

## **Christianity in Modern Korea:Welfare and Propagation**

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**Abstract:**The arrival and establishment of Christianity in Korea, especially in South Korea, is highlighted in this study. American Christian missionaries actively engaged with Korean society following the Korean War, transforming South Korea's social structure. Conversion to another religion occurred, and the social welfare agenda was a crucial instrument in making their presence known. In light of this, this paper examines the evolution of welfare programs and their shifting dynamics.

## Introduction

Following the Korean War (1950-1953), South Korea broadened its social policies to aid the war victims and marginalized members of society. Although the first outcome was initially feared to be far worse, the expansion had far-reaching effects. Since many Christians participate in social welfare programs, it's

critical to comprehend how their decisions may affect their finances. Furthermore, Protestants also have a greater focus on socioeconomic advancement than do Roman Catholics. We could refer to these people as liberation theologians because they advocate for Christian humanitarian concepts.

In an effort to assist their neighbors, contemporary Korean churches are becoming more involved in social welfare and running volunteer social welfare initiatives. Through social welfare initiatives, they are growing and sharing the good news of Jesus. Still, a lot of churches are having trouble locating social assistance programs that work for them. This essay will look at the welfare work and agenda.

Early in the seventeenth century, Catholic missionaries in China and their Chinese associates translated works on "Western learning," which served as the Koreans' initial introduction to Catholicism. Although Koreans were fascinated by the technology,

science, and math these books offered, they rejected their religious message even though they could understand the classical Chinese in which they were written. The late 1700s saw the beginning of this shift when a Korean scholar named Peter Yi Seung-hun (1756-1801) went to Beijing as part of a tribute mission and underwent baptism.

Numerous Koreans would be baptized by him, and the movement swiftly expanded to include commoners and women in addition to scholars. As a result, by the time Chinese missionary James Zhou Wenmo (1752-1801) arrived in Korea in late 1794, there were already several thousand Catholics living there. While lowborn men, like the butcher Hwang Ilgwang (1757-1801), attested to Catholic teachings on spiritual equality by declaring that there were two heavens-one after death and one in the midst of a church community in which everyone was respected-women, like Columbia Kwang Wansuk (1760-1801), rose to prominence as leaders in the Catholic Church. However, violent state-sponsored persecution of Catholics resulted from Catholicism's foreign links, government fears that it would incite revolt, and the Catholic rejection of ancestral rites.

Protestant missionaries made two unsuccessful attempts to enter Korea in 1832 and 1866, but it would

take until the final quarter of the 1800s for there to be consistent contact and conversion. Before Methodist Horace Allen (1858-1932), the first resident missionary, arrived in Korea in 1884, Koreans living abroad in Manchuria were introduced to Protestantism by Scottish missionaries like John Ross (1842-1910). They also smuggled Korean translations of the Gospels and eventually the entire New Testament into Korea. Allen served as the American legation's official physician because of concerns that his open missionary work might result in persecution.

The first ordained Protestant clergyman to arrive on the peninsula was Presbyterian Horace Underwood (1859-1916), who arrived the next year. He would later assist in founding Yonsei University and collaborate with Allen in setting up Severance Hospital. Despite their perceived inherent goodness, Protestant missionaries really concentrated on these medical and educational establishments in order to promote conversion and get state backing.

Thus, when the 1919 March 1st independence Movement commenced, its key organizers were Korean Protestants and adherents of the indigenous, syncretic religion known as Cheondogyo. Fifteen members of that religion, two Buddhist monks, and sixteen Protestants signed the declaration of

independence that the movement delivered. Similar to this, many Korean Protestants refused Shint? ritual participation in the 1930s due to nationalism and religious concerns.

And while the actions of missionaries may appear patriarchal to those of the twenty-first century, Protestant Christianity provided women with access to church-related organizations for work, study, and public gatherings. For example, Korean "Bible women" would go out on their own and seek out recruits to the new faith. In 1886, American Methodist Mary Scranton created the first modern public school for Korean women. Additionally, Christianity might act as a bridge to open doors for Korean women who want to study overseas.

Christianity in Korea arrived into Korean peninsula through social welfare agenda. Their initial concentration was on children, education, the impoverished, and the homeless, but we also noticed significant changes in their program. Christian organizations are making a lot of effort to meet the needs of society as the population of Korea ages and need greater assistance from public and private entities.

When the proportion of people 65 years of age or older exceeds 7% of the total population, the society

is said to be aging. When the late 19th and early 20th centuries rolled around, many industrialized nations had already begun to age as societies. Nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany joined the society slightly later, but industrialized nations like France and Sweden jumped on the trend first. However, in the late 20th century, nations that would eventually evolve into wealthy nations-such as Japan and Korea-primarily saw an aging population.

### **Christian Organizations and NGOs**

Early in the eighteenth century, Protestant and Catholic missionaries had laid down significant roots in Korea. The Protestant and Catholic groups are not treated as separate entities in this text, despite the Koreans' strong misgivings about them. This is because Korean Catholics maintain that Christianity is not the same as their own beliefs. Since Korea initially adopted the western paradigm of social welfare in the early 1920s, Christian missionaries have been active in the community. Prior to this, these missionaries took on the responsibilities of modern primary education, health care, and poverty elimination, which sounded novel to those with a medieval mindset. As a result, millions of Koreans were drawn to the movement and went on to become its ardent supporters and

contributors to the spread of Christianity. In this context, Andrew Eungi Kim has correctly quoted Samuel Moffett's observation: "The Korean Church found an easier way because of education and medicine, not evangelism and preaching. Furthermore, one significant element that made it easier for Christian missionaries to travel was the lack of hostility toward new religions."

In addition, throughout the post-colonial era, the Church embraced a constructive view of labor and social movements by empowering the marginalized urban masses and dismantling the outdated rural social system. In addition to its social activity, the Church played a significant role in the political activism linked to democracy in the 1980s. In addition, it has addressed social justice and human rights issues. The most sensitive concerns of religious harmony and coordination as well as the reunification of the Korean peninsula are now better understood by Korean Christian organizations. In light of this, certain churches have launched unique initiatives aimed at achieving these specific goals.

The National Catholic Welfare Conference and Young Christian Workers (YCW) are the leading organizations for advancing social and educational initiatives. The first contemporary western-style

institutions were the Pai-chai School in Seoul, the Kwanghye-won Medical Clinic, and the Baejae Hakdang (Institute for producing able men), all founded in the 1880s. Despite attempts to eliminate Christianity by the colonial administration through orthodox laws, missionaries persisted in their endeavor to improve the lives of the impoverished and oppressed. Following the Korean War, the missionaries expanded their welfare initiatives by giving money to widows, orphans, the elderly, the disabled, and the mute. As a result, several institutions were built for these populations.

Korea will have an elderly population by 2023. In July 2017, South Korea made the shift from an aging to an old society. It is 18% as of November 2023. According to Statistics Korea, the country will experience a super-aging society by the end of 2024 or the beginning of 2025, with a 20.0% old population to total population. Furthermore, it is anticipated that in the future, the percentage of elderly individuals would rise rapidly to hitherto unthinkable proportions. Due to this sharp rise in the senior ratio, South Korea is predicted to have the oldest population in the world, placing it in a challenging position overall. Ageing and the issue of low birth rates are intrinsically related. This is because the old-age dependency ratio rises when the population of young and middle-aged people

declines as a result of low birth rates, exacerbating socioeconomic issues related to aging. With a total fertility rate of 0.84 as of 2020, Korea currently faces a very low birth rate issue, and finding a solution to the senior welfare problem is getting more and harder every day. See the articles Low Birth Rate in South Korea and Low Birth Rate/Perspective for additional details on the low birth rate problem. Among the total increase in employment, the number of elderly people employed is much higher than the proportion of elderly people, so there are many jobs for the elderly, but many of the jobs for the elderly are temporary workers, daily workers, or contract workers provided by public institutions, making their employment status unstable. Almost all of the elderly employed are irregular workers, and most of their jobs include guides and street order helpers. The welfare provided by the government to the elderly is not only insufficient, but the problem is worsening because they are unable to find proper jobs. The social welfare strategy used by Christian missionaries is showing signs of change. Initially, their focus was on children and education; now, as the elderly population grows, they are increasingly focusing on them.

The average senior poverty rate in the OECD countries is greater than in Korea when measured in

terms of market income; however, when measured in terms of income that includes state-run public pensions, the OECD countries see a rapid reduction to nearly nonexistence, while Korea experiences minimal change. It gradually diminishes until it vanishes entirely. When comparing the OECD countries to Korea, income inequality for the elderly is likewise much higher when based on market income rather than income including governmental pensions. This difference is evident when comparing the Gini coefficient between the two groups. Comparatively speaking, it drops far more than in Korea. Government support for the elderly is thus lacking in the Republic of Korea.

These Christian missionaries support local social welfare initiatives while striving for the benefit and advancement of women, children, youth, the elderly, and the disabled. They offer a wide range of programs according to age groups, social classes, and the type of job. Providing childcare services for children through Baby School (Agi Hakgyo), Baby House (Eorinjib), Study Center (Gongbubang), Love House (Sarangbang), and I and Friend Together (Chinguwa Hamkke) are essential measures. The elderly are the focus of the Elders' Public Service Center (Noinpokji Bongsasenteo), Elders' House (Noinujib), Elders'

University (Noin Daehakgyo), and Elders' Club (Noinhoegwan). Furthermore, the unique concepts and missions are the Regional Social Service Centers (Jidyeok Sahoebongsadan), Our Community (Urigongdongche), and Reading Room (Dokseosil). According to the data, the Catholic missionaries have mostly focused on the following areas: Old-age centers and Free Housing centers (Noinpokji Unryosilbi [54.2%]), Kids' House (Eorinjib [32.5%]), Community Life Centers (Gongdong Saenghwal Siseol [23.7%]), and Disabled Community Centers (Jangaein Saenghwalsiseol [28.4%]). Nonetheless, data that is currently accessible indicates that the government social welfare fund provides more than half of the funding. Additional sponsors of funds include the corporate sector (7.2%), prosperous businesses (8.8%), and private donations (10.4%).

Additionally, the missionaries are skilled in a few specialized fields, such as child welfare and elder welfare. In addition, a few more notable child welfare groups are NCWC, Christian World Vision, Foster Parent's Plan, Christian Children Federation, and Unitarian Service Community of Canada. In South Korea, there were 283 child welfare centers in 1980, with roughly 259 (91.6%) Protestant, 17 (6.0%) Catholic, and 6 (2.1%) Buddhist centers. The data

from 1997 also shows that, in comparison to the Catholic Church and Buddhist Monasteries, the Protestant Church operates the greatest number of social assistance centers.

Nonetheless, more Christian missionaries-Protestant and Catholic-have managed more centers than Buddhists, even Won Buddhism, particularly in the field of senior welfare institutions. In fact, there are 461-Protestant, 561-Catholic, and 268-Buddhist welfare centers, both registered and unregistered, dealing with old age people. These organizations are providing institutional support including coverage of health care, lodging and food costs.

The Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs is a key player in the development of the Catholic social agenda, which must be acknowledged. In addition to thirty-eight high schools, thirty-three middle and elementary schools, thirty-two hospitals, and over 750 social assistance institutions, the Catholic Church also operates ten universities, including one college. These religious institutions have developed their own systems for managing social affairs on the outside as well as inside organizational structure. According to data from the Korean Health and Social Institute published in 2005, for Protestant social welfare centers, there are roughly 20.3% under trust and 79.7% under direct

management; for Catholic centers, there are roughly 70.8% under trust and 29.2% under direct management; and for Buddhist centers, there are roughly 63.7% under trust and 36.3% under management.

Changing societal mores and a declining population are likely the two biggest issues facing Korean Christians today, Catholic and Protestant alike. However, Christians in Korea have survived centuries of persecution, war, division, and oppression as a result of the strong foundations they have built during this turbulent past. As a result, they will be able to creatively address the challenges they face today, albeit with varying degrees of success.

### **Religious Propensity in Contemporary Korea**

It is important to note that Koreans have traditionally viewed religion with pragmatism and flexibility. Whenever new ideas-whether from Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, Christianity, or the more recent new religions like Islam and Won Buddhism-have knocked on their doors, they have stepped up to grasp the essence. In Korean society, where a single family may have Buddhist grandparents, a Confucian father, a Christian mother, and a child who does not practice any religion,

religious diversity has always been fundamental. The Koreans have skillfully used religion to further their nation-building, social progress, and economic expansion. Despite this, it is undeniable that Buddhist groups have adopted several contemporary non-Buddhist social work techniques.

It is rather obvious that the religious landscape of Korea has been significantly impacted by the modern way of life. When holidays or Sundays come around, the majority of Koreans would rather visit places of worship. As per the Korea National Statistical Office's 1996 data, individuals dedicated an average of 7.7% of their time to engaging in religious activities. This consisted of 4.1% dedicated to personal religious practices and 5.1% to attending religious meetings. Conversely, the average amount of time spent by people on Sunday prayers has been 15.7% of their entire time; women have made more contributions than men overall. The average participation has increased by just 0.7%, while Sunday prayers have increased by 1.7%, according to data from 2004. Such participation rate in the religious activities demonstrates that Koreans have deep inclination towards religious activities.

According to data from the Social Indicators in Korea (1996), it is noteworthy that students are

attending religious services more frequently. 13.3% of elementary students, 23.2% of middle school students, 22.7% of high school students, and 29.2% of university students reported attending religious services once a week in 1991. It implies that older pupils have demonstrated a stronger propensity to attend religious services, and that frequency has somewhat increased after five years. Based on the statistics at hand, it can be deduced that approximately 25% of the population has participated in weekly religious services. Notably, women have been notably more likely than men to attend these events nationwide.

In addition, since 1990, there has been a new trend in Korean society that is characterized by a strong desire to volunteer overseas. These volunteers operate in the fields of industry and technical support, public health and medicine, forestry and agriculture, education and culture, and fishing. In light of this, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) organized a survey to highlight public attitudes toward various activities. In 2004, over two thousand people reported volunteering; however, religious participation is not listed under a separate heading. But many people don't seem to be as interested in attending religious gatherings these days. The older population seems to be more secular than the younger in terms of

religion.

One of the main characteristics of Korean society has been the diversity of religions. Even though there have been a few instances of fanaticism and community violence in modern Korea, the country has demonstrated great collaboration and coexistence. Every religion is inclined to carry on the conversation about religious development that the Christians and Buddhists started in the 1990s. The last 20 years have seen a slow increase in the number of religious Koreans. People in their late forties or early 60s have been found to have a stronger interest towards religious activities, based on data from the last three censuses. Compared to men, women have participated more, particularly those in their late forties. According to the 2005 religious census, about fifty-seven percent of women respondents accepted their belief in religion, whereas, only about forty-nine percent of male respondents admitted their belief in religion.

### **Religious Distribution**

Year	Religious-in %	Buddhist (in %)	Protestant (in %)	Catholic (in %)	Others (in %)
	Yes	No			

1985	42.56	57.43	46.84	37.72	10.84
	4.88				
1995	50.72	49.27	45.67	38.76	13.05
	1.52				
2005	53.08	46.48	42.9	34.5	20.6
	2.0				

Source: 1985, 1995, and 2005 censuses have religious data in percentage, based on sex, age and religion of people.

Remarkably, the aforementioned data suggests that there has been a notable decrease in the number of Buddhist and Protestant adherents during the post-1995 era. On the other hand, Catholicism and other religions are steadily growing in number of adherents while also progressively broadening their stance. From a Buddhist standpoint, the Won Buddhism has demonstrated its impulsive nature and is constantly expanding its adherent base. Thus, since 1985, the number of people who identify as belonging to a specific religion has increased, and the number of people who declare they have no religion or disassociate themselves from all religions is rapidly decreasing.

## Conclusion

Building a church is based on two pillars: social

service and evangelism. After engaging in social work, the early Korean church turned to evangelism. By giving Koreans what they needed, missionaries helped them open their hearts. The Great Revival Movement made it possible for Korean churches to get involved in evangelism and social service. The massive rebirth movement People's spiritual lives changed as a result of it. A person who has undergone spiritual transformation exhibits a new feature in their life. People were transformed wherever revival took place. God has continued to increase the number of individuals being rescued in the Korean church since the great revival movement. In many respects, Christian social service has evolved since the Great Revival Movement. Above all, a large number of individuals were able to study thanks to the quick expansion of schools. Additionally, there was a large expansion in hospitals, orphanages, and nursing homes. The Great Revival Movement raised social consciousness and improved Koreans' quality of life. These initiatives were initially conducted by missionaries, but when Korean Christians experienced revival movements and saw an increase in church membership and resources, they were able to take on more of these tasks. Christian social service is, above all, something done with the love of Christ. Therefore,

in order for Christianity to show greater love to more neighbors, the great revival movement needs to continue. Christianity Social Welfare seeks to address social difficulties by advancing the gospel of God's Kingdom through believers and churches, so benefiting the welfare community of the nation and regional society. They are working in various areas to help people. The Mental Health Welfare provides expert knowledge to support the rehabilitation of mentally impaired people in their local communities and helps them and their family with mental health issues.

For Christian social workers to feel more fulfilled in their work and provide various services to society. However, they maintain ethics and they keep one's faith and profession apart. As a result, Christian social workers in the field find it challenging to perform Christian social welfare due to the taboo surrounding the application of religion in social welfare. These issues cause both the lives of Christian social workers and the standard of Christian social welfare practice to decrease.

As more Koreans migrate to Asia and found churches outside of the peninsula, Christianity in general and Korean Christianity in particular is becoming more widespread. They travel to the Korean peninsula as non-Koreans and work as missionaries

abroad. The resilience of Christianity in Korea, whether in its Catholic or Protestant forms, means that even if change is unavoidable, Christianity-in all of its forms-will probably continue to play a major role in the Republic of Korea for some time to come. Religious activities that are socially involved have had a variety of effects on Korea and, to some extent, other countries. The nation developed into a wealthy nation with advanced technology, and its economic expansion had an impact on religious organizations. Resources were being used; churches were experiencing a financial boom. Economic growth prompted donations to religious institutions, which in turn sparked a great deal of social welfare activity aimed at strengthening ties to the community. The propagation of social activities has become considerably easier as the nation has developed. The government has been providing financial support to religious organizations in addition to private and public donations. As a result, many organizations are coming up with creative ways to use the money they get. Furthermore, it appears that social welfare initiatives are a better fit for the utilization of deposited monies. As a result, they have started a number of social empowerment initiatives.

**Notes**

1. Sang-duck Sunim, "Buddhist Laywomen's Social Work in Korea," (paper presented at the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women: Present and Past, Seoul, Korea, June 27~July 2, 2004).
2. Andrew Eungi Kim, "Protestantism in Korea and Japan from the 1880s to the 1940s: A Comparative Study of Differential Cultural Reception and Social Impact," *Korea Journal* (Winter 2005): 272-276.
3. Tongshik Ryu, "Religion and the Changing Society of Korea" (paper presented at the Symposium on Family and Religion in East Asian Countries, Tokyo Japan, June 18-20, 1971).
4. Jang Sukman, "Historical Currents and Characteristics of Korean Protestantism after Liberation," *Korea Journal* (Winter 2004): 142.
5. The Severance Hospital and Ewha Women's University have been developed by the missionaries in due course of time. Ministry of Culture and Sports, ed., *Religious Culture in Korea* (Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1996), 73-85.
6. See the table for diverse programs organized by Christian organizations. Most of the Churches have specific social welfare programs for specific groups,

which is a peculiarity of Christian Church of Korea. Gu Jong Hoe, "Hangukui Gidokgyo Sahoepokji" in Gidokgyo Sahoepokji Chongron, ed. Hanguk Gidokgyo Sahoepokjihakhoe (Seoul: [Ju] Sinheungmedeu Ssaieosseu, 2004), 234-235.

7. Won Seok Jo, 366-367, for financial data based on the different facilities, see 373-374.

8. Lee Bae Geun, "Gidokgyo Adongpokji Silcheon," in Gidokgyo Sahoepokji Chongron, 264-265.

9. In 1990, 11.8% old age welfare centers were run by the Buddhists, which is gradually increasing, though the exact data is unavailable. For statistical data, see table-5 titled 'a comparative study of old age centers conducted by the religious organizations. Baek Seon-hui, "Hanguk Pulgyo Gyodanui Pokjimunje Daehan Yeongu" (Seoksa Nonmun., Dongguk Daehakgyo, 1994), 36-39.

10. Jihyeon, ed., Pulgyo Sahoe Pookji Pyeonnam (Seoul: Jogyejong Chulpansa, 2006), 17.

11. There are some cases where the mother is Buddhist, while the children are Protestant or believe in other religions, for more discussion, see Kim Kwang-ok, "The Religious Life of the Urban Middle Class," Korea Journal (Winter 1993): 10.

12. National Statistical Office, ed., Report on the

Time Use survey, Volume 1: Time Spent on Activities (Daejeon: National Statistical Office, 2005), 83.

13. The social indicator reveals the religious inclination of common Korean people. For the detailed data of 1999 and 2003; see National Statistical Office, ed., Social Indicators in Korea (Daejeon: National Statistical Office, 2005), 590-591.

14. National Bureau of Statistics Economic Planning Board, ed., 1985 Population and Housing Census Report, Vol.1 (Republic of Korea: National Bureau of Statistics Economic Planning Board, 1987), 289.

15. National Statistical Office, ed., 1995 Population and Housing Census Report, Vol.1 (Republic of Korea: National Statistical Office, 1997), 343.

16. Korea National Statistical Office, ed., 2005 Population and Housing Census Report (Daegu: Korea National Statistical Office, 2007), 309.

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