Ecclesial
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Special Issue
Current Missional Church
Perspectives in South Korea

edited by
Nigel Rooms
and Steve Taylor

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June 2023 Special Issue: Current Missional Church Perspectives in South Korea

Bokyoung Park, Seonyi Lee

This special issue came into being as a result of a conversation with Nigel Rooms, one of the editors of this journal, during the 15th IAMS conference in Sydney in 2022. In Sydney, there were several Korean scholars who presented their papers, and many of them were in the Christian Communities in Mission Study Group track. Taken together they showed the strong interest that Korean scholars have in missional ecclesiology. Seeing such increasing interest on this subject from Korean scholars, Nigel approached us and enquired whether we, as the leaders of Korea IAMS Fellowship, might be willing to edit a special Korean edition of *Ecclesial Futures*. Without any hesitation, we accepted this challenge, hoping that we could contribute to the sharing different voices within the academic discourse which is missional ecclesiology. Thus, the collective journey to produce this issue had begun. Over the course of this journey, there were also moments of discouragement and disappointment where we might have given up this attempt. Going through the processes of writing and translating, as well as the peer-review process, we realized it is not an easy task. But by God's special encouragement and the work of diligent scholarship, we finally reached the moment of publication. We are thankful to Nigel Rooms for his persistent encouragement to complete this special issue.

It has been about 20 years since missional ecclesiology was introduced into Korean missiological discussion, practice and scholarship. After a few years of the initial introductory stage during the early 2000s, Korean scholars quickly developed their unique missional ecclesiology from a Korean perspective. Korean missional ecclesiology was birthed from the realization that the Korean church is situated in a very different context from the Western world. Missional ecclesiology arose in the West from the acute realization that the gospel needs to interact missionally with a highly secularized post-Christian culture, Korean missional ecclesiology emerged from a totally different situation, especially in its relationship with surrounding cultures.

In the pre-Christianized culture of modern Korean society, Korean Protestant churches were segregated from their wider society for a variety of reasons. One of them is the theological stronghold of a dualistic worldview that creates such segregation. Another reason comes from the contextual factor in which Korean churches are located. Being a minority in society during the early period of Korean Christianity, the church had to struggle for its own survival. As a result, a strong sense of Christian identity was often identified with a sense of belonging over against the wider majority. Furthermore, due to the rapid modernization and urbanization of Korea, people often suffered from rootlessness and social dislocation, and the local church was able to provide identity, community and therefore, this same sense of belonging. In developing Korean missional ecclesiology, Kook-Il Han has described this unique centripetal and attractional approach in Korean churches as the paradigm of "Noah's ark" where the church provides safety from the wider world and which soon became the undergirding paradigm of Korean Protestant churches. There are positive sides to "Noah's ark", such as the strong commitment of church members to the local church as well as a strong sense of identity, as we have noted above. In the case of Korean Christians, the communal sense of belonging was often manifested most clearly in important moments within members' lives. For example, on occasions of new births, weddings and funerals in the family, the local churches became the main support system of the communal Korean lifestyle. When unique contextual factors coincided with more overtly theological approaches, the paradigm of Noah's ark also produced a sense of exclusion as a side effect. For this reason, while the Christians in Korean churches have strong commitments to their local church, the segregation of faith and lifestyle is apparent. In this situation, Korean Christianity needs a fresh view of missional ecclesiology that is different from the way in which Western churches need a new missional ecclesial approach. Understanding the context, missional ecclesiology should be manifested differently according to the situations in which believers live.

From the turn of the twenty-first century, while more research on Korean missional ecclesiology has developed in academic circles, there was also a booming of the missional church movement in Korean Protestant churches at a more popular and practice-based level. Numerous books on missional churches were produced for local pastors during the last decade in Korea. Among them are publications by the first generation of scholars of the Korean missional movement, including Kook-Il Han, Hu-Chun Lee, Hyung-Geun Choi, Dong-Kyu Choi, Seuk-Jae Jun, Byung-Bae Hwang and others. However, since many of these publications were written in Korean; they are not available to international scholars. There are only a few articles published in English, but they are rather scattered in various journals. We believe that this project is one of the first major issues in which Korean missional ecclesiology has been dealt

with extensively in a single academic journal. We think this is only the beginning, and there will be more publications on Korean missional ecclesiology in the future.

In this issue, Seung-Hyun (Nathan) Chung proposes to reflect on missional ecclesiology starting from the theology of creation. Chung carefully investigates the missional church movement in Korea during the last two decades. Reviewing the current discussion about *missio Dei* in Korea and applying the creation theology of Jürgen Moltmann. Chung argues that the missional ecclesiology in Korea should include the theology of creation by using the cases of Kong3al Community and *Ilbeot* Church located in Gang-hwa Island as examples.

Sung-Hyuk Nam deals with missional ecclesiology from digital mission discourse. He argues, while online churches are prevalent in Korea, there is insufficient understanding of ways to meet the younger generation of non-believers in the metaverse. Since online churches generally operate in the analog paradigm, there is a massive gap between the metaverse and the younger generation in the digital paradigm. Critical contextualization is still necessary in approaching the metaverse as a digital mission field. Nam proposes that Korean churches need to understand the metaverse as a space of mission and coexistence.

Bokyoung Park searches for new ways of missional engagement during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic and afterwards in Korea. She surveyed three congregations as case studies of how local congregations responded to their missional tasks during the pandemic. With some preliminary assessments from these case studies, she suggests three ways of missional engagement through the local congregation in Korea, that is, to engage in personal fellowship using narratives, to perform a habitual ethical lifestyle, and to embrace the practice of hospitality.

Bright Myeong-Seok Lee argues that the decline in social trust in the Korean Protestant church is a significant social issue that requires attention and action. In his paper, Lee examines that one of the factors of decline may be found in the previous dominant method of discipleship training. By using a case study of Suwonsung Church that demonstrates the effectiveness of its discipleship training and its consequent impact on social trust, Lee suggests missional discipleship as a way to overcome church decline. He recommends discipleship which seeks to create a more engaging and inclusive environment that inspires the church to lead and participate in community service.

Seonyi Lee examines the Nasom Community for Mongolian Migrants as a model for missional church in Korea. Analyzing the situation of Mongolian migrants in South Korea, she reviews the missionary vision and missionary strategies of Nasom

Community and how they are implemented in practice. She argues that Nasom Community exhibits the missionary potential of the Korean church for Asia mission.

Hyeong-Kyoon Kim explores how Korean immigrant churches in Aotearoa New Zealand can be balanced in their view between missions (plural) and Mission (singular). Employing interviews and qualitative methodology, Kim concludes that missional understanding can be a trigger to interacting between visible belonging as missions and invisible belonging as Mission through three missional concepts: the purposed, progressed and experienced aspects of mission itself. He also suggests practical ways that Korean churches in Aotearoa New Zealand can balance missions and Mission by following these three missional aspects.

An-Wei Tan argues small missional churches are a helpful alternative in overcoming the problem of the current decline in Korean Protestant churches – especially the much larger ones. As a bi-vocational minister who started Café Underwood and ministers with Chinese students in Korea, Tan examines how Korean Protestant churches faced the new phenomenon of "believing without belonging" and the increase of bi-vocational ministers in general. To respond to this situation, Tan argues that the small missional church provides a helpful alternative to the decline of Korean Protestant churches.

In this issue, many of the contributors are emerging scholars, taking their rightful place in the global scholarship of missiology represented in this journal. The Korea IAMS Fellowship assisted in editorial help for these articles. As the leaders of Korea IAMS Fellowship, we are thankful to God that we were able to give them an opportunity to widen their scholarly opportunities through this assistance. Moreover, in this issue, we tried to provide concrete cases of local churches with an analytical view of Korean missional ecclesiology so that these articles showcase how Korean missional ecclesiology has been implemented in local churches. In Korean Protestantism, the vitality of the local churches and the strong commitment of Christians to their churches are notably famous. For this reason, most of the writings are field-oriented approaches, and we have avoided being purely theoretical in our discussion of missional ecclesiology. We hope that this will give readers more opportunities to catch a glimpse of the Korean missional church movement.

Two small editorial notes need to be made. The first concern is that throughout the issue, the word "Korea" is meant to be limited to South Korea. All articles deal with the situation of South Korean churches. The second is that the whole study deals with Protestant churches in Korea. Therefore, "Korean churches" refers to the Protestant churches in this issue. It is also important to note that some of writings have

already been published in Korean and have been translated, peer reviewed and revised to be available to English-language international scholarship.

In closing, we want to acknowledge that the last twenty years of struggle by Korean missiologists to formulate a missional ecclesiology fitting the Korean soil has resulted in a strong missional church movement in Korea. This issue is a small achievement in the larger journey of constructing a contextualization of missional ecclesiology that fits the Korean context. In this issue, it is true that the missional church movement has crossed over various denominations in Korea, including Methodists as well as Holiness church traditions. All contributors to this issue come from Protestant churches and mainly from the Presbyterian denomination. We hope that academic inquiries related to missional ecclesiology as well as the ministerial formation of missional ecclesiology continue to develop in the Korean context as well as to communicate with the rest of the world.

A note of thanks from the Co-editor, Nigel Rooms

It has been a joy to see this project come to birth, especially the growth in confidence that the contributors have achieved in working and publishing in English, the (hegemonic) need for which, I recognize, does unhelpfully, for emerging scholars from places like Korea, restrict their reach and development. Bokyoung and Seonyi deserve a big round of applause from our international readers for keeping going when things were, understandably difficult. I want to personally thank them here for their hard and committed work to bring this issue into being. The issue as a whole, I trust, stands as an important contribution to missional ecclesiology from our sisters and brothers in South Korean churches and their diaspora.

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

Seung-hyun (Nathan) Chung

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.

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 NCCK (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 wineand 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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Interview with Jung-hoon Suh (23 September 2022).

The Metaverse as a Digital Missionary Site[1]

Sung-Hyuk Nam

Abstract

The metaverse attracts considerable attention in politics, economy, society and culture. Unfortunately, seminaries and churches are still in their early stages of missiological research and understanding the metaverse. If we understand the metaverse as a digital mission field, research on the missiological approach is required. We should pay attention to the infinitely expanding and integrating metaverse. Overseas, there is already a history of experimental challenges and settlements from decades ago on the potential for churches in virtual spaces. While online churches are famous in Korea, there is insufficient understanding of ways to meet the younger generation of non-believers in the metaverse. Since online churches are analogue enterprises, there is a massive gap between them and the digital younger generation. Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization is still valid in approaching the metaverse as a digital mission field. Heidi Campbell's study of the relationship between media and religions, "religious-social shaping approach to technology" reminds Korean churches of the value of the metaverse as a new media. Both theories show Korean churches need dialogue and patience when approaching the metaverse to contact non-believers. Missiological discussions on the metaverse should promote a holistic understanding in which the two worlds closely relate rather than a dualistic understanding. The digital living space of the MZ generation that emerged with the development of new technology does not conflict with the nature of the Christian Church. Therefore, Korean churches need to understand the metaverse as a space of mission and coexistence.

Keywords: Metaverse; Contextualization; Analog; Digital; MZ generation

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1   This article was originally published in Korean as "Digital sŏn'gyojirosŏ metaverse segyeŭi ganŭsŏng-gwa tŭksŏng yŏngu. 디지털 선교지로서 메타버스 세계의 가능성과 특성연구 [The Characteristics of the Metaverse and the Possibilities as a Digital Mission Field]" Korean Presbyterian Journal of Theology 54 (2) (2022): 103–24. Following translation, it was revised and peer reviewed for publication in Ecclesial Futures.

Introduction

Around the world, the next generation is giving explosive attention to the metaverse. The metaverse has already grown beyond the initial stage to become a substantial IT industry for the future, drawing attention from many investors. Existing IT industries are also checking the potential of the metaverse, and companies such as Microsoft, Google, Apple, NVIDIA, Facebook, Amazon and Tesla are trying to change the direction of their business and investment. The metaverse is not just in the limelight from the industrial point of view. It is receiving much attention from politicians and artists. In the 59th US presidential election, Senator Joe Biden campaigned by creating a promotional island called Biden HQ on a metaverse platform called "Animal Crossing New Horizons". In 2016, the Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton used "Pokémon Go" in her campaign. On 5 October 2020 Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA, a global company in graphics cards and artificial intelligence, delivered a keynote speech at the GTC 2020 keynote address, "The Metaverse is Coming" (NVIDIA 2020). According to metaverse users, Fortnite currently has 350 million users, Roblox has 120 million and Naver's virtual reality platform Zepeto has 200 million. In April 2020, the famous rapper Travis Scott held his concert on Fortnite, with 12.3 million people joining and 27.7 million viewers. Travis Scott's offline performance revenue was 1.8 billion Korean won in 2019, while his performance on Fortnite drew over ten times as much revenue at 21.6 billion won. There was also a showcase for BTS, the wildly popular K-pop group. Teenagers and children in the United States spend 2.5 times as much time on Roblox than YouTube and 16 times as much on Netflix. Zepeto is collaborating with Korean entertainment companies Big Hit, YG Entertainment and JYP for the next generation with investments of 17 billion won. In addition, 50 million people flocked to BLACKPINK's virtual fan signing event in 2020. It is also raising sales by collaborating with Gucci and Nike.

In Korea, actual missional cases of the metaverse are rare compared to the explosive growth trend of metaverse users. Related research papers are also quite limited in quantity and subject matter. The following results are found when searching academic journals through the Academic Research Information Service (RISS). The search term "metaverse" has seven academic publications, none in theological journals. When "virtual reality" or "virtual world" are used as search terms, there are 1,875 results, with only five published by missionary theological societies. There are 1,635 papers on "augmented reality," but only two in missionary studies. Joo Young-Min states, "The virtualization revolution changes the landscape of civilization and asks us fundamental questions. Nevertheless, it is not easy to find a philosophical consideration for this. Today's discourse on technology is thoroughly organized in the language of industry" (Joo 2019: 15). The church treats the metaverse simply as an IT industry technology and an economic issue. Kim Sang-Kyun (2020: 264) states,

"We need to think about whether we can completely break down the boundaries between the real world and the virtual world with human technology from various perspectives such as philosophy, religion, and law." However, academic research by the Korean church still concerns the real world rather than the virtual world. Kim Dohoon (2013) deals with the histological discussion of Douglas Estes' overseas case of Sim Church. Kye Jea-Kwang (2022) defined the metaverse as a digital mission field. Hwang Byung-Bae (2020: 447–50) hinted at metaverse missionary work through "construction and liberation from the municipal treaty" as one of the eight suggestions for the renewal of the Korean church. Still, academic research on online platforms remains in its early stages, with reviews of previous research rather than actual case studies. Nevertheless, it is consistent with the insufficient interests of the Korean church in the metaverse.

While Korean churches' studies focus on online activities for their members, the overseas church in the metaverse has attracted unbelievers outside the church. Therefore, missiological research on the metaverse is necessary to help the Korean church convert its perspective from self-centered to others. However, the scope of this research is limited to understanding the metaverse as a missionary sphere. It examines the convergence of missionary studies and the metaverse. It raises key theological issues to serve as a foundation for further research on specific cases of virtual church and missionary contact with nonbelievers on the metaverse.

The metaverse

The metaverse is a combination of "meta" and "universe," which means transcendence of the real world and refers to a three-dimensional virtual world. However, beyond the technical scope of the commonly used term "virtual reality," the metaverse is fluid and evolving to include a wide variety of synthetic realities. Still, the technical research group Acceleration Studies Foundations (ASF) categorizes four expressions of the metaverse: augmented reality, lifelogging, mirror world, and virtual world. "Metaverse" was the first used in Neil Stephenson's science fiction novel *Snow Crash* (1992), to mean a virtual world that can only be entered through an avatar. A good visualization of this metaverse is in Steven Spielberg's 2018 film *Ready Player One*. As can be guessed from the movie's content, the metaverse platform does not end up as a space for entertainment for young people. It includes economic and political power. In Netflix's 2019 earnings announcement, Reed Hastings (Netflix 2019) pointed to the virtual game *Fortnite*, not HBO, in the same streaming industry, as a competitor. In the competition to occupy users' time, the infinitely expanding and integrating metaverse has become a competitor for other businesses in the real world.

Douglas Estes (2009: 28–31) distinguishes the virtual world, the real world, the fictional world, the imaginary world, the augmented world and the virtual world. Since the virtual world is in its infancy, there is generally much confusion and no simple definition. As a result, there are misunderstandings when people try to describe a virtual world using real or imaginary concepts. To explain the virtual world, Estes argues that we must contrast the virtual world with other worlds. First, the real world is where we are reading this article. The virtual world is as real as the real world in its core and essence, though both worlds are different. Second, the fictional world is created in the reader's mind by reading books, watching movies or exercising the imagination. The fictional world is the way of possibility, while the virtual world is the way of reality. Third, the imaginary world is another kind of world cut off from the real world. A virtual world may or may not be an imaginary world. In particular, Christians equating the virtual world with the imaginary world may lead to inaccurate conclusions about faith and church in the virtual world. Finally, the augmented world is a mix of real and virtual worlds developed through technology. The virtual world is different from the augmented world because it occurs only in the virtual world. On the other hand, the augmented world comes from the real world.

As such, the virtual and augmented worlds belonging to the metaverse can be correctly understood when they deviate from the stereotype of disconnection from reality or from false worlds, such as fictional and imaginary worlds. We live in the real world and can access the metaverse through a digital interface. We can live in a composite space and interact with others in the real world. Augmented reality allows more contact points with churches in the real world, but the virtual world as a synthetic space is not likely to be a form of the natural world.

The metaverse and Korean churches

Compared to the continued increase in people's interest in the metaverse, the virtual church is now germinating among Korean Christians. Although there are many examples of online worship due to the Covid-19 pandemic, churches with analog sensibilities are still hesitant to access the online world. Reactions and opinions of church members to the online church are various and divided. In the church, there are the analog, the digital retard and the digital generation. However, even it is still lacking in understanding this category. There is a negative and minimal recognition of the more technologically advanced metaverse. Kim Seung-Hwan (2021) of the Urban Culture Community Research Institute classifies churches into online church and church online. Church online is where the existing analog church establishes an online presence. It is the type of online ministry that many churches are practising during Covid-19. Church online only uses digital platforms as tools while maintaining

the existing analog system and tends to recognize online ministry as a temporary measure for existing believers. Church online receives hardly any attention from nonbelievers. The online church refers to a form of church that is not just a part of analog churches and independently begins within the metaverse world. This church has been entirely digital from the beginning. It is challenging because it does not mimic an analog church. It establishes new church theology, that is to say, a digital ecclesiology.

For example, finding Korean churches on various metaverse platforms is difficult. Roblox has about 150 virtual churches, all founded overseas. Roblox Community Church (2022) has 110,000 members, and Faith Church has 27,000 members. Meanwhile, in Korean churches, there is no awareness of the metaverse. Instead, there is an understanding of the online church as the extensional device level of the real church. Even if some churches promote online ministry earnestly for its members, it appears different from the missionary intention of online ministry for the unchurched. Many churches transplant analog ecclesiology onto the digital world, failing to reach the unchurched digital generation. Instead, only people who attend or have attended local churches visit the digital churches (Hutchings 2017: 229). The inability to communicate between the younger generation in the metaverse and the Korean online church is evident.

It is also statistically proven that the decline of Sunday school membership in Korean churches has surpassed the decline in Korean society's youth and young adult population. In Korean churches, Sunday Schools have decreased since the 1990s, with more than 50% of churches without Sunday Schools and only 3% of churches with Pre-K classes (Nam 2019). As such, the Korean church is becoming super-aged and unable to prepare for the younger generation. Yet the Korean church, stuck in the analog perspective, regards life in the real world through the paradigm of exclusion resulting in a lack of communication with others in the digital world. Since the metaverse is in its early stages, gaming is the first genre through which the next generation forms elements of the new society. But the analog generation is resistant to the changes and perceives the metaverse as merely a game or entertainment. As a result, these traditional churches put off the tensions between the virtual and real world as a matter of the distant future rather than a present reality.

In addition to the fact that the Korean church has an analog ecclesiology as opposed to the digital generation that utilizes the metaverse, there are various reasons why the Korean church is still hesitant to understand and engage with the metaverse as a mission field. First, church activities in the metaverse are still very early, so theological discussions such as sacraments are lacking. Second, the Korean church member-

ship is aging. They are unwilling to familiarize themselves with the digital worldview and utilize the metaverse. Furthermore, senior church leaders are more interested in ministering to the old than utilizing the metaverse for the younger generation. Third, there is a lack of missional purpose and practice for young metaverse residents. Fourth, there is mistrust and anxiety about the anonymity of metaverse activities. By perceiving the metaverse as a virtual space, the understanding that it is fake is too strong. It causes the Korean church to reject the metaverse as a mission field. In addition, there is a reluctance to leak personal information through online activities. Lastly, the church's past experiences with online activities (homepage, online cafe) have not been positive.

Nnon-Korean cases of metaverse church

Religious activities in the metaverse world have already been studied for a long time. The first virtual church was founded in 1985, before the advent of the World Wide Web. The members worshipped together through a text-only interface. Since then, other pioneers have gradually founded more churches amid rapid changes in the virtual world. According to some estimates, there were about 30 virtual churches by 2000 (Hutchings 2017: 245).

Then the virtual church underwent a significant change in 2004. The metaverse platform called Second Life was launched in 2003, and in the following year, the British Methodist Church started the Church of Fools to experiment with virtual churches in the metaverse. The church decided to experiment only for four months. The number of people attending its service reached 41,000 at one point. Participants were able to attend in the form of 3D avatars. This church is designed to operate independently, not to expand the online service of the real church only for its members. Another church, St Pixel, officially started in 2006 and survived past the end date of the experiment due to continuous requests from participants. As a parish of the Church of England, I-Church started cultivating Benedictine spirituality. Anglicans of Second Life (AoSL) was also founded in 2006, and Sunshine Cathedral in 2009. Currently, there are about 15 virtual Christian churches in Second Life, and about 70% of the category of Spirituality & Beliefs are Christian churches. In these churches, participants can worship by typing their prayers and sharing their meditations on blogs and forums. In particular, the Second Life Episcopal Church has appealed to Anglicans who are already familiar with their traditions by recreating cathedral architecture and using Anglican etiquette. These Anglican virtual churches have grown to worship seven times a week.

Life Church (virtualchurches.tv) differs from the previous churches in that it emphasizes conversation or communication rather than only broadcasting church activities to participants. Life Church is a virtual church based in Edmund, Oklahoma, in the United States. They purchased real estate on Second Life, hired developers, built church buildings, and created seats for avatars to attend church every week. One week in 2007, more than 1,400 people attended the online campus of Life Church. It measures attendance by the number of logged-on IP addresses. The virtual church did not limit itself to meetings within the metaverse but began its first mission trip to the real world in 2007. People who previously met only in the virtual world joined to establish the kingdom of God in the real world. Recently, new metaverse platforms such as Altspace (Altvr.com) and Roblox are evolving to host more sophisticated 3D virtual churches. Estes describes the emergence of these virtual churches as follows:

> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church is beginning to be different not in style, venue, feel, or volume but in the world in which it exists. A new gathering of believers is emerging, a church not in the real world of bricks and mortar but in the virtual world of IP addresses and shared experiences. This type of church is unlike any church the world has ever seen. It has the power to break down social barriers, unite believers from all over the world, and build the kingdom of God with a widow's mite of financing. It is a completely different type of church from any the world has ever seen (Estes 2009: 17–18).

The emergence of the metaverse as new media and church

The traditional church's analog standards will make its future uncertain and helpless, and its members' practices will erode the metaverse world. Leonard Sweet's EPIC theory, which presents a framework for analysing the characteristics of the postmodern generation, helps to grasp the features of the metaverse (Sweet 2000). First, the experience in the metaverse is utterly different from the real world. Suppose haptic technology, which may soon enable the sense of touch in addition to the visual and the auditory in the virtual world, the metaverse experience will further expand. The metaverse will allow experiences that are impossible in reality. Second, the metaverse enables infinite creative participation by users producing user-generated content (UGC). Users are not just consumers but may simultaneously be producers. Since Minecraft and Roblox are sandbox-type platforms, metaverse users can create and use virtual worlds as much as they want, just as children make their shapes with sand on the beach. This autonomy stimulates participants to be more active and creative. Third, the metaverse emphasizes virtual visualization. Users create avatars as personas, giving users another identity in the virtual world. The metaverse, full

of images (image-driven), is especially effective for the younger generation, which is more familiar with images than letters. Fourth, the world is connected simultaneously online. Tesla uses Neuralink to connect human brains and computers and installs small satellites in the earth's orbit to enable Starlink, aiming for a life that can always be connected through autonomous driving and artificial intelligence. Big data collected through Google Maps connects everything in human life.

This metaverse is not satisfied with a world separated from reality like the virtual world but is evolving into an augmented world connected to the real world. Metaverse-related companies such as Tesla, NVIDIA, Epic Games, Facebook, Apple, Kakao, Naver, and Microsoft face numerous challenges to win this metaverse business competition. Korean church seldom has leaders interested in or participating in technology conferences, annual events, or CES (Consumer Electronics Show), which introduces new technologies and products. There is no mention of religion in Kim Sang-Kyun's book (2020), which discusses the metaverse as a digital district. In the secular world, the metaverse is very developed and has hundreds of millions of young users, yet the church is still only struggling with issues of churches in the physical world.

Throughout Christian history, the church has used various means such as letters, print media, TV and radio to reach people and invite them to be Jesus' followers. With the advent of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, the Internet became the foundational platform for relationships in many aspects of society. Many churches also began to pay attention to cyberspace as a space to practice faith in prayer, worship, and sacrament. In contrast to radio and television ministry, virtual churches in the metaverse are the products of two infinite torrents leading to the development of humankind in the twenty-first century: the exponential pace of technological growth and postmodernism. The confluence of these two massive flows is creating a fertile delta for virtual churches to grow. These churches are entirely new, not the shadow of the real church recorded and podcast. Radio and television in church ministry are non-mutual communicational means. In other words, they are simple unidirectional monologues. It is similar to the vertical relationships in traditional churches reproducing tremendous power for churches and pastors. Nevertheless, modern people will never confuse the church with TV programmes or radio shows. Modern-day people may hear their favorite pastor on TV or the radio more often than attending a brick-and-mortar church, but Christians still consider attending a physical church as a sign of true faith. However, with the advent of postmodernism, the definition of the church is expanding, and its borders are fading. Unlike monologues on radio and TV, virtual world experiences are interactive and immersive. Residents of the virtual world are not just consumers but participants who worship with pastors in a genuinely collaborative experience. The analog generation, which is now the majority of

real-world church members, may be unfamiliar with the virtual world. Still, virtual interactions can be much more authentic and less awkward for the MZ generation than real-world relationships. As in-person education became impossible due to Covid-19, Soonchunhyang University held the 2021 freshman entrance ceremony on the metaverse platform Zepeto operated by Naver. Using virtual reality experience tools supported by the university, the first-year students made an avatar of themselves and participated in the school event.

As the virtual world becomes more and more of a reality in the coming decade, more and more people will turn to the virtual world for everyday interactions and meet their spiritual needs. It does not mean that the metaverse church will replace the real-world church. The virtual world is an independent operation method from reality, but the activities of the real church can further expand by connecting with the virtual world through augmented reality. The metaverse receives much attention from the younger generation because of its flexibility, transparency, diversity, and other innate strengths. The younger generation who had difficulty participating in the traditional church prefers to worship in the virtual world. The phenomenon will also influence and change churches in the real world.

Still, church members of the analog generation are unfamiliar with and adverse to virtual churches. When face-to-face worship has become impossible due to Covid-19, most Korean churches gathered through Zoom, Google Chat and Kakao Live. Ten years ago, no one expected the Korean church to conduct religious activities in these forms. However, technological advances have changed them despite the resistance of the analog generation. People first exchanged messages on Kakao Talk. Then they sent electronic gift coupons on the same messaging app. They now conduct financial activities through Kakao Bank. Eventually, the metaverse will become more than just an online phenomenon limited to funds and games and into a technology that changes our lives.

The metaverse as a digital mission field

The Korean church's response and research on the metaverse are in an extremely early stage. For the next generation of Korean society and the Korean church to form a healthy relationship, it is necessary to understand the metaverse as a digital mission field and take a missional approach. Using new media such as metaverse can initiate dialogue for the unchurched. The metaverse may be beneficial to church members, but it may also challenge the authority or control of the church. Encouraging openness can boost church community networking and relationships but poses a threat if it appears to encourage excessive or prohibited behavior. There-

fore, a critical contextualization approach that enables cultural dialogue between the digital mission field and Christian churches is essential (Hiebert 1985: 171–92).

Technological changes have been of great help in the missiological history, while the resistance from the existing church's traditions has also been. In the second century, scroll-type scriptures developed into codexes. In the sixteenth century, the development of printing supported the Reformation. Since then, oceanography has significantly contributed to changing the missionary paradigm for coastal missions, communication techniques for inland missions, and computers for the evangelism of unreached tribes. The virtual world is not where the analog generations must physically move. However, considering the future of the Korean church's mission and evangelism, the church must recognize that the metaverse is where the younger generation resides and communicate with its residents in this space.

The metaverse as a missionary field has many advantages. In other words, it can overcome various obstacles a real church has faced. First, it breaks down religious and cultural barriers. The unchurched who are reluctant to visit a real church can have a place to encounter God in the metaverse. Second, it removes the barrier of physical distance. It provides opportunities for those who need help to participate in faith community activities due to foreign missions or long-distance travel. It allows the church to provide various church education programmes and theological education without needing leaders to visit the mission field physically. Third, it can bridge generational barriers. It can overcome the culture of traditional Christian adults with limited play and fun in their religious activities and actualize Christian education through interest and fun for the next generation. Fourth, religious activities in the metaverse erase social barriers. It provides opportunities for the marginalized to participate in faith activities. For example, disabled or older people with limited mobility can participate in activities. People restricted from participating due to social rejection, such as ex-offenders and refugees, can become active. Sixth, the metaverse eliminates spatial constraints. Especially for small churches with limited financial resources, it is possible to provide a space for various small group activities at little cost.

The four stages of critical contextualization applied to the metaverse are as follows. First, it is necessary to investigate the metaverse as a digital mission field. For the church to respond appropriately to the metaverse culture, unbiased information on the space is required. Because the church's online activities have been very church-centred, collecting objective data on the digital mission field is necessary. In particular, it needs social and scientific explorations in the metaverse characterized by anonymity and autonomy. Second, the evangelist and the recipient exegete

Scripture with the collected information in the first stage. Third, based on the analysis of the metaverse context, possible church activities may be proposed. Fourth, the church needs to re-discuss from the perspective of the digital native. It should not uncritically apply the newly proposed church activities to the metaverse. Some discussion topics may be the relationship between online and offline activities, the validity of online communities, the form and effect of online ceremonies, the design of virtual architecture and sacred spaces, and the impact of digital media on religious authority. The nature, purpose, potential and limitations of virtual churches should be investigated, and discussions on the role of avatars, virtual spirituality, virtual ministry and the development of virtual church communities are necessary. Finally, problems such as virtual identity, individual spirituality and the risks and limitations of niche ministry should not be neglected on a personal level. In this critical contextualization process, the Anglican pastor Mark Brown's response to the question of who is in charge of the Anglican Cathedral of Second Life is meaningful. He said, "church has only about 3 percent of it figured out; 97 percent is continual trial and error. 'We don't have the answers'" (Estes 2009: 38). Estes confesses that considering the long debate over the nature and practices of the church and the differences between traditional churches in North America, Europe, and Asia, it seems almost impossible to create the theology of the virtual church (Estes 2009: 28). Under the critical contextualization process, finding new practices for the Korean church to understand the metaverse as a digital mission site will take time. Through this, the evangelist and the recipient of the gospel may respect each other, and balanced and unbiased missionary communication may be possible.

Heidi Campbell, who studied the relationship between media and religion, naturally rejects the stereotype that deeply religious people are necessarily anti-technical (Campbell 2010). Nevertheless, she argues, many devout people are "constrained by many social and faith-based factors that inform and guide their responses to the possibilities and challenges that new forms of media offer" (Campbell 2010: 6). Campbell's concept of the 'religious-social shaping approach to technology' allows religious organizations to systematize the development of media use and prospects based on a four-step process. First, it is essential to understand how certain religious groups have historically dealt with technological innovation and precedents. The second step deals with the group's core beliefs, religious values, and interpretation in light of the development of new media. Third, the negotiation process on the nature of innovation and authority that determines its position within the religious framework of the group follows. The process decides the usefulness of specific new media devices and their ideological and symbolic components. Finally, the ensuing joint discourse helps to examine how the use of new media will cooperate with the norms of the group, resulting in problem-solving. Campbell supports a "construc-

tive" approach rather than a "deterministic" approach to studying how religious communities respond to the emergence of new communication technologies. Her argument refutes the earlier perception of religious groups as passive respondents merely accepting or rejecting new technologies. Heidi Campbell's constructivist approach has similarities with Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization. Therefore, the complementary dialogue between the two theories will require the Christian church to naturally settle in the metaverse and seek ways to preach the gospel to its digital residents.

Conclusion

The metaverse, a new missionary destination, should not be an object of fear but a new opportunity for the gospel. For example, in Roblox, user access time during September 2020 was 22.1 billion hours. The Christian church still meets far less than one per cent of the population residing in the virtual world. It means that the virtual world is the largest unreached group on earth. Simon Jenkins, one of the founders of the Stupid Church, said, "Someone has created a new town, and it's like no one is thinking of building a church there. It's very shameful" (Estes 2009: 39). Real churches in Korea tend to understand the online format forced by the Covid-19 pandemic as a temporary measure. In this situation, missiological research on the metaverse residents is urgently needed to inspire the church to see new missional possibilities.

The missional discussion of the metaverse should promote a holistic understanding in which the real and the virtual worlds are intimately connected rather than taking a dualistic approach where the generation is forced to choose between the two. The MZ generation emerged with the development of new technologies, and their digital space does not conflict with the nature of the Christian church. With the efforts to understand the metaverse as a place of mission and its digital residents, the Korean church can coexist with them for the Kingdom of God.

Ed Stetzer, a church futurist, said, "many say they think the church will never be the same again. Some wonder, for instance, if the day of the large church is over. I'm more concerned the church will be the same again" (Stetzer 2020: 14). It shows concern for the church's future. The Korean IT company Naver has created the metaverse platform Zepeto, named after the character who brought life to Pinocchio, a lifeless wooden doll. People who do not know God think they have gained a new life in this virtual world. God made humans out of clay to steward the created world. So then, shouldn't we be prepared so that the metaverse does not end up as a world of lies? This study raises more questions than answers. However, it goes beyond the assess-

ment of the present situation to begin a new conversation about a digital missional field called metaverse.

About the author

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ARTICLES

Churches' Missional Engagement During the Pandemic and Afterwards in Korea[1]

Bokyoung Park

Abstract

The paper describes new ways of missional engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic and afterwards in Korea. While Covid-19 is inflicting serious damage on the entire Korean society, the damage to the Protestant churches is serious. The local government's prohibition of 'in-person gathering' for worship resulted in the decrease of membership and endangered the unique paradigm of 'in-gathering'-centred ecclesiology in Korean Protestant churches.

The study tried to understand how local congregations coped with the changed situation in their missional engagement. Three congregations were used as case studies of how the local congregations responded to their missional tasks during the pandemic. With some preliminary assessments from these case studies, the paper suggests three ways of missional engagement of local congregation in Korea during the pandemic and even after the pandemic: 1) engaging personal fellowship using narratives, 2) performing a habitual ethical lifestyle, and 3) embracing the practice of hospitality.

Keywords: Missional engagement; Covid-19; South Korea; Local congregation; Storytelling; Ethical living; Hospitality

Introduction

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues and new variants are being discovered constantly, humanity has entered a prolonged pandemic. There is no question that Covid-19 is inflicting serious damage on the entire society. Not only is it posing serious risks to

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1 This paper was originally published in Korean in *Theology of Mission* 65 (2022): 157–88. However, it has been revised to suit a global audience.

people's health, but due to continued social distancing working-class people are on the brink of bankruptcy, and a sense of despair is settling throughout the society.

Damage to ordinary Christians in Korea is also serious. The credibility of the Korean Protestant Church has fallen significantly during the pandemic. According to a survey, the credibility of the Korean Protestant Church dropped from 32% in the year 2020 to 21% in 2021 (Ministry Data Institute 2021: 3). Such a steep decline offers a glimpse into the Korean Protestant Church's fall in the perception of society. According to the survey, only 9% of non-Christians consider the Korean Protestant Church credible (Ministry Data Institute 2021: 3), and this phenomenon can be expected to have a negative impact on communicating the gospel in society. Besides, there is already widespread aversion to the church throughout Korean society. Due to media reports of church gatherings becoming Covid-19 super-spreading events, Protestant churches have been labelled as anti-social institutions.

As society increasingly regards Christianity in a negative light, internally, churches are seeing an accelerated loss of membership. How can the church carry out its task of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new way in this new context? How can we engage missionally in this time? To find the new way, this paper attempts to find the answer from local churches. Based on their actual response, the paper proposes a new way for missional engagement especially during the pandemic era, and even applicable to the time afterwards.

Korean society and churches during the pandemic

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the unchanging truth but the form containing that truth must be renewed for each generation. In this changed situation, we are called to discover new and more appropriate approaches to missional engagement for this generation. So what are the new factors that have descended on Korean society recently? Lee Mann-shik identified five general changes to Korean society (Lee 2021: 18–29). First is the generational imbalance due to low birthrate and rapid aging. As lifespans lengthen and the senior population increases to accelerate population aging, various factors are worsening the problem of low birthrate to result in generational imbalance. Second, with the improvement of women's status, new family structures – especially the single-person household – are appearing. Third, the transition to postmodern society is evident in relativistic views on truth and challenges to authority. Fourth, Lee identified the loss of *joie de vivre* as a characteristic of Korean society today. Severe competition and chronic fatigue are causing society-wide depression. Fifth, Korea is becoming multicultural due to the constant increase of immigration from various Asian countries. These characteristics existed

in Korean society before the pandemic, but the pandemic accelerated the changes already begun.

Among these factors, the rise of single-person households warrants special attention. This is forming a culture of aloneness and hastening the transition into the age of digital media (Ji 2020: 318–21). Among many causes behind the dawning age of digital media is the coming of age of the digital generation. They hold fundamentally different values from previous generations. The characteristics of the digital generation are identified as follows. First, as the internet is easily accessible, there is the equalization of knowledge, naturally resulting in anti-hierarchical relationships. The digital generation is anti-authoritarian and prefers to work in start-up companies that tend to be less authoritarian and encourage creative approaches. Second, the digital generation is emotionally sensitive, values self-expression and individual experience, and prioritizes the individual rather than the collective. Third, they value individual rights, while at the same time being interested in social issues that they encounter online. In a nutshell, they actively participate in various social issues and monitor society's moral standing (Nam 2020: 96–97).

In addition, the prolonged pandemic became another factor in the rapid emergence of the digital age. As the pandemic continued people spent more time alone. With social distancing, meetings were limited, and people quickly entered the digital space. As social distancing was prolonged in the pandemic, these phenomena intensified. The age of digital media has inescapably dawned on us.

The trend of finding information from algorithm-focused media is intensifying polarization by class and age. Bias according to individuals' ideological preconceptions is further isolating the people from other people who hold different ideas and is intensifying the information bubble with others who hold similar views, which results in deepening social polarization.

Furthermore, months of the Covid-19 pandemic is also causing depression throughout society. Due to the pandemic, opportunities for in-person encounters are minimized and everyone is forced into an "un-tact" lifestyle. This lifestyle is naturally intensifying anxiety and depression in the phenomenon of "Covid blues" (Jung 2021: 69). Loneliness had already been a feature of modern society, but prolonged social distancing has intensified the loneliness (Choi 2020; Jung 2021: 71). These are the situations the churches are facing in their surrounding world.

Then, what is the situation with the Korean Protestant Church in this age of pandemic? In the pandemic, loss of church membership is evident. Even before the pandemic,

Protestant churches suffered from a negative image due to media reporting on some problematic churches with their obsession with growth and extravagant building construction. The scandalous news of hereditary succession of mega-church leadership also brings them into social contempt with the public. The public news that reports about heretical groups of fanatic believers also brings negative images of churches. This negative image of the church became a major stumbling block in sharing the gospel with the public. In the meantime, smaller churches also suffered financially. New members were few and far between while existing members were leaving the church.

During the pandemic, Protestant church membership decreased even more. Jeong Jae-young predicts that in the pandemic the most visibly accelerating phenomena will be the increase of "unchurched believers" and the loss of church membership (Jung 2021: 72–73). Before the pandemic, there were more than 1.5 million "unchurched believers", many of them deciding to leave after being disappointed by churches. Considering the unique characteristics of Korean Protestants, that is, confessing the Christian faith is identified with being a member of a local congregation, increasing the "unchurched believers" who adhere to Christian faith but refuse to be members of a local congregation, a new phenomenon in Korean Protestant churches.

In the Korean Protestant Church, the ecclesiology of the "in-gathering paradigm" emerged from its unique history. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christians faced persecution and resistance in society. Conversion to Christianity meant detachment from traditional paganism. This separation from society coincided with a new sense of belonging to the local congregation. The local church provided space for communal fellowship and solidarity to provide emotional support. In addition, church programmes such as Bible study groups and spiritual training programmes for church members also heightened the "in-gathering" paradigm. As a result, loyalty to local congregations is very evident, and their identity as Christians is often associated with their regular attendance at Sunday worship services. The "in-gathering paradigm" was inevitable in such a social context (Han 2016: 17–18). Therefore, when the pandemic hit, the government prohibition against in-person gatherings for church services posed a crisis, even a threat, and was met with severe resistance by some conservative Christians. Among them, some had expressed their strongest protest, publicly criticizing the current administration's social distancing policy. They called the policy a persecution that threatened their freedom of assembly. Unlike a few extreme conservative groups, many local churches proactively accepted the prohibition regulation of in-person gatherings. These groups considered the new situation to be an opportunity to overcome serious polarization

between church and society which had been a major side-effect of the "in-gathering" paradigm.

In sum, during the pandemic, the Korean Protestant Church had experienced serious decline and many committed Christians turned into "unchurched believers". Public perception of the Korean Protestant Church is worsening due to negative images shown in media reporting of some extremist conservative churches that put up strong resistance to the social distancing policy. Due to regulations against and limitations to in-person gatherings for worship services, churches lost membership during the pandemic.

Missional engagement of local congregations during the pandemic

The pandemic has abruptly caused major changes in the Korean Protestant churches – changes nobody could have prepared for it in advance. The previous section gave an overview of changes to the Korean Protestant churches. This section more specifically explores how local churches have responded in their missional efforts. This is a field study of three specific local churches and their attempts to communicate the gospel during the pandemic. For this, I conducted these interviews from March to June 2021 at Dongil Presbyterian Church, Baegut Joeun Church and Onnuri Vision Church. These churches had a membership of 1000 to 2000, and all belong to the Presbyterian Church of Korea. All three churches are considered middle-sized churches with sufficient ministers to support the changed situation caused by the pandemic.

Dongil Presbyterian Church[2]

Dongil Presbyterian Church is typical in its indirect approach to missional engagement. The church successfully adjusted to local government's prohibitions against gatherings thanks to their new programme of Family Worship that started three years ago. The church distributes a *365-Day Bible Verse Memorization, Meditation, and Home Worship* guide to all members both as booklets and through social media. Each family logs on through a link online to have Family Worship sessions. Along with this emphasis on worship in the family unit, Bible verse memorization was also encouraged for the congregants' spiritual training.

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2 The interview with Rev. Kim Hui-Hyun, the senior pastor of Dongil Presbyterian Church, was carried out on 11 March 2021.

Moreover, since church members were not allowed to gather, the church started a new ministry of distribution of church newsletters. Newsletters are sent out three times each week. *Scenes in Dongil Community* is about various events that happened in church in the past week. On Thursdays, *Dongil Mission Bulletin* and *Dongil Church School Bulletin* were sent out. The purpose of these newsletters is to continue delivering church-related information and to strengthen the members' sense of belonging even when they cannot attend in-person worship.

A new ministry that started in the pandemic was the Online Prayer Room ministry. The link to the Prayer Room is sent out to congregants every Monday through Kakao Talk (a Korean social media platform). Individuals can go online to join the Online Prayer Session. Each person may participate whenever they can, whether at home or in the office, by clicking onto the link and following through the prayers according to a preset sequence. The last part of the Online Prayer Session encourages participants to contribute their own prayer requests, which also functions as a satisfaction survey for this ministry.

Dongil Presbyterian Church also conducted several neighbourhood ministries. When Covid-19 cases were identified among church members, they proactively encouraged PCR testing for the whole congregation and followed hygiene requirements suggested by the local government. While some conservative churches' resistant and uncooperative attitude became scandalous to the public, this church tried to show a more positive image of the church to its neighbours by responding proactively on disease prevention. When there was a period of mask shortage, they distributed masks to the poor and to marginalized groups in the neighbourhood free of charge. The church especially prioritized mask distribution to foreign labour migrants who could not buy the masks without citizenship identification numbers. When local small businesses struggled with social distancing measures, the church began a campaign among congregants to buy things from these local businesses. They also explored other volunteer opportunities to deliver gifts to the marginalized in the local area. Moreover, special offerings were regularly sent to other churches that were suffering financially.

Baegot Joeun Church[3]
Baegot Joeun Church, located near the city of Incheon, is an extraordinary case of a local congregation that actively conducted an evangelistic campaign during the

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3   See their homepage http://thegoodchurch.co.kr/main/main.html. The interview with Rev. Park Joseph was conducted on 13 May 2021 at his church. See also Shin Dong-ha 2020.

Covid-19 pandemic and even saw notable results. This church's outreach ministry is centred around Open Cell Group Gatherings. Open Cell Group Gatherings are an outreach strategy uniquely developed by this church. In these groups, non-Christians are invited to hear the gospel and commit to the faith. Unlike many churches in Korea, outreach ministry is not only the task of individual church members, but also of the cell group.

This is how Open Cell Groups operate. First, the groups are organized and started entirely by voluntary initiative of group leaders. New groups then emerge out of these existing groups, headed by leaders who have been trained and appointed by the original group. In this way, cell groups continue to divide and expand. When three or more cell groups form in this way, the original cell group leader is promoted to regional leadership, and he or she may take more responsibilities in ministering to cell groups. In this way, the lay leader's ministry influence also expands.

Outreach campaigns by cell groups are also the focal point of this church's outreach ministry. Each year the church organizes a ten-week outreach festival to invite non-Christians. During this period, new members are invited to the church. But the focus is not on bringing new members but encouraging existing church members to become passionate about sharing the gospel. The first five weeks are critical, when cell group members go through preparatory training on outreach ministry. Then each cell group considers and identifies potential converts, sets a numerical target for the group, and writes down the names of potential converts. Simply writing down the names of potential converts is enough to remind cell group members of the importance of outreach ministry. Sermons and Bible study lessons delivered in this period also encourage the church to be passionate about evangelistic outreach.

During the pandemic, however, in-person gatherings in cell groups became difficult. As the public image of the church got worse, a ten-week evangelistic outreach festival was almost an impossibility. After some consideration, the church decided to hold the festival in an alternate form while respecting social distancing regulations. Open Cell Group Gathering used to mean inviting non-Christians to the cell group leader's house, but with the regulation against private gatherings of five or more people, Open Cell Groups that used to involve ten to twenty people were further divided into more frequent sessions involving four or less people gathering in locations convenient to the invited non-Christian. The Evangelistic Outreach Festival of Open Cell Groups was organized and resulted in the commitment of a higher number of new converts than in previous years. When non-Christians who had been isolated by social distancing measures were invited to small groups, they were even more

willing to join the church than before. This proved that Open Cells for evangelistic outreach were an even more effective approach during the pandemic.

Onnuri Vision Church[4]

The city of Suwon, where Onnuri Vision Church is located, is a region where a comparatively younger population resides and works in various companies in the area. This means that the church had to respond to the pandemic faster than in other regions. The news of certain uncooperative churches spread rapidly through the media and among company employees. The perception of the church in this region turned so negative that some new Christians were afraid of even stepping foot in the church lest they get infected. The image of the church was negatively impacting Christians at their workplaces. Recognizing this, the church conducted two rounds of surveys among church members in April and August of 2020.

In the first round of surveys in April 2020 more than half of the church members absolutely preferred to hold services online. In the second survey at the end of August, almost all the members responded that the church should continue online services. Onnuri Vision Church could not ignore these results. The church members preferred online services mainly because of unspoken pressures at their workplace. They did not want to risk becoming Covid patients, forcing hundreds of co-workers to get tested and quarantined. They also wanted to protect their young children. Especially in the August survey, the church members expressed pride in their church's online services compared to some conservative churches widely criticized around that time for resisting government regulations. The younger church members were even more supportive of the church's decision to continue with online services.

Meanwhile the church shifted its ministry focus to prepare a greater variety of online services. First, they began bold remodeling of the sanctuary to make it more conducive to online services. To raise the level of satisfaction of the congregants, Sunday worship sessions that used to be held in four different time slots were divided among the head pastor and the assistant pastors to be uploaded online. This provided an opportunity for church members to experience different worship styles. The four different Sunday services are each produced in video format to be uploaded. There is a total of seven services each week, and each sermon is also uploaded, which means there are a lot more video clips uploaded online than in other churches that hold the same number of services. This is designed to provide a variety of options to church

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4   See their homepage http://www.onnurivision.org/. The interview with Rev. Kim Dong-guk, the senior pastor was conducted on 19 May 2021 in his office.

members who participate in worship services at home. As a result, Onnuri Vision Church has more subscribers to its video platform than other churches of similar size.

Onnuri Vision Church is interested in reaching "unchurched believers". The prolonged period of online worship services naturally produced non-committal Christians who skipped worship and eventually ended up as "unchurched believers". But by the end of the pandemic at least some of them will return to the church community. Onnuri Vision Church is predicting a large-scale horizontal move of Christians from one church to another at this point. Unchurched believers will decide to settle at a church depending on whether the church has acted ethically during the pandemic. This means that constructing a positive perception of the church during the pandemic is critical, so Onnuri Vision is trying to be even more proactive in following social distancing regulations to be a model church in the local community and make for a positive perception. This is ultimately to attract "unchurched believers" to the church once in-person services resume.

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Based on these interviews, I come to the conclusion that even though their attitudes toward the changed situation were different, there are a few common characteristics of how these local congregations responded to the changed situation in their missional engagement. They are as follows.

First, during the pandemic, many Korean Protestant churches generally focused on membership strengthening such as implementing the programmes for the spiritual growth of current members rather than reaching out to non-believers. Churches focused on devoting themselves to survival. The most proactive missional engagement that churches could offer was preventing church members from turning into "unchurched believers". It is true that this is not direct engagement with nonbelievers, yet strengthening the faith of existing church members was also important missional engagement. Nominalization of the Christian faith has been one of the noticeable phenomena during and even before the pandemic. In light of this, it is meaningful enough to strengthen the existing church members. In the case of Dong-il Presbyterian Church, the weekly church newsletter has been an important source for the sharing of church members' stories.

Second, the pandemic created a new perspective on their ecclesiology, and made these congregations accept the new ecclesial paradigm of dispersion. As mentioned earlier, the Korean Protestant Church historically developed a gathering-centred paradigm, but this became difficult churches were forced to shift to the new ecclesio-

logical paradigm of dispersion. In my observation and interviews, all these churches recognized the necessity of the ecclesial paradigm of dispersion. The sudden pandemic forced these churches to rethink the purpose of the church, and led to the transition that prepared these churches to become missional churches.

Third, most of the missional engagement by local congregations was by indirect approach. They served neighbours in need, distributed goods and helped small churches financially. In such ways, the local congregations attempted to show a positive image of Christians to the public. In Dong-Il Presbyterian Church, they switched from direct evangelism to more indirect evangelism by showing good works for the suffering neighbourhood, and such good works for suffering neighbours is only possible through this new ecclesial paradigm of dispersion.

Fourth, during the pandemic, missional engagement in local congregation to non-Christians was not entirely dismissed. As large-scale meetings were prohibited, small group gatherings were still possible. The case of Bae-gok Joeun Church is a unique case of this. This church was able to develop in new ways. Instead of inviting non-Christians directly to mass worship services, they were invited to small group sessions. In this case, they modified the existing campaign event to fit the new situation. The case shows that even when in-person gathering was restricted, churches found other ways to engage missionally in new ways.

Fifth, there was a clear increase in attention to "unchurched believers" for missional engagement. Many congregations are considering specific and unique ways to attract these people into church community during the pandemic and once the crisis is over. In the case of Onnuri Vision Church, their bold investment in online ministry is aimed to reach out to "unchurched believers" and non-believers. Their online programmes are designed not just for the existing church members, but also for "unchurched believers" who may decide to join.

Sixth, there was a clear increase in online services in many congregations. Due to the pandemic, many local congregations launched new online ministries and streamed their worship services. Churches began to offer various online Bible studies and produced various church-related contents. But in many cases, these are produced to support existing membership. In other cases, online worship services became new opportunities to participate in the worship services of other churches. As a result, it weakened the commitment of existing members to their home congregations.

Proposals for missional engagement during and after the pandemic

In the previous section, I described how local congregations handled the pandemic situation as they engaged in missional endeavour. Many congregations were not able to actively engage in any evangelistic endeavour during the pandemic, but that does not mean that they totally abandoned their missional outreach. Some are more direct in how they engage in evangelism, but some are more indirect as they seek to be meaningful neighbours as the local church.

In finding an appropriate way to encounter suffering neighbours, I propose three ways of missional engagement during and even after the pandemic. These approaches are suggested by the lessons derived from previous sections.

Missional engagement using narrative

In this time of deep pain and despair, we must pay attention to the power of narratives in communicating the gospel. Alister McGrath emphasizes the importance of narratives in apologetics (McGrath 2019: 7–8). He states that "God has shaped the human mind and imagination to be receptive to stories." For McGrath, narrative approaches are not displacing but rather supplementing reasoned argumentation in apologetics. He states that mystery, in the proper sense of the term, refers not to something that is irrational, but to something that cannot be fully comprehended by reason (McGrath 2019: 8). The mystery of the gospel can be better communicated by narratives.

John Drane similarly states that "telling a story requires honesty to accept both our strength and weakness. When we show our weakness and vulnerability others are more willing to identify with us and hear our invitation to join us in following Christ" (Drane 1997: 67). Earlier on, David Bosch in his classic *Transforming Mission* wrote that the postmodern paradigm proved that rationality is not enough to tell the entire story of life, and therefore, it needs to be expanded. One way of expanding it is to recognize that language cannot be absolutely accurate, and that it is impossible to define neither scientific laws nor theological truths once and for all (Bosch 1991: 353). So, in articulating the nature of God, we can employ stories both oral and written. Therefore, the upsurge of interest especially in Third-World churches in narrative theology has become prominent. Today "theology as narrative" and other non-conceptual forms of theologizing have become more important. I also experienced how narratives can persuasively communicate the gospel especially during a time of suffering (Park 2021). When people are in deep suffering, the emotional dimension often stays front and centre. An intellectual approach to the gospel does not fully

engage the listener's imagination for empathy, but stories that share similar pains and interests can make people more open to the gospel.

Narratives are even more important for digital natives. Digital storytelling is a new form of narrative approach through digital medium (Y. W. Lee 2010: 13) and is receiving more attention due to heightened interest in virtual reality. In this virtual world, people experience new stories of self through their avatars. Some are concerned that the virtual world would create more isolation in people's lives. But in *Storytelling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall argues that, if the migration of humanity to the virtual world is inevitable, we should rather utilize the virtual world for narrative (Gottschall 2013: 197). The virtual world is not a cause of isolation in modern life but rather a response to it. Gottschall further states that the virtual world is more authentically human than the real world in important ways. It provides us the sense of community, a feeling of competence, and a sense of being an important person whom people depend on (Gottschall 2013: 195–96).

Narratives are also useful to answer the existential questions and communicate the mystery of life more powerfully during a time of pain and suffering. During the pandemic, words such as "God", "prayer", and "death" rose as most searched terms globally, which shows people are asking existential questions especially during times of suffering (W. J. Kim 2021: 129).

In the case studies, I also found that narratives are powerful ways of sharing the gospel and appropriate tools for the missional engagement reaching non-believers and "unchurched believers". In these case studies, I highlighted that during the pandemic, many Korean Protestant churches had implemented various programmes for the spiritual growth of existing members. In the case of Dong-il Presbyterian Church, when the regular worship services were restricted or banned, the weekly newsletter prepared by the church has been the important source for the sharing of the stories of members. Here, the stories of the members are used in strengthening the friendship that had been distanced among church members. In Beagot Joeun Church the small group meetings use narratives to make a warm atmosphere for the newcomers. Once rapport was established, the religious and existential conversation can be expressed more comfortably. In this sense, the narratives can be used for encouraging a more welcoming and hospitable space. After all, narratives on existential topics such as the meaning of life based on a Christian worldview can open people to Christ more easily than ever before.

Forming a habitual ethical lifestyle

In the age of the pandemic and afterwards, missional engagement must be expressed through forming the habitus of an ethical lifestyle. As already proposed by many scholars, the ethical lifestyle of Christians is the key factor in spreading Christianity. According to Rodney Stark, the explosive growth of Christianity in the first century was the result of their ministry toward neighbours infected by disease and facing death. These early Christians demonstrated charity and love to their non-Christian friends (Ko, Hudson & Jao 2020). Similarly. Alan Kreider argues that the distinctively holy lifestyle of the pre-Christendom Christians was key to evangelism and church growth. Prior to Christendom there was no intention to make worship attractive to outsiders. Yet worship was all-important in the spread of the church. Its rites and practices were designed to reform the pagans who joined the church into distinctive people who lived in a way that individually and corporately looked like Jesus Christ. And these reformed people were attractive. Their freedom, their new practice of corporate life, and their behaviour toward non-Christians in this period was intriguing, inviting and question-posing (Kreider 1994: 10).

Ethical lifestyle continues to be a significant factor in missional engagement, and it became even meaningful in the time of pandemic and afterwards. However, I want to express the importance of their habitual dimension in practice. According to Suh Jung-Woon, the respected Korean missiologist and President Emeritus of Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, a person's ethical lifestyle is the result of how one subconsciously behaves in everyday life (Suh 2021). Such ethical living is not something that can be practised through rationality, will-power or self-control. Rather it is something that subconsciously flows out of oneself. The gospel embedded in the subconscious is manifest outwardly and naturally in everyday situations, and such manifestation of the gospel through one's life in fact communicates the gospel. What Suh emphasizes here is the importance of deeply embedding Christian values in one's subconscious if one is to communicate the Christian gospel. In other words, it needs to be the habitual and natural.

Similarly, Michael Frost emphasizes the importance of habits in missional practice. According to Frost, missional habits are not strategic, but they are consequential (Frost 2016: 21). In other words, the gospel becomes attractive when the audience is surprised or intrigued by the exceptionally ethical life of Christians. As Christians live an extraordinary holy life to the point of making others curious, Christians may then point to the gospel as the answer. In other words, the simple way to show the gospel to the world is none other than to surprise them through the life of the Christian. When Christians' good deeds flow out of the unconscious and become habitual, only then is gospel communication possible. Therefore, missional engagement happens

through Christians' lifetime of self-discipline and acts of love. Here Frost's argument resonates with Suh's view. While such an approach cannot be expected to show the visible results of evangelistic endeavours immediately, in the long term they are decisive for missional engagement.

Embracing the practice of hospitality

Hospitality is essential in communicating the gospel in the pandemic. Whether in-person or online, in small groups or one-on-one settings, the essential aspect of fellowship is whether one has experienced hospitality. Donald McGavran's famous homogeneous unit principle also emphasizes the importance of a sense of belongingness in the process of the conversion: "people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers" (McGavran 1990: 163). Although McGavran's arguments apply mainly to ethnic and racial groups, his basic idea is that social detachment is often the real reason that unbelievers do not respond to the gospel. For the gospel recipients, friendship and a sense of acceptance is more important than the message itself. In this way, the sense of belonging and of being accepted is truly essential part of relationship. The affective dimensions, such as intimacy, belonging and solidarity, are prerequisite for gospel communication.

Recently the affective dimension is increasingly highlighted in gospel communication. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch introduce the idea of "whispering" to show the importance of emotional intimacy when meeting with people one wants to evangelize. Evangelism is to be seen as whispering to the soul of the other (Frost and Hirsch 2013: 126). The evangelism associated with militant and invasive ways needs to be revisited. We must rather approach others to whisper to their souls, listen to their inner desires and respect their humanity. Similarly, Ha Do-gyun also emphasizes the importance of small groups in evangelistic sharing. He values small groups as the halfway point for non-Christians to finally come to Christ. Small groups are "nurture groups" and safe spaces where non-Christians are contacted and nurtured in Christian faith (Ha 2020: 69–71). It is my understanding that if these small groups are truly to function as halfway points and communicate the gospel, they must be where enough hospitality is experienced for one to safely share one's vulnerability.

In section 2, I showed how the pandemic had intensified the sense of loneliness and isolation in the Korean society. When the isolation becomes so severe and prevalent, the experience of hospitality and a sense of intimacy can be even more crucial and valued in our missional engagement when isolation is common. As Frost and Hirsch remind us that most people are whispered into the kingdom slowly and gracefully (Frost and Hirsch 2013: 128), the experience of intimacy and safety in small groups is often key to non-Christians meeting Christ and even joining a faith community.

Non-Christians who first experience hospitality and feel entirely accepted into these small groups gradually become more open to the message that Christians want to share.

To summarize, I developed the interrelationship of three approaches in missional engagement as Figure 1 below.
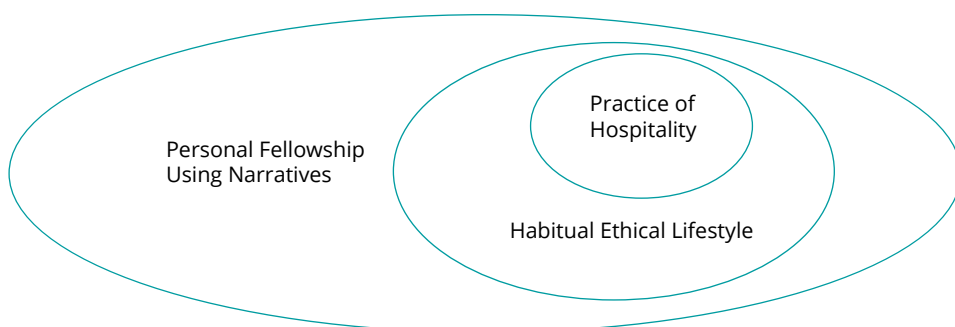
Figure 1   **Three ways of missional engagement**

The missional engagement usually starts with the storytelling of the messengers. The messengers' storytelling leads the recipients to encounter the gospel in a new and deeper way. Then the messengers' exemplary and ethical living witnesses to how the gospel can transform a person. The hospitality that is experienced by recipients integrates all these processes and opens their hearts to Christ. Sincere hospitality of the messenger enables the communication of Christ's love to the recipient. The three approaches do not progress mechanically one after the other, but they often overlap and echo each other.

Conclusion

As Covid-19 has swept the whole of Korean society for the last three years, we experienced fundamental changes and entered a totally new situation. The pandemic changed the way we connect not only in the society but with the whole creation. The despair and the feeling of powerlessness caused by disease opened a new space for longing for God. Yet the church in Korean could not respond to the invisible cry of the people.

This paper tries to locate where we are in this situation in our missional engagement, while at the same time attempting to provide better approaches to such a situation from the three cases studies. Then, the article proposes a new framework to the Korean protestant churches for missional engagement during and after the Covid-19

pandemic. The paper suggests three different approaches. First, we can present the gospel through personal fellowship using the narratives of the messenger. Second, a habitual ethical lifestyle as subconscious self-expression is credible evidence of the power of the gospel. Finally, embracing the practice of hospitality is to be initiated through hospitality.

It Is true that these three types of missional engagement are applicable generally throughout history, yet it is even more applicable in this time of crisis. As the prolonged pandemic resulted in the isolation of individuals and the sense of belongingness is even more desired by many people, these approaches recquire more attention in our missional engagement. Especially where the church has lost its ethical and positive influence in the society, these approaches are even more meaningful. Finally, although I have not yet provided concrete and applicable suggestions for churches to utilize for their ministry, this topic will be discussed in a future paper.

Covid-19 brought a crisis in the church's missional engagement, but the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be shared without stopping. If old tributaries are blocked, new waterways form. The message of the gospel will continue to shine through new people in new places and through new methods.

About the author

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Missional Discipleship in Post-Pandemic Korea: The Case of Suwonsung Church[1]

Bright Myeong-Seok Lee

Abstract

The decline in social trust in the Korean Protestant church is a significant social issue that requires attention and action. Despite being more involved in community service than other religions, trust in the church has fallen, and it is essential to understand why. This paper will examine the previous dominant method of discipleship training, which may have contributed to this decline. By using a case study of a Korean church, the study will analyze the effectiveness of the discipleship training and its impact on social trust. Then I will reflect on how the Korean church should respond to today's situation characterized by VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) and the pandemic. This paper will suggest a new approach called missional discipleship, which seeks to create a more engaging and inclusive environment that inspires the church to lead and participate in community service.

Keywords: Pandemic; Korean church; Reliability; Disciple(s); Discipleship training

Introduction

Besides the mega trends of digitization and climate change, South Korea is rapidly aging and the birthrate is falling at an alarming rate. The world encountered a pandemic in February 2020 that tremendously changed the way of life. Today's situation may be most aptly described by Yuval Noah Harari who said that humanity has

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1   This paper has been adapted from the author's article originally published in Korean under the title "A Missionary Discipleship as an Alternative in the VUCA and Pandemic Era", Theology of Mission 69 (2023): 270–303. The author wants to recognize special gratitude to Dr Rebekah Lee, who translated this article.

technologically developed a canoe into a galley ship then into a steam ship to finally a space shuttle, yet no one knows the direction humanity is headed (Harari 2015: 415).

In an uncertain, unpredictable, and rapidly changing world there is even less time or capacity to respond. According to Doris Märtin, the acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) best describes the first quarter of the twenty-first century (2021: 37).[2] Perhaps one reason why the Korean church cannot find a way out of this turbulence is that, as Märtin pointed out, we continue to be like an ostrich with our head in the sand rather than facing up to the new reality that requires an openness to adapt to change (2021: 111).

The ministry strategies that once worked can no longer guarantee the sustainability of the Korean church. It is time for the Korean church to sincerely ask if we have the will to transform ourselves to be able to face the new challenges of our age. In this study I will consider reasons why the Protestant church has lost public credibility despite being actively engaged in community service, indeed more than any other religious groups. For this purpose, I will analyze the phenomenon of discipleship training that once dominated the Korean Protestant church. Based on the analysis I will consider ways for the church to respond to the age of VUCA and pandemic and suggest missionary discipleship as a solution.

Definition and usage of the term "disciple"

According to *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Gerhard Kittel, the word "disciple" can be defined as a learner or a follower. To be a disciple means to personally draw close and follow after a teacher in all aspect of life (Kittel 1967: 44). The etymology of the word "disciple" and its application in different historical periods should be reviewed.

"Disciple" in the Old and New Testaments

The word "disciple" is not clearly defined in the Old and New Testament but is merely used to name a group of people. In Isa 8.16 the word *limud* (למד) appears once, and it comes from the word *lamad* (למד) which means to learn, train and experience. In the New Testament Gospels, Matthew calls the crowds who follow Jesus Christ the disciples (Mt. 10.1), while Luke calls the same people apostles (Lk. 6.13). This implies

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2 VUCA is originally a military term to describe the unpredictable and constantly changing battleground situation, but now it is more often used to describe our complicated and uncertain reality that necessitates swift response.

that in the first-century church community the terms were used interchangeably. The term apostle (*apostolos*) comes from the Hebrew word *shaliach* (חַשלִי) to indicate one who was sent from Jerusalem with a specific mission to the Jewish community dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. According to Robert M. Johnston, these Jewish apostles were generally supported with funding from the Jerusalem temple, and worked through Jewish networks (Johnston 2006: 2). For instance, Saul from Tarsus who appears in Acts 9.2 was one such apostle for Judaism until he was called to be God's disciple.

The development of the term "disciple" in the early church can be further deduced from the *Didache*.[3] George Cantrell Allen states that the term "apostle" was first only applied to the twelve who had personal relationship with Jesus during his lifetime (Acts 1.21), but as time went by it also came to mean ones who had been sent with a mission, or missionaries (Allen 1903: 21). So, by the time the *Didache* was written, the focus shifted from the importance of direct encounter with Christ toward discerning the true apostles from the false missionaries who called themselves apostles (Allen 1903: 21). Johnston states that apostles are usually those who had been sent by an authority to carry out tasks on their behalf, while the term "disciple" was used specifically for those who were with Jesus Christ in person (Johnston 2006: 5).

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul tells them, "Be imitators of me [*Μιμηται μου*], as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11.2). The term "imitators of me" (*Μιμηται μου*) almost reminds one of the image of children imitating their father (1 Cor 4.16).[4] This means to go beyond cognitive response to Paul's teachings, to imitate Paul's character and even his behaviour. This also expects of the teacher an ethical and exemplary life which the disciples would want to imitate.[5]

"Disciple" in the early church and Roman Empire

In the culture of the Roman Empire, a disciple was primarily a student, or someone who learns from a great teacher. An example of this use is found in the writings of Dio Chrysostom (ad 40–120), the philosopher and historian who lived in today's Turkey. In his fifty-fifth Discourse, Chrysostom says even though one has not lived at the same time as a teacher, someone who wholly lives according to the teacher's teachings must be called a pupil or a disciple (Chrysostom 1962: 383) Chrysos-

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3   120 pages of handwritten Greek manuscript found in the Jerusalem monastery of Constantinople in 1873 by Philotheos Bryennios, Bishop of Nicomedia.
4   I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. (1 Cor. 4.16)
5   For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. (1 Cor 4.15)

tom's understanding of discipleship is the extra-biblical evidence of the widespread perception of discipleship in the first century, as Christianity was growing.

Justin Martyr (ad 100–165), the church fatherm tells of the interests of the earliest church members.

> And on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things (Richardson 1953: 287).

Having the people "imitate the noble things" means to go beyond cognitive acceptance to imitate the actions of the teachers according to what has been written by the apostles and the prophets. This is in line with apostle Paul's exhortation to the churches he founded to imitate Christ and live as disciples of Christ (Acts 20.35; Gal. 4.12; 1 Cor. 11.1; Phil. 3.17–21).

Transforming discipleship

The Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Arusha, Tanzania from 8 to 13 March 2018 brought to the forefront a new perspective on discipleship for churches worldwide. With its theme of "Called to Transforming Discipleship", the conference highlighted a novel approach, urging churches to embrace the notion of "transforming discipleship" (Jukko and Keum 2019: 5–19). While the traditional understanding of discipleship is often limited to a relationship with Jesus, this conference emphasized the need for a proactive engagement in fulfilling Jesus' mission in the world (Ross 2020: 18–20). Thus, what Pope Francis has termed "missionary discipleship" is, in essence, the concept of transforming discipleship (Francis 2013: 96–98).

The Arusha Conference sounds the alarm that the relentless exploitation of God's creation to sustain our economic system is giving rise to circumstances of ecological degradation and insists that ecological concern consists of an essential part of discipleship of the churches worldwide (Jukko and Keum 2019: 9–11). The conference also emphasizes that "Mission from the Margins" involves validating the capacity of marginalized individuals, engaging in their battles and embracing their aspirations (2019: 11–12). This requires overcoming the tendency to marginalize, resisting and challenging the influences that promote exclusion in our respective contexts.

In this context, embracing transforming discipleship in the spirit of mission from the margins enables the church to re-evaluate our approaches to wielding power,

distributing leadership, and collaborating for mission. It provides an opportunity for us to reset the church's priorities and explore new avenues for fostering inclusivity and equity in our shared mission.

Discipleship training in the Korean church: the case of Suwonsung Church (PCK Tonghap)

As is widely known, the new ministry paradigm called discipleship training in Korean churches started with Rev. Oak Han-heum of SaRang Church in the 1970s (Hong 2022). Oak was inspired by Hans Küng's ecclesiology and apostleship of the laity during his study at Calvin Theological Seminary in the US (Park, E. 2013: 127). As he studied the training materials of the Korea Campus Crusade for Christ and the Korean Navigators, he recognized problems with the widely used doctrinal (catechistic) approach. Oak's main idea was to implement discipleship training that revolves around small groups of lay members rather than church leadership. His book *Called to Awaken the Laity* was translated into ten different languages. He led 85 sessions of lay leadership seminars and trained 18,500 ministers on discipleship training (Kim, M., 2010). Oak poured himself into discipleship training to the point of terminal illness. This discipleship training functioned as the rudder for a generation of the Korean church. Park Eung-gyu has this to say about the impact of Oak's discipleship training programme:

> *One contribution of Oak Han-heum was to effectively imprint on the Korean church the truth that all saints, whether clergy or lay, have inherited the apostleship, and are called to share the gospel passed down in the church and to make disciples of all nations (Park, E. 2013: 127).*

In this way, Oak's discipleship training had at its core the recognition of apostleship of the laity. Discipleship training brought fresh change into the stagnant Korean church structure, and there is little doubt that it was the new paradigm that grew the Korean church since the latter half of the 1980s. The pastor of Suwonsung Church, in Suwon in Gyeonggi Province, early on adapted this new discipleship training paradigm for his church.[6]

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6   The rationale behind choosing Suwonsung Church's discipleship training as the case study originates from the author's first-hand participation in this training. This experience enabled the researcher to undertake pertinent research on the discipleship training methods implemented by Suwonsung Church.

The beginning of discipleship training in Suwonsung Church

In this section I will briefly examine the process of discipleship training in Suwon-sung Church and its major characteristics to draw out lessons with which the Korean church may be revitalized in today's changed society.

Pastor An Gwang-soo of Suwonsung Church first began discipleship training in 1987 when the church was reaching its five-year anniversary. The first cohort of beginners class was conducted for five weeks from 9 June to 10 July, meeting twice a week for a total of ten sessions (*Suwonsung Church Bulletin* 1987). An says he was motivated to start the training based on his own experience of coming to Christ and attending church in his youth. He was frustrated that the church would not teach new believers the basics of Christianity and all he had to rely on was the pastor's sermons (An 2021). Based on An's own experience of asking and searching for answers about God, he wrote a manual accessible to any new believer. He says he was able to use this beginners' discipleship training class to answer questions new Christians may have about the basics of faith and strengthen their convictions.

He applied the insights he gathered from the beginners class to his sermons. A characteristic of his sermons is to proclaim the gospel message periodically. In his sermons the essential gospel message is preached at least once a month in ways that are easily understandable for new believers. This means his sermons are generally simple and clear (An 2016). These simple messages had an impact on new believers and other Christians who had not been rigorously trained. But these beginners classes focused on personal salvation and neglected the prophetic role churches should have fulfilled for the society in the 1980s and the 1990s. As Yim Hee-mo pointed out, Suwonsung Church's discipleship training was similar to that of other Korean churches at the time, in that it tended to focus on personal spiritual salvation. If the Korean society is to accept the Korean church as a true and trusted companion, discipleship training in the church should also be renewed and integrated to get past its preoccupation with dualistic spiritual salvation (Yim 2021).

Impact and limitations of discipleship training in a multifaith society

Being aware of the diverse religious landscape in Korean society and the challenge of sharing the gospel, An Gwang-soo began teaching about the existence of God. His approach was different from traditional catechistic discipleship training used in mission organizations and churches in Korea. In the following, he explains the impact of his beginners' discipleship training class.

The beginners' class became the foundation for our church. Once people became convicted of the existence of God and their own salvation, their spiritual life completely changed. You didn't need to tell them to come to church, they just did…. This is our church's greatest resource, our church's uniqueness and strength, our everything (An 2021).

The fundamental principle of discipleship training at Suwonsung Church was the self-discovery of the laity and their role. In the 1980s and 1990s, the baby boomers born in the 1950s and 1960s took over church leadership just as the Korean church grew thanks to various political and economic factors. Like SaRang Church, Suwonsung Church aimed to form faithful volunteers in the church through its discipleship training.

However, by the late 1990s, the training that emphasized the role of Christians within the church showed limitations in its missionary function. This structural limitation was similar to what the discipleship training program at SaRang Church had experienced. As a result, Suwonsung Church's discipleship training took a new direction in the 2000s.

When one person changes, the world changes

An shifted the focus of discipleship training from church growth to world mission, inspiring some people to the missionary calling overseas. An recounts a decisive incident one year when only two people signed up for the evening slot of the discipleship class. It was practically challenging for a senior pastor to devote evening hours regularly for three months just to train two people. But to make matters worse, one of them ended up withdrawing. He prayed whether to continue the training for only one person, and he heard a voice in his heart saying, "When one person changes, the world changes." He chose to obey the voice and trained the remaining person to the best of his ability (An 2021). This experience led An to recognize the value of each soul and shift the focus of his discipleship training toward world mission.[7]

Han Guk-il calls An's ministry approach "authentic passion" and "authentic leadership". He believes such an approach is necessary for the church to overcome its tendency towards local-church-centrism and to respond to the world's disappoint-

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7   This was the experience of this author as I underwent the discipleship training of Suwonsung Church. The training had a profound impact on my spiritual journey, ultimately resulting in my acceptance of Jesus, theological training and two decades of missionary work in Africa. This experience has been the subject of two separate publications (Kim Do-il 2018: 296–303 and Han Guk-il 2019: 279).

ment with its lack of integrity. According to Han, An's leadership style exemplifies the "missionary infrastructure"" and "social capital" necessary for the Korean church to become a missional church (Han 2019: 380).

Weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12.5)

By 2009 Suwonsung Church's discipleship training took yet another turn. The church adopted a social service missionary system to financially support civil society professionals and activists responding to social issues of the time (PCK World 2009; Park, J. 2017). Most recipients have been Christian civil society organization workers struggling to make ends meet while working for social causes. The church supports their living expenses as a way to participate in social service mission (An 2016: 221). This resolve to carry out the mission even when there is no immediately visible impact, and the resolve to work for justice and righteousness, shows that the church's discipleship training had reached a new level.

There was also another incident that led to the greatest change in the church's discipleship training. That was the Sewol Ferry shipwreck on 16 April 2014. The ferry embarked from Incheon to Jeju Island, many of its passengers being Danwon High School students from the city of Ansan. The ship sank in the waters near Jindo drowning 304 passengers. At the suggestion of Nam Gi-up who was a deacon and a social service missionary of Suwonsung Church, some church members visited the families of the deceased, then invited them to church to let the whole church hear the stories directly. Some more conservative church members at first interpreted this event as the pastor taking a political stance. But An persuaded even these churches members saying that obeying the command to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12.15) and wiping the tears of those who have lost their children is a new mission the church must conduct for society.

The Korean church has for a long time tried to speak to society but it has rather neglected listening to society instead. This was one of the reasons why the church has lost its credibility in the eyes of the world. Now after the Covid-19 pandemic the Korean church needs a new kind of ministers. Unlike the previous generation's ministers who tried to cast grand visions for the direction of the church and charismatically lead the church at its helm, the world today needs ministers to listen calmly and put their discipleship into action out in the world (Roxburgh 2006: 144). The case of Suwonsung Church shows that the world today calls for obedient and incarnational discipleship that listens to forgotten stories and empathizes with others' suffering.

Proposal: Discipleship training from the perspective of the Kingdom of God

The usual kind of discipleship training in the Korean church had a rather narrow soteriology and church-centered bias against the world. This discipleship training focused on gathering the world into the church rather than sending disciples out to the world. The church consequently experienced amazing growth, but it also neglected the command to be salt and light of the world. The church-centric discipleship training also neglected the Kingdom of God that is wider than the visible church. The church closed its eyes to the world and did not tend to what it should have. As a result, the church lost its social credibility.

These same limitations were found in the discipleship training by Suwonsung Church. But to overcome the limitations they listened to the demands of the society and sought to practice incarnational discipleship, and these efforts took them to a new level. Based on this case I now want to propose some new principles of discipleship training for the Korean church as it works to recover its social credibility.

Sola Scriptura and Solo Scriptura

Much of discipleship training in the Korean church has focused on Bible study. Suwonsung Church's discipleship training in the 1980s and 1990s also had this emphasis. The Korean church inherited the reformed church tradition of *sola scriptura* which privileges the Word of God as the sole authority for Christian behaviour. However, throughout church history scriptural interpretation has often relied too much on certain authorities, leading to negative consequences.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer has pointed out the problem of scripture-centrism and the danger of confusing *sola scriptura* with *solo scriptura*. The *solo scriptura* approach risks getting trapped in church traditions or neglecting the need to read scripture as a church community (Vanhoozer 2019: 178). Stanley Hauerwas argues that North American Christians have been taught to interpret the Bible for themselves without undergoing spiritual and moral transformation. Hauerwas goes so far as to say, "No task is more important than for the Church to take the Bible out of the hands of individual Christians in North America" (Hauerwas 1993: 15). He also argues that "each person in the Church" should not have "the right to interpret the Scripture" (Hauerwas 1993: 16), meaning that scripture interpretation should not serve personal whims, but rather the church community should be the agent of interpretation. In the same vein, discipleship training in the Korean church must go beyond the simple intellectual exercise of reading and interpreting the Bible.

Lamin Sanneh argues that Christianity is the only world religion that has spread in languages and cultures different from those of its founder (Sanneh 2003: 98). Sanneh emphasizes Christianity's translatability and mentions the linguistic translatability of scripture and consequent changes to the power structure of the church. Sanneh's argument for Christianity's translatability is rooted in his own context of the African church that emerged from centuries of Western colonialism in which African culture, language and religion were deemed inferior to those of the West. The church has subsequently worked to recover its own identity, and language is a critical element in one's sense of identity. When Sanneh as an African theologian writes of the scripture communicating its depths of meaning in his own language, and not just in a European language, this has more powerful impact. The process of Christianity spreading from Western Europe to Africa was a process of exploitation and destruction. Translation of the scripture into African languages was thus a momentous event. For discipleship training in the Korean church, scripture interpretation must be understood from the perspective of the receiver, not just the sharer.

Therefore, for a church to produce proper interpretations, it cannot be sectarian. The Bible also reveals its full meaning when communities of different languages and cultural experiences read it together (Wright 2017: 117–206). This is the path that the Korean church must take in its discipleship training.

Sanctity and discipleship as stewards of creation

What made discipleship training trend in the Korean church in the 1980s was the principle of apostleship of the laity. Suwonsung Church's discipleship training was also in this paradigm. This new perspective leveled the relationship between the clergy and the laity and called all believers to discipleship. But today the society has changed and there are new expectations for the church.

Constant connection to digital media is engendering problems especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Preoccupied with digital media, people have no time to enjoy true rest, and the fall-outs are evident. Eun-Ah Cho observes, "The youth are too busy to take stock of themselves. They live disassembled lives." In a such of temporal scarcity the youth ultimately fail to find their true identity from within and fall into depression (Cho 2022: 23–25). This situation can be remedied by recovering our sanctity.

The restoration of sanctity should be a core focus of Suwonsung Church's discipleship training, as well as for Korean churches in general, in light of the challenges posed by digital media and changing societal expectations in the post-pandemic era. In this regard, the term proposed at the Arusha Conference, "Christ-connected-

ness", which emphasizes living our entire lives in close connection with Jesus Christ, is particularly relevant for churches in the digital age (Bevans 2018: 374).

As Miroslav Volf emphasizes, embracing our sanctity requires making space for others and inviting them in (Volf 1996: 129). This inclusive approach to sanctity recognizes that "Discipleship is not primarily a matter of personal or corporate performance or even the living out of the implications of doctrine, but something more deep-seated in desire and identity that is to do with the human longing for holiness" (Cherry and Hayes 2021: 331). It is through this deep-seated desire for holiness and connection with God that disciples are called to serve as stewards of creation and adopt a "discipleship as gardening" approach towards caring for their most vulnerable neighbours in nature, as we have learned from the lessons of the pandemic (Ewell 2021).

Ethics and social participation

To be set apart from society while fulfilling its function, a Christian must remember to participate in society. Therefore, recovering the Christian sense of ethical and public responsibility is critical. Ethical standards that are agreed upon by the entire society, not just shared among Christians, should be implemented. The church is responsible for approaching the world in a language they can understand and doing good works so that people outside the church may know its good intentions.

Along with social inequalities, the sociopolitical divide between the conservative far-right and the progressive far-left is detrimental to society. These divisions cause the public commons to shrink, putting socially marginalized groups in precarious positions. The Korean church has remained too long in the private realm and has not been free of the persistent tendency long tendency in the Korean society to distinguish insiders and outsiders. Political partisanship has also seeped into churches to contaminate preaching from pulpits, and Christians have defended the powerful for their financial gain while neglecting the powerless in distress.

Since 2009, Suwonsung Church has been operating the social missionary system as the basis for nurturing new disciples. In the twenty-first century, we cannot return to the pre-Christendom era when Christians were a social minority, as Alan Kreider, the Mennonite historian of the early church, pointed out. However, we must seriously examine how the early church functioned in society as the true disciples of Christ (Kreider 2015: 22).

Suwonsung Church's social service missionary system attempts to recover the sense of ethical responsibility of the early church community. By participating in social issues, churches can fulfill their prophetic calling and function as missional church.

Hospitality and empathy

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, Robert D. Putnam and others have warned that American society is disintegrating (Putnam 2000: 15–25). Putnam observes that Christians in the US have been building social trust by engaging in more social services and charities than non-Christians, thereby accumulating more social capital (CEMK 2020: 85). Similarly, Sanneh notes that Peter's apostolic calling began when he broke down ethnic and national barriers. Sanneh states, "Peter's insistence that true religion cannot be restricted to mere institutional adherence signals a radical shift to the idea of God as boundary-free truth, of God as one who is without partiality" (Sanneh 2008: 4).

The Korean church must now rediscover God's acceptance and hospitality in the gospel rather than engaging in political strife and social division. As those who have been accepted and forgiven by God, we must make space for others. To this end, we must embody two things: embracing uncertainty and vulnerability and practicing self-denial. These two aspects must work together, like wagon wheels. The early church demonstrated this in words and loving action (Brady 1938: 68). In the third century, Cyprian, an early church leader in Carthage, encouraged Christians to develop embodied habits that he referred to as "patience" (Kreider 2015: 224). Discipleship training should instil patient love as described in 1 Corinthians 13 so that it becomes a natural expression of Christian life.

Another challenge facing the Korean church is its inability to relate to society. More people are floating between the church and the world today because the church's messages and interests do not address society's challenges. Suwonsung Church's discipleship training demonstrates that to be a true disciple of Christ, a church must empathize with those in despair outside the church and raise society's capacity for empathy. According to Yim Hee-mo, this is precisely what it means to follow, imitate and obey Jesus Christ in incarnational discipleship, and this is what every Korean church must strive for. This is what it means to be a radical evangelical (Yim 2021: 248).

Conclusion

The case of Suwonsung Church provides valuable insights into the challenges facing the Korean church and churches worldwide in the post-pandemic world. Traditional forms of discipleship training are no longer sufficient, and new approaches must

be adopted. Scripture interpretation must move beyond intellectual exercises and embrace the translatability of scripture. It should be grounded in the church community and read collectively by diverse communities with different contexts and cultural experiences to uncover its full meaning.

In light of the challenges posed by the rapidly changing digital media landscape and evolving societal expectations in this era, there is a pressing need for Korean churches to refocus their attention on the restoration of sanctity in their discipleship training. A more inclusive approach to holiness is crucial as it recognizes that authentic discipleship is rooted in innate human desire for deeper connection with Christ (Bevans 2018: 374) and requires openness to others and a willingness to create space for them.

As responsible stewards of creation, disciples must adopt the "discipleship as gardening" mindset, which entails a compassionate approach to caring for the vulnerable members of society, both human and non-human. Through this approach, the church can embody the incarnational discipleship of Jesus Christ and carry out its mission to uplift and empower marginalized and underserved individuals.

Society expects the church to practise true discipleship, which entails following the example of Jesus Christ's incarnational discipleship. This involves reaching out to the sick at Bethany and responding to the requests of the diseased trapped around the pool of Bethesda. The Sewol Ferry tragedy subsequently catalysed Suwonsung Church's social missionary services. In the current societal climate, the church must assume a larger role beyond its existing religious institution and expand its public outreach. This responsibility, however, is not exclusive to Suwonsung Church, but rather demands a collective effort from the broader Korean church community.

The church should prioritize individuals and society suffering social inequalities and unjust structures. To achieve this, the concept of discipleship and the practical implementation of its principles should transcend the traditional confines of the church and actively engage with those beyond its physical boundaries. Missional discipleship is a critical element of a missional church's work to uplift and empower the marginalized and the underserved. This type of discipleship aligns with the genuine discipleship that society expects of the church.

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ARTICLES

Mongolian Migrants in a Korean Missional Church: The Case of Nasom Community

Seonyi Lee

Abstract

Ever since Lesslie Newbigin's missional ecclesiology was introduced to South Korean churches in 2000, Korean scholars and pastors have been reaching beyond church growth theory to explore alternative and practical models. Missional ecclesiology led them to refine their ecclesiology and to restore the essence of the Korean church. This paper examines Nasom Community for Mongolian Migrants as a model of missional church in Korea. This study first describes the situation of Mongolian migrants in Korea. Secondly, the missionary vision and missionary strategies of Nasom Community, and how they are implemented in practice, are explored. Finally, the mission of Nasom Community is reviewed. This case shows the missionary potential of the Korean church for Asian mission.

Keywords: Missional ecclesiology; Nasom Community; Korean church; Mongolian migrants; Asian mission

Introduction

The Korean church began as a missional church. While Western Protestant missions originated from mission societies, the Korean church was a missionary community from the beginning. Protestantism entered Korea through Western missionaries in 1885, and the Independant Korean Presbytery was organized in 1907 where Koreans were ordained as pastors (Moffett 1962: 55). Then in 1913 the Presbyterian General Assembly was organized and sent missionaries to Shandong, China. In only 30 years, the Korean church had become a missionary-sending church. At the time of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, the Korean church was still young. But in the 2000s it was sending more than 10,000 missionaries, and by the end of 2017 it was sending the second highest number of missionaries among all countries (Byun

2018: 317). Korean churches today play a central role in world mission, serving Asia, Africa and South America.

However, the Korean church's missionary work is not without problems. Korean church missions may be characterized as church-focused, self-expanding and individualistic (Han 2010: 77). Korean Christians are used to understanding mission as church-focused. This was naturally the influence of Western missionaries and their missiology since the nineteenth century. From the 1980s, missions conducted by single church units had great impact and Korean church missions acquired the tendency to focus on the local church's own self-expansion. This was influenced by the church growth movement that greatly influenced the Korean church at the time, the result being to reduce missions to an event of the church rather than the event of the Kingdom of God for the world. The church growth movement directed all the church's resources to numerical increase in visible church membership. This naturally also narrowed Christians' focus on individual spirituality.

Since the 2000s, the Korean church has faced a crisis of stagnation and loss of social influence. In this situation, some scholars and pastors have suggested that missional ecclesiology is a solution. That is why Lesslie Newbigin's missional ecclesiology that emerged in UK and then US academia in the 1980s and 90s gained attention in Korea in the 2000s (Korean Society of Mission Studies, 2015: 198). Newbigin's *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* showed us how to seek the missional nature of church facing secularization and Neopeganism in the Western World (Newbigin 1954). The missional church movement arose during the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. The movement seeks to rethink and redefine the nature of the Church and create a new paradigm in which churches are seen as missional in natue. A missional church is a Christian community that is focused on engaging with its surrounding community and actively participating in God's mission in the world (Han 2019: 45). This approach emphasizes the church's role in reaching out to the entire world outside the church and in local context.

Missional churches seek to break down the barriers between the church and the world by actively seeking to understand the needs and challenges facing their surrounding community. This involves building relationships with people in the community, engaging in acts of service and justice, and sharing the gospel in relevant and meaningful ways. Missional ecclesiology was a practical theology to overcome the dominant church growth perspective. It afforded an opportunity to again ask what the church is and to re-establish Korean ecclesiology. The missional church movement is a response to the changing cultural context in which churches operate. It seeks to provide a more relevant and effective approach to fulfilling the church's

mission in the world. Nasom Community is made up of several institutions including Nasom Church (http://www.nasomchurch.com). Nasom church, a local church, is a part of Nasom Community.

This study examines Nasom Community as a Korean church that practises this essential mission of the church. Nasom Community is a critical case to study for keeping the nature of missional church and reaching out to migrants who were excluded in Korean society. Nasom Community which is unique in sending migrants back their countries for mission, is a case of missional church in Korea. Nasom Community is involved in both local and overseas mission. This study first examines the situation of Korean migrants and the relationship between Korea and Mongolia to understand the context of Nasom Community's mission to Mongolians. Second, the ministry and activities of each segment of the community to identify the missionary vision and strategy of Nasom Community is investigated. Third, the findings from the perspective of missional ecclesiology is assessed. Finally, suggestions are made for the Korean church may become a missional church for Asia as a channel of *Missio Dei*.

Mongolian migrants in Korea
The situation of immigrants in Korea
The number of foreigners staying in Korea began to increase in the early 1990s with the influx of manufacturing workers from China, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. During this period, the need for foreign workers for domestic production increased due to rising wages, avoidance of 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult), low birth rate, aging population and high educational attainment. Therefore, an industrial trainee system, an employment permit system and a visiting employment system were implemented for foreign workers. Many of these workers are engaged in manufacturing or menial service, and most of their labour costs less than that of Korean citizens, which helps alleviate human resource shortages in these sectors. But the influx of foreigners is not just limited to blue collar industries. In the process of economic growth and transition to high-tech industries, the number of high-wage foreign workers is increasing, and foreign high-skilled people are entering various sectors in major corporations.

According to a report compiled by the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, the number of foreign residents living in Korea reached 2.13 million as of November 2021, increasing fourfold since 2006 (Newspower 2022). According to monthly statistics, the number decreased from 2,524,656 in 2019 to 2,135,689 by the end of June 2020 in the aftermath of Covid-19 (Christiandaily 2020). In 2022, the number of foreign residents was 2,245,921, of whom 849,804 were from China,

235,007 from Vietnam, 201,681 from Thailand, 156,562 from the United States, 79,136 from Uzbekistan, 57,452 from the Philippines, 56,995 from Russia, 53,038 from Mongolia, 50,841 from Indonesia, 49,240 from Cambodia etc. (seoul.go.kr). However, the number of migrants in Korea is expected to continue to increase in the future as Korea's population ages and birthrate falls.

The Ministry Data Institute (2022) shared the results of a self-reported survey report on the religious life of 445 foreigners living in Ansan and vicinity from 4 July to 22 August 2022. According to this survey, 8% of the participants are currently Protestant, and more are Buddhists at 12%. More people responded that they have become non-religious after migrating to Korea, and the proportion of people adhering to each religion also decreased after migration. In addition, when asked if they had been encouraged to join a religion in Korea, 71% responded that they had not. Meanwhile, a high proportion of foreign migrants are favourable to Protestantism.

Protestantism topped all categories when asked to identify "the religion that has affection for migrants", "the religion that best understands the difficulties of migrants", and "the religion that provides practical help to migrants". Of the non-religious migrants, 44.5 % responded that they may be open to Protestanism in the future, followed by Buddhism (31.1%), Catholicism (3.8%) and Islam (1.5%). Migrants who attended religious events had positive experiences because they "felt peace of mind" (41.9%) and were "welcomed warmly" (31.5%), suggesting that the Korean church should become a community of welcome and hospitality. As the number of migrants in Korea increases significantly, Korean churches must be attentive to missions and strategic ministry to migrants. Migrant missions are as important as overseas missions.

Mongolian migrants in Korea

Mongolian people began entering Korea after diplomatic relations were established in 1990. They came pursuing the "Korean Dream" of economic prosperity. Especially with the implementation of the employment permit system and President Roh Moo Hyun's visit to Mongolia in May 2006, migration to Korea exploded (*Korea News* 2006). The Mongolian government asked the Korean government to accept more Mongolian workers, and the president and other government officials visited Mongolia and signed a memorandum of understanding to permit entry of Mongolian workers into Korea. The number of Mongolian migrants has already exceeded 53,038 in Korea, which is nearly 1.6% of the Mongolian population. Mongolia's most important source of national finance is Mongolian workers in Korea.

About 70% of Mongolian workers in Korea are highly educated people who graduated from community college or higher education. Many of them are also young people in their early thirties. This tells us that most of Mongolians visiting Korea are the elites in the upper-middle class or young and competent leaders with the potential to shape public opinion in the future. These are the people lining up outside the Korean Embassy in Ulaanbaatar to enter the small country called Korea. Mongolia was once at the centre of world history and geopolitically located next to the neighbouring countries of China and Russia at the heart of the central Asian Silk Road. Mongolia is also a museum of religions containing Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism and shamanism. Therefore, there is a potential place for Asian mission.

The missionary vision and strategy of Nasom Community

The missionary vision of Nasom Community

Nasom Church was established on 5 October 1997 in the basement of a building in Gwangjin District in Seoul. The church belongs to the Seoul Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), and naturally began with believers who shared a vision for migrant and multicultural ministry. In 2011, it became an organized church and formed the Nasom Community (Co.) that operates an International Mongolian School, Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Cultural Promotion Centre, Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, and Nasom Multi-culture Children Care Centre. The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, a branch of Nasom Community, was established on 28 January 1996 in Seongdong District of Seoul before Nasom Church was established.
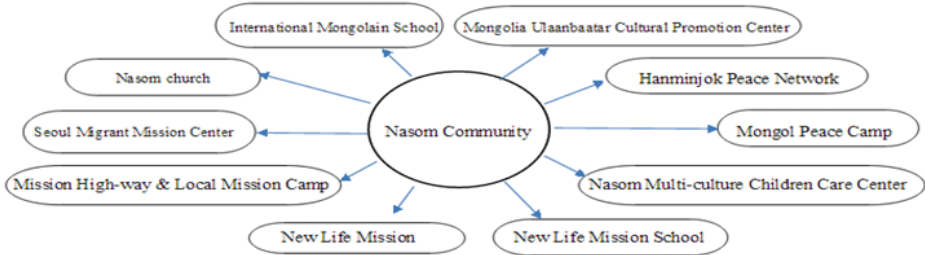
Figure 1   Organisation Chart of Nasom Community

The community motto is "serving the migrants, serving by giving, and serving by going forth", expressing their identity as a community that welcomes Jesus Christ (Nasom Community website). The community aim is to support migrants and form a life-giving community. A large proportion of migrants Nasom Community serves are from Mongolia, so the scope of this study is limited to the Community's mission

to Mogolian migrants. The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre is a missionary agency affiliated with the Seoul Presbytery of PCK. Currently, 2,500 migrant workers from 29 countries are registered to receive medical check-up services. Over 10,000 people participate in this ministry each year. Nasom Community is a missionary community founded to support the neighbouring foreign migrant workers.

For this article, an interview is conducted with Hae-geun Yoo, who is the president of Nasom Community. He graduated from Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary and studied social welfare policy at Soongsil University. He was the first General Secretary of the Korean Church Foreign Labourer Missions Council. His ministry philosophy is to follow God's will and stand with the socially marginalized, to incorporate diversity in the rapidly changing context of globalization and information exchange, and to reject a capitalist standard of success. His aim is qualitative, rather than quantitative, church growth, presenting an alternative model of doing church. He is building a migrant ministry and missions network for Nasom Church to practise faith by serving the migrants and the marginalized.

Yoo was full of resentment toward God due to his child's cognitive disability and the loss of vision caused by his disease. He had come to the end of his tether and decided to take his life, but met Jesus who more than empathizes with the poor and the marginalized and dwells among them (Yoo 2019b: 97–118). Yoo affirms that true mission and ministry is to love the marginalized neighbours and to live among them just as Jesus did. His vision for Nasom Church is for it to be a community that serves the migrants and to be the salt and light of the world. He refers to his ministry as "nomadic life and spirituality". Nomads are those who chart new paths and respond to the needs of the time with a constant pioneering spirit rather than building fortresses (Yoo 2006: 244–49). Especially as borders blur in the age of globalization and information and as modern Korean society becomes multicultural, sojourning migrant workers may be the seedbed of world mission. Yoo shares the gospel with migrant workers as he sees the potential for world mission through them.

Currently, about 2,000 migrant workers are registered with Nasom Community, and more than half of them are from Mongolia. In 1999 the Community established International Mongolian School for the children of Mongolian migrants. The school has currently enrolled 65 Mongolian students and about 50 Korean and Mongolian teachers. Some of them live in their two dormitories, House of Nasom and House of Joseph. There is also Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Culture Promotion Centre, which plays a role in civilian diplomacy between Mongolia and Korea. In addition, the International Mongolian School is essential to prepare for mission to Mongolia. Education is also the most thriving type of ministry to Mongolian migrants. The role of Nasom Commu-

nity serves the foreign migrants' urgent needs. Koreans' perspective may misinterpret the actual needs of the migrants but a true community is an open community that understands and accepts all migrants.

The mission strategy of Nasom Community

The number of foreigners staying in Korea grew rapidly from about 910,000 in 2006 to about 2.3 million in 2018. To respond to God's call to be the ark of salvation for the migrants coming to Korea, Nasom Community sends back migrants as missionaries to their hometown, operates missional businesses for financial self-sufficiency and trains retired seniors for missionary work.

The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre

The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, affiliated with PCK, was the first among Nasom Community branches to be established on 28 January 1996. It serves foreign migrants with the love of Jesus Christ and shares the gospel with them. There are currently more than 150 people worshipping at the Centre each week. It serves foreigners and migrant workers with human rights advice and medical support, and holds various gatherings and events.

There are regional worship services at the Mission Centre. Every week, 150 migrants attend services for Mongolian migrants, for others from Southwest Asia (mostly India), Islamic regions (Iran, Türkiye), China and Vietnam, as well as services in English for others from the Philippines and Africa. For Mongolian worship, 20 to 30 people gather every Sunday at 2 p.m. to worship in the library on the first floor of the International Mongolian School which also serves as the exhibition hall of the Mongol Cultural Centre. Most of the participants are Mongolian teachers at the International Mongolian School. The services encourage the teachers to share the gospel with the Mongolian students and educate them in the Christian worldview and values to fear God and love their neighbours.

Region	Worship time	Attendee
English-Speaking Region	Sunday 14:00	4 teams
Southwestern Region	Sunday 14:10	15 to 20 migrant workers
Islamic Region	Sunday 14:00	3 Koreans and 3 Iranians
Mongol Region	Sunday 14:00	2 to 30 Mongolian teachers
China Region	Sunday 13:00	8 to 10 Chinese students and worker
Vietnam Region	Sunday 14:00	7 to 8 Vietnamese Women & Workers

Table 1   Regional worship by Seoul Migrant Mission Centre.

In the Seoul Migrant Mission Centre, various counselling and medical services are provided to effectively help migrant workers solve various issues they encounter in their employemt. Counselling is mainly on employment, wage, passport and visa problems and work-related injuries, to help them file reports and guide them to hospitals. The centre provides practical help for migrants in physically demanding working conditions and advocates for their rights. Medical service is provided on internal medicine, surgery and oriental acupuncture on Sunday afternoons by volunteers. Doctors and specialists provide medical services to migrant workers who have difficulty accessing medical care.

The Centre conducts a spiritual retreat programme for migrants during the Lunar New Year holiday every year at Nasom Multicultural Ecology Village in Yangpyeong. Nasom Church and Seoul Migrant Mission Centre also hold joint Easter and Thanksgiving services. In addition, a sporting event (May), cross-country pilgrimage (during Chuseok holiday) and Nasom Festival (December) are held annually. About 100 people attend the retreat, where on the first day they have prayer sessions and Bible reading and meet in regional groups. On the second day, there is an early morning worship service, breakfast, then the Pilgrim's Progress activity when they have time to commit to following Christ's footsteps. They finish the event on the Lunar New Year, baking and enjoying pizza and spaghetti and enjoying the local hot springs.

In Easter, members of Nasom Church and Seoul Migrant Mission Centrr worship together to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. After worship, groups from each country present their dance and praise. The presentations are attended by the Nasom Church members, who serve the migrants. The sporting event promotes mental and physical fitness for the tired migrants and multicultural families and helps them adjust to Korean community life. The teams are divided into countries; there are recreation programmes for children and also for their parents. They also worship together for Thanksgiving in a gathering of brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ with different language and culture to offer true worship through praise and prayer. In December, several teams of people from Mongolia, Iran, India, the Philippines, Vietnam and China participate in the Nasom Festival to present their own ethnic song and dance. The groups experience unity and comfort as they take time out from difficult daily life in this foreign land and practise the songs and dances of the country they dearly miss. Homesickness deepens by the year end and the New Year holiday. These events facilitate the sharing of the love of Jesus Christ with those who came to Korea as migrants.

The Centre supports some migrants who accepted the faith in Korea to study theology and get ordained and be sent back for mission to their own country to preach the gospel in their own language. There are Pastor Borma of the Mongolian Blessed Church, Pastor L in Country A, Pastor Pangaz Kapila and Hye-jung Lee in India and Missionary Wentituha in Vietnam all work to expand the Kingdom of God by evangelizing people in their own language.

Borma came to Korea as a migrant worker and received Jesus Christ as her Saviour in Seoul Migrant Mission Centre. She studied theology at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary and was ordained after graduation. Yoo tells her story as follows:

> A undocumented migrant woman who only wished for money had an encounter with God. Ever since then, she prefered to turn the pages of the Bible than count cash, and she much more enjoyed serving church members than serving at restaurants. The church pastor who observed her closely supported her theological studies. After three years of difficult ministry training, she is now heading hom to spread the gospel (Yoo 2008: 152).

In June 2006, Pastor Borma was dispatched to Mongolia Blessed Church. The Blessed Church's Sunday 11 a.m. service is attended by 25 adults, 15 to 20 youths, and 20 to 30 children. There are morning prayer services from Easter Day to 1 September every year. Most of the morning prayer meetings are attended by 5–10 elderly ladies. About 10 young people gather to pray for Mongolia and for the Kingdom of God at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Educational institutions and welfare programme for migrant children
Nasom Community has added several programmes for the children of migrants responding to their need. Mongolian culture is a family-centred culture so the migrants bring their children to Korea. There are the International Monglian School, the Nasom Multi-culture Children Care Centre and Free Meal Programme and the Good Samaritan Inn.

The International Mongolian School was established in 1999 with nine Mongolian migrant children to provide education opportunities for them when they did not have access to a Korean public school. Later in February 2005, the school was officially accredited by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. It was the first school for children of migrant workers to gain such accreditation. Today more than 200 students are enrolled from grades 1 to 12 and are being educated according to the Mongolian curriculum. They also receive training in adapting to Korean culture

and preparing for globalization so that they may grow into leaders to transform Mongolia and the world. About 40 students whose homes are far from school stay at domitories, the House of Nasom and the House of Joseph.

Mongolian children are today permitted to attend Korean public schools, but it is not easy for them to adjust. They face numerous obstacles due to cultural differences, language gap and financial limitations. They are often bullied by others or suffer low self-esteem in Korean schools. The children forget the vast steppes of Mongolia and suffer through life in small cell-like rooms. They should be educated to live free as people of the steppes. Therefore, the International Mongolian School educates using the Mogolian curriculum and adds Korean language, English language and ICT education to prepare them for globalization and leadership in Mongolia. The school aims to nuture future leaders of Mongolian society (Yoo 2018a: 103–70).

Daycare centres for multicultural pre-schoolers are urgently needed. Every child has a right to be educated and protected. They should receive the same benefits regardless of their nationality and residential status. But the Korean society still has a long way to go in accepting multicultural families and their children. Nasom Multi-culture Children Care Centre was established to provide suitable daycare for children of migrant workers and multicultural families aged three to seven. Today the Centre cares for 20 infants and toddlers of Mongolian and other ethnicites.

In Nasom Community, 60,000 meals are served each year – about 100 to 200 each day. It has been more than a decade since Nasom Community started this ministry. Alongside the meal programme, the Good Samaritan Inn provides shelter for homeless and unemployed migrants. Unlike Korean homeless people, the migrant homeless really have nowhere to go. They are also ostracized from the Korean homeless community. They may be found dead in the streets or in forgotten places. Some who struggle for basic survival may fall into despair and mental illness. The Free Meal Programme and the Good Samaritan Inn are basic welfare programmes for migrants who have fallen into desperate circumstances. They gain hope for new life as they eat and sleep in Nasom Community.

Multi-cultural education programmes
Seeing the need for education for multicultural understanding, Yangpyeong Nasom Multicultural Ecology Village was established in 2009 by Nasom Community as a multicultural learning centre. At this site visitors can experience cultures of various countries such as Mongolia, India, Iran, Turkey, China and Vietnam. In addition, it is a venue where urban dwellers can experience various wildflowers, plants and insects.

The Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Cultural Promotion Centre was founded in 2001 with the official support of the government of the city of Seoul and the city of Ulaanbaatar. It organizes the annual Nadam Festival for Mongolians in Korea, as well as other events. The purpose of the establishment is to introduce Mongolian culture through mutual cultural exchange between the two countries, promote friendly relations between the two countries and contribute to cultural development. Since its establishment in 2001, it has served as a bridge between Korea and Mongolia through various exchange activities such as Mongolian culture education, the Mongolian Peace Corps and the Mongolian Language Institute.

The New Life Vision School was launched in 2012 to serve as a bridge between foreign migrants and retired seniors willing to serve as missionaries in the next stage of their lives. It provides short-term mission programmes for lay seniors to learn the basics of different cultures and migrant missions and put it in practice in Korea and abroad. The 10-week course is provided twice a year in March and September. Participants are former teachers, CEOs, office workers, entrepreneurs and housewives, mostly in their early seventies.

The New Life Mission is a non-denominational missionary organization led by these graduates of New Life Vision School. People who trained in New Life Vision School draw from their their abundant life experience to serve migrant workers and multicultural families through medical service, legal counselling, Korean language education, hairdressing and computer education in Dongdaemun, where people of various ages and backgrounds gather (Yoo 2019a: 128–36).

The Mongol Peace Camps were built hoping for the day of Korean unification. Nasom Community established an Ivy School to support North Korean defector youths. The school provides a network to support them to start their own business and fosters leaders in preparation for unification. In 2016, a non-government organization was started with the youths to provide the defectors with a space of encounter and education. They are working to establish headquarters in Mongolia, Vladivostok in Russia, and Cambodia to serve as half-way stations on the road to unification. Mongol Peace Camp is at the heart of this effort. The Korean church must remember that East and West German unification was the result of persistent exchange between the East and the West German churches. Unfortunately, churches in the North and the South cannot interact, and today the relationship between the North and South Korea is at a critical point. But as more North Korean defectors arrive in the South, helping and serving them will pave the way to unification (Yoo 2018a: 214–23).

Missional evaluation of Nasom Community
The implications of Nasom Community from the missional church perspective

Seen from a missional church viewpoint, the case of Nasom Community has the following implications.

First, Nasom Community in conducting ministry to migrants presents an alternative model of church in the multicultural era. Members of the Nasom Community have contacted migrants in local society. They established educational institutions for Mongolian migrants and the migrants have worshipped together with Koreans. Migrants have been helped to set up their own worship service. Jesus came down among the lowly and the marginalized, and the mission of Nasom Community is to meet the needs of migrants in Korea. Nasom Church leads them to the gospel of life and sends the gospel back to their homeland in their language. This suggests that churches and their missionary strategies should be changed in step with changes in missions paradigm from the traditional model of sending cross-cultural missionaries overseas to the new model of sending the people back to their home cultures. This is the work of supporting the wandering nomads to become pilgrims with purpose and vision.

Second, Nasom Community aims for a balance between missions and pastoral ministry for the glory of God. Yoo asserts that the Korean church has a mission toward migrants, and this mission should be conducted by recognizing South Korea as a mission field and striving to live and love faithfully in our daily lives (Yoo 2019b: 210–13). Missions and church ministry are not far removed from each other. Mission is proclaiming the gospel and ministering to others in everyday spaces as an apostolic community. In the globalization that has blurred national borders since the end of the twentieth century, migrants who approach us as friendly neighbours should be recognized as seeds of misson sent by God.

Nasom Community is very different from Korean traditional churches. Most big churches are involved in cross-cultural mission, but small churches are not. However, Nasom Community was established for migrants in Korea. Only members of Nasom church who followed Yoo's vison remained in Nasom Community. The priority placed on migrants slows church growth even though Yoo seeks the balance between mission to migrants and the local ministry. Nasom Community members considered not only spiritual salvation but also social issues – discrimination, peace between South and North Korea, environmental problems – including migrant problems. Nasom church members are involved in social responsibility and this impacts the local community and Korean society.

Third, Nasom Community practises giving and serving in daily life. It aims for qualitative maturity based on missions rather than quantitative church growth. As national borders blur under globalization and people of various cultural backgrounds gather, church members primarily see themselves as temporary residents on earth with nomadic spirit, and as the light of hope that shines in darkness. The church description states that it is a community for Christians with nomadic consciousness. This community that dwells missionally among the marginalized is distinct from the majority of society steeped in capitalism and growthism.

Fourth, Nasom Community has limited financial and human resources. There are four types of missionary work in a multicultural society: planting, parallel, transition and special type (Korean Society of Mission Studies 2023: 370–76). Planting is when the church is started just for migrants. The parallel type is when church and multicultural centre or school manage it together. The transition type is the church that starts with Korean members and turns into ministry to migrants. The special type is when the church member is Korean in nationality but of a different culture; this type of church is for North Korean refugees. Nasom Community is the parallel type. The strength of this type is making points of contact with migrants, various ministries through institutions for migrants and an active connection between migrants and local society. However, there is a lack of human resources and finance for managing institutions. People working in the institutions need to share their vision to help migrants. Nasom Community struggles to manage the institutions rather than the ministry of the local church.

In sum, Nasom Community is a missionary community that shares with migrants the joy of becoming the people of God. It is also as a community of neighbours serving strangers in their midst. It is a missional church that understands God's will and plan and participates in God's mission to save by the power of the gospel. Nasom Community continues to be dedicated to establishing God's Kingdom in various countries with the missionary vision of sending migrants back to their countries.

Significance of Mongolian mission by Nasom Community

The Asian continent has the lowest evangelization rate among the six continents. Western missionaries worked hard in Asian missions until the nineteenth century, but Christianity did not take root in Asia. Asia is multicultural, multireligious, and multi-ethnic, which means Asians who share such similarities should participate in Asian mission. Mongolia borders Russia and China. Genghis Khan in the early thirteenth century founded the largest empire in history. After the decline of the Mongol Empire, the remaining central region was subjugated under the Qing Dynasty and Outer Mongolia became today's Mongolia. The country gained autonomy after the

Revolution of 1911 but this was then abolished in 1920. Then, influenced by Russia's October Revolution, Mogolia launched the Revolution of 1921 and became independent.

Of the religious population, 53% identify as Buddhist, the majority of them Mahayana Buddhists, and 4% identify as Muslim (Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Culture Promotion Center). Mongolia is at the geographic centre of Northesat Asia. In the past, it was an important passageway on the Silk Road, but today it has the potential to be the missionary starting point on the reverse Silk Road. Mongolia has had a communist system for more than 70 years since its socialist revolution that occurred alongside the Soviet Union. It was the second country to eatablish diplomatic relations with North Korea, before Mongolia established relations with South Korea. Mongolia may play an important role in the interaction and unification process between South and North Korea. Through missions in Mongolia, it may be possible in the future to maintain close relations with North Koreans and to solve the problem of North Korean defectors who flee China.

Nasom Community did not stop at ministering to Mongolians who came to Korea, but sent Mongolians back to their countries for mission work. Yoo believes training the migrants in Korea and sending them back to their home town is a sustainable missionary strategy (Yoo 2008: 144–59). Especially when many Korean missionaries had to return to Korea because of Covid-19, Mongolian migrants could be sent in the missionaries' place to continue the work. They have no problems with visa, language or cultural barriers. That is why Nasom Community has sent missionaries not only to Mongolia, but also to Turkey, India, Vietnam and Uzbekistan. This is a new and alternative model of mission.

Conclusion

The Korean church has been zealous in overseas missions from the beginning. However, since the 1980s, church-centred and self-expansionary missions rather than God-centred missions have been recognized as problematic. As missional ecclesiology began to be discussed in the Korean context in the 2000s, it served as an opportunity to re-establish Korean church ecclesiology. There was a move to reflect on the missional nature of the church and to restore the essential mission of the church rather than simply pursuing quantitative growth. Although most churches in Korea are still not interested in missional ecclesiology, many scholars and pastors have come to suggest the missional church as a desirable alternative.

Nasom Community is one of the missional churches in Korea. Its mission is to serve foreign migrants, especially those from Mongolia. The Seoul Migrant Mission Centre was founded first; then Nasom Church was established for migrants who came to Korea. In addition, the International Mongolian School, Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Cultural Promotion Centre, Nasom Multiculture Children Care Centre, the Free Meal Programme, the Good Samaritan Inn, the Yangpyeong Nasom Multicultural Ecology Village, the New Life Vision School, New Life Mission and Mongolian Peace Camp are various branches with their own communities, ministries and purposes, yet they also form a coherent whole. Yoo writes, "More communities should be formed to turn migrants into pilgrims. Send them back home for mission to change the world" (Yoo 2018b: 67).

As a missional church, Nasom Community is a church that is responding to the essential call to mission. Nasom Community serves the migrants, presenting a new model of church in the multicultural era. It is a pioneering community that aims for a balance between missionary work and pastoral ministry. As a community of giving and service, it aims for qualitative maturity rather than quantitative expansion. The church and mission centre for migrants total about 500 in Korea (Korean Society of Mission Studies 2023: 378). This is less than 1% of Korean churches. Korean Christians should be more interested in migrants in a multicultural society. If the Korean church recovers its identity as a missionary community like Nasom Community, it may be used as a channel for Asian mission.

About the author

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ARTICLES

Balancing Visible and Invisible Belonging for Korean Migrant Missional Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand

Hyeong-Kyoon Kim

Abstract

This paper explores how Korean migrant churches in Aotearoa New Zealand can find a balance between missions (understood as extending the Church) and Mission[1] (construed as participation in the *missio Dei*), in relation to their sense of belonging. For this purpose, the research uses a qualitative methodology interview method guided by interpretivism. The paper begins by identifying key contextual factors related to Koreans in New Zealand as migrants, Christians and missional beings. The responses of 31 research participants regarding what constitutes a "sense of belonging" are analysed in terms of visible and invisible belonging. Visible belonging is associated with churches that have strong boundaries, and invisible belonging is found in one's relationship with God; the two can be correlated with missions and Mission, respectively. The analysis suggests that a missional understanding can be a trigger for enabling interaction between visible belonging as missions and invisible belonging as Mission, through three missional concepts: purpose, progress and experience. Finally, the paper suggests practical ways that Korean churches in New Zealand can balance missions and Mission by following three missional guidelines.

Keywords: Korean church; Mission and missions; Belonging; Missional; Migrant

Purpose and structure

The phrase "Mission vs missions" has been used to illustrate different perspectives on the mission of the church. "Mission" and "missions" are at times controversial issues in Korean churches (Han 2012: 90–99). For example, some Korean churches

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1   In order to distinguish these two terms, the author has capitalized Mission throughout the article.

that emerged from evangelical movements are strongly oriented toward church growth, and thus emphasize the importance of missions (Han 2012: 93–96; Ma, 2017). In contrast, other churches with a more ecumenical outlook tend to focus on Mission as *missio Dei* (An & Park, 2008: 313).

Korean churches in New Zealand are not free from this controversial issue. However, both Mission and missions are essential to live out Jesus' command to embody life in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the primary purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning of *belonging* in Korean churches in New Zealand with the aim of building a bridge between Mission and missions through missional perspectives.

With this purpose in mind, a sampling of 31 Korean Christians in New Zealand answered the question: "What is the sense of belonging?" Their responses can be summarized in three categories: *visible belonging*, *invisible belonging*, and *missional belonging*. *Purpose*, *process* and *experience* are missional triggers that provide a stepping stone to establishing a bridge between Mission (invisible belonging) and missions (visible belonging).

The paper is divided into two main sections. The first section explores three contextual terms: *Korean churches*, *missional*, and *belonging*. This section also provides the rationale for incorporating the contextual background in missional and practical theology studies. The second section is the analysis of the 31 interviews, which identifies three different understandings of belonging: *visible belonging*, *invisible belonging*, and *missional belonging* as a catalyst for synthesizing the first two concepts. Following the analysis, the paper suggests practical ways to enable Korean missional churches in New Zealand.

Scope

This research is located in the fields of missional and practical theology studies. Missional and practical theology approaches are linked to contextual interpretation, although the two approaches have different focal points. For example, the field of missional studies tends to emphasize direction, like a route on a map, whereas practical theology suggests practices for achieving visible results. Despite these differences, the interpretation of contexts is an essential starting point for both approaches.

Swinton and Mowat describe practical theology as "recognising and respecting the diversity of interpretation within the various expositions of performed gospel" (Swinton & Mowat 2006: 5). In other words, practical theology focuses on observing

and interpreting context through "performed gospel", which means the gospel realized in our context. Contextual interpretation is also important in missional studies. As Darrell Guder writes, "Our understanding of truth is always an interpretation relative to our context and cultural understanding" (Guder and Barrett 1998: 40).

In terms of methodology, this paper uses an interview method based on a qualitative and interpretivist methodology which is useful for analyzing contexts in light of practical and missional perspectives. The aim is to observe Korean churches in New Zealand and to encourage these churches to be missional churches both within and beyond ethnic boundaries.

This study does have certain limitations in terms of sampling and translation. First, although 31 interviews provide a suitable sampling size for the case study, the sampling is limited in the sense that the participants were drawn from only two Korean churches. However, I maintain that this is nonetheless a representative sampling, because the two churches are the oldest Korean churches in the two largest cities and Korean communities in New Zealand. These two churches can thus adequately represent migrant Korean Christians' perspectives despite the geographical limitations.

The second limitation is related to translation issues, as it is impossible to translate an interview from Korean to English without changes in nuance and emphasis. As a result, I have used an interpretivist methodology. This is a methodology in the social sciences that is suitable for contextual analysis because it offers scope for a variety of interpretations related subjectively to specific contexts (Furlong and Marsh 2010). This paper accurately records interviewees' perspectives, but some words, phrases and sentences may be interpreted by the researcher to provide a clearer meaning in English.

Three contextual terms

The title of this paper incorporates three main terms: *Korean churches*, *missional*, and *belonging*. These words have developed in a specific context, and thus it is necessary to define the three terms contextually. First, 'Korean Christians' in New Zealand construct their own boundaries as a way to interpret their Christian faith within Korean culture. This is in line with Bevans' characterization of contextual theology as being based on "present human experience" (Bevans 2002: 4).

Second, the term "missional" first emerged from real issues in North American churches, so it is impossible to understand "missional" without this contextual under-

standing (Guder and Barrett 1998). Finally, the sense of "belonging" obviously cannot be excepted from contextual understandings. This section explains the contexts of the three core terms in this order: the Korean church, the missional understanding and the sense of belonging. It also explores how a possible relational structure can be built between the three contextual categories.

Korean church context

The character of the Korean church is best described in terms of diverse characteristics developing in different times and locations, because every church has roots in living societies, united by a belief in an unchanging divine being. Contexts rely on "personal and communal experience, culture, social location and social change" (Bevans 2002: 7).

Applying this claim to Korean churches makes it clear that they are contextual churches through their experience, culture, social location and experience of social change (Guder and Barrett 1998). Korean churches in New Zealand have erected unique boundaries to help them understand and live in the New Zealand context. They are grounded culturally in Korean culture and locationally in New Zealand. These churches have experienced migrant life and extreme social changes from Korea to New Zealand.

Korean migrant churches in New Zealand are comprised almost exclusively of Korean rather than other ethnicities, and the Korean language plays a pivotal role in these churches (Chang, Morris and Vokes 2006). In contrast, the majority of New Zealand churches are rooted in European or, to a lesser extent, Maori cultures, so the English and Maori languages are essential in their churches to sustain religious and cultural identities. Koreans in New Zealand refer to churches that use English and consist mainly of Europeans (*Pakeha*) as 'Kiwi churches' (Chang, Morris and Vokes).

Korean migrant churches in New Zealand attempt to preserve their culture through Korean Christianity, an approach deemed the "anthropological model" by Bevans, who writes that "The primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity" (Bevans 2002: 54). Korean churches in New Zealand have a strong connection with their members' experiences as Koreans and as migrants, and with the Korean language. Because of these strong bonds, members of Korean churches can recognize their differences and similarities in relation to broader New Zealand society.

In New Zealand census results, Korean Christians are categorized in three ways: their experience in Korea; their experience in New Zealand; and their experience as

migrants moving between Korea and New Zealand. Figure 1 shows the percentages of Christians in three different contexts: Christians in South Korea, Christians in New Zealand as a whole, and Korean Christians in New Zealand. The percentage of Christians is decreasing in all three contexts, so the numerical weakening of Christianity is common to each context.

Christian Population (%)

Korean and New Zealand censuses are tabulated in different years, so it is not possible to perfectly compare the percentages of Christians in Korea and New Zealand. However, while the census data is drawn from different years, the purpose of this comparison is to check trends.

Korean Christianity in New Zealand has unique characteristics compared with Christianity in Korea and in New Zealand as a whole, regardless of denomination. First, the percentage of Korean Christians in New Zealand is significantly higher than in the other two contexts. According to three censuses in New Zealand, the percentage of Koreans who were Christians decreased from 73% in 2006, to 68% in 2013, to 57% in 2018 (Stats.govt.nz, 2018). But while the percentage of Christians among Koreans in New Zealand has indeed decreased, these statistics show that Koreans in New Zealand have a solid Christian culture compared with those in Korea itself.

Christianity has been one among several religions in Korea from the missionary period until now (Gallop.co.kr, 2021). In contrast, in the New Zealand Korean commu-

nity, Christianity is the main religion, and the percentage is more than double that of Christians in Korea. As a result, Koreans belonging to religions other than Christianity are comparatively marginal in the Korean community in New Zealand (Kim, Hocking and McKenzie-Green 2016). The point is that Koreans in New Zealand tend to cultivate a more Christian-centric culture than Koreans in Korea.

Moreover, compared with the overall percentage of Christians in New Zealand, the Korean Christian percentage in New Zealand is outstanding. Theologians and sociologists interpret this phenomenon as one in which Korean migrants believe that their Christianity plays a crucial role in how they are perceived in the social (secular) arena (Butcher & Wieland 2013). For example, Butcher and Wieland illustrate the perception of the Korean church in New Zealand through the phrase "God and Golf".

One reason for the high percentage of Christians in the Korean community in New Zealand may be that new migrants struggle to integrate into New Zealand society because of the linguistic and cultural differences (Chang, Morris and Vokes 2006; Morris, Vokes and Chang 2008). Interestingly, several other migrant ethnicities also show a higher percentage of Christian affiliation in New Zealand than in their home countries (Stats.govt.nz 2018). Korean churches and perhaps other migrant churches in New Zealand offer members a safe space in which to escape from the stresses of integrating into New Zealand society. In sum, Korean churches' characteristics in New Zealand are shaped by their migrant context.

Missional perspective

Defining the word "missional" is not straightforward because this terminology is a fairly recent addition to the field of missiology, emphasizing certain distinctive directions related to mission (Roxburgh and Boren 2009: 30). Missional has been defined briefly as "the doing of the mission" (Ott, Strauss & Tennent 2010). However, Roxburgh and Boren highlight the danger of only "doing" something to achieve visible results and escape confusion between missional churches and the so-called "attractive" churches.

Roxburgh and Boren offer two helpful warnings for the missional journey: "Beware of formulas for creating missional churches, and beware of missional church models" (2009: 23–25). Because the missional movement is shaped by specific contexts in different places and times, Roxburgh and Boren assert the importance of reading contexts carefully. Missional movements are linked inextricably to the act of interpreting contexts.

The starting point of "reading context" in a missional movement is the word "here" – "where we stand" (Roxburgh and Boren 2009: 122). "The missional journey begins where people are, not from some vision for where we would like them to be" (2009: 123). This is a crucial point in connecting the missional movement and local churches, because "the local church we belong to is shaped by a history that forms the ways it works and how people interrelate" (2009: 124).

This statement can be applied to the Korean churches in New Zealand insofar as they are shaped by a migrant history that has influenced the ways their context unfolds and how they relate to people in the host country. The Gospel and Our Culture Network has examined missional boundaries in North America along these lines, and found that regional context plays a pivotal role in this missional network (Guder and Barrett 1998: 7–12).

Missional approaches seek to erect a bridge between the gospel and local culture. "The gospel is always translated into a culture, and God's people are formed in that culture in response to the translated and Spirit-empowered Word" (Guder and Barrett 1998: 11). This means that a missional approach offers a meaningful gospel lens through which to settle in a new culture, and revises forms of Christian proclamation in the light of culture (Guder and Barrett 1998: 12). Therefore, when interpreting the missional movement in the Korean church context in New Zealand, previous experiences related to the Korean church will be their past "here" context, and more recent experiences of the sense of belonging will influence their present "here".

Moreover, the missional movement has the energy to move toward *missio Dei* – the Mission of God – beyond visible results seen in church programmes and campaigns (Franke 2020; Terry 2015). Missional language does not limit a church's boundaries, and for this reason Alan Roxburgh uses the phrase "missional people" instead of "missional church" to focus on missional life broadly understood (Roxburgh and Romanuk 2011). In this perspective, missional language can be a trigger to move beyond a church-centred life. This is a transformation from "God-Church-World" to "God-World-Church" (An & Park 2008: 273–81).

The sense of belonging

The third key word or category is "belonging." Generally, this refers to the sense of belonging in a certain place or community. Discussions of belonging in a church context may include, for example, reflections on how to grow membership. However, the sense of belonging encompasses not only such visible aspects but also an invisible aspect, focused on belonging to God.

Visible belonging may refer to "fitting in" in an institution, group, ethnicity and so on, and invisible belonging may be experienced through culture or traditions (Kim 2021: 73–75; Painter, 2013: 1–2). But even though the sense of belonging can be divided into these two "types", it is impossible to separate them too rigidly, because the sense of belonging is connected with the real world in all its dimensions.

According to Emile Durkheim, the sense of belonging in a moral community is the foundation of religious life, and he calls this community a church (1995: 44). Therefore, the church as a moral community is a visible manifestation of belonging. Similarly, Max Weber (2005) asserts that the sense of belonging is expressed in cultural and religious communities. In this sense, a denomination established on the basis of religious belief can create a visible boundary around the sense of belonging, and a cultural boundary like Christendom can create an invisible sense of belonging.

Secularization theorists assume that religious communities and gatherings will fade away over time in the societies where they are located (Dobbelaere, 2009: 602). As a case in point, religions such as Christianity, the major religion in Europe in the past, came to maintain a cultural function instead of a religious one. Secularization theorists thus claim that Christianity in Western countries is an example of invisible belonging through culture (Davie 1994; 2002).

Secularization theorists rely on an understanding of visible belonging to strengthen their theory that religion will fade away in modern societies. Church attendance or membership is seen as evidence of visible belonging. Rational Choice theorists evince a similar understanding of visible belonging to support Christianity's revival in the United States through the numerical evidence of membership and attendance (Stark and Finke 2000).

Sociological approaches do not lean toward one side of the sense of belonging, visible or invisible. They see the meaning of the sense of belonging not as unchangeable but as influenced by contextual factors. Philosophical or ontological research tends to situate belonging in invisible boundaries like culture, and practical or epistemological research, such as a census, attempts to provide clear evidence for visible belonging.

For example, researchers at Pew Research Centre interpret church belonging in terms of affiliation with a congregation or denomination (Mohamed, Cox, Diamant and Gecewicz 2021). This means that unaffiliated people do not "belong", even if they have Christian beliefs, so the sense of belonging is restricted to visible forms of

church boundaries. New Zealand censuses have interpreted belonging to denominations and other groups in the same way (Stats.govt.nz 2018).

Interactions among the three contextual terms

In the previous sections, I explained the three contextual terms at the heart of this study: *Korean churches*, *missional* and *belonging*. These concepts are related to each other. For example, missional is based on "here," where Korean churches are located, so the fact that Korean churches in New Zealand are migrant churches is an influential context. Since belonging consists of two aspects, visible and invisible, visible church boundaries and invisible cultural boundaries also interact in Korean churches.

In this interaction, the Korean church is an influential factor for missional movement, as a context for developing a sense of belonging beyond visible boundaries. However, it is also possible to go in the opposite direction, such that the sense of invisible belonging can develop into visible contexts through a missional understanding.

The understanding of mission has two dimensions: one is *Mission* as *missio Dei*, which emphasizes God's mission, and the other is *missions*, which describes the churches' human activities to extend the gospel (Franke 2020; Gailey & Culbertson 2007: 8; Terry 2015). In this study, I adopt a new frame to describe Mission and missions: *Mission–invisible belonging–missio Dei*; and *missions-visible belonging-church* (its human side). Balancing visible and invisible belonging therefore means balancing Mission and missions in Korean migrant churches. The coming sections will address the interrelation between the three contextual terms by analyzing interviews with 31 Korean Christians in New Zealand.

Analysing interviews

The earlier sections explained the three core contextual terms by drawing on theoretical and scholarly sources, in order to establish an interacting frame for the three words. This section investigates this frame in Korean churches in New Zealand by means of a qualitative methodology, based on 31 interviews with Korean Christian migrants in New Zealand. The interviewees' ages spanned from people born in the 1940s to people born in the 2000s, and their migrant years ranged from the 1980s to the 2010s. In addition, some interviewees were born in New Zealand and are known as the second generation (Kim 2021: 170).

The interviewees were primarily recruited for my PhD research, so this paper reinterprets their earlier interviews through a missional lens. Specifically, this study interprets interviewees' answers to the question, "What is the sense of belonging?"

To maintain confidentiality, I use fictional names instead of the names of the participants. This section first explores specific expressions of belonging related to the Korean church, followed by insights regarding how the concepts "missional" and "belonging" are understood by the interviewees.

Visible belonging in Korean churches

Korean churches have two primary visible aspects. First, some concrete information is recorded and maintained to indicate membership, beliefs and identities. Second, other words and activities focus on the people's context as migrants. These visible aspects might be summarized in two orientations: human-centred, and church-centred.

Visible belonging can be expressed by tangible boundaries in the church. One interviewee, Gong Ji-Hu, described the sense of belonging as providing a way to maintain Korean culture by emphasizing the boundaries within the church that separate and preserve Korean identity and culture over against the dominant "Kiwi" identity and culture.

The Korean church is thus a place-based boundary within which to teach and enact Korean culture. In the church, Korean migrants can affirm their uniqueness and their differences from the dominant New Zealand society. Lee An, who is second generation, described the sense of belonging in terms of recognizing these differences, and she also felt a stronger sense of belonging in a church group whose members are of a similar age. Park Do, who is also second generation, likewise emphasized finding a sense of belonging in a Korean Christian group which has shared interests.

In addition, interviewees focused on institutional norms and organizations, which are boundaries in themselves. The denomination was one of the crucial reasons for choosing a church after migrating from Korea to New Zealand, because the Presbyterian denomination provides a lens through which they understand Christianity. Korean migrants thus naturally prefer to attend church in the same denomination to which they belonged in Korea.

This explains why the Presbyterian Church is the main denomination of Korean migrants in New Zealand, because it is the major denomination in Korea, compared with Methodists, Anglicans, Pentecostals and others. Denominational boundaries are crucial in maintaining Korean Christians' religious identities. Maintaining their identity as Korean, Christian and Presbyterian expresses a church-centred understanding of visible belonging.

In addition, several interviewees described the Korean church in New Zealand as a kind of base camp for nurturing social activities and relationships. This is because the Korean church is one of the most comfortable places to meet other Koreans, in the face of the larger context in which New Zealand is a comparatively strange place. These are trusting relationships, as Korean churches represent family, home and friends.

Relationships with others in the church thus play a leading role in constructing visible boundaries. Kim Sung-Hyun emphasized that the Korean church is a place for "working together", which can also be understood in terms of socializing with friends. Hwang Eun explained that feeling a sense of belonging in the church means "living together like a family and helping together".

Korean churches are also crucial for socializing without language barriers, and Butcher and Wieland describe Korean churches as "golf communities" (Butcher and Wieland 2013). Korean migrants feel similarities with other Koreans regardless of faith, but visible membership in a church is a safety boundary for developing and extending their relationships and feeling connected to others as social beings. These relationships illustrate the second aspect of visible belonging, the human-being-centred focus.

Invisible belonging in Korean churches
The previous section focused on the role of visible belonging in migrant Korean churches in New Zealand, but that is only a part of understanding what the sense of belonging means for people in these Korean churches. Invisible aspects of belonging show the desire to belong to God rather than to manufactured systems, institutions and practices. Invisible belonging is closer to the *missio Dei* perspective.

According to Choi Sung-Je, the sense of belonging is a sensitive issue and he describes the sense of belonging as being "a child of God." Park Hyun also explains the sense of belonging as "to stay in God". Many Korean Christians in New Zealand, especially the first-generation migrants, converted to Christianity from other religions after migrating to New Zealand. Hence, they firmly believe that migrating to New Zealand was God's plan to save them. Park Hyun and Choi Sung-Je thus both say, "I am elected" as a child of God when explaining the sense of belonging. The "child of God" symbolism focuses on the relationship with God instead of membership in a religious institution.

In the Confucian perspective, humans are connected to the divine being, Dao (道) or Tae-Kuk (太極) through Jung (情) or Yang-Ji (良知). And recovering the harmo-

nious relationship is illustrated the healthy relationship between parents and children (Kim, 2000; 2022: 152–55). Moreover, humans are related to the whole world, including animals and nature, via Jung or Yang-Ji. *Missio Dei* for Korean Christians is underpinned in part by these Confucian principles. In other words, belonging in the sense of being a "child of God" is a Korean expression based on the Confucian understanding found in passages such as John 14.11 and 15.5.

Among six first-generation interviewees who migrated to New Zealand after 2010, five articulated their understanding of belonging in terms of their relationship with God, using phrases such as "a child of God", "my root is God", "always [I] belong to God", "belong to God" and "the relationship between God and me". These expressions all emphasize the relationship with God instead of the sense of belonging to institutions.

Lee Gao explained the difference between social belonging in the form of "membership" and religious belonging, stating that belonging is about one's relationship with God, which is not found only through being a member of a church. Of the 17 interviewees who were from the first generation, 11 also stressed that the sense of belonging is not found only within social boundaries but in one's relationship with God. As one said, "The sense of belonging is not [related to] U-Ri as a church, Korean churches and denominations, but to the relationship with God."

Understanding the sense of belonging in terms of one's relationship with God was not only found in the first generation but also in the younger generation. Lee Bun-Woo described the sense of belonging in this way: "As I belong to God, [I practise God's love] even though I meet unfamiliar people who are different from me. [This is because] they are also one of God's creatures." This sense of belonging plays a pivotal role in developing one's identity. Choi Hee-Su added that because the core of belonging, which is the relationship with God, is nurtured in a church, church membership is one way to enhance this relationship with God.

The children of the first generation of migrants used phrases such as these to illustrate the sense of belonging: "God stays with me", "God's plan" and "[being part of] one body". Kwon Suk's starting point for describing the sense of belonging was a question: "Where do I belong?" He already has membership in a Korean church and strong friendships with other Koreans there, but his relationship with God is nonetheless the core element in his sense of belonging.

Prioritizing the invisible sense of belonging was also spelled out in Cho Il-Eun's explanation of the connection she makes between belonging and identity: "Clearly, before

I had firmly believed [in God], I felt that identity issues were very important [in my life]. Am I a Korean or a New Zealander? Even though I am a Korean and Kiwi by half and half, the proportion of the mixture was different. In this situation, [I] was confused by having no absolute standard [to recognize my identity]. [However], this problem was solved after finding belief [in God]."

In summary, research participants preferred to use phrases such as the following to explain invisible belonging, regardless of different migrant generations, genders and ages: belong to God, the child of God, unity with God, in Christ, one body, invisible relationship with God. In other words, their invisible belonging prioritized divine being rather than human beings and manufactured systems.

Missional movement as trigger

I have described above the relationship between membership in Korean churches as a visible sign of belonging and belonging to God as an invisible aspect. These two features interact continuously, and there is therefore a need for a catalyst, such as a missional orientation, to create interacting movement or an active interrelation between the two. This section analyses possible trigger words for this missional movement which emerged in the interviews. These trigger words that stimulate interaction between visible and invisible belonging can be divided into three categories: *purpose*, *progress* and *experience*.

The first category is related to the *purpose* of becoming church, but it is not results-oriented. Interviewees dreamed of the church as the Kingdom of God, which is impossible to achieve on earth. Lee Sung-An asserted that the final goal of belonging is "the recovery of the image when created by God". Kim So-Mi said that belonging is not an artificial but a natural phenomenon; there can be no intention to gain it because she already belongs to God. Kim Ham-In also felt that belonging is not something one can attain or achieve on one's own, whether it is manifested visibly or invisibly.

In expressing the original purpose of the church, interviewees tended to use words associated with essential Christian faith, such as "salvation", "calling", "comfort", "the place of meeting God", "hope", "love", "Christ" and "identity". The interviewees used these words to describe why they believe the church exists on earth. Interviewees hoped to develop resilience related to these more idealized purposes of the church, in the face of several disappointing experiences of church, such as church splits, conflicts and corruption. Shin Ji-Su emphasized the importance of flexibility and resilience in the life of faith, and these traits could be seen as triggers to stimulate a healthy interrelation between visible and invisible experiences of belonging.

The second triggering category is *progress* in Christian discipleship, and this category is closely connected with practical actions. This can be seen in interviewees' references to the importance of special acts of faith, such as love, sharing and contributing. Interviewees hoped to make progress toward becoming mature Christians through actions that grow out of belief.

However, these actions do not focus only on individual tangible achievements but on inner spiritual progress or growth in the life of faith. Many interviewees asserted that these actions are the responsibility of all Christians. Gong stated that belonging is not only to a church but to the life of a Christian. Son Mi-Ju had a similar perspective, describing belonging as "the progress of reaching to God in my life." Actions such as love, sharing and giving, which are essential to living daily life as a Christian, synthesize or integrate visible belonging to a church and invisible belonging to God.

The last category which can be a missional trigger is *experience*. Belonging is not only a theoretical concept but an experienced reality. According to interviewee Lee Gao, the sense of belonging is "living together". This is a meaningful understanding of belonging because it is not only an individual experience but a communal experience of Christian life. Living together can connect all of the aspects related to belonging: sharing, solidarity, love, recovery and so on. "Sharing" is impossible to do alone, since sharing needs to be done with other beings.

To summarize, the key words highlighted in the interviews can all be grouped under the "missional" concept, and these words are not result-oriented but progress-oriented, in the service of realizing the purpose of the church and the life of faith. Progress-oriented words include aspects of experience beyond individual activities; progress is understood as spiritual and moral development, which has concrete implications for the actions we take. These missional concepts can be a catalyst to balance and interweave the visible sense of belonging found within the boundaries of Korean churches in New Zealand and the invisible manifestations of belonging associated with *missio Dei*.

Implications

Defining Korean churches in New Zealand is impossible without taking into account the Korean migrant context, and so the earlier sections of this paper explored Korean migrants' understanding of the church in light of their migrant experience. In light of their visible and invisible experiences of belonging in relation to their Christian faith, I introduced a missional approach to integrate a *missions* orientation based on visible

belonging with a *Mission* orientation associated with invisible belonging to God. This section suggests possible implications for Korean churches in New Zealand.

According to *Christian Life*, a newspaper published for Korean Christians in New Zealand, there are 109 Korean churches or Christian institutions in New Zealand. They exist largely to support Koreans rather than other ethnicities or English-based Christians (christianlife.nz, n.d.). Less than 10% of Korean churches in New Zealand belong to "Kiwi" (English-based) denominations such as the PCANZ (Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand), Elim, GPCNZ (Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand) and others (onechurch.nz n.d.).

There are several reasons Korean churches find it hard to relate to Kiwi churches, but the central reason is differing understanding of "missions and Mission". Korean churches put considerable effort into overseas missions, in countries such as Vanuatu, Fiji, and other Asian countries. However, the Korean migrant churches do not always sense this same zeal for missions in the English-based denominations in New Zealand.

But how do the missions of the Korean migrant churches in New Zealand interact with Mission, with its sense of invisible belonging? First, the "purpose" of missional orientation is a valuable way to identify Christianity's unchangeable purpose on earth, in the process mitigating differences between ethnicities, denominations or religious traditions. Korean migrant perspectives can be very helpful in this regard. As one example, the belief of all Christians in an eternal life with a return to a heavenly home, an original homeland, triggers Korean migrants' connections with other Christians in New Zealand, because we are all migrants on earth.

Second, the "progress" of missional orientation has the potential to move beyond the church-centred focus that is geared toward church growth to encompass a spiritual growth focus on living a mature Christian life. In this regard, the chaplaincy system, which exists outside the church, is a valuable point of connection with non-Christians. In New Zealand, pastoral care for students in schools is mandated by law and must be provided (NZQA 2021). Chaplaincy can connect students regardless of religion or background, and for international students, having a chaplain of a similar background can help to mitigate their isolation.

In a larger sense, encouraging Korean church members to join local non-profit organizations or charities might stimulate Korean Christians to live out their Christian faith through acts of love and service outside the church walls or concerns about church growth. The "progress" missional element is also not only for individuals but for

communities. Therefore, encouraging Korean churches to work with other denominations, charities, government agencies or other institutions is pivotal in bridging the gap between the churches' missions and God's Mission.

Conclusion

This paper has explored three contextual terms related to Korean churches in New Zealand: *Korean churches*, the *missional* orientation and the meaning of *belonging*. Through this exploration, the understanding of the Korean church context was linked inextricably both to *visible belonging*, in the form of missions which are human and institutional works, and *invisible belonging* in the form of Mission as *missio Dei*. Both missions and Mission co-exist in Korean migrant churches in New Zealand.

However, while missions and Mission are ideally essential aspects of all churches, they are at times in conflict in Korean churches in New Zealand. This prompted me to explore more deeply Korean Christians' understandings of what it means to "belong" as migrant Korean Christians in New Zealand. This paper therefore analysed, through a representative sampling of interviews with Korean Christians in New Zealand, their understandings of the sense of belonging, highlighting both visible and invisible manifestations of belonging. Their perspectives, in turn, suggested possible resources (related to purpose, process and experience) for balancing missions and Mission in New Zealand's Korean churches, with the aim of being a healthy missional church in the midst of their contextual realities as an ethnic minority in New Zealand.

About the author

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Small Missional Church as an Alternative in the Period of Church Decline in Korea

An-Wei Tan

Abstract

This article examines the causes and circumstances of the decline of Korean churches since the 2000s. After briefly sketching the history and critical events of the growth of the Korean church, it pays attention to one of the leading reasons people leave the church and a reason that the Korean church has lost its reliability in the view of much of Korean society. After that, the author introduces two phenomena in the process of the slow growth and decline of the Korean church: the phenomenon of "believing without belonging" and the increase in numbers of bi-vocational ministers. This is a time when the missional church has begun to emerge as a new type of church, different from the traditional church, and at the same time non-institutional churches have emerged as a missional approach to believing without belonging. Furthermore, the author argues that the small missional church is a helpful alternative and required paradigm in the context of the decline of the Korean church by using several case studies, including shared worship space, bi-vocational ministry, and local missional church.

Keywords: Korean church; Decline; Missional ecclesiology; Small missional church; Shared worship space

Introduction

It is well-known that the Korean church experienced revival and growth in a short period of time in the mid to late twentieth century. However, it is not well known that Korean church attendance has since declined due to low growth. The Korean church began showing a trend of decline in the 2000s, and this trend is still in progress. This paper briefly describes the history of the growth of the Korean church and then discusses the new direction that is now being demanded. It explores the causes and circumstances of the decline of Korean churches since the 2000s. It pays particular attention to two issues: the phenomenon of believing without belonging and the

mass production of bi-vocational ministers. In addition, this article proposes that the small missional church is a newly required paradigm in the context of the decline of the Korean church.

The author speaks of a "small" missional church because he agrees with Deuk-Hoon Park that it is time to de-large it. Park says that the goal of enlarging the church was influenced by capitalism, and he highlights small churches because he views the 'aspiration to be big' and greed are the main culprits in destroying churches (Park 2017: 167–68). In addition to Park's claim, megachurches as bound to have pastoral limitations. The megachurch pastor cannot know all the members' names, the spiritual care through the pastor cannot be performed appropriately and the reality of the community as a body in which members communicate with each other is inevitably lacking. On the other hand, a small church can be preferred not simply for its small size but as a church that more ably emphasizes the role of community in the church. Therefore, the author will share an example of a small church that seeks communality, communicates with and serves the local community and is performing a ministry that is unique in a Korean context.

The context of the Korean church
From rise to slow growth and decline

After the Korean War (1950–53), Korea became one of the poorest countries in the world. But through industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s it developed to achieve what has come to be known as the "miracle of the Han River". The 1970s and 1980s were an era of industrialization and urbanization, but also a time of population explosion. The explosive growth of the Korean church can be viewed as a matter of course given the population growth rate in Korea. This period was also a time of reconstruction after the war. People flocked to the city for a better life, and it was a time when the evangelism movement was active, including on university campuses. When someone planted a church, people started to flock to it. There was a time when you could rely on gathering a number of believers if you planted a church in an urbanized area, for example, in a place where apartments were built. Rev. David Young-Gi Cho's Full Gospel Church, which is known worldwide, has also grown by delivering healing and hope for success, such as the Threefold Blessing, Fivefold Gospel and Fourth Dimension Spirituality (Lee 2022). In 1993, 23 of the world's 50 largest churches were situated in Korea (Kungminilbo 1993).

Among the causes of growth during this period, the church growth movement of each denomination played an important part. For example, GAPCK (The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, or "Hapdong") launched the

"10,000 church planting movement" as a 10-year plan in 1975, and after five years the number of churches had increased by 13.2% and the number of members by 17.4% (Kim 2002: 131). This period was also a time when the inter-denominational evangelism movement and evangelical campus mission developed. These ministries include Campus Crusade for Christ and the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (a member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students). During this time of church growth, large-scale evangelism rallies took place. As a representative example, 2.6 million people participated in the Billy Graham evangelism rally that was held for four days in 1973. 37,000 people were converted. In EXPLO74, which was hosted by CCC in 1974, 6.65 million people participated, and 272,000 people were converted (S.-H. Lee 1995: 34–35).

However, the growth of the Korean church began to slow as industrialization and urbanization were completed. The decline is also related to the small growth in population and the phenomenon of de-religiosity that is evident more broadly in society. Hee-Song Yang presents five events that occurred in 2007 as indicators of slower growth of the Korean church (Yang 2012: 41–53). Among these, the dismissal of irregular workers in E-Land, the abduction of the Afghan mission team, and making an elder president are the three major events in the early 2000s when Korean society in general grew increasingly negative in their perception of the Korean church.

In the case of E-Land's layoff of non-regular workers, a company that emphasized its identity as a Christian company could not differentiate itself from other companies. In 2007, new legislation was passed to protect non-regular workers. The content was that workers who had worked as non-regular workers for two years should be converted to regular workers. However, E-land, which claimed to be a Christian company, fired most of its non-regular workers before the law was enforced. This did not match people's general expectations of Christian companies, and it was an event that became a big social issue.

It was thought that if a Christian became president, politics would be different from before, or at least politics would not be hostile to Christianity. As a result, President Lee Myung-bak, an elder of the Presbyterian Church, was elected. However, socially, it seemed that the church was openly engaged in political activities to pursue its own interests. Among these events, the most prominent event was the abduction of a Korean short-term mission team in Afghanistan. The incident shocked the whole nation as the mission team was kidnapped during an outreach in Afghanistan while ignoring the government's travel ban notice. Due to this incident, Korean society began to recognize that there was a problem with the aggressive mission of the Korean church, and the Korean church became a target of criticism.

The Korean church led the independence movement during the Japanese colonial period (1910–45), participated in democratization (1960–87), and continues today to work for the poor. Citizens had a positive impression of Christianity because there were many people in the Korean church who acted in socially responsible ways. However, due to several incidents, the social perception of the Korean church has turned increasingly negative. The media has begun to cover other adverse events within the church. As various issues with pastors' non-transparent financial dealings, sexual immorality and the privatization of church as family inheritance have come to light, society has tended to view the church in an increasingly negative light.

Changes in the Korean church ecosystem in the early 2000s
The increase of "believing without belonging"

The phenomenon of believing without belonging began to appear more prominently in the context of the events mentioned above. Believing without belonging refers to a Christian who claims to be a Christian but does not attend services on Sunday and does not belong to a Christian community. This phenomenon has led to the rise of the so-called "Canaan Saints" in Korea. The word "Canaan" is a wordplay that reverses the Korean word Ga-na-an (Canaan) to An-na-ga (not going).

According to a survey by the Korean National Association of Christian Pastors and Ji&Com Research conducted in 2017, the population of believing without belonging was already 23%. This more than doubled from 10.5% in 2012 (Lim 2017). At one time during the Covid-19 period, almost all Christians were unable to attend church and worship due to the government's ban on gatherings. However, even after the restrictions were loosened, offline attendance was only about 50% of what it was prior to the pandemic. Currently, Korean churches are interested in how many will return. Many pastors judge that they have reached a situation where they have no choice but to continue the online ministry that started during the Covid-19 period.

According to the survey mentioned above, 42.8% of the respondents left the church for personal reasons such as a life of faith that is not bound by norms (30.3%) and lack of time (5.7%). Church-related problems like dissatisfaction with the pastor (24.3%) and dissatisfaction with church members (19.1%) made up 43.4% (Korean National Association of Christian Pastors). These de-churched individuals maintain personal religiosity but do not belong to an institutional church. Instead, they mainly practice their faith in their personal life. However, non-institutional churches were also established by the pastors with a missional heart toward them. Jaeyoung Jung has found three things such nearby established, non-institutional churches have in common. First, there is often a small number of people gathered to have personal fellowship and share leadership in a communal environment. Second, there is a tendency to

gather in a relaxing and comfortable environment on Sunday afternoons and hold worship services. There is no other meeting besides Sunday worship. Third, there is typically time to talk about the sermon after worship (Jung 2015: 17–18).

As a result of a series of events, the credibility of the Korean church has declined sharply. In the most recent example during the Covid-19 pandemic, society has crit-icized some church gatherings as superspreading events. Korean society has been questioning the public function of the Christian religion, while Christianity has become more privatized as some churches acted against the social climate when they should have fulfilled their citizenship duties. During the time of Covid-19 that started at the end of 2019, this kind of appearance was shown to the public without filtering. Since the beginning of 2020, there have been cases in which Covid-19 spreads through people who gather at church on Sundays to practise their faith. The government restricted gatherings, but some churches with fundamentalist tenden-cies strongly resisted this, and even continued offline worship despite community protests. According to a survey by Ji&Com Research conducted in March 2022, 31.8% of Korean society saw the Korean church as credible in 2020, 20.9% in 2021, and 18.1% in 2022 (Kangjuhwua, Changch'angil and Ch'oegiyŏng, 2022).

Rapid increase in bi-vocational ministers: imbalance in the supply and demand of pastors
There are a limited number of churches, and the number of church members is decreasing. Yet the number of pastors is increasing, which means that pastors who cannot find a ministry site must start planting churches. This is because the supply and demand have not been properly controlled. The reason is that the Korean church did not take the reduction in personnel seriously, and another is related to the finan-cial resources for running seminaries. As of 2015, the number of pastors in Korea's Protestant churches reached 98,305 (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2018: 108–16). There are nearly 400 seminaries in Korea – 57 seminaries accredited by the Ministry of Education and 300 unaccredited – and 7,000 pastoral candidates are produced from these seminaries every year.

In cases where existing churches provide support for new church planting, the new church may grow to become stable. However, a more common way to plant is for pastors or a few households to start a church on their own. In this case, the pastor earns a living through means other than pastoral work. In Korea, many are in bi-vo-cational ministry not because of a double calling but to sustain their livelihood. In a survey of 904 pastors in 2016, 66.7% of respondents were living below the minimum cost of living for a family of four, and 73.9% responded positively when asked about bi-vocational ministry. They answered that they were employed bi-vocationally

because they had to take responsibility for their livelihood, while only 20.4% offered theological reasons for their bi-vocational lifestyle (Cho 2016: 245–48).

Rise of the missional church
Missional church
Alongside the events in the early 2000s that impacted the church's social standing, Korean missiologists also started to hold active discussions about the missional church at the same period. According to Kanghee Han, it has been 20 years since the discourse of missional church was introduced to domestic missiology discourse and to the field of ministry (K. H. Han 2022: 6). For local church pastors, the missional church idea became a breakthrough alternative in church ministry. The missional church discussion also provided a tool to interpret the model of missional churches in Korea that pre-existed these discussions. When discussions about missional church took place, the idea of café church was one of the first that arose.

In 2016, the *Kukminilbo*, a newspaper with a Christian background, published a special article titled "An Alternative to Small Churches: Talking About 10 Years of Café Churches." From this, it can be inferred that café churches were established in Korea before 2006 (Kim Ayeong 2016). A café can be a point of contact that allows the church to meet nearby residents, and it can also function as a space for various events like worship services and cultural events. Other forms have emerged, including library churches, concert hall churches and bookstore churches. Pastors have taken on the roles of baristas, librarians and bookstore owners, naturally taking on dual roles.

Non-institutional churches
As mentioned earlier, the category of believing without belonging includes people who have been disappointed by the institutional church. New churches are now being formed for them. Sociologist Jae-young Jung refers to these churches as "non-institutional churches" and names the growing number of non-institutional churches as "Continuous Challenges" (Jung, 2022). In a survey of 227 non-institutional church members, 124 (54.6%) said they belonged to a church with pastors, and 103 (45.4%) said they attended a church consisting only of lay people without pastors (Jung 2022: 42). The survey data suggests that believers who are disappointed with pastors prefer a horizontal church without pastors.

In terms of thinking about the church, members of institutional churches and members of non-institutional churches had very different thoughts. Members of non-institutional churches do not place much importance on matters that have traditionally been considered important elements of the church's composition (e.g.,

pastors, sermons, sacraments, service on Sundays, chapel), taking an especially passive stance on the role of pastors (Jung 2022: 75).

Jung suggests that the Korean church must overcome these problems by moving in the following directions (Jung 2022: 174–245):

– Restoration of the essence of faith: As the church becomes institutionalized, it tends to move away from its essence and weakens its original spirit.
– Towards a community: The church should ideally emphasize discipleship and community together. In the meantime, however, discipleship has been more emphasized, so community needs to be restored.
– Improvement of communication structure: The current church needs to improve its structure because many people cannot have their voices heard due to vertical communication.
– Improvement of the fiscal structure: This step emphasizes transparency in fiscal management and should be used where necessary.
– Restoration of church publicity: The church must take on a public role without becoming private.
– Social participation based on publicity: The public nature of the church should eventually lead to social participation.
– Ministries through small group communities: When gathered as small communities, each community has different characteristics and can work in different areas.
– Village community movement as an expansion of the community: Social participation changes the community to which the church belongs.
– Preparation for change: This is to grasp and prepare for the flow of society and the church.

Jae-young Jung's detailed proposal is appropriate in the context of the Korean church. Jung's proposal is not directed at non-institutional churches, but at institutional churches. He expects churches to break away from the current negative aspect and show a more ideal pattern in the practice of faith.

Small missional churches as an alternative in the period of decline

Thus far, this paper has examined the growth of Korean churches, the loss of social trust, factors such as believing without belonging, and the active discussion and practice of missional churches during this time. The author argues that the current situation of the Korean church demands a paradigm shift. The church must break

away from the growth and enlargement of the past. Therefore, I would like to argue that the small missional church provides a viable alternative in the current Korean context.

What is a small missional church?

The idea that a larger church must have received greater blessings is not biblical but based on materialism. The church needs to remember the teaching that "each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function" (Rom. 12:4, NIV). Members can be interpreted as individuals, but if we look at the whole Korean church as one large body, we can see that different sized churches can play different roles. A human body has two arms and ten fingers and toes, and each serves a different function. As one body in Christ, the church has the same mission. But different sizes of churches can be understood to have different functions. There are many examples of large churches that have grown through a revival. However, many churches become unhealthy if their only goal is quantitative growth. In addition, as mentioned above, the Korean church is declining. The church needs to recognize the need for degrowth and focus instead on the essence of ministry. In addition, this paradigm shift is not a choice but a requirement of the times, society and the environment.

A small missional church results in several reorientations in the organizational aspect of the church. First, a small missional church does not intend to be large. Ideally, the size of a church should be given as the result of practising faith rather than intentionally through marketing. Many evils arise when the intention to increase the number of members is the first and only goal of a church. When the church grows naturally, it can also choose to split and maintain its scale in smaller units. Second, a small missional church focuses on the essence of the gospel. A missional church recognizes and practises mission as the essence of the church. The questions that fellow pastors often ask in the field of ministry are "Does the church revive if you do that?" and "Does the church grow if you change to that system?" Whether a small church or a large church, if growth is the criterion for judging ministry, it will eventually be buried in growthism. For this reason, small missional churches must break away from growthism and practise the gospel in response to the Bible and the needs of the times.

Third, a small missional church avoids complex structures and has a simple system. Complex structures slow movement, and a simple decision-making structure can enable quick response. Fourth, a small missional church cooperates with other missional churches. These churches are challenged by a shortage of human resources. In many cases the pastor is the sole leader or two or three people work

in a team. Therefore, churches with the same orientation can form partnerships to help each other.

Advantages of a small missional church

Characterization
A small missional church can respond directly to specific community issues such as caring for those who believe without belonging, participating in social issues like creation care, environmental efforts, peace activities, and human rights.

Flexibility
Due to globalization, pandemics are likely to occur again in the future. The likelihood of future pandemics increases the need for small communities with organizational flexibility. A small missional church has a relatively simple crisis management structure. It can be flexible about on-offline conversion and is relatively free of government restrictions on the number of people gathering in a pandemic. It also has the advantage of providing individualized spiritual care online.

Toward maturity
Although the Korean church has a history of more than 100 years, it can remain in some ways immature due to its egocentrism, conformism, secularism and historical irresponsibility (O-K. Lee 2020: 103–32). The Korean church is being asked to mature from the inside out. A small missional church is an alternative form of church community that is suitable to move the Korean church toward maturity as expected and required by society.

Mission in partnership
Fourth, the small missional church is a church that works together with other communities. Small churches, where a single pastor or a few pastors work in a team, are inevitably short of human resources. Churches with the same orientation can thus come together and cooperate to coexist.

Examples of small missional churches
In Korea, many such small missional churches are currently emerging. One new form is through sharing worship space. Space sharing is becoming common place in the general society, and worship space is also being shared by more churches. The following are cases of sharing worship spaces in the Korean church.

Café Underwood (missional church & shared worship space)
Café Underwood is located adjacent to the campus of Yonsei University with all the attendant cultural and economic entities that go into supporting a large university.

This café was started and operated by Campus Crusade for Christ with the support of an entrepreneur. Then, in February 2020, two pastors planning a Chinese student-immigrant ministry were commissioned to manage the café. As a missional café church, Café Underwood operates a free counselling room for international students and immigrants from Chinese-speaking countries. A pastor who majored in psychology and pastoral counselling conducts the counseling. Counselling is professional and does not evangelize during counseling, but it can lead to evangelical conversation outside of counselling through relationships. In addition, a pastor with a professional barista licence is making use of the café's characteristics to open a Chinese coffee class and contact people in a situation where there are few opportunities to learn about coffee in Chinese.

While running a café and doing campus mission, they considered ways to use the café space in missional ways. They saw that newly planted churches have difficulty finding space for worship and often do not have enough money to pay rent. The pastors therefore networked to provide gathering spaces for four churches that meet during different time slots. The churches are free to use the video and sound equipment in the café. They also share items such as a pulpit, a piano and a donation box. Furthermore, they are considering ways in which they can collaborate. It is worth mentioning that the one-year-old church planted in this space recently decided to rent their own space and start a shared worship space to serve other churches. This church became the first fruit of Café Underwood's pioneering church incubation work.

Co-Worship Station (shared worship space)
Co-Worship Station is a shared church platform launched by Gimpo Myungsung Church to help small churches. They sold the previous church building, bought a new building for a shared chapel space, and established Assist Mission as a missionary organization to operate the space. The Co-Worship Station started in one location but has now grown to four. Assist Mission provides a location and takes responsibility for overall church administration, such as building management, video and sound equipment, and multimedia support personnel. These provisions provide a stable ministry setting. In particular, for the first year the monthly rent and management fee is only about USD100. Pastors who share this space and its equipment are likewise seeking for the partnership in ministry, so they have started to hold early morning prayers in union. Café Underwood and Assist Mission's Co-Worship Station function as both a platform and an incubator.

Seoro Books and Seoro Church (bi-vocational ministry)
Seoro Books and Seoro Church started in February 2020 when Covid-19 started. The pastor of this church serves simultaneously as the pastor and the head of the

publishing company. He chose the publishing business as a means of making a living and as his mission. So he opened a publishing house in Paju BookCity, a district created for the publishing businessin Paju City. As a Christian publishing house, this publisher publishes alternative books for the Korean church, mainly producing books on theology, history and missions. Since the pastor is a PhD candidate and researcher, he is also researching representative theologians of the Korean church, making YouTube videos of criticism, and writing articles that can promote a healthy church.

Moreover, they started their church in the publishing office on Sundays and planned weekday services for people who work in the area. As the situation of Covid-19 became severe, the government issued an administrative order to ban church gatherings. This church soon switched to an online church and started worshipping via Zoom. The congregation has existed longer as an online church than it has as an offline church. This church is interested in social issues. Members visit places that have become known for social problems, most being where tragic events have occurred. For example, they went to Gangjeong Village, where the seashore was destroyed to build a naval base. They observed the site and tried to understand God's heart there. They also went to the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ), the site of the split between South and North Korea, and prayed into the pain of division and hopes for reunification. They also occasionally worship in solidarity with other small missional churches and encourage each other. They are now planning to have united worship for the families of the Itaewon Halloween crush victims in order to comfort the bereaved and also to participate in social pain.

Gongmyong Church (local missional church)

Gongmyong (Resonance) Church was started by two pastors who were missionaries serving in Britain and China. This church runs a bookstore during the week in a small city called Yangpyeong. This bookstore mainly aims to meet young couples in their 30s and 40s who have children. The parents are interested in their children's education, but their children have nowhere to go after school. So, this bookstore is not just a place to sell books, but a platform for culture, conversation and learning.

The pastors and their wives used their knowledge to start English storybook reading groups, embroidery classes, Chinese character classes, Photoshop lectures, and book discussion groups. They accurately grasped the cultural needs of the region and became pastors of the village by thinking of the customers they met at the bookstore as "weekday saints". Thirty or forty people connected in this way worship at the bookstore on Sundays. One pastor also introduces his pastoral work and ministry academically as a steering committee member of the Family, Church &

Village Research Institute. The pastor introduces various cases of village ministry and provides consulting for a local church willing to switch to a local missional church.

Shared worship space as a new trend of the Korean church

Shared worship spaces are being recognized as a solution and a new trend for the Korean church. In the Presbyterian Church of Korea, there was a recommendation on it at the General Assembly level, and presbyteries are starting to establish shared worship spaces. In other countries, it is common to share space with other churches and even other religions. However, Korean churches are not used to sharing their spaces with other churches. Through this, we can see that the Korean church has not felt the need to borrow the space of other churches while experiencing revival and growth and that the Korean church has not been accustomed to having an open attitude toward others and partnership. The individual-churchism of the Korean church is very strong (Yang 2003).

 Sharing a place of worship has significant implications. In Korea, there are more churches than convenience stores (Chang 2020). Therefore, in the general perception of Korean society, the church is also a group competing for market share. The shared worship space will show society that several churches share one space and cooperate with each other, so the church will be recognized as a group characterized by sharing rather than as a selfish and competitive group. In an age of sharing rather than private ownership, sharing a place of worship is good news for small churches struggling with planting, financing and responses to the pandemic. In addition, small missional churches that share a space of worship can complement each other's weaknesses and maximize their strengths by forming partnerships. However, it is also necessary to reflect more deeply on why the place of worship should be shared (Han 2021: 166–67).

Conclusion

The author is pastor of a local church intending to become a missional church. He author also teaches pastoral candidates at the seminary. As a local church pastor, he feels a sense of crisis as he looks at the decline of the Korean church; he thinks the Korean church should not continue to go with the existing paradigm but should change. Bi-vocational ministers have been introduced because of declining numbers of Korean churches and the imbalance in the supply and demand of pastors. The situation is not good, but the pastoral resources are plentiful. The author hopes that if a small missional church, rather than a growth-oriented church, is planted through them, the church will be able to establish itself as a new hope.

Megachurches that have been growing for a long time continue to exist as landmarks. However, churches starting anew are no longer in an age or environment in which they can imagine growing into megachurches. In addition, the Korean church must take on social responsibility both internally and externally while maturing for the benefit of the public. Church membership in Korea will continue to rapidly decrease alongside the population decline. Furthermore, the number of the bi-vocational ministers is increasing. The small missional church is a necessary trend in this situation. The Korean church must enter society and be reborn as a small missional church that goes and makes disciples.

About the author

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Benac, Dustin D. 2022. *Adaptive Church: Collaboration and Community in a Changing World*

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Reviewed by James Butler

There have been a good number of books which reflect on the changes in church seen over the last couple of decades in the development of fresh expressions, missional communities, missional church and pioneering, but few books have explored the wider networks and the enabling of these new communities and churches. This is exactly where Dustin Benac's book *Adaptive Church* focuses. Through careful and extensive qualitative research with two such "hubs" in the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America it identifies how they enable the imaginative environment for adaptive change to occur. The focus on this region, made up of the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, is because of its post-religious landscape. In the midst of changing social and religious commitments Benac identifies a history of religious entrepreneurship in the region and in this book he explores what this atmosphere of innovation and entrepreneurship can reveal about the future of church in the United States. He frames the organizations he looks at as ecclesial adaptations which can help churches to navigate the complex situations they find themselves in within contemporary culture.

The book is made up of four parts and each of those parts has two chapters. The first part has chapters introducing each of the organizations, which Benac refers to as "hubs"; chapter 1 looks at the Office of Church Engagement and chapter 2 introduces the Parish Collective. Part 2 looks at organizational structures with chapter 3 identifying the primary challenges facing the hubs and their developing collaborative approaches. Benac then turns to explore his idea of hubs, distinguishing them from a megachurch or denomination, and exploring the webs of connections they make. Chapter 5 opens part 3 with a practical theological account of the hub's aim of "reimagining church". He then offers a "theological redescription" of the work of these

hubs by engaging with Bonhoeffer and Luke-Acts in chapter 6. Part 4 develops the account of practical wisdom looking at the way different modes of leadership complement each other in bringing about organizational change. Chapter 7 is perhaps the most important in terms of contribution presenting an expansive typology of leadership providing a framework for churches to think about the different skills, gifts and collaboration required for adaptive change. The final chapter looks to the future of church, exploring the "possibilities beyond certainty" and the way these hubs help to sustain these possibilities.

The key word within the book is "adaptive" with Benac drawing on and developing Ronald Heifetz' theory of adaptive change as his lens for understanding the practice of the hubs. Heifetz discusses two types of challenge: technical, where the problem is known and the obstacle is primarily resources; and adaptive, where the problem and solution are unknown, where the obstacles are often the received values and practices and where the change needed is structural and systemic. They require more imaginative responses and an ability to explore new possibilities. Benac gives the example of the question "What is God up to?" as one which invites new imaginative possibilities. In reading the hubs through this lens of adaptive challenge and change he provides a fresh way of engaging with these new churches and communities, and the ways these "hubs" can support and enable change.

I was particularly drawn to part 3 where he engages with imagination and develops a pneumatological account of church and adaptive change. He expands Dykstra's account of ecclesial imagination showing how the practice and outlook of these hubs extend the account of ecclesial imagination to include the wider community connections made by churches across these hubs. Following this he engages with Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* and Luke-Acts to describe how church has always faced adaptive challenges and has changed. Benac describes his work as "redescription", making implicit connections between the practice of these hubs and the theological accounts. He sees Bonhoeffer and Luke-Acts as demonstrating the kind of adaptations that are happening in these hubs. Through them he identifies the significance of the church as a theological entity and the work of the Spirit in adaptive change. He uses these sources to offer a theological rationale for the adaptive church he is calling for, a church which "creates structures for connection, belonging and possibility". This could be helpfully developed further by drawing more fully on the theological insight from practice to push these accounts further in into developing an ecclesiology of adaptive church.

The turn to leadership in part 4 develops a "practical wisdom" for the adaptive church describing leadership in six modes of being with. In helping hubs, like the

ones in the study, to respond to adaptive challenges, this chapter is key. It provides practical ways in which the diversity of leadership can be recognized in an interconnected way. Benac's focus is on cultivating the conditions for imagination and adaptive change, and how they can take root and grow.

While I find the theological accounts in part 3 fruitful for my own thinking there is scope for integrating them more fully into the practical wisdom section of the book. I found myself asking what difference these accounts of imagination and the Spirit made to the leadership model proposed. I also would have liked an account of why leadership was the focus of the practical wisdom, particularly given that in my own experience of these kinds of churches and communities it is often lay and focused on the quite ordinary and everyday nature of faith. Perhaps this highlights the difference between the US and UK contexts and demonstrates that although there is much that is helpful in this book, there is always some work to be done to make the connection and adaptations between contexts. All that said, I found it a stimulating and enriching book, one which challenged my thinking and provided helpful concepts to explore the ecclesiology of such communities. For those looking for an ecclesiology of church drawing on these new communities, this book provides rich starting points for developing such an ecclesiology weaving together helpful ideas of adaptive change, imagination and theological redescription. For those working in the kinds of hubs, networks and organizations that are the focus of the book, the practical wisdom and conceptual frameworks developed here will provide important and enlightening ways to reflect on and develop their work. I think this book and the work of Benac more widely is making a welcome and generative contribution to the development of church in post-religious contexts in the US and Europe.

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Aldous, Benjamin. 2022. *The God Who Walks Slowly: Reflections on Mission with Kosuke Koyama*

London: SCM Press.
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Reviewed by Simon Woodman

Many Western Christians are unaware of the work of Kosuke Koyama, the twentieth-century Japanese theologian. Ben Aldous, in this book, provides an introduction to Koyama through the medium of autobiographical theology. Aldous encounters Koyama as a fellow pilgrim, and shares how Koyama's words of wisdom have helped shape reflection on Aldous' own life and ministry. So, in a sense, this book gives us two-for-the-price-of-one: we get to know not only Koyama, but also Aldous.

Aldous positions Koyama as a contextual theologian, one who brings their experience of the past (through the scriptures and church history) into intentional dialogue with their experience of the present (through culture), with both being honoured as the context of God's revelation. Each chapter of the book takes a particular theme from Koyama's writing that speaks to the current climate of mission in the UK, inviting the reader in each case to 'slow down', to attend to what is important.

In "Walking: The Importance of Slowing Down", Aldous introduces Koyama's theological perspective of 'time*full*ness', noting that for most of his life Jesus only ever travelled at walking pace. Koyama defines this as the God who walked slowly, the "three-mile-an-hour God", and invites us to do the same, to take the time to feel the wind, rain and sunshine. When this idea of time*full*ness is brought into dialogue with the Western obsession with clock-watching productivity, a timely challenge emerges: we have idolized time, and time has taken that power and used it to oppress us in return. Against this, God calls people to divine time, to a perspective much longer than our own minutes and days. The implications this has for mission, for missional "productivity", and for ecclesial decision-making are explored helpfully by Aldous.

In "Seeing: Notes in the Margins", we encounter the God who "sees", who moves slowly enough to see the excluded, the marginalized and the isolated. The challenge here is for each of us to see those whom we often ignore, and Aldous frames this in terms of the church's colonial legacy of exclusionary and imperialistic violence. Koyama calls people to "neighbourology", to hospitality toward strangers, to embracing those often unseen because they have been pushed to the margins of society. He says that "extending hospitality" is the beginning of mission: inviting others to the table, both literally and metaphorically. This is a direct challenge to the post-colonial legacy of English exceptionalism, and the populist rise in the "othering" of those who have migrated to British shores. Aldous proposes that the future of the UK church needs to be more diverse, as people learn to live together with difference in a way that reflects the *shalom* of the coming Kingdom of God.

The next chapter, "Talking: Shut Up and Listen, Will You!", is grounded in the aural attentiveness that the three-mile-an-hour God paid to those he encountered. Aldous considers how evangelism in the UK might learn from Koyama's challenge that "Christianity suffers from teacher complex": we are too quick to speak, and too slow to listen, too quick to teach, and too slow to learn. Contrary to the way Christianity often positions itself at the centre of society to proclaim and declaim, Koyama says that it is the broken Christ who heals the world broken by idolatry, and that the church needs to recover the brokenness of its saviour if it is to be relevant to those who live with weakness and pain. The call here is to evaluate evangelism less by numbers and statistics, and more by pilgrimage, soul friendship, deep learning, and reciprocity. Aldous proposes "apophatic evangelism", which is grounded not in knowledge, but in recognition of ignorance, not in strength, but in recognition of weakness. This is evangelism in mysticism, in silence, in *expectant quiet*, where listening is prioritized over speaking, and where those who have been ignored find their true place of belonging.

In "Surrendering: Nailed Down!", Aldous reflects with Koyama on the powerlessness of the crucified God. Koyama's early years were marked by his experience of being in Japan at the time of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so his theology is marked by a profound sense of the fragility of human beings and culture. In the face of this, he advocated a 'bodily *this*ness', an embrace of the material and the local as the site at which Christian living and discipleship take place. Against those strands of Christianity that over-emphasize an otherworldly experience or destination as the goal of mission, Koyama points to the fragile humanity of Jesus, noting that God chooses to work slowly and inefficiently, to the point where God in Christ comes to a full stop on the cross: the "nailed down" God. Aldous hears this call to "stop" in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, and asks what mission in human frailty

and vulnerability might authentically look like. Listening to those who have worked in disability theology, Aldous points to the disabling vulnerability of God nailed to the cross, and brings this into dialogue with the technological utopianism of transhumanism: for all of the benefits of technology, God is still an *embodied* God, revealed in the vulnerable and broken body of Christ Jesus.

This is a book that calls its readers to profundity, to hold the context of their lives in dialogue with their scriptures and their faith. As such, it is also a profoundly relevant book, engaging with some of the key questions and challenges of the twenty-first-century Western world. Koyama's insights enable fresh reflection on the real world of our lives, and Aldous brings his own story to bear in ways that generate new insight. For those longing to discover an alternative to the fast-paced, performance-driven, task-focussed, high-energy, hyperactive functionalism of so much of contemporary church culture, this book is the perfect antidote.

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Chitando, Ezra, and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha (editors). 2022. *Interfaith Networks and Development: Case Studies from Africa*

Reviewed by Kimion Tagwirei

This book unravels the needful integration of faith-based networks and sustainable development in Africa. The editors are seasoned academics and practical theologians. Ezra Chitando is a well-grounded and respected Professor of History and Phenomenology of Religion at the University of Zimbabwe and Theology Consultant on HIV for the World Council of Churches, who has researched and published extensively about religion and development, security, gender, sexuality, climate change and related matters. Dr Ishanesu Sextus Gusha is a highly progressive priest in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, in the Anglican Diocese in Europe and is a former New Testament lecturer with the University of Zimbabwe who has researched and published a great deal on interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding and biblical theology. They present an enriching book with enlightening and empowering contributions by experts and theologians from different African countries.

The book connects religious networks with sustainable development. The Church carries a holistic mission of proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel in all areas of life, for example through *kerygma* (preaching total salvation), *diakonia* (attending to the needy, advocating for peace and justice) and *koinonia* (ecumenical, congregational and social fellowship). Thus, the call for the interconnection of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to sustainable development deserves the attention of practical theologians, missiologists, ecclesial practitioners and stakeholders.

In the introduction, Ezra Chitando remarks on how "Despite the importance of the interfaith movement globally, it continues to be neglected in scholarly discourses. While there is a growing realization that religion is strategically placed to contribute

towards development, there is still some hesitation among scholars to invest in researching and publishing in this area" (3).

Chitando notes that religion and development as a discipline in universities continues to be an encouraging testament to the consideration and endorsement of faith as integral in developmental discourses. Observing that, generally, secular and religious worlds appear distant from each other and were for decades kept like separate compartments of life, he laments that "most developmental discourse and programming has assumed a secular orientation, falsely believing the secular to be superior to the religious … yet, interfaith networks are critical players in the quest to meet the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030" (4).

Consequently, this book addresses the theme of interfaith networks and development in Africa, with particular attention to SDG 10 (Addressing Inequalities) and others.

Engaging with practical reflections on interfaith initiatives and networks, this volume delivers new data and case studies from varied African contexts. It pays heed to the rising significance of interfaith networks in quest for the betterment of lives across the world.

Commendably, the book calls researchers, policy makers, activists and other stakeholders to invest in researching and enhancing interfaith networks and development in and beyond Africa. Bearing in mind that there are some voices that doubt the contribution of religion to sustainable development, each chapter presents different types and roles of interfaith networks towards meeting the UN's SDGs from diverse African settings.

The initial chapters provide theoretical reflections and examples of international interfaith networks that are active in developmental work. After the introduction, Sokfa John in the second unit explores key considerations for Interfaith Networks and development in West Africa. He scrutinizes the United Religions Initiative in West Africa, and proffers pivotal factors that determine one's understanding of the structure, role and contributions of interfaith networks and their potential for sustainable development. His chapter suggests that spiritual and value foundation, size of network, brokerage, connections and other factors influence the effectiveness of interfaith networks and development. This is highly commendable because it upholds flexibility, empathy, inclusivity, courtesy and collaboration in networking and engaging faith towards sustainable development.

Thereafter, Ahmed Ragab, Emma Rachmawati, Grace Kaiso and Matthias Brucker revisit the contribution of the Faith to Action Network to development with a special focus on Africa. Appreciating that religious praxis is deeply rooted in communities, they say that "faith organizations reach large numbers of people with messages on health, gender equality and peace that resonate with local beliefs and culture and provide social services through sustained networks of support" (47). FBOs profess and propel the reconciliation of SDGs, human rights as well as faith teachings and values. The authors capture the growing influence of FBOs on humanity through establishing life-bearing entities such as schools and hospitals. This concurs with my researches (Tagwirei 2022: 3), which add that, besides education and health, some FBOs, especially churches, have also invested in real estate and agriculture. Resultantly, they have deepened and widened their influence on humanity. Therefore, this book is greatly creditable for demonstrating that ignoring religious organizations in developmental deliberations is retrogressive and regrettable.

Befittingly, the authors lament that "there is a lot of disagreement between faith actors and non-faith actors. Faith to Action Network believes that too much attention is given to those voices that propagate disagreement, and insufficient space is given to voices that seek agreement and constructive engagement" (62). They recommend a shift of attention from differences to common interests towards enhancing constructive voices for inclusive sustainable development.

Complementarily, Ishanesu Sextus Gusha in chapter 4 applauds the monumental work of King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz's International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). Gusha heralds that KAICIID facilitates interfaith and intercultural dialogue for peace and sustainable development under an interreligious governance of state and religious representatives from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in Austria, Saudi Arabia and Spain. Subsequently, Florence Iminza and Esther Mombo end the section with the work of the Programme for Christian–Muslim relations in Africa (PROCMURA) towards peacebuilding. They historicize PROCMURA as a capacity building and relational organization that affirms the principle of partnership, collaboration and networking in communities. Aptly, their review confirms the promising potential of FBOs in advancing the accomplishment of SDGs in and outside Africa.

In chapters 6–9 the book promotes the integration of interfaith networks and gender. Based on researches in Tanzania, Ghana, Botswana, Uganda and Mozambique, separate contributions tackle femininity, masculinities, inequalities and tragic violence with religious tolerance, dialogue and social transformation.

Chapters 10–13 discuss African and global interfaith networks and development. Armed with case studies from selected African countries and international of Interfaith Networks, authors share various potentials, challenges and possible contributions of FBOs in development. They give examples such as the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) in Uganda, Zambia Interfaith Networking Group (ZINGO) in Zambia and evaluation of interfaith networking in Ghana which mirror the need for correspondence and reciprocal collaboration between FBOs and secular institutions for sustainable development. Together, the contributions indicate that FBOs possess more than spiritual influence. They display that FBOs are blessed with human, financial and material resources that can be harnessed towards the attainment of SDGs.

Chapters 14–16 present diverse themes of interfaith networks and development. Chapter 14, by Ezekiel Abdullahi Babagario, delivers the theme of education and interfaith development in Northern Nigeria. The author remarks that "Education is power, it is an avenue where enlightenment is passed from one generation to the other" (266) and reveals that it inspires and enlightens people towards tolerance, harmony, co-existence and development. Following that, Tapiwa Gusha and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha interface environmentalism with interfaith dialogue through a case study of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environmental Institute (SAFCEI). The work of SAFCEI upholds environmental stewardship.

In conclusion, Nomatter Sande brings the volume to its end with an incisive discussion of interfaith communities from the African Diaspora. Taking migration and globalization into account, his chapter corresponds sustainable development with engagement, integration and dialogue. While focusing on interfaith trajectories in the United Kingdom, the author engages with the United States of America and Southern African contexts. Largely, he reconciles diversities of interfaith networks with their promotion of tolerance, dialogue, integration and cooperation. For ecclesiology and missiology, this book inspires intersecting *diaconia* and *koinonia* with global interreligious discourses towards inclusive sustainable development. Overall, it teaches all of us to appreciate and maximize tolerance and co-existence as well as collaboration.

Taken together, all chapters observe and bless the marriage of interfaith networks to sustainable development and bemoan attempts to divorce them. I strongly believe that this is a transformational resource for religious, secular, academic and governmental, non-governmental, collective and individual considerations for sustainable development. Its submissions are greatly insightful about the potential, problems and strategies of accommodating and utilizing FBOs to realize African and global sustainable development. Recommendations from its different chapters can be contextual-

ized and applied in and outside Africa. All in all, this book motivates multiple further researches and publications in correspondence with changing contexts.

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Hart, David Bentley. 2022. *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
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Reviewed by Cristian Sonea

David Bentley Hart's book explores the intersection of theology, history and eschatology. He provides a compelling argumentation for the relevance of the Christian tradition in contemporary society while also exploring the challenges posed by modernity and the looming threat of the apocalypse. With his characteristic erudition and rhetorical flair, Hart engages with diverse philosophical and theological traditions, from Church Fathers to contemporary thinkers. Whether you are an experienced theologian or simply curious about the future of the Christian faith, this book offers a stimulating and illuminating read.

The author initially addressed the topic of this essay in a lecture entitled "Tradition and Authority: A Vaguely Gnostic Meditation" at a conference on religious traditions and modernity held at Valparaiso University in April 2018. A version of the lecture was printed as an article in *The Idea of Tradition in the Late Modern World,* edited by Thomas Albert Howard. The original text was published in *Theological Territories* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020). I will briefly present each of the seven chapters of the book, in the hope that the review will turn into an invitation for other readers to engage profoundly with this work. Overall, the book offers a philosophical and theological exploration of the nature and role of tradition in Christian theology.

In the first chapter, "Tradition and Traditionalism" (11–45), Hart discusses the tension between traditionalism, healthy moral and intellectual growth, and the failure to synthesize the historical and dogmatic perspectives of modern Christian thought. He suggests that an unjustifiable fiction, such as "incurious belief" (36), eventually loses its persuasive power and can lead to disillusionment. He argues that it is only

through recourse to the "historical record" (41) that the legitimacy of the Christian tradition can be defended. Theology and Christian history were once a single science, but they have become rigidly separated in modern times. This failure to synthesize historical and dogmatic perspectives has led to an increasing divergence, with theological scholars avoiding early Christian studies and aspiring scholars of Christianity and Christian texts of late antiquity, ignoring the historically unchallenged statements of systematic or dogmatic theology.

In the second chapter, "Tradition and Causality" (46–76), Hart discusses the difficulty of applying the concept of causality to human affairs and history, as opposed to the physical sciences. He questions what constitutes a cause, how it can be distinguished from chance, and whether there is "a vital and rational unity to *any* stream of events" (47) that can be recognized as a tradition. He then warns against the danger of confusing physical and historical processes and the pseudo-scientific theories that arise from "careless conflation" (49), arguing that the unity of a tradition arises mainly from the intentional states of rational agents and must be deliberate rather than simply spontaneous agreement. However, such unity must remain invisible to the historical sciences and can only be judged by a "proleptic apprehension" (58) of the ultimate cause of that tradition. The author notes that historical development will always require creativity and selectively ignoring historical data that the "preferred narrative cannot assimilate" (59).

One of the main arguments of the third chapter, "Tradition and Development" (77–154), is that the development of religious doctrine involves an initial moment of belief and an ongoing process of rational validation. The author suggests that accurate religious adherence consists of a moment of an apocalypse, in which one is seized by a sense of seeing and knowing more than one can initially account for, only to be strengthened and enriched by reasoned argument and corroborating evidence. Hart argues that nothing is suspect or deplorable about this "'apocalyptic' priority of conviction *by* faith" over rational validation (78). Nevertheless, this reasonable justification of belief must become increasingly dependent on evidence as the journey towards understanding continues.

Hart discusses Maurice Blondel's response to the crisis of modernity in the early twentieth century, particularly Alfred Loisy's controversial treatise *L'Évangile et l'Église*. Loisy had argued that the Synoptic Gospels only recorded Jesus announcing the Kingdom but that the Church had arrived instead (111). This statement caused a scandal but would be considered relatively tame by today's standards. Loisy also made claims about the historical accuracy of the early chapters of Genesis and the development of Israelite monotheism from earlier cults of divine figures. In response

to Loisy, Blondel's essay was written on a tightrope, attempting to navigate the thorny issue amid the ongoing crisis of modernity. While Loisy is often portrayed as having rejected Catholic ecclesial history, Hart argues that Loisy believed in the absolute necessity of the Church "as the living and necessarily the adaptable presence of the Gospel in history" (112).

The fourth chapter focuses on "Tradition and History" (155–79). Here Hart discusses the concept of doctrinal definition and the history of dogma. He notes that the development of doctrine is not simply a matter of "finding the right words" (174) to express beliefs already present in the community of faith but involves the generation of new and often "vague formulae describing unprecedented models of Christian confession" (175). Each dogma represents a synthesis and an innovation and can "radically alter the meaning" of previous beliefs and claims (175). This process inevitably involves an "a degree of willful historical forgetfulness" (176) and the invention of a new version of the past, purged of the complexities and confusions that necessitated a new dogmatic definition in the first place. The author argues that orthodoxy and heresy are retrospective and ideological constructions designed to reinforce each recent doctrinal decision by wrapping it in the mythology of a pure and exhaustive deposit of faith. But he also notes that this does not mean that innovations are false developments or corruptions but rather creative acts of "reinterpretation and reinvention" (178).

In chapter 5, "Tradition and Doctrine" (180–211), Hart discusses the power of the Nicene synthesis, which was formulated with vagueness and imprecision, allowing for a vast conceptual world and "numberless variations and developments" (208) in theological thought. The author argues that the historical record must prove any doctrinal synthesis's "correctness or incorrectness" (208). Yet the theological legacy of the Council of Nicea demanded and permitted a rich and fertile tradition, subordinating the evidence of the past to a finality whose whole meaning could not yet be known. The author suggests that the future of theology and doctrine is open and cannot be closed off and that traditionalists may hinder "healthy developments" (210) in theological reflection by resenting the chaotic and disruptive vitality of the living tradition. The author implies that the living tradition is a spiritual reality and that "the Spirit breathes where it will" (210).

In chapter 6, "Tradition and Apocalypse" (212–42), Hart argues that distinguishing the true Christian story from its many phantom inversions or caricatures requires discernment, especially in separating an "original 'orthodoxy'" from all "its simulacra and counterfeits" (233). The lines of demarcation become even more confusing and indecipherable as one engages in the hermeneutical and historical work of

identifying the original "orthodoxy". The author claims that the apparent unity of a "dogmatic continuum is often much more credible when viewed from the present, as a *fait accompli*" (234). In the past, however, it looks more haphazard. The author argues that the tradition has always progressed by discovering new implications in what is currently understood as orthodox Christian confession and practice and by questioning, challenging and reinterpreting what has been before. Thus, the author argues for the integral unity of a living Christian tradition and the internal rationality of its history of dogmatic development; one must see it not only as a source of agreement and cogency but also "as a force of destruction, reconstruction, reinterpretation and unanticipated renewal" (240).

The final chapter, "Tradition as Apocalypse" (243–98), is dedicated to the future of the Christian faith. Hart describes it as an ideal dimension of Christian tradition, essential to its "coherence but inexhaustible by any of the configurations the tradition has assumed over the centuries" (243). He admits that he cannot claim he knows what lies ahead, but he believes that the Christian faith constantly evolves and even desires "its overthrow in a fuller revelation of its inner truth" (245). Hart argues against certain forms of traditionalism, dogmatism and fideism and rejects the options of extrinsic and historicism as "intellectually stultifying and imaginatively suffocating" (246). He proposes a rule for theologians to follow, which involves seeing doctrines as dynamic orientations of "reflection, desire, and imagination" (247) rather than fixed properties.

Hart also discusses the "final cause" or "ultimate intentional horizon" (265) of the Christian tradition, which is the goal or purpose of the rule. This final cause is pervasive in practice and transcends its historical configurations, allowing for the revision of foundational narratives and concepts of faith. The author argues that this final cause cannot be reduced to a simple sum of propositions but is the whole absolute future of the tradition. In other words, the last reason is a vision of a future reality in which all things are restored and reconciled to God. This vision of the future animates the Christian tradition and provides the ultimate ground of unity for believers.

In short, one of the book's main arguments is that the development of religious doctrine involves an initial moment of belief and an ongoing process of rational validation. Hart suggests that accurate religious adherence consists of a "moment of apocalypse" (77). One is gripped by seeing and knowing more than one can initially account for, only strengthened and enriched by reasoned argument and corroborating evidence. The book is a stimulating and illuminating read, but it can also be challenging and thought-provoking. Hart's exploration of the intersection of theology, history and eschatology requires close attention and a willingness to

engage with complex and sometimes difficult ideas. However, this book is well worth the effort for those interested in the future of the Christian faith.

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Ecclesial Futures publishes original research and theological reflection on the development and transformation of local Christian communities and the systems that support them as they join in the mission of God in the world.

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