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St Andrews

St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology  
**Protestant Theology in Korea**

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First published: 1 February 2024

<https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/ProtestantTheologyinKorea>

### **Citation**

Chung, Meehyun. 2024. 'Protestant Theology in Korea', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/ProtestantTheologyinKorea> Accessed: 5 June 2026

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ISSN 2753-3492

# Protestant Theology in Korea

*Meehyun Chung*

This article deals with the landscape of Korean Christianity, focusing on the development of Protestant theology in socio-cultural contexts and the main issues of theological discourse. This article consists of mainly three parts: first, it illustrates the dawn and rise of Korean Protestant Christianity. Second, it elaborates the landscape and the characteristics of Korean Protestant theology regarding Presbyterian and Methodist theology in modern Korea. Third, it discusses theological subjects including God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, gender, and enculturation. In closing, it will summarize the current situation of these theological subjects.

**Keywords:** Contextual theologies, Korea, Protestantism, Christian theology, Christian mission, Ecclesiology, Political theology, Enculturation, Indigenous theologies, Feminist theology

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# 1 Introduction

Catholicism was introduced to Korea in the late eighteenth century, and Protestantism in the mid-nineteenth. The culture in which they arrived was based on a rich religious heritage of Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as much older shamanistic practices and beliefs. Koreans were very active to adopt Christianity, and both Catholic and Protestant confessional churches were started by Koreans before any systematic foreign missionary work was introduced. After many kinds of state persecution against Catholics, Protestantism was introduced relatively peacefully. Seo Sang-Yun, who founded the first Protestant congregation in 1884 at Solnae in North Korea, met the Scottish missionary John Ross in Manchuria. He participated with Ross in a translation of the Bible into Korean, and afterwards propagated evangelism by himself in Korea. This process was an example of how the work of evangelism was carried out by ordinary Korean people prior to the arrival of Western missionaries or clergies. This voluntary and independent development makes Korean Christianity unique.

According to a Gallup survey (2021), 6% of the population of Korea are Catholic, 16% are Buddhist and 17% are Protestant. Among Protestants, the majority (69%) are Presbyterian. This article will discuss primarily some major denominations which belong to the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK; <http://www.kncc.or.kr>). This council was established in 1924 as the first Korean national Christian council and ecumenical umbrella organization. In Korea there is an ongoing conflict between ecumenical and evangelical groups. As a coalition of socially engaged churches, the NCCCK work together on social issues. On the other hand, ultra-conservative right-wing churches founded their own organization in 1989, the Christian Council of Korea (CCK). While the NCCCK is a member of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia, the CCK didn't join these and instead created their own network. Besides the relatively progressive and ecumenically-oriented NCCCK, there are other umbrella associations of Korean Protestant churches: the United Christian Churches of Korea (UCCK) was organized in 2001 as a moderate group, and the Communion of Churches in Korea (CCIK) was established in 2011 as a new conservative association. Protestant churches in general could be characterized variously as progressive, modest, conservative, and ultra-conservative right-wing fundamentalist.

Among the Presbyterian churches, only the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK) joined the NCCCK and worked with global communities. Other Protestant churches that are members of the NCCCK are the Korean Methodist Church (<https://kmc.or.kr>), the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea (<https://www.orthodoxkorea.org>), the Salvation Army Korea Territory (<http://www.salvationarmy.kr>),

the Korean Evangelical Church (<http://www.pkec.org>), the Lutheran Church in Korea (<http://info.lck.or.kr>), and the Assembly of God of Korea (<http://www.kihasung.org>).

## **2 The dawn and rise of Korean Protestant Christianity**

### **2.1 Theological education**

The Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation between the United States and Korea was signed on 22 May 1882. Based on this treaty, which was the first between Korea and a Western country, Protestant missionaries like the British Horace Grant Underwood (1859–1916) and the Swiss Henry Gerhard Appenzeller (1858–1902) came to Korea as official missionaries in 1885. The nineteenth-century Protestant church in the US was influenced by premillennialism, which was one reason why many young North Americans were eager to deliver the gospel to the Global South, to make Jesus Christ known to all people. In the US, Underwood was supported by the Northern Presbyterian Church and Appenzeller by the Methodists. From this early period onwards, the Korean Protestant church adopted the Nevius (Mission) Methods of self-support, self-propagation, and self-government. However, the establishment of Christian churches and theology have been supported by Western missionaries.

There was controversy among missionaries, because most missionaries wanted to focus on the theological education of pastors while Underwood was more interested in general education for young Koreans in Seoul, especially modern sciences like chemistry, physics, mathematics, economics, and commerce, based on a Christian spirit with knowledge of the Bible. Another US Presbyterian missionary, Samuel Austin Moffett (1864–1939), wanted to educate more pastors and develop theology in Pyongyang. This controversy among missionaries was combined with the issue of whether they wanted to focus on the education of pastors or general Christian leaders. Underwood planned to establish an institution for general, high-quality education based on the Christian spirit. At the time of writing, Yonsei University (formerly Chosen Christian College) has become one of the leading Christian institutions in Asia, where Christian character is clearly emphasized (Rhodes and Campbell 1964: 290–302).

The Methodists started their education for pastors and a mission school through Appenzeller in 1887, in a Methodist school (Baejae Hakdang). In 1907 Methodists established Union theological seminary, which merged with a female-only Bible school in 1925 (now Methodist Theological University; see <https://www.mtu.ac.kr>). During the Japanese colonial period around 1940 the seminary was closed. It reopened after liberation, in 1959 became a Methodist college, and in 1993 a university.

The Mission Council of Presbyterian Churches is composed of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada. On 15 May 1901, they agreed to open a theological seminary in Pyongyang for the training of pastors and evangelists: Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (<https://www.puts.ac.kr>). Samuel Austin Moffett was the first principal of this seminary, and Western missionaries were heavily involved in theological formation and education.

On 20 June 1907, the first seven pastors graduated from this theological seminary: Gil Seon-Ju (1869–1935), Bang Gi-Chang, Seo Gyeong-Jo, Song In-Seo, Yang Jun-Baek, Lee Gi-Pung, and Han Seok-Jin. In September of the same year were ordained by the freshly established presbytery (Min 1972), and they became the first pastors of the Presbyterian Church. Under Japanese colonialism this seminary has been closed due to issues over Shinto shrines and bowing, and after the liberation of Korea from Japan the seminary moved to Seoul. It was operated in the beginning by the Korean Christian Federation (KCF). Denominationally it has been mainly focused on Presbyterianism, but it has been widely influential theologically in Korean Christianity. Regardless of denominations, Protestant churches generally adapted the Presbyterian system into the structure of congregations.

## **2.2 The first generation of important theologians**

The first generation of important Korean theologians were experts in Korean religions like Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. They attempted to make essential Christian doctrine understandable for a general audience influenced by Korean religious traditions. These figures included: Methodist No Beong-Seon (1871–1941), Presbyterian Gil Seon-Ju, the author of *Remark on Hae-Ta* (1905), Methodist Choi Pyeng-Heun (1858–1927), the writer of *The World of Religion* (1922), Methodist and mystic Lee Yong-Do (1901–1933), the founder of Korea Evangelical Church Choe Tae-Yong (1897–1950), and the beginner of the non-church movement Kim Gyo-Sin (1901–1945).

The 1930s were a pivotal moment when some Korean theologians from various denominations studied abroad and returned to Korea. This produced a Korean awareness of theology which was independent of the teaching of missionaries. Meanwhile, Koreans took over the leadership in church and seminary settings for theological formation. Jeong Gyeong-Ok (1903–1945) was one of the examples (1939: 39). He was very much affected by his professor Harris Franklin Rall (1870–1964) at Garrett Theological Seminary, and he introduced Karl Barth's ideas to Korea. After completing his MA at Northwestern Graduate School, he taught at the Methodist seminary in Korea. He authored several books, including a basic introduction to systematic theology, and sought to establish the dogmatics of Methodist theology in Korea. He described himself in this way: 'In

terms of faith I am conservative, in terms of theology I am liberal' (Jeong 1939: 4). He underlined religious experience, which he combined with pietism, and promoted a spirit of mission which was combined with evangelism. His essential message was to follow the discipleship of Jesus Christ in the freedom of faith.

Yu Yeong-Mo (1890–1981) was one of the most well-known Christian leaders in the first generation for the enculturation of Christianity in Korea. His idea of Christ as the Being-in-Non-Being was based on the cosmology of Asian religious thought. Yu Yeong-Mo showed a deep understanding of Indian religion and Chinese religions like Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In his thought, those religious traditions and understandings are amalgamated. He translated the Tao Te Ching into Korean, and later led a non-church movement. He concentrated on restoring a spirituality of truth, virtue, and beauty, which was the essence of his thought. He thought that the selfish ego, which is based on an animal instinct, should be swayed, while genuine spiritual ego, which is unified with God's being, should be promoted (Park 2008: 48). He underscored the divine spirit alongside logos, love, the way, and oneness.

Ham Sok-Hon (1901–1989), one of Yu Yeong-Mo's most influential students, developed the thought of Sial (seed). He defined individual human beings in Sial as genuine Koreans, which embraced a democratic future (Ham 2016: 599–604). He studied under Uchimura Kanzo in Tokyo and later joined the Quaker movement. He was politically engaged during Park Jeong-Hui's regime, criticizing his alliance with Japan and the constitution's reform for his re-election. One of his famous books was a Korean history from the perspective of suffering. He made a comparison between Israel and the Korean nation in order to encourage Koreans to overcome difficult challenges (cf. Ham 1985). Ham Sok-Hon was the person who promoted a national awareness that was grounded in Korean religiosity, and he was one of the pioneers of Korean indigenization, making Korean theology not a theology of translation or an imported theology. He was recommended twice by the central committee of US Quakers for the Nobel Peace Award.

### **2.3 The relationship between church, state, and religious culture**

The relationship between church and state became a controversial issue from the early period of Christianity in Korea, especially under Japanese colonialism. It was asked how Christianity could intervene in the realm of the state, and how the government defined rules and regulations for faith communities like the church. There were some missionaries who were supportive and collaborated with Japanese rulers. They taught strict separation between church and state, and not to let Christians be involved in political action. On the other hand, there were some other Western missionaries who promoted independent movements for Koreans on the side of the Korean state, and supported a

kind of resistance as Christians against imperialism. This element has been influenced by theological developments. Only a minority group was engaged in political theology as social salvation, while the majority was interested in individual salvation.

There is a globally negative connotation with cooperation between mission and colonial imperialism. However, Korea is an exceptional case, because Korea was not colonized by a Christian nation. Western missionaries were not merely dispatched as an agent of colonial expansion. Rather there were many historical factors about how they helped Koreans against oppressors (Kang 1997: 17–42).

Koreans have shown deep devotion to religious communities throughout history. The first generation of Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, dealt with the conversion from other religions like Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, or Shamanism. They encountered Christianity from the perspective of Korean cultures and religious traditions (Lee 2015). To introduce God was not difficult, as because of indigenous beliefs there was already faith in God's being as the creator. However, Jesus as messiah and the vicarious atonement of Jesus' death on the cross, his redemption, and resurrection were not easy ideas to elaborate on and understand. Due to the general traditional belief in pantheism, the universal perception of spirits was very popular. In Korean religious culture the spiritual dimension was widely developed. In elaborating the doctrine of the Holy Spirit it was difficult to differentiate from other spiritual powers.

## **2.4 Scripture**

Korean culture and society have been influenced by the scriptures of Buddhism and Confucianism. Thus, the Bible as Christian scripture has been also highly respected from the beginning. Unlike Buddhism and Confucianism, Christian scripture has been translated into Korean from the early period of Christianity. The Bible was translated into Korean by Protestant missionaries in collaboration with native Koreans. The Korean language invented by King Sejong (1397–1450) was seen by academics, who preferred Chinese, as a language for lower-class citizens such as women. Bible translation and distribution helped to provide widening accessibility of the Bible for everyone. The Korean Bible contributed to general education and the eradication of illiteracy. Even though the Korean Protestant church started around 100 years later than its Catholic counterpart, Protestants accomplished Bible translation into Korean several decades earlier than the Catholic church. The Scottish missionary John Ross was the first person who translate the Gospel of Luke into Korean, with the help of other Koreans, in Manchuria in 1882. Afterwards, Lee Soo-Jung did his translation of the Gospel of Mark in 1884, with the help of the Bible Society of the US in Japan. Due to the active participation of Protestant missionaries like Underwood, the Protestant Bible translation was finished in 1910 with the help of Koreans. On the Catholic side, translation of the New Testament was completed

in 1941 and the Old Testament in 1963. There was an ecumenical joint venture between Catholics and Protestants for the Korean Bible translation of Old and New Testaments, which was finished in 1977. This ecumenical version was the first attempt to translate from ancient biblical languages into modern Korean. From the Protestant side, ecumenically oriented Presbyterian Churches like PROK and the Methodist Church participated in this cooperation of translation. This ecumenical version of the Bible is used mostly by the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and a few progressive Protestant churches. The majority of evangelical Protestant churches didn't use it. Due to the focus on liturgy and style of faith, Catholics were further behind in the translation of the Bible. While Protestant churches are focused on the Bible as the word of God and on preaching in the worship service, Catholic churches are oriented towards mass, liturgy, and doctrine of Catholic teaching (Lee 2003: 42–48).

## **2.5 Naming of Christian communities and denominations**

The dawn of mainline Protestant churches, like Presbyterians and Methodists, will be described in the next section. The present section will briefly introduce other Christian communities that mostly belong to the NCKK.

The Korean Orthodox Church was started by the Russian Orthodox in the eighteenth century, but, due to political changes in Russia, the Orthodox Church in Korea was established in multilayered form in terms of ethnicity, culture, format, etc. In 2004, an archdiocese was established in Seoul. Orthodox Christianity in Korea is a small minority in terms of size, as it never expanded thus and remains a minority group within the Christian community.

The Korean Evangelical Church, the Korean independent church, was established in 1935 with Choi Tae-Yong (1897–1950), who became a non-church movement activist under the influence of Uchimura Ganjo in Japan as an assistant professor at the former Yonsei University. It promotes an evangelical non-church movement that emphasizes the Bible without being bound by the church's past and system, and emphasizes salvation by faith not by compliance with the law. Gradually, enthusiasm for the non-church movement, based on nationalism, faded, and with it the church's gospel-based vitality. The theology of the Korean Evangelical Church should be academic, and should advocate for a church and for the Korean people. Since 1966, when Ji Dong-Sik was the chairperson of the board, this church has been a member of the NCKK.

The Lutheran Church was introduced to Korea in 1958 by a missionary from the Missouri Synod (LCMS). Since Presbyterianism is very strong in Korea, Lutheranism, which was introduced relatively late, remains as a very small denomination. Their form of worship is similar to that of the Anglican high church style. This church is affiliated with NCKK

and UCKK. It has its own pastoral seminary, and unlike the German and Nordic Lutheran churches it maintains a theologically conservative trend.

The Salvation Army was started in 1908 when a Salvation Army missionary came to Korea upon the request of a Korean student studying in Japan. It was suppressed during the Japanese colonial period and forcibly disbanded. After liberation, a new missionary came and resumed the Salvation Army in 1947. It follows the principles, organizational system, and theological direction of the broader Salvation Army initiated by William Booth, its founder, and it has its own Salvation Army theological school.

The Anglican Church in Korea was started in 1890 and is a member of the global Anglican community. It has its own theological institute which was founded in 1914 and in 1989 became a college then a university in 1994. Although it shows inclusiveness that encompasses progressive and conservative tendencies, it is a numerical minority. In 1965, Lee Chun-Hwan was ordained as the first Korean Anglican bishop, and was active in the Korean Ecumenical Movement. The Korean District was officially established in 1993. Since the Anglican Church of Korea is an independent district, the approval process of the Archbishop of Canterbury in England is no longer necessary to amend the church law (Kim 2014: 881–898).

The first Pentecostal church was established in Seoul in 1932, and the Pentecostal Church of Korea was disbanded during the Japanese colonial period. After liberation, the church was rebuilt in 1949. The Assemblies of God of Korea was founded in 1953 by Arthur B. Chestnut with the preliminary work of Koreans like Park Gwi-Im and Heo Hong. The Full Gospel Church Seminary began in 1953. Explosive growth happened after 1966 when Cho Yong-Gi became president of the General Assembly. The Assembly of God in Korea was rapidly developed through Cho Yong-Gi (see Cho [n.d.]) and his mother-in-law Choi Ja-Sil. In 1984, the church allowed female ordination. Since 1996, the Assembly of God has been a member of the NCKK. It has religious seminaries and universities nationwide to train pastors and to educate lay people.

The Holiness Church does not belong to the NCKK, but it has significant meaning in the Protestant landscape in Korea. It is based on the Oriental Mission Society (OMS), established in Japan as part of the American Holiness church movement which was begun under the influence of John Wesley. It began in 1907 when Kim Sang-Joon and Jung Bin, graduates from the Tokyo Bible Academy of the Oriental Mission Society, established a missionary institution in Seoul. It has a doctrinal characteristic that emphasizes the quadruple rebirth, holiness, healing, and the second coming of Jesus. Its principles of theological interpretation emphasize the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience, according to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

Catholic churches do not belong to the NCKK, however, they work ecumenically together. Although the NCKK contributed to the democratization of Korean society, after the introduction of the civic government its influence became weaker. On the Protestant side, mega-churches dominate the Christian landscape, and main-pastor-centred models are more popular instead of the theological consensus of the NCKK or evangelical alliances.

### **3 Landscape of Korean Protestant theology regarding Presbyterianism and Methodism**

The majority of Protestants in Korea are Presbyterian and Methodist. Among Presbyterians, there are many different branches which divided based on theological hermeneutics and church politics.

#### **3.1 The issue of introducing the Abingdon Bible commentary**

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, theological conflict began over the use of Abingdon Bible Commentary among Korean Protestants. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the mission to Korea in 1934, the Abingdon Bible Commentary translation project was developed. The commentary was co-written by sixty-six biblical scholars from Canada, the United States, Europe, India, and Australia. It contained academic content, but it was an evangelical book that was designed to be easy for the general reader to understand.

This work of translation was carried out mainly by Methodist theologians, who advocated progressive theology, and some Presbyterian theologians. The commentary played an important role at the time in helping Korean pastors and church leaders study the Bible, but it was harshly criticized and suffered boycotts by conservative Presbyterian theologians and pastors for its liberal interpretation of the Bible.

In addition, disciplinary action against Presbyterian theologians who participated in the translation and editing of this book was also discussed. Therefore, at the Twenty-Fourth Presbyterian General Assembly held in September 1935, the Presbyterian Church decided not to subscribe to the commentary on the grounds that it violates Presbyterian doctrine, and they requested a public apology from the translators.

This case became an opportunity for public discussion in the Korean church due to the principle of biblical interpretation. The conservative Presbyterian church leaders criticized theologians and pastors for interpreting the Bible in an academic way, and for analysing the history of Jesus Christ's revelation as religious and academic objects by introducing the principle of higher criticism which they thought destructive, which intensified the confrontation between Methodism and Presbyterianism.

#### **3.2 The formation of Presbyterianism**

Already in the beginning of the twentieth century Koreans went to US seminaries for further study. This resulted in US theology being influential in the theological education and formation of Korean Christianity. The history of Korean Presbyterian theology adapted to and resembled the Presbyterian schism in the US, and the US Presbyterian controversy was repeated to a degree in Korean Presbyterianism. The crisis between the Old Princeton theology and the new Princeton theology was related to not only theological controversy but also political issues in the US like abolitionism.

The schism of Korean Presbyterianism was related to this schism of US Presbyterian churches, especially Princeton theological seminary. The struggle between old and new theological approaches involved people like J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), who established Westminster Theological Seminary (Stonehouse 1978: 446–468). Those who were more influenced by the ideas of Westminster Theological Seminary and Old Princeton were influential in establishing the Chong-Shin Theological Seminary, one of the Presbyterian seminaries of Hapdong. Founded in 1953 by Park Hyeong-Yong, it was a major conservative Presbyterian denominational institution. The Old Princeton theologians like Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921) were strongly influential in formatting the conservative stream of Presbyterianism in Korea. Their rigid Puritan reformed theology was inherited from a large group of Presbyterian theologians (Park 1977: 140–142). This kind of theological tradition was especially imparted to Park Hyeong-Yong (1897–1978), who graduated from Soong-Sil University in 1920 and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1926. He was trained and influenced by Charles Hodge of Princeton and Louis Berkhof of Calvin Seminary (1873–1957), and got his PhD from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was a main figure in carrying out the establishment of an Old Princeton-style seminary in Korea.

Park Hyeong-Yong was focused on the inerrancy and verbal inspiration of the Bible. He described how he used to teach the students at Pyongyang Seminary: ‘One of the attempts to keep the authority of the Bible and to prevent disseminating wrong theological thoughts to the students, they kept International Critical Commentary in the library of George O. Engel (1864–1939) who was the chief librarian. Those books were only available to the professors’ (Park 1976: 16).

More concretely, the first schism of the Presbyterian Church occurred based on a Shinto shrine issue between a ‘liberal minority’ and a ‘fundamentalist majority’. Horace Horton Underwood, the son of Horace Grant Underwood, led the ‘liberal minority’ (Ryu 2022: 184–196). Pyongyang Seminary was faced with the Shinto shrine issue, which became controversial among theologically and politically differently oriented people. During the Japanese colonial period, paying respect to Shinto shrines became very problematic among many people. The key point was whether Christians were allowed to participate in the exercise of bowing in front of the Shinto shrine, because people thought it violated

the first commandment based on which Christians must not worship other gods. Thus, this action became a kind of criterion to distinguish real and false Christians. Those who took the Bible literally refused to participate in showing respect and kneeling in front of Shinto shrines. The consequence of this refusal was martyrdom.

Many thought genuine theological seminaries should not participate in kneeling in front of Shinto shrines, and this forced the closure of Pyongyang seminary during the late 1930s. Exceptionally, the president of the Twenty-Seventh general assembly of the Korean Presbyterian churches approved in 1938 a bowing ceremony in front of Shinto shrine. Chae Phil-Kun, who had pro-Japanese tendencies, took over the principal's position and the General Assembly reopened the seminary in Pyongyang in 1939. Thus, this seminary lost its genuine identity and is not recognized as an authentic seminary anymore because it inherited the authentic tradition of the seminary along with Christian nationalism. During this critical time, the United Theological Seminary was established in Manchuria with Methodist, Holiness Church, Baptist, and other influences.

On the other hand, Chosen Theological Seminary was established in Seoul on 12 September 1940 by Song Chang-Geun (1898–1951) and Kim Chae-Chun (1901–1987) with the help of the elder Kim Dae-Hyun. Song Chang-Geun graduated from Pierson Memorial Union Bible Institute in Seoul (currently Pyeong Taek University), studied at Princeton theological seminary in the US, and got his PhD from Iliff School of Theology. He developed an inclusive middle way after experiencing both conservative and liberal theology. The institution received official permission from the Korean government in 1947 and became Chosen Theological University (the name was changed in 1953 to Hanguk Shinhak Seminary). Song Chang-Geun and Kim Chae-Chun participated in bowing during the Shinto shrine ceremony. They primarily wanted to protect the newly-started theology seminary and its students under the Japanese colonial power and oppression. Moreover, they thought (like Horace Horton Underwood) mere attendance and the act of bowing did not harm real Christian belief (Ryu 2022: 184–196), because it was not genuine participation in the worship or ritual of the enshrined beings. After the liberation of the country, this group who refused to bow, who had even suffered death, took over a more powerful position within Presbyterian churches and the church politics of Korea.

Song Chang-Geun and Kim Chae-Chun represented two major streams of progressive theology which were more open to social justice, academically more serious, and independent from the Western influence of education by missionaries. They were real pioneers of a theology of life based on the Bible:

Absolute oneness is alive in all things, and everything that lives in it is cherished and raised in its arms [...] In this way, all things live due to One. One lets all things live. All things let

oneness live. There is no life, if oneness leave from all things. Vice versa is the same.  
(Song 2000: 185, present author's translation)

### **3.3 Further Presbyterian schisms in the 1950s**

After liberation from Japanese colonization, conflicts among Korean Presbyterians increased and became more visible. Chosen Theological Seminary was uniquely placed in South Korea after the division of the two Koreas in 1945. Those who were strongly against the bowing ceremony in front of Shinto shrines established their own theological seminary, Koryo Theological Seminary (today's Kosin University), because alumni of Pyongyang wanted to have their own seminary again to keep the purity of faith in their own way (see Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea [n.d.]).

The liberation from Japanese colonialism was not brought by the Korean people, despite so many active independence movements, but by its allies, the USA and Russia. It became a source of potential crisis, which led to the Korean War and ideological conflict. During the Korean War period, when ideological conflicts erupted, another major schism among Presbyterian churches began. The first was the separation of Kosin denomination from the mainline Presbyterian Church in 1952. This resulted in the first division of the Presbyterian Church (Rhodes and Campbell 1964: 415). The primary issues were different behaviours, the act of bowing in front of Shinto shrines under Japanese colonialism, and whether the church was willing to defy, suffer, and even die, or accept and collaborate with the colonial government as a compromise. To refuse to kneel down in front of a Shinto shrine was interpreted as keeping pure Christian faith.

After the schism of Presbyterians over the Shinto shrine matter, there was another separation due to biblical hermeneutics. Kim Chae-Chun denied Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament. The decision by the conservative Presbyterians to declare him heretical was grounded in his academic approach regarding interpretation of the Bible, and in critical comments about Western mission policy which made Korea more independent. The critical point was whether academic interpretation of the Bible and liberal influences on theology could be accepted or denied. Kim Chae-Chun insisted on developing independence from foreign missionary education and applying a scientific theological approach. Finally, he was expelled in 1952 from membership as a pastor. Afterwards, Kim Chae-Chun established the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK) in 1953 with the help of Canadian missionary William Scott (1886–1979). After the separation, Kim Chae-Chun built up a new theological seminary and worked as a dean. There, education was more open to ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, and social justice. Instead of focusing on the salvation of individual souls, Kim Chae-Chun underlined the social gospel and the fight against structural sins. After he introduced various critical methods to interpret the Bible, he tried to interpret the Bible free from any confessional ideology and apologetics. He explained clearly that the purpose of adapting an academic

methodology of hermeneutics was not to deny faith: 'If the higher criticism (literal criticism and historical criticism) would be attempted, as mere rationalism and denying (God's) inspiration to interrupt the faith of believers, the church should be vigilant' (Kim Chae-Chun 2014: 233; Hwang 2014: 233, present author's translation). Kim Chae-Chun made it clear that higher criticism was not destructive but constructive, seeking for the truth of the Bible. The spirit of reformation allowed believers to correct wrong information about the Bible and its interpretation. He was critical not only of literal understandings of the Bible but also of all kinds of trends which interpreted the Bible by mere scientific evidence and methodology. Kim Chae-Chun underscored some problems of ideology- or doctrine-oriented interpretation, no matter what side it came from. As an Old Testament scholar, he focused on prophetic messages like Amos and Jeremiah.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church was disrupted again on 28 September 1959, between Tonghap and Hapdong. This led to the third separation and division among Presbyterians (Rhodes and Campbell 1964: 416). The tension was related to the membership question of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the ecumenical movements due to theological reasons. Issues of ecumenism became controversial as people such as Han Kyung-Jik (1902–2000) of Tonghap (<http://hankyungchik.org/Home/bbs/page.php?hid=hanAbout>) and Park Hyeong-Yong of Hapdong disputed each other. There was already tension among the WCC, The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC). Additionally, people of the Old Princeton school like J. Gresham Machen and his supporter Carl Macintyre (1906–2002) were especially influential in reinforcing this conflict of separation. It meant that the theological separation between Princeton and Westminster Seminary, following the separation of the US Presbyterian Church, was brought to Korea. This religious right-wing group strengthened Korean fundamentalism against the Korean modernist group. Besides this schism, the merger was not the key element of strength among Presbyterians, nevertheless there was an ongoing attempt to unite and cooperate. As an example, the Council of Presbyterian Churches in Korea was created in 1981 (<http://www.cpck.kr/about/>).

### **3.4 Outline of theological characteristics after the 1960s**

The 1960s was generally a period when theology and ecumenical movements bloomed. After the Korean War, more people went abroad for further study with the aid of foreign scholarships. Ecumenical movements were activated in many ways through the World Council of Churches and the Asian Council of Churches. The Second Vatican Council was also one of those components, and promoted opening the doors of the Catholic Church. More theological institutions were founded and developed. One of them was the ecumenical institution of the United Graduate School of Theology at Yonsei University, founded in 1964 with financial support from the Theological Education Fund (TEF) of the

World Council of Churches in order to promote ecumenical education and formation. The PCK and PROK, Anglican, Methodist, and Korean Evangelical Church all participated in this education together. Important theological journals and publications were also established during this period (Ryu 2000: 265–271).

On the other side, conservative churches had grown rapidly. The successor of Park Hyeong-Yong was Park Yune-Sun (1905–1988) who inherited a theological legacy from J. Gresham Machen, Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), and Edward Joseph Young (1907–1968). He became the influential leader of the Kosin denomination and an anti-ecumenism actor. He used to teach in the Kosin seminaries and in 1979 became the dean of the graduate school at Chong-Shin University which, again, further separated Presbyterian branches (Park 1992: 257–258).

Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Reinhold Niebuhr were the most-discussed theologians in the last century, regardless of theological orientations. Thus, these major figures of theology in the twentieth century affected Korea in various ways. Besides the issue of participation in the ecumenical movement, the theology of Karl Barth was one of the other theological issues and debates among Presbyterian theological seminaries. Barth's theology was considered a liberal theology that had affected European churches negatively and promoted liberalism, according to conservative theologians like Park Hyeong-Yong. Park Hyeong-Yong's theology was based on biblical inerrancy and verbal inspiration and was strongly against neo-orthodox theology, which was understood as the theology of Karl Barth. This kind of doctrine was developed as the theology of Hapdong, Chong-Shin University, another Presbyterian theological seminary (currently PCK Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary). Initially established by S. Moffett, it has been academically changed since Lee Jong-Seong took over the dean's position. Because Lee Jong-Seong interpreted and approached Barth's theology with different eyes, he gradually introduced it and embraced both conservative and liberal ideas. Lee Jong-Seong was an influential theologian who made Barth's theology more acceptable and popular for his denomination.

The Progressive Presbyterian group (PROK) accepted Barth's theology, especially his political action under Nazism, which has been a blueprint for developing the PROK's political theology since its beginning. Karl Barth's theology was very important to most leading scholars and theological formations, regardless of denomination; and, in the Presbyterian schism between Tonghap and Hapdong, Barth's theology was one of the most controversial elements. Major denominations and their leaders had to deal with Barth's theology, whether they accepted or denied it. The founder of PROK, Kim Chae-Chun, studied Barth in Japan and his thought is based on Barth's theology. Kim Chae-Chun studied in 1925 at Aoyama Gakuin University where he encountered Karl Barth's theology. Afterwards, he studied the conservative theology of Machen at Princeton, and

then liberal theology at Western Theological Seminary. He founded a neutral Barthian position between fundamentalism and liberalism.

Methodist theologian Yun Seong-Beom met Karl Barth in person in Basel and studied with him. The first Korean feminist theologian, Methodist Park Soon-Kyung, was a Barth expert and adopted his ideas for her theological development from a feminist perspective. This shows the gravity and impact of Barth's thought and theology on the formation of Korean theology in general.

Minjung theology was developed by progressive Presbyterian theologians who are oriented towards social justice (see Minjung Theology). It dealt with the problem of classism and structural sins regarding socio-economic discourse in society. Although this theology is focused on inequality, however, it neglected gender discourse, and the major figures of Minjung theology were also all male. In the era of multi-media and technocracy, Minjung theology could be expanded to include discourse on cultural politics (Kim 1997: 6–29). Minjung theology tried to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century, bringing together theology, cultural phenomena, and faith in dialogue with justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It is still a male majority that leads Minjung theology, while women lead more in activities and civil movements. One of the outcomes of Minjung theology is the promotion of the people's movement, and the priesthood of believers of the Reformed tradition is practised in these Minjung churches. Although its impact on society in general was very limited, Minjung theology became a promoter of several NGO movements like the Protestant Urban Industrial Mission, the Catholic Farmers Movement, and the process of democratization.

Among Protestant theologians, including Presbyterians who are a majority in Korea, Martin Luther is most popular as the originator of the Reformation, although Lutheranism itself is a numerically small minority. Despite the Reformed and Presbyterian churches and theology having been established by Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, Luther's name is valued and his theology is widely accepted. Theologically, John Calvin has been more influential in the Presbyterian Church than Zwingli, who has only recently been introduced in academic discourse. Worldwide tendencies reflect this trend in Korea, as the German Reformation is more influential than the Swiss Reformation despite its historical root. The methodology of Lutheran theology, specifically the transition from law to gospel, is widely adapted to Korean theology and church practice, as the accumulation of good deeds in traditional Korean religious thought is equivalent to the Lutheran perception of keeping the law to reach the gospel.

Methodist theologians were more liberal and progressive compared to Presbyterian theologians, as the controversy on Abingdon Bible Commentary showed. Methodist

theologians were more interested and involved in the discourse on indigenization in general, while Presbyterian theologians refrained from developing it.

In the 1990s there was controversial debate on religious pluralism among Methodist theologians. Byeon Seon-Hwan's article *Buddha and Christ* was one of the critical objects in this controversy, which attempted to relate Zen Buddhism with Christianity. The religious pluralism and syncretism of Byeon Seon-Hwan, and the postmodernism of Methodist Hong Chung-Soo, were charged by the Methodist Board of Church. Byeon Seon-Hwan sharply criticized proselytism, calling it a methodology of religious imperialism. Both pastors were deprived of their ministry in the Methodist Church and excommunicated. In summary, there was a controversial discussion among fundamentalists, modernists, moderates, conservatives, progressivists, and liberalists among major Presbyterian and Methodist groups, based on hermeneutics and relationship with religious culture and state.

## **4 Theological discourses on diverse issues**

### **4.1 God**

The landscape of Korean Christianity and theological discourse has been affected by both religious and cultural components. Traditionally, in Korean religious thought, pantheism, anthropomorphic animism, and celestial deities are widespread. According to traditional religious spirituality, there was already faith in a God who is a heavenly being and a universal one. Already Western missionaries observed how Koreans define and believe in God in the Korean traditional way, as 'the One Great One' (Gail 1909: 78). Korean traditional perception of God was as the Supreme Ruler, 'the distant, all-powerful, unapproachable One' (1909: 118): '[l]ove and light and life and joy are not associated with God's image and perception' (1909: 79).

After the introduction of Christianity, God is interpreted as a personalized God. God is considered omnipotent, the ultimate strict judge who will punish people and send them to hell or to heaven, which is equivalent to the traditional image of God, and controls moral thought with good triumphing over evil. This kind of doctrine and perception of God is popular, and stronger than a perception of a God who liberates people from the bondage of fear and oppression. The perception of God in the New Testament, where he is defined as love (1 John 4:16), is not highlighted.

Overall, heaven is symbolized in Korean culture and religious components as a masculine God, while earth is symbolized as a feminine God, a dynamic which is related to the yin and yang theory. This principle of the cosmos is religiously adapted. Yang is positive, creative, productive, and active, and Yin is negative, receptive, reproductive, and passive. The perception of God as father was influenced by Northeast Asian religious beliefs like Confucianism and Taoism. Additionally, it has been influenced by Western Christian

patriarchies which were brought and taught by Western missionaries. This kind of cultural tendency and conventional practice of double patriarchal perception is reinforced to define God as old male figure.

How to define God in Korean was one of the controversial issues among missionaries who worked on Bible translation in the late nineteenth century. Catholics name God as the Lord of heaven (천주), while Protestants prefer 'the Universal One' (하나님). The latter refers to the uniqueness of God, who embraces the universe. God is considered and understood as the unique one, the biggest one, and the highest one. Protestants adapted the indigenous perception of God (Kim and Kim 2015: 100–106; Oak 2013: 33–83).

In the Korean founding myth, there is a story about the heavenly god Hwanung. His son Hwanin came to Earth with his father's permission to rule and govern it. A tiger and a bear who lived together in a cave wanted to become human beings, and Hwanin required them to stay in the darkness for one hundred days and eat only some garlic and wormwood. The bear tolerates this with endurance and perseverance and passes the test, while the tiger gives up. As a reward, the bear becomes a human being, specifically a woman. This bear-turned-human married the son of the heavenly god and gave birth to a son called Hwankum/Dankun. This being, a harmonious combination of celestial and earthly beings, was the founder and first king of Korea in the founding myth.

Different theological lines approach and interpret this myth differently. Faith in a personalized God helps to understand the God of the Bible. Yahweh and Elohim in the Old Testament have been accepted in this religious and cultural background. Some Methodist theologians value this myth very positively in order to develop an Indigenous discourse on God.

For instance, Methodist theologian Yun Seong-Beom makes clear that the Korean perception of Hananim (하나님) refers to a 'unique personalized God' which is indicated in this myth (Yun 1998: 346–369). He interpreted the uniqueness of God as not meaning monotheism in numerical terms. In a similar way, Presbyterian theologian Hur Ho-ik elaborates how the Korean people's traditional concept of God, such as appears in Dangun mythology, was accepted as the perception of Christian God and was sublimated into the concept of the supreme God's being by deviating from a polytheistic and shamanistic perspective (Hur 2005: 553–554).

When the Catholic faith was introduced to the country, the first generation of Christians faced challenges about whether the old traditional rituals like ancestor worship services should be kept or denied. The first converted Catholics understood the first of the Ten Commandments literally and refused ancestor worship, and as a result were persecuted. This kind of denial of ancestor worship was interpreted as a refusal of authority and the value of dynasty, social system, and government. The theological debate about

Confucianism is related to the policy of the Chosun dynasty which supported Confucianism structurally as state ideology and oppressed Buddhism. It was an either/or choice without any compromise. To obey a Christian God was interpreted as a denial of other gods, a secular king, ancestor worship, etc. The first commandment, 'you shall have no other gods before me' was a theological axiom and norm of faith. It led to the martyrdom of many Catholics in the early period of Christianity in Korea as well as the Japanese colonial period, due to the Shinto shrine issue.

The God who liberated the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage was interpreted as the God of Christianity, with other gods belonging to other religions. This reinforced a dualism between Christianity and other religions. Proselytism and conversion from other religions to Christianity was a core methodology of evangelism. In general, practice of the believer's community to call God 'father' in prayer is very popular. The feminine image of God and feminist interpretation of God are still the preserve of the minority, due to a literal interpretation of the Bible.

## **4.2 Jesus Christ**

Atonement, redemption, vicarious death, and resurrection are rather unfamiliar concepts in traditional Korean religious understanding, although the sacrifice of animals in traditional rituals has been practiced. Propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation are also new terminology and concepts in order to understand Christology. Discourse on Christology could be differentiated mainly along the following lines: exclusivism, inclusivism, and religious pluralism. Exclusivism is a general understanding of Christology. Regardless of denomination, the majority take this position of exclusive Christology. No other salvation except Jesus Christ is highlighted in theology, as well as a doctrinal practice among faith communities to accept Jesus as the only way to God. Exclusivism is almost a synonym for evangelism, and it shows no tolerance for other religions. Personal salvation is accepted instead of universal salvation. Human-centred redemption is a popular understanding. In street evangelism, the catchphrase 'believing in Jesus, go to heaven, while unbelieving in Jesus, go to hell' is still frequently used.

Inclusivism refers to keeping Jesus Christ as the unique saviour but not ignoring other religious teachings and showing respect to them. Inclusivism has different nuances according to different scholars. It differs from exclusivism because inclusivism recognizes universal salvation, and it does not deny the possible value of other religions. Inclusivism takes the middle way between exclusivism and pluralism, and affirms salvation by Jesus Christ. In this stream of inclusivism among progressive Presbyterian groups two kinds of characteristics could be highlighted: one is led by Kang Won-Yong (1917–2006; see Kang Won Yong Foundation [n.d.]), who used to be representative of the World Council of Churches. As one of the founding members of the Presbyterian Church of the Republic

of Korea (PROK), Kang did not remain silent about social issues (Kang 2005: 334–349), and was well known for speaking up against the military dictatorship in the 1970s. Kang promoted movements of dialogue with politicians, social leaders, labourers, academics, and young adults in order to develop a platform for social awareness and democracy. His concern and methodology were to create a third way between and beyond the dominant dualistic ideological tensions.

To catch up with the reformed spirit, he underlined the importance of the gospel, which brought the love of God concretely by Jesus Christ. He kept his christological identity strong, yet had an open mind towards other religious communities. He taught that Jesus as incarnated God is a real human being and a real God, and that Jesus practiced God's love in this worldly realm:

Asia today has not been fully liberated from religious imperialism. In other words, Asia has not been able to break away from Western influence. Christ alone, liberated from Western Christianity and incarnate in Asia, can be our liberator in Asia today. (Kang 1995: 211)

In order to imitate Jesus as a disciple and to confess Christ, it is also important to act in society, but social action is not limited to Christians. Thus, Kang initiated the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP) in order to work together among religious people on social issues and promote peace in the Korean peninsula. Kang was influenced by Paul Tillich to combine religion and culture. Like Tillich's theme – 'religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion' – Kang was open towards Korean religions and adapted Korean culture into the liturgy and Christian events. Since the 1990s, Kang focused more on environmental issues and universal salvation in his theology for the general wellbeing of all creatures. He also focused on cosmic Christology in order to promote environmental awareness.

The other stream is led by An Byeong-Mu for Minjung theology (Korean liberation theology). Jesus is understood by them as a liberator of oppressed and marginalized people under the Roman empire, a transformer for societal and cultural change, or a teacher who showed the best way to the truth. This group is socio-politically progressive and culturally open to diverse issues. Social salvation is highlighted more than individual soul salvation. Minjung theologians try to critique structural and socio-political problems. Oppressed people – Minjung – became the focal point for societal reform and were highlighted in theological discourse. Jesus is interpreted as Minjung, and Minjung is considered as Christ.

The first generation of Minjung theologians, primarily An Byeong-Mu, brought the idea of the Ochos to define Minjung. Another leading scholar of Minjung theology, Suh Nam-

Dong, defined suffering people as Minjung. Suh elaborated on their social structural problems and advocated for those who were oppressed under this system. These were the theologians who elaborated a Korean contextual theology of suffering, using the socio-economic frame of Minjung. An Byeong-Mu defined Han as the unrequited suffering of the victims as revealed through Jesus's crucifixion. The essence of Minjung theology is an analysis of labour problems in a socio-political context. More recently, the labour market and the situation of technocracy have changed, however the precarization of labour continues and remains a significant problem in a capital-driven society. Minjung's status has been changed, but the systemic injustice remains. The identification of Minjung with Jesus is an issue for Christology to define, to accept the historical Jesus yet still confess Christ in each new context, according to Bultmann's perception.

Religious pluralism reject Christ's divinity and other essential Christian doctrines, like salvation only through Jesus Christ. It affirms that all religions are more or less the same in terms of the believer's ability to reach God. Jesus Christ is considered one of the teachers or role models for real humans. To reach supreme-being is compared symbolically to climbing mountains, as if there are many ways to reach the peak, thereby denying that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ.

Some Methodist theologians were strong enough to insist on this religious pluralism. Byeon Seon-Hwan focused on religious pluralism and criticized the exclusivism of Christianity in terms of salvation. Byeon Seon-Hwan started attempting to promote religious dialogue between Christianity and Zen-Buddhism, and he tended to avoid dependence on Western theology. In order to develop religious liberation, he embraced religious pluralism in 1980. He was a leading scholar in this regard. However, he was strongly criticized by conservative Presbyterian theologians and mainstream Methodist church leaders. In 1992, he was excommunicated and removed from his role as pastor (Lee 2015; Byeon 1997a; 1997b).

### **4.3 Holy Spirit**

The spirit world and the supernatural dimension were a concern and interest of Korean people based in traditional pantheism. From the early period of Christianity, it was not easy to differentiate between natural spirits and Holy Spirit. Thus, missionaries concentrated on Christology instead of dealing with pneumatology. Pneumatology was examined more by Pentecostal groups later. The development of pneumatology could be also elaborated according to the theological line between liberalism and evangelicalism. Liberalism refers to two kinds of trends: political progressiveness and hermeneutical progressiveness. The first is related to the Korean political theology of Minjung, and Suh Nam-Dong was a major figure in this subject. He opposed the conventional interpretation of theology, concentrated on Christology, and emphasized Minjung theology, which is interpreted

from pneumatology. Suh Nam-Dong underlined the activities of the Holy Spirit throughout history. He identified Minjung as the subject of salvation, saying that Minjung inherited the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus, according to his pneumatology, Minjung could be saved by themselves.

Hermeneutical progressiveness is related to an attempt at enculturation. Ryu Tong-Shik developed threefold Korean elements in order to do his theology of enculturation: *han* (greatness, oneness, no relation to unrequited suffering), *mot* (aesthetic beauty), and *sam* (life). He found these elements in the tradition of P'ungnyu (wind and flow) which was inherited in the spirit of Hwarang (an elite male youth group) in the Silla state period in the sixth century.

Ryu Tong-Shik tried to develop the origin of Korean culture and beliefs regarding Shamanism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and develop the theology of P'ungnyu. P'ungnyu thought is based on Choi Chi-Won's idea, who initiated this Hwarang system. He elaborated P'ungnyu in relationship to the Hwarang system which embraced Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Moreover, he was an expert on Korean shamanism and shamanistic elements of Korean culture. However, there is a significant difference between shamanism and Christianity in terms of God's love and the incarnation. Ryu indicated the pneumatic dimension of Korean components within this spiritual movement and interpreted it from a Christian point of view. He made a diagram out of this threefold dimension: *han* (no relation to unrequited suffering) refers to the religious aspect, *mot* to cultural, *sam* to social, and all are related to *OI* (얼, Korean for 'spirit'). The critical point is how this Korean spirit could be differentiated from the Holy Spirit, or rather combined in a syncretic way or as a replacement (Kim 2014: 963–988).

Among evangelical groups, pneumatology is mostly developed by a Pentecostal circle. Cho Yong-Gi was representative of this group and a prominent leader. He recognized the supremacy of the Holy Spirit and concentrated on a dualistic approach between the power of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of evil. Cho considered the spirits of Korean tradition as evil, and demonized Korean religious spirituality as superstition. These cultural and religious components and the territorial devil were, for him, the object which should be fought and defeated (Cho 1979: 36–37).

The Pentecostal church generally highlights the visible gift of the Holy Spirit. Miraculous healing, exorcism of demons, praying fervently, fasting, and speaking in tongues are common practices. Additionally, the priest who practices with special charismatic power makes personal cults possible, as the shaman was doing in shamanism. The Korean Pentecostal movement rapidly developed through the Prayer Mountain movement and cell groups during the period of industrialization (Kim Sung-Gun 2014: 989–1009). Intensive prayer, speaking in tongues, and divine healing are characteristic of this group. Divine

healing and charismatic ministry are primarily related to demonology, and retrieving pneumatology was the major concern of the Pentecostal group. The Pentecostal group identifies God with the Holy Spirit as the healer of mind, soul, and body, and mystical union with God, speaking in tongues, and prosperity are essential characteristics of this group. Compared to the Presbyterians, it is liturgically less strict and more informal and flexible, because their liturgical form and style is more related to oral tradition instead of written liturgy. Their ideological orientation tends towards evangelicalism and anti-communism.

Ryu Tong-Shik defines the Pentecostal movement as a maternal and healing-oriented movement (2000: 415). This group supports marginalized people in society through charity and diaconal work instead of analysing and criticizing structural injustices in society. People in need generally prefer prosperity theology, which is driven by the Pentecostal group. Minjung theology was developed as an academic discourse of minor groups, which is rational and analytic but in practice lacked empathy with marginalized people. By contrast, the Pentecostal movement is accessible to marginalized people but lacks analytical rigor in addressing structural problems and seeking social justice. Minjung theology remains academic, while the Pentecostal movement is well-accepted by large audiences due to its simplicity (Chung 2018: 50).

The Pentecostal leader Cho Yong-Gi claims the charismatic power to control exorcism and healing, which underlines the work of the Holy Spirit (Kim 2016: 185–186). Cho Yong-Gi's leadership has been affected by manifestations of divine miraculous power in the Full Gospel Church. He highlighted the threefold blessing and the theology of prosperity, and his message and prayer for wellbeing were broadly accepted and very influential. As a kind of messenger of the Holy Spirit, he was respected very widely. This charismatic pattern has been inherited from Korean traditional religion into Christianity in general and Pentecostalism in particular (Chung 2018: 51–52).

Cho Yong-Gi described the line as the first dimension, the plane as the second, and the cube as the third, to which the material world and the whole earth belong. The Holy Spirit belongs to the fourth dimension:

Every human being is a spiritual being as well as a physical being. They have the fourth dimension as well as the third dimension in their hearts [...] By natural order, the fourth dimension has power over the third dimension, and the human spirit, within limitations, has the power to give order and creation. God gave power to human beings to control the material world and to have dominion over material things, a responsibility they can carry out through the fourth dimension. (Cho 1979: 39–40)

Cho Yong-Gi's theological perception could be summarized as fivefold good news and triple blessings: salvation, fulfilment of the Holy Spirit, divine revelation, blessing, and ultimate union with God as the key themes of the Christian faith. Triple blessings – like spiritual and physical health, fertility, and material success – were his core message, and these triple blessings refer to practical aspects of the quintessential gospel. The content is well illustrated in the words of 3 John 1:2: 'Dear friend, and I pray that all goes well for you. I hope that you are as strong in body, as I know you are in spirit'. The contents are as follows: first, the wellbeing of the soul, believing in Jesus Christ and living a spiritual life full of salvation. Second, good for everything: this means a life in Christ where everything works together to achieve goodness and the blessings that one receives through it. Third, robustness: the blessing of a saved believer could be liberated from the pain of disease. In this view, the above triple blessing is a blessing that all believers can enjoy; Christians should seek the righteousness of the reign of God if they want to set their life goals in salvation (Chan 2004: 104–112).

#### **4.4 Gender and feminist theology**

Christianity brought the half-liberation of women in Korea, in a patriarchal society driven by Confucianism. The equality of women as human beings according to the image of God was highlighted in Christianity. Nameless women found their own name, instead of being called daughters, wives, and mothers of someone else. Women could express their presence and contribute to the establishment of Korean Christianity to a certain degree. However, after Christianity was established, women became invisible in church structures and excluded from decision-making bodies. Korean traditional patriarchies were intertwined with Western Christian patriarchal hierarchies which were brought by missionaries. For the establishment of Korean churches, female Christians contributed a lot, especially as evangelists. They were mostly educated in Bible school since theological seminary became a male-only domain in the early period. The refusal of women's ordination has a long history. Although women's ordination has been allowed by law since the mid-1990s, implementing this takes longer, and has not yet been practised fully.

In order to create and promote Korean feminist theology, the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) was founded in 1980. The theme of feminist discourse was very diverse; firstly, Park Soon-Kyung tried to see women and 'Minjung (people)' in the light of what is meaningful for the people 'Minjok (nation)'. She led the theological discourse of political theology on unification (Kim 2015: 96–97). Her significant legacy of Korean feminist theology for unification will receive special attention below.

Secondly, feminist theologians attempted to bolster feminist hermeneutics to read the Bible with new eyes. Since the rejection of female ordination or female eldership was based on certain Pauline letters, there was an attempt to reinterpret certain hostile passages and

to investigate the essential message of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Women in the Old Testament and the meaning of women in the image of God were elaborated in a constructive way. Biblical hermeneutics was developed in order to find the positive ground from the Bible for women's ordination and gender equality. God's feminine image and matrilineal approach have also been investigated to strengthen this perspective.

Thirdly, Korean culture and religious texts are objects of feminist theology in terms of enculturation and finding alternative dogma. Korean popular tales and myths, and the texts of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Donghak religions became objects of feminist theology. Also, Shamanism from feminist principles has been used for constructive syncretism. Redemption through Jesus Christ as the male figure has been denied, while other religious figures and components were replaced for Christology. A religious pluralistic approach is adopted in this regard. Each scripture of religious traditions is highly respected instead of the Christian Bible as an alternative against patriarchal components.

Fourthly, Minjung theology has been developed from a male perspective. Socioeconomic statuses in Korea have changed, yet injustice and inequality regarding gender, class, and race remain. The triple burden and challenges of women in the personal and public domain are elaborated from the perspective of female Minjung. Active Minjung movement among this circle has been tried instead of academic theological discourse. The subjects and elements which Minjung theologians are discussing have expanded into various areas: gender equality, including LGBTQ+ issues (see Queer Theology), urban development, gentrification, and the issue of the precarization of labour.

Fifthly, seeking nameless and forgotten women is another theme of feminist theology. Western female missionaries and many Indigenous women who helped Western female missionaries are not much investigated in academic work. To discover them, in order to find values in their work and to give them respect and recognition, is the goal of feminist theology regarding 'herstories'.

Sixthly, in terms of practical theology like liturgy, pastoral caring, and performing ministry there are many attempts to find a new way of practice in comparison with conventional methodology. The Minjung feminism movement has also developed in place of theoretical discourse. To make women's issues public, many kinds of joint ventures and common actions have been developed regarding comfort women issues, migration, sexual prostitution at US military bases, and campaigns against sexual harassment. Environmental awareness and participation in eco-theological practice are also promoted.

Park Soon-Kyung was one of the pioneers and leading figures of Korean feminist theology. She insists that Korean feminist theology should be rooted in the Korean context of division, not just imitating Western feminist theology, and she established a theology of unification (cf. Chung and Sedlmayr 2013: 191–210). Her theological background was

related to Karl Barth's theology and his radical approach to the transcendence of God. However, Park did not remain a Barthian but instead developed her own theological concepts as a Korean feminist theologian and considered the division of Korea and its impact on society and people's mindsets. Her perception of feminist theology was connected to the problems and context of divided Korea. Thus, peaceful unification and co-existence are the goals of feminist theology in Korea. Park criticized Korean Christianity as being too much affected by anti-communism, and urged self-criticism towards reconciliation instead of increasing hostility. In Tokyo, in July 1991, she delivered a lecture titled 'Perspective of the Korean Church and Reunification', and as a result was charged with violating national security law and imprisoned for 106 days. She criticized the ideological orientation of the church as being not the promotor but the barrier for unification in Korea. She elaborated on the problem of Korean Christianity, which supported the military system and the military-industrial connection instead of promoting peace.

Park also problematized the South Korean Christian concept of free democracy in general, which is connected to military power and US-led globalization, and is rooted in Western capitalist bourgeois individualism and liberalism. Moreover, Park underlined the 'tendency of Anti-Communism and Anti-North Korea [to result] in a mistake of Western Christianity' (Park 2005: 80). She believed that Christianity had lost its essential power to deliver the eschatological message of God's reign. She highlighted the consideration of North Korean socialism in the discourse of reunification, and the mutual correction of capitalism and socialism in order to seek for neutral third way (Park 2002: 29). She taught that feminist theology should not be reduced to advocating only for women's rights or recovering female images, including goddesses. It should be contextual and functional, observing socio-political problems in the patriarchal society and suggesting alternative solutions.

## 4.5 Enculturation

Based on its multi-religious heritage, Korean theology began a discourse on indigenization among believers' communities. The gospel is regarded as a seed and Korea as soil. The crucial question is how the once-for-all truth could be interpreted in different cultural and geographical contexts. The methodology of indigenization depends on how the gospel (Christ) could approach and encounter culture; whether it was the gospel against culture, the gospel of culture, the gospel above culture, the gospel in paradox with culture, or the gospel transforming the culture, like H. Richard Niebuhr indicates in his book *Christ and Culture* (1951). The majority of evangelical Koreans take a position of Christ against culture. Progressive Methodists prefer to take a position as Christ of culture and Christ and culture in paradox, while progressive Presbyterians prefer a position of Christ transforming culture. Theologians who want to do theology of indigenization primarily try to find a contact point within a culture for the gospel.

Already by the end of the nineteenth century, when the Protestant mission started, enculturation was an important theme, because missional work was an attempt to demonstrate biblical thoughts and contents in Korean religious context and culture. From the beginning, Christian leaders made a comparison between old Korean religious components and Christian doctrine. To translate the Bible was an attempt to enculturate Christianity into the Korean context.

Korean Christian theology was created in 1900, in the beginning period of Western missionaries, and developed in 1930 under Japanese colonialism and Western theological influence. Since 1960 the theology of enculturation has been developed among Methodist theologians, while Minjung theology as an enculturated Korean theology was more established among progressive Presbyterian theologians (Lee 2015). Both theologies are developed as contextual theologies. People were gradually aware of not merely doing imported theology but reflecting on theology in a Korean cultural-religious context (Suh 2001: 173–200).

The most essential issue of indigenization was the discourse on ancestor worship which is based on Confucian values and spirit religion (Clark 1932: 114–116). According to the lunar calendar, there are celebrations and special holidays where this kind of performance is conducted. It is an expression of gratitude to ancestors, filial duty, and commemoration of dead people on behalf of the general wellbeing of descendants. The strong belief in destiny and spirit cults were also combined with this performance of ancestor worship because people believed that the general wellbeing of living people depends on this kind of ritual. Catholics are more open to adapting traditional forms of ancestor worship, although in the beginning there was even martyrdom due to the denial of ancestor worship. Major evangelical groups denied it as a form of 'Christ against culture', while compromised groups implemented it in a simpler way, as Ch'udo Yebae did, in order to adapt the meaning and to find a way in Christian liturgy (Grayson 2014: 1107–1128).

The other major theological discourse on indigenization is combined with debate about the Dangun Myth. It is related to understanding God's being in Korean culture in general, and religious spirituality. This myth of Dangun (단군) is reported in Old Korea in the history of Three Countries (삼국유사) as the founder of ancient Korea. It was very controversial whether the Myth of Dangun is a historical fact of the Korean nation or merely a mythological fiction. It has been differently discussed according to Korean Confucian scholars, historians, and religious scholars. It has been argued even among Korean Christian theologians in accordance with their own perspective and orientation. While Presbyterian theologians made negative comments on using and adapting this myth into theological discourse, Methodist theologians were more active in adapting and combining it. This kind of ancient belief could be interpreted as a pre-condition for having faith in the God of the Bible. The leading Methodist scholar of this discourse was Yun Seong-

Beom, who tried to culturally internalize the transcendence of the gospel in relation to the Bible. In order to develop his theology of indigenization he adapted the idea of inherent understanding (*Vorverständnis*) by Rudolf Bultmann and the ideas of Paul Tillich (Yun 1998: 17–39):

If the gospel is compared to new liquor [or 'new wine'; Matt 9:17], the new leather unit [wineskin] is considered to be a unique cultural a priori of the Korean people. It's possible. The word 'new' here must not be a Deus ex Machina from the sky, but in the long historical tradition of our people, its original ideology is newly recognized. (Yun 1998: 27)

Yun Seong-Beom has developed his 'theology of sung (성)' in order to adapt Confucian elements into Christianity. In his 1963 thesis, '환인, 환웅, 환검 is God', he supposed that three persons (환인, 환웅, 환검) in Dangun Myth could be understood as a form of trinity. He interpreted it in relation to Nestorian Christianity, which was widely spread in the sixth and seventh centuries in Asia (Yun 1998: 367–368). He compared the bear (환웅) who became a woman and gave birth to a son (환검/단군) with Mary who delivered Jesus. This son (환검/단군) is the mediator between God, humans, and the Earth. Yun Seong-Beom reflected on this aspect of the Dangun Myth as Vestigium Trinitas (Yun 1998: 462–483). This attempt to elaborate the Dangun Myth was sharply criticized by both progressive and conservative Presbyterian theologians. Culture itself is also an object of redemption. That kind of cultural component could be used as a contact point, but nothing else.

Secondly, Kim Kwang-Shik interpreted the myth of Dangun as the ontology of being human, including the foundation, structure, and form of being human, from the perspective of anthropology. He underlined this myth by offering 'typical Korean' (*proprium Coreanum*) as the personification of the categories of origin of hearing human beings. It also shows consistency with one's words and acts.

Thirdly, Ryu Tong-Shik, in his Pung-Ryu (풍류) theology, suggested that the main structure of the Dangun Myth is a combination of a threefold relationship with heaven, earth, and human beings. This harmony of three Taeguk (삼태극) and belief in three Gods (삼신) have been transmitted from generation to generation as the belief of Pung-Ryu. He developed the theology of Pung-Ryu, based on the Gospel of John, in order to enculturate the good news into a Korean context (Ryu 2009: 515–542).

Fourthly, Park Jong-Cheon proposed the theology of Ungyeo (웅녀), the bear who became a woman, in the view of feminist theology as well as Minjung theology. Overall, the content and structure of Dangun Myth, the organic harmony of three realities, has been adapted as the principle of hermeneutics for interpreting the main theme of the Bible from a Korean theological perspective mostly among Methodist theologians (Hur 2001: 347–384).

This kind of theological reflection on Korean religious components was not well accepted by leading Presbyterian theologians, who were influenced by exclusivism. They were concerned with the dangers of syncretism and rejected religious pluralism. Thus, sharp controversy occurred around this issue between exclusivism and religious pluralism. The next generation of enculturation theologians took over from their predecessors and had dialogue with Minjung theology and missiology, because Minjung theology is also a form of enculturation of theology in a Korean context and missiology is an attempt to bring cultural elements into dialogue with the contents of the Bible.

## **5 Conclusion**

The scar of the Korean War and its divisions still remains in many areas of Korean life, culture, systems, and theological discourse in general. The prevailing tendency of anti-communism in particular manipulated the theological spectrum and Christian communities. Political conservatism combined with anti-communism influenced not only society but also Christianity. Those who migrated from North Korea into the South, who had directly experienced the Korean War, were generally anti-communism oriented because they still carried the trauma of oppression and brutality from the communist regime. This trend remained even once democratization was implemented. Certain ideological and theological tensions among socially progressive groups, conservative groups, and fundamentalist groups were showing up in every pivotal political event, like the impeachment of former president Park Geun-Hye in 2017.

Political distancing was a conventional attitude among most Christians. This was an outcome of the teaching of missionaries under the colonial government. A critical minority group used to be progressively engaged in political discourse; however, this kind of traditional understanding has since changed. In the 1990s, 'sphere sovereignty', which was created by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), was generally accepted among evangelical theologians. Korean Kuyperians, who adopted neo-Calvinism, are active in transforming society through secularization. They developed a modest position in terms of socially oriented theology. Christian fundamentalists, the most rigidly conservative group, are trying to develop their own theology in which political ideology is adapted. Inherited from US fundamentalism, Christian nationalism was revived in the Korean context in the 2000s.


The conflict and tension regarding communism and anti-communism have slightly shifted toward otherness. Ideoscapes of dualistic ideas remained and shifted to Islamophobia and homophobia (Chung 2020: 128–131). The other is also related to Islamophobia, due to work migration and economic situation. Racial, ethnic, and sexual discrimination are combined. Moreover, conservative Korean Christians are generally not open to discourse regarding sexuality. Homosexuality is considered a major sin according to their biblical hermeneutic of literal interpretation. Culturally it is also not acceptable to change the

conventional social order in areas of marriage and sexual identity. This kind of attitude is integrated with general homophobia and hostility against LGBTQ+ groups.

According to a survey conducted by Korean Gallup between 18 March 2021 and 7 April 2021, with face-to-face interviews nationwide in Korea, the present religious situation in Korea and religious demography looks like the following (Gallup 2021): among adults, the total number of religious people decreased by 54% in 2004; 50% in 2014; and 40% in 2021. Particularly, youth and young adult numbers keep decreasing. Among the whole population, religious proportions are: Protestants 17%, Buddhism 16%, and Catholics 6%. However, among non-religious people, the response to a question about a favourable impression of the different religious traditions was Buddhism 20%, Catholicism 13%, and Protestantism 6%. This shows the unpopularity of Protestantism in society in general. Financial corruption, sexual abuse scandals, and inheritance of a pastor's position from father to son in megachurches are some of the many reasons why the Protestant church became less popular. Additionally, corruption scandals involving well-known pastors or Christians prominent in public life have discredited the churches in the eyes of many. Moreover, non-religious respondents replied that there is no favourable religion for them: in 2004 it was 33%, in 2014 it was 46%, and by 2021, 61%. This means that the 'no favourable religious tendency' has significantly increased. Generally, the younger generation lost their interest in a discourse on social issues and religious matters, as the public survey expressed. Moreover, the aging problem within Korean Christianity has increased.

After civic government was introduced, progressive Christian groups began to deal with environmental issues as theological discourse. Regardless of denomination, it became a matter of church engagement and theological discussion, although it is still not a primary element of mainstream churches or theology. Due to the COVID-19 crisis and environmental disasters, Christians are more aware of this element of theology. However, cosmic universal salvation is still not a widely-held belief, but is rather a perception of minor progressive groups.

## **Attributions**

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