

## ARTICLES

# How to Make the Best *Ganjang Gejang*: The Missional Church Movement in Korea: Evaluation and Proposal

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### Abstract

In Korean Christianity, interest in missional church has almost exploded in the past 15 years, with two main streams of ideas. One emphasizes that a local church should reflect the missionary nature of the Triune God in a series of activities such as worship, preaching, praise and Bible study. The other insists that since the God of scripture always calls and sends people, church members should also go to their local community. This paper reviews the current discussion on *missio Dei* in Korea and the creation theology of Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann states that God's creation continues until the end and God's ultimate purpose is to fellowship with all creation. Kong3al Community and Ilbeot Church, located in Gang-hwa Island, South Korea, practise such fellowship between human and human, human and nature, and creation and God. For the missional church movement to proceed fully in Korea, both streams should engage each other through the osmosis of the economy of salvation and the work of creation.

**Keywords:** Missional Church; *Missio Dei*; Creation theology; Kong3al; Ilbeot Church

### Introduction

One of Koreans' favourite foods is *ganjang gejang*, a raw crab marinated in seasoned soy sauce. To make *ganjang gejang* right, at least two conditions must be met. One is good soy sauce to prepare the crab meat. The other is having sufficient time required for the soy sauce to seep through the crab meat. In other words, the fermented soy sauce must enter every part of the crab's body, and the crab must be sufficiently immersed in the soy sauce in a wide bowl.

In Korean Christianity, interest in missional church has almost exploded since 2000. By 2021, there were 678 academic papers written about missional churches (Korean

Citation Index 2022), in which there have been two main streams of ideas. One emphasizes that a local church should reflect the missionary nature of the Triune God in a series of activities in the church, such as worship, preaching, praise and Bible study. The other insists that since God revealed in scripture always calls and sends people, church members should likewise go to their local communities to participate in his mission. To support the full development of the missional church movement (MCM) in Korea, I would like to review *missio Dei*, the foundation of MCM, and propose an osmosis of both streams by discussing creation theology.

## Two streams of the missional church movement in South Korea

As is well known, the 1952 International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany, proclaimed that “The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself” (Goodall 1953: 189). To put it simply, for a long time in Christianity, mission was a programme or project in which a church or a mission organization took the lead and sent certain missionaries abroad according to specific passages of the Bible. And these kinds of mission almost always proceeded in one direction, from the West to the Third World. However, Willingen IMC declared that mission is of the very nature of God, like love, justice, grace and holiness. This means that mission can no longer be accepted in only a narrow sense. The missionary nature of God must be manifested in life by all believers, both inside and outside the church.

However, in Korea, recognizing this missionary nature of God as the church’s DNA is proceeding in two different directions. One emphasizes the internal renewal of local churches from the perspective of *missio Dei*, and the other focuses on the church’s actions in the local community. On the one hand, the group that emphasizes internal renewal of the church underlines that the missionary nature of the Triune God must first fill general church activities such as ministry, worship, Bible study, and discipleship before performing missions outside the church (Juan International University 2021). This is partly because, although Korean society has never reached a fully-fledged version of Christendom, it is under the influence of “functional Christendom”, as Darrell Guder explains it (Guder et al. 1998: 6). In other words, a functional Christendom lacks the concept of *missio Dei* and has not practised what Guder calls “missional theology education” (Guder 2015: 1–19). It can be argued that Christendom has influenced the vast majority of seminaries in Korea. As a result, local churches have been mainly focused on pastoring church members rather than participating in God’s missionary nature active in the world. In that sense, it is thought that before doing missions in and for the world, various activities within the church must first be revitalized with God’s missionary nature (Chung 2016; 2020a & b; 2021). This

is felt to be a step necessary to transition “from church with mission to missional church” (Guder et al. 1998: 4).

On the other hand, another group of Korean churches has mainly focused on developing relationships and having fellowship with residents. Kook-il Han claims that the local church focuses too much on simply evangelizing the local community without engaging with the community (Han 2016:77) and thus, for the church to be a community sent out into the world, a relationship with them must come first (Han 2016:90). As an example of this, the Maeul (village) movement in the Korean Church is one of the typical examples of MCM focused on this mode of engagement with the *missio Dei*. Dosimlee church, located in Hongcheon, Gangwon-do, sees the church community and the Maeul community as one. Therefore, for the church, Maeul events are church events and church events are Maeul events. Ranking cannot be determined. This can be understood by regarding MCM holistically (Hong 2018: 159–60).

These two directions of MCM are similarly apparent in conferences with local church pastors. The Korean Society of Mission Studies (KSOMS) and NPT-RIG (New, Integrated Platform that Transcends Region, Ideology, and Generation) KOREA have conducted annual joint conferences on MCM in Korea since 2019. At the first joint conference, four pastors presented, mostly sharing about their various ministries conducted in their respective local communities. In 2020, three pastors announced how they were reflecting the missionary nature of God in the worship, pastoral care and education of their local churches. In 2021, four pastors presented, two of whom mainly spoke about the church’s ministry in their local communities, and two shared the process of converting a traditional church into a missional church.

However, these discussions were mainly about the church or community rather than *missio Dei*, the source of a missional church. Understanding this trend, I would now like to look at contemporary discussions of *missio Dei* in Korea.

## Recent discussions of *missio Dei* in South Korea

*Missio Dei* is a critical concept still being discussed in missiology and I especially pay attention to the arguments of Korean scholars. First, Soo-il Chai points out that there needs to be more academic research on the issue of money and other religions from the perspective of *missio Dei* in Korean Christianity. In the second half of the twentieth century, Korean Christianity was consumed with tensions between evangelicalism and ecumenism, conservatives and progressives, and spiritual salvation and social participation. While that trend has gradually faded in the twenty-first century, a new polarization emerged between poor and rich churches (Chai 2003: 542–43). In

addition, Chai cites the example of the conflict between Buddhism and Tang Kun to emphasize the need to study how *missio Dei* can enable Christians to approach other religions without taking a conservative and aggressive stance (2003: 543–45).

Secondly, the systematic theologian Baik Chung-Hyun indicates that the discussion since Willingen IMC proceeded as a study of the church's doctrine rather than of the Triune God himself.

*However, missio Dei is here approached mainly in relation to missio ecclesiae right from the start. Still giving a statement centering around church but not around God, Willingen's proposal of missio Dei is basically ecclesiological. This is one of the main reasons why it does not say much about God or the triune God, except saying that God the Father sends the Son and works through the Spirit (Baik 2021: 332).*

In other words, Willingen IMC was a breakthrough in the definition and subject of mission. Still, it then developed as a new ecclesiology rather than a study of the missionary nature of God himself. Thus, Baik adds that the concept of *missio Dei* should be further discussed as a character of the Triune God himself. "We need to approach *missio Dei* quite differently. That is, we need to approach it not in relation to *missio ecclesiae* but primarily in relation to *processio Dei*, that is, the procession of the Triune God" (Baik 2021: 339).

Finally, the more critical theological and missiological problem of *missio Dei* in Korea is that Jesus Christ is understood almost exclusively in terms of soteriology. According to Jürgen Moltmann, God the Son is "the divine foundation of creation and its inexhaustibly creative ground." He explains this in a threefold sense:

*1. All things from God are created 'through him' and through him find their forms and the community that binds them together; 2. All things from God are made fast 'in him', their lives and existence being sustained against the threat of chaos by his presence in them; 3. All things are 'for him' – that is to say all things are created for his sake, and for him all things are waiting (Moltmann 1990: 287).*

Like two sides of a coin, creation theology and the soteriology of Jesus Christ cannot be divided. MCM in Korea, however, primarily focuses on humans' salvation; consequently, discussions of creation, such as climate change and ecological issues, remain marginal. In the articles and conferences of Korean scholars, it is hardly possible to find discussions that link *missio Dei* to creation theology. In summary, although *missio Dei* is a very comprehensive concept, Korean Christianity has understood and interpreted it in narrow terms and mostly applied it to ecclesiology in relation to human

salvation. In this context, this paper examines the creation theology of the Triune God, mainly drawing from Moltmann, to propose a direction for MCM in Korea.

## Brief sketch of creation theology according to Moltmann

Moltmann's creation theology is closely related to the Trinity. The centre of that connection is "the unique and perfect fellowship of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Moltmann 1985: 1–2). According to Moltmann, the order is essential in creation. There is a relationship within the Triune God first, and then God creates the world and has relationships with the creation in the pattern of that original relationship (Shin 2015: 61–63).

As is well known, Moltmann explains the Triune God's inner relationship with the concept of *perichoresis* or *circumincessio*, which was the original idea of John Damascene.

*An eternal life process takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. (Moltmann 1981:174–75)*

Also similar to *perichoresis*, the three Persons of the Trinity have a process of mutual manifestation: "the process of the mutual manifestations of the Persons through their relations in the divine glory. The Persons of the Trinity make one another shine through that glory, mutually and together. They glow into perfect form through one another and awake to perfected beauty in one another" (Moltmann 1981: 176). Ok-su Shin summed up *perichoresis* as 'mutual reciprocity, mutual indwelling, and mutual interpenetration' of the three Persons of the Triune God. And they form the unique and integrative unity of the triune God through intimate existence with each other, for each other, and within each other" (Shin 2015: 59).

The Triune God now wants to have this perfect fellowship in the created world. So he participates in creation and invites all creatures to this fellowship.

*In the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the triune God himself is an open, inviting fellowship in which the whole creation finds room: "That they also may be in us", prays the Johannine Christ (John 17:21)... It is not merely an external bond joining human nature with the divine essence. It issues from the essential inward community*

*of the triune God, in all the richness of its relationships; and it throws this community open for human beings in such a way that it gathers into itself these men and women and all other created things, so that they find eternal life (Moltmann 1992: 218–19).*

When the Triune God has fellowship with the world, the way of indwelling is different. Since the Triune God is Himself perfect, He does not need the finite world. However, he wants to have fellowship with the creatures, and for this, God spatially reduces and constrains himself through a voluntary kenotic action (Moltmann 1981:105–14; 1985: 86–89). God also limits His eternity to give creatures a finite time (Moltmann 1985: 114) and his omniscience to provide them freedom (Moltmann 1981: 109–10). Through this process of creation, God is in the world, and the world is in God. Moltmann distinguishes it from deism, which emphasizes only the transcendence of God, or pantheism, which highlights only immanence. And he claims that “the Trinitarian concept of creation binds together God’s transcendence and his immanence” (Moltmann 1985: 98).

Furthermore, this creation of the Triune God does not stop once and for all with the original creation, but continues when new creation takes place. Moltmann explains this as the original creation, the continuous creation (*creatio continua*), and the new creation (*nova creatio*) that completes everything. God continues to create through fellowship with humans and other creatures related to the original and new creations. On the one hand, continuous creation is maintaining and preserving what was created in the beginning, and, on the other, preparing to complete the new creation (Moltmann 1985: 208–10).

By the way, the reason God created all creation is not so that human beings can merely admire the creation or take unilateral responsibility for the creation on behalf of God. What God wants is fellowship. This must happen in both directions.

*The coexistence of Creator and creature is also their mutual life, their cohabitation, and influence on each other. The Creator finds space in the fellowship of creature. The creature finds space in God. So creation also means that we are in God and God is in us. Rather, creation means fellowship between God and the world (Moltmann 1991: 133).*

However, although God has entrusted humans as stewards of creation, they have misunderstood it and committed at least three mistakes. The first mistake is that creation became for the convenience of humans, or to put it more practically, he subjugated the creatures for profit. Numerous animals and plants are unilaterally sacrificed for human greed. Secondly, despite human beings being sufficiently aware of and experiencing the climate crisis, they are choosing to repeat their past mistakes.

Finally, Christians who are responsible for God's creation are focused only on human salvation and fail to listen to the cries of creation. In other words, the church regards preserving creation and fellowship with creatures as secondary and optional.

To sum up this section, the Triune God humbled himself voluntarily to create the world and he is inhabiting it and continuously creating it. In addition, these series of God's creations are for fellowship. The purpose of missional church should be to experience and embody this fellowship inside and outside the church. Both renewing the church with *missio Dei* and serving the local community is important, but the fellowship with God's creation is essential. With this understanding of creation theology, I would like to examine one community dedicated to such fellowship.

### Communities that embody fellowship

Kong3al (Three Beans) Community was established in Gang-hwa Island, South Korea, in 2005. It is said that Korean ancestors planted three seeds when planting beans. One bean was to be eaten by insects or birds, one to share with neighbours, and the last to be eaten by the planter himself. As such, Kong3al began with the spirit of a farmer who plants three seeds to bear fruit: one for the community to form a mutually life-giving fellowship, another to share with others out of joyful overflow, and the last to be harmoniously integrated to sustain the ecological cycle.

Kong3al practises social farming to implement this vision. Social farming was one of the 100 national tasks of the Moon Jae-in administration in Korea. Social farming focuses explicitly on three areas. The first is care. Agricultural activities are carried out with educational and welfare institutions for those needing care, such as the elderly and the disabled. The second is education. Social farming mentors the disabled, young people, and women who do not have basic agricultural skills through agriculture-related education for settlement in rural areas. The third is employment. It provides vocational training opportunities in the agricultural sector in rural areas.

Kong3al aims for the self-reliance of the community and its members by planting and harvesting beans to make and sell tofu products. The community practises sharing while working with the socially underprivileged. Sixty per cent of its employees are people with disabilities in the local area. Kong3al takes care of the mentally ill and the disabled as well. In addition, Kong3al helps elderly farmers and returning villagers to restart farming. Furthermore, it allows people who are tired of city life to gain alternative experiences by forming an agricultural social network. Through these processes, Kong3al considers humans and nature to be mutually dependent.

Jung-hoon Suh, who leads Kong3al, pioneered Ilbeot (friends who work together) Church in 2006. He was born into a family of farmers for generations. His life experience led to his interest in rural missions and pastoral work from his seminary days. While studying ecological theology, he searched for an agriculture-based ministry and communal life. At first, he did not plant a church because, to him, the church is not a building but a gathering, and a community itself. He participated in everything related to farming and the local community, and met like-minded friends on the journey. They gathered together to create the Ilbeot community, and naturally Suh, who was ordained, became the senior pastor of the Ilbeot Church on the recommendation of its members. Like the church's name, it became an intimate community of friends who shared life-giving work.

Suh regards labour as life. For him, labour is not just about making money. It is a mission beyond survival, and it is to save the lives of those in God's Kingdom. He asserts with conviction that Jesus' work was to save lives. Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn 5.27), so we must work to save lives. Suh is trying to catch two rabbits: regional economic revitalization and ecological conservation. He is also zealous in environmental missions, such as conducting a group on reading the Bible from an ecological perspective and writing a confession of faith that pledges the importance of life and the environment. As part of these efforts, Ilbeot Church was selected as the Green Church of the Year for the 38th Environmental Sunday in 2021. Since 2006, KCEMS (Korea Christian Environmental Movement Solidarity) and NCKK (The National Council of Churches in Korea) have been selecting Green Churches which seek to preserve the creation world in all aspects of the church, including worship, education, service, missions and organization.

Suh emphasizes that the Korean church must rediscover communal intimacy. This is difficult in a neo-liberal society that values competition. The church also operates on the same values of competition for personal acquisition. That is why relationships in the church are shallow, and other people are merely meant for one's ends. Suh insists that we should instead consider the mystery of life in all of nature and feel awe at this mystery. He believes that the Korean church will also be restored if communication, a sense of mystery and the sense of wonder regarding others are restored in a healthy community.

Ilbeot Church and Kong3al practice *fellowship* in multiple dimensions. The first is between people. Korean society has progressed dramatically, but it still struggles to coexist with the disabled. There needs to be more awareness of what it means to share life with people who are different from the majority. Until almost the year 2000,



most of Korean society was made up of a single ethnic group. Like Korean society's exclusion of other ethnicities, people with disabilities have also been marginalized. They were often not welcomed even in church communities. Many church buildings do not have the most basic facilities, such as parking spaces, elevators and restrooms for the disabled. However, in Ilbeot Church and Kong3al, God's fellowship is being practised from person to person, rooted in the land given by God. In other words, disabled and able-bodied people practise the fellowship God wants for the world.

The second is the fellowship between humans and nature. At Kong3al, the community goes beyond simply caring for nature as an object. It is a harmonious and sustained interaction. Nature provides people with a place to live. The able-bodied people and the disabled live together while planting, cultivating, harvesting and making tofu. And people participate in God's ongoing creation in places that could quickly become wastelands. As Moltmann pointed out, God did not create in the beginning and then end all creation. God's creation in the beginning was already wonderful and good in God's eyes, something even twenty-first-century science cannot imitate. But God will not stop creating until the end. God wants to have fellowship with all creatures through creation. Ilbeot Church and Kong3al participate in the continuous creation (*creatio continua*) and through it participate in fellowship with creation. In other words, participating in fellowship means realizing the preciousness of creation.

The third is fellowship with all creatures and God. As mentioned, God provides and guides the arena of all this fellowship. Through creation, he wants fellowship between human and human, between human and creation, and between creation and God. He also wants the perfect fellowship seen in perichoresis to be realized on earth. For this, God sent his only begotten Son, and he broke down all human barriers. Men and women, Hebrews and Greeks, poor and rich, the able-bodied and the disabled, and people of other faiths, can now all experience fellowship in the God of creation. And human beings who have experienced that fellowship extend it to all creatures, and ultimately give glory, praise, and worship to God who allowed that fellowship.

## The missional church sent to creation

The missional church is a church that recognizes *missio Dei* as the DNA of the church and practises it inside and outside the church. Here, mission led by God does not mean only overseas missions that Western Christianity had performed in the nineteenth century. The Latin *missio Dei* is "God's sending". In the West, the term *missio Dei* has been used from Augustine's time when discussing the Trinity. God the Father sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth, and the Son, Jesus Christ, was

sent (Jn 3.17; 5.30; 11.42; 17.18). And the Heavenly Father and the Son Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to this earth.

However, Georg F. Vicedom argued that the record of God's *sending* appears more extensively in the Bible (Vicedom 1962: 12–14). He stated that the Bible describes God's work of salvation for humans and the world as sending. First of all, God sent countless prophets to his people. In addition, God sent grain, new wine and oil (Joel 2.19), mercy and truth (Ps. 57.4), light and truth (Ps. 43.3), his Word (Ps. 107) and salvation (Ps. 111.9) as well. On the other hand, God sometimes sends his people a famine for them to pay attention to the Word of the Lord (Amos 8.11) and a sword to punish them (Jer. 9.16).

In this context, our God is a God who sends what is needed for his children. He is the God who sent, sends and promises to send. Vicedom clearly describes this character of God as follows, "In this sending God is always present. Thus sending is an expression of His actual presence in judgment and grace. Thereby the *missio Dei* becomes a declaration of His Deity" (Vicedom 1962: 13). If God did not send his Son, the Holy Spirit, the Word, many prophets and many other necessary things to humans, we could never realize his divinity. The Triune God is the sending God, and in sending he reveals himself.

As mentioned, the Triune God not only sends, but is also sent. God did not only send angels or prophets for man, but is willingly being sent himself. However, there is an apparent reason why the Triune God sends and is being sent. On this, Vicedom argued, "Missions to the heathen as we have them today are only possible because God continued His sending and, through the event of the sending of His Son, established a continued mission" (Vicedom 1962: 72).

The sending of the Triune God is not a continuous and meaningless charity for an unspecified number of people. His sending is his mission to save the fallen creatures he himself created. His love does not leave a sinful creature alone. That is why God started the mission, carried it out, and completed it in the end by sending and being sent himself. In this way, H. H. Rosin insisted that *missio Dei* is interpreted in English as God's mission or the mission of God rather than simply literally sending of God (Rosin 1972: 1–2). The Triune God was sent and sends at the same time for the creatures of this earth. And he wants to have fellowship with all of creation. Now he invites the faithful to join him in this very mission. In other words, to participate in *missio Dei* means to participate in his work of both salvation and creation.

## Conclusion

Most Korean Protestant churches continue church-centred missions even in the era of *missio Dei* post-Willingen IMC. And the goal and method of missions are still mainly based on soteriology. While this approach is not a problem, it has some limitations in responding to continuously changing contexts and issues today, such as conversing with other religions and responding to climate change. Ilbeot Church and Kong3al are not perfect models of the missional community, but compared to most existing church communities in Korea, they actively participate in realizing God's fellowship.

The Triune God continuously accomplishes creation through osmotic pressure with the created world based on inner fellowship. "Creation exists in the Spirit, is moulded by the Son and is created by the Father. It is therefore from God, through God and in God" (Moltmann 1985 :98). Just as making a good *ganjang gejang* requires a process of osmosis between soy sauce and crab meat, MCM in Korea requires sufficient osmotic pressure between soteriology and creation theology. Such engagement is needed now more than ever to engage with God's creation.

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