepted and internalised, it is possible to form ethical stances and actions. We wish to make the following remarks. First of all, as Christians, we must make it clear to ourselves that here on earth, we are to serve God by worshipping, glorying him by thanking for all what we have, including Planet Earth. The third and the longest part of the Heidelberg Catechism concerns thankfulness. This feature is often forgotten by Calvinists, although it is one of the most productive seeds and soil of the interpreted message of the gospel. From this a lot of blessings may emerge including our awareness and attitude to nature that result in action. We may learn from the good actions of

the communist and capitalist countries, set their 'examples' as a model and pay severe attention to events I have alluded to in the lecture. It is vital to create a responsible community, to work together towards a better society where nature and the environment are taken care of. We may wish to set examples for Christians and other citizens of the World as a model of life to follow. What should those models imply? What Christian eco-sensitive Calvinist education may offer in a future curriculum:

- Create a feeling of sensitivity to nature given to us by God
- Gather other people to the cause of protecting what God has given us
- Do not demonise those who are negligent or do not care to the degree that you do but lovingly warn, gently persuade them
- Expose them to the reality of pollution – shock therapy
- Encourage them to take action
- Reflect on the biblical teaching about creation, and stewardship in a broader sense.

Finally, I wish to finish my reflections from a quotation: "One of the important contributions that the WCC and member churches are making to the climate change discussions is to emphasize the indispensable interconnection between ecological sustainability and social justice".³² If Christians take stewardship seriously that attitude indirectly nurtures a sense of responsibility for the fellow human being as well as nature. The two aspects are interconnected. Should Calvinists of Hungary or Korea wish to glorify God in their lives, the above mentioned points may be introduced in their classrooms so as to make a little, but significant change in their own communities.

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- 1 This is a fine article how The Philippines as a country is regarded as a rubbish dump by Western societies. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/opinion/comment/why-are-western-nations-happy-to-treat-the-philippines-as-a-rubbish-dump-1.869847> (downloaded: 15 March, 2024).
 - 2 David G. Hallman, "Climate Change: Ethics, Justice, and Sustainable Community" in *Christianity and Ecology* ed. by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, (Harvard University, 2000), 460-461.
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 - 5 Szabó, István Bogárdi: *Egyházvezetés és teológia Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948-1989 (Church Leadership and Theology in the Reformed Church of Hungary 1948-1989)* (Debrecen: DRTA, 1995).
 - 6 Füstí-Molnár, Szilveszter: *Ecclesia sine Macula et Ruga: Donatist Factors among the Ecclesiological Challenges for the Reformed Church of Hungary Especially after 1989/90 (Sárospatak: Sárospataki Református Teológiai Akadémia, 2008).*
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- I am aware of a very different road that liberation theology took. However, their experience is from a very different context and interpretation of Marxism. In Latin America Marxism in the home of liberation theologian never became the sole, utterly exclusive rude political system as it was experienced in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, I am still very critical of any ideology, philosophy which wishes to be ‘married’ with Christian theology.
- 9 Marx, K. & Engels, F., 2009, *The Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1, (People’s Publishing House, Beijing, 186).
 - 10 Stéphane Courtois et al.: A kommunizmus fekete könyve. Bűntény, terror, megtorlás. A magyar kiadást jegyzeteivel kiegészítette Kun Miklós és Zinner Tibor (Nagyvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 2000), 13. The citation is from the journal *Izvesztyija CK KPSZSZ* nr. 4. cited in the Hungarian translation. The original title of the book. *The Black Book of Communism* (Harvard University Press, 1999).
 - 11 Applebaum, Anne: *Gulag: A History* (Doubleday, 2003).
 - 12 John E. Smith, *Quasi-Religions: Humanism, Marxism and Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994).

- 13 By now, when this essay is being finalised the Hungarian government has also introduced similar things.
- 14 David G. Hallman, "Climate Change: Ethics, Justice, and Sustainable Community" in *Christianity and Ecology* ed. by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Harvard University, 2000), p. 461.
- 15 *It is the powerful Western European countries dominate EU and they often educate us as secondary citizens of EU. No doubt Germany, France and Britain (while still in the EU) not to mention the Benelux and Scandinavian states lecture us and with their ideology driven mentality to tell what is good to do. They often treat Eastern and Central European countries as secondary.* Let me here refer to the witty but famous sentence by a prominent Polish minister: "The EU is governed by three princes (Germany, France, Britain), and takes occasionally into consideration of some of the earls (Spain, Italy) and have some barons (Dutch, Swedish) and the rest a subjugated to the will of those in power". This is the democracy of theoretically equal states in the EU.
- 16 Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, in Russian Совет Экономической Взаимопомощи. it was an economic organization from 1949 to 1991 under the leadership of the Soviet Union that comprised the countries of the Eastern Bloc.
- 17 Margaret A. Walls: „Motor Vehicles and Pollution in Central and Eastern Europe” *Resources*, 113. (Fall, 1993), 2-7.
- 18 Millions of Highly-Polluting Used Cars “Dumped” on Developing Countries - UN
<https://earth.org/cars-developing-countries/> (downloaded: 22 February, 2024).
- 19 Chang, Yoon Jae: „Exodus to a Nuclear Free World: A proposal for Solidarity for Life and Peace without Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Power Plands, *CTC Bulletin*, Chian Mai, Thailand: Christian Conference of Asia (2013), 60. As said before, I am aware of the problematic use of nuclear power which is also not a clean energy so as the electric car which use batteries that never break down. Chang 's paper to cite HHTF. – See lecture entitled “an Exodus into New Light” of “prof. Yoon Jae Chang.
- 20 What experience and history teach is this—that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (1830, tr. H. B. Nisbet, 1975) introduction, See also: Introduction, *Oxford Essential Quotations* (4 ed.) edited by Susan Ratcliffe. „Rulers, Statesmen, Nations, are wont to be emphatically commended to the teaching which experience offers in history. But what experience and history teach is this, - that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it. Each period is involved in such peculiar circumstances, exhibits a condition of things so strictly idiosyncratic, that its conduct must be regulated by considerations connected with itself, and itself alone. Amid the pressure of great events, a general principle gives no help. It is useless to revert to similar circumstances in the Past. The pallid shades of memory struggle in vain with the life and freedom of the Present. Looked at in this light, nothing can be shallower than the oft-repeated appeal to Greek and Roman examples during the French Revolution. Nothing is more diverse than the genius of those nations and that of our times.” Hegel, *Philosophy of History*.
- 21 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GQAXxmiSdk> Creating rain, “You will be like gods”.
- 22 Barbour „Scientific And Religious Perspectives on Sustainability”, 389,

23 Ibid.

24 America, Britain, or other 'Calvinist' nations like Afrikaaner speaking Dutch, or 'nation (a people of God) like Mormons cf. „a nation chosen by God to proclaim the reprimed Christianity of the Protestant Reformation to all peoples”.

25 *Climate change*, p. 460.

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27 Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of The Western Mind: Understanding Ideas that Have Shaped our Worldview* (New York: Harmony Bok, 1991), 245.

28 Wesley Granberg-Michelson, „Creation in Ecumenical Theology” in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*” ed. David D. Hallman (Geneva : WCC Publication, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 97.

29 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudem et Spec.*

30 I have already alluded the first two earlier.

31 David G. Hallman, „Ecumenical Responses to Climate Change”, *Ecumenical Review* 49. 2. (April, 1997).

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HU ISBN 978-615-5853-79-1



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ISBN 979-11-958594-5-0



