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Korean theologians' deep-seated anti-missionary sentiment

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This study examines a deep-seated anti-missionary sentiment of Korean theologians and church historians. Chai-Choon Kim and Jong-Sung Rhee were arguably most responsible for popularizing anti-missionary sentiment among Korean Christians. The main reason for the criticisms of both Kim and Rhee against the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries was the supposedly fundamentalist schisms of the Presbyterian Church of Korea in the 1950s, which both Kim and Rhee reasoned to have been originated from their Old Princeton theology. The theological rationale of both Kim and Rhee was the Barthian triumph frame that the Reformed Orthodoxy including the Old Princeton theology, which had been suspected of having a fundamentalist tendency, was overcome by Karl Barth's Neo-Orthodoxy. These theological anti-missionary criticisms facilitated some younger Korean church historians, especially both Kyung-Bae Min and Man-Yul Lee, to view Korean church history from an anti-missionary, Korean ethnic nationalist perspective. Min emphasizes some seemingly good but anecdotal works of individual Korean native Christians, hence resulting in depreciation of the works of the missionaries and their Korean coworkers. Following Min, Lee goes even further, praising what some individual Korean Christians did for socio-political (anti-establishment) purposes and ignoring what the missionaries and their Korean coworkers did cooperatively for their Korean churches. Those Korean theologians and church historians with quite a strong anti-missionary sentiment might have succeeded in arousing Korean Christians' ethnic nationalism, but in so doing, they have quite surely deprived Korean Christians of their critically significant and rich ecclesiastical and theological elements which have been originated from the missionaries.

Keywords: Anti-missionary sentiment; American Korea missionaries; Korean theology; Presbyterian Church of Korea; Chai-Choon Kim; Jong-Sung Rhee; Kyung-Bae Min, Man-Yul Lee; Reformed Orthodoxy; Old Princeton theology.

Introduction: Korean theologians' two distinctive criticisms of the Western missionaries

The purpose of this study is to present an in-depth understanding as well as a critique of some notable Korean theologians' apparently very negative estimation of the past Western Protestant Korea missionaries, who made a decisive contribution in establishing Korean Protestant churches during their formative first 60 years, roughly from 1884 to 1945. The Korean Protestant churches, whose majority was Presbyterian and Methodist, were established and rapidly developed principally by North American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, all of whom might number over 2000 during the period. Thus, the Korean Protestant Christians in general have been quite interested in who and what the missionaries were, and many conservative theologians have published books and articles treating their positive works. Yet the majority of somewhat liberalist Korean theologians seem to have had a considerably strong anti-missionary sentiment. So we examine why and how some notable liberalist Korean theologians have so undervalued who and what the Western missionaries were in Korea. We deal with those Korean theologians who have been very critical of the missionaries for a theological, Barthian Neo-Orthodoxy-based reason, on the one hand, and for a Korean ethnic nationalist one, on the other hand. There has been no detailed study of Korean theologians' negative assessment of the missionaries, which makes the present study necessary and useful.

Some Korean liberalist theologians, notably Rev. Chai-Choon Kim and Dr Jong-Sung Rhee, began to spread an anti-missionary sentiment against the Western Presbyterian Korea missionaries on the basis of their Barthian theology. The Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), which was organised in 1907 independently from the missionaries' four Western Presbyterian home churches (American

North and South, Australian and Canadian), is the mother church of some tens of Korean Presbyterian denominations. The PCK's predominant leaders in its formative period, therefore, were naturally North American Presbyterian missionaries, whose theology was a considerably conservative, Old Princeton theology. Especially significant was their doctrine of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, which profoundly influenced Korean Protestant Christians, bringing about their churches' rapid growth. Nevertheless, this conservatism of the PCK has been believed to have caused two critical schisms between apparently liberalist and conservative wings in the 1950s. And both the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries and their conservative, Old Princeton theology have been severely criticised by the PCK's liberalist wing as being the culprit for the schisms. Thus we have the two most important theologians, Rev. Chai-Choon Kim and Dr Jong-Sung Rhee, who began and fostered a theological anti-American missionary movement in Korea from a supposedly Barthian position.

Then this theological anti-missionary effort coalesced with Korean ethnic nationalism, which was based on an anti-foreigner sentiment and deeply spread especially amongst Korean anti-establishment intelligentsias.

Here, two Korean ethnic nationalist church historians, Drs Kyung-Bae Min and Man-Yul Lee, have been working effectively, drawing quite a large following. As a result, some 2000 American Korea missionaries have been regarded as imperialist and even fundamentalist, becoming 'others' for liberalist Korean theologians and Christians. In a sense, the American Korea missionaries have been expelled from their adopted home country called Korea, a tragic legacy not only for the missionaries themselves but for Korean Protestant churches, which have been deprived of their own great church history involving these missionaries. This study examines how this tragic event happened in Korea, focussing on Chai-Choon Kim and Jong-Sung Lee, who began and led this movement on a theological – allegedly Barthian – ground, as well as on Kyung-Bae Min and Man-Yul Lee, who have deepened it for Korean ethnic nationalist reasons.

Korean theologians' Barthian-based theological anti-missionary movement: Chai-Choon Kim and Jong-Sung Rhee

Chai-Choon Kim

Rev. Chai-Choon Kim (1901–1987) was surely the most responsible for the anti-Western missionary sentiment in Korea, starting it in the 1930s and making it bloom from the 1950s up to the present. He was not only absolutely critical of the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries' conservative, Old Princeton theology, which he derogatively identified with the 17th-century Reformed Orthodoxy, but he was also the most important theologian for having succeeded in replacing the Orthodoxy by a new, largely Barthian Neo-Orthodoxy. From Kim and his numerous followers, we can find an interesting, close correlation between an anti-missionary sentiment and a supposedly Barthian theology. In other words, the more Barthian a Korean theologian becomes, the more anti-missionary he or she becomes.

Rev. Chai-Choon Kim had notable educational and ecclesiastico-political reasons for his deep aversion to the conservative, Old Princeton theology of the American Presbyterian missionaries in Korea. Firstly, he had an exceptional educational background for his deeply ingrained liberalist theological orientation. He grew up in the Eastern and Northern province (*Hamkyungdo*) of North Korea, where somewhat progressive Canadian missionaries worked. Secondly, because of this background, he avoided the Pyongyang Presbyterian Theological Seminary, the PCK's only denominational school, where the Old Princeton theology of the American Presbyterian missionaries was predominant. Thirdly and lastly, he went to both Japan and the USA, where he could study Barthian theology as a new, modernist and liberalist theology, which seemed to have a seemingly modern and scientific outlook for him. So he might have had a kind of prophetic vision and mission for the modernist, Barthian theology, especially knowing that by the end of the 1920s, Princeton Theological Seminary itself, the bulwark of the Old Princeton (Orthodox) theology, had abandoned its own theology, adopting a new, modernist and liberalist one. Therefore, Kim tried hard to promote his modernist and liberalist theology in Korea, particularly by becoming one of the translators of the then-liberalist American *Abingdon Bible Commentary*[1] into Korean in 1935. As a result, he was lightly disciplined by a committee of the General Assembly of the PCK, which was led by the American Presbyterian missionaries and Korean pastors. So probably having had an even deeper aversion to their Old Princeton theology, Kim became a leader in building a liberalist theological seminary (*Chosun* Theological Seminary, now Hanshin University) in Seoul in 1940.

The majority of Korean conservative Presbyterians, who were then even more conservative because of the turmoil of the post-liberation and Korean War period (1945–1953), did not welcome the liberalist and modernist orientation of the *Chosun* Seminary. As a result, Kim was expelled from the PCK and came to create a new, somewhat liberalist Presbyterian denomination, *Hanguk Gidokkyo Jangrohoe* (*Gijang*), in 1953.

Two significant elements led Kim to denounce the American Presbyterian missionaries: firstly, Kim's experiences of bitter conflicts with and eventual expulsion from the PCK, and secondly, his (since 1949) knowledge of H.R. Mackintosh's condemnation of the Reformed Orthodoxy on the basis of Barthian theology.

Firstly, it is clear that Kim's bitter battles against and consequent expulsion from the PCK caused him to depreciate

1.This book (eds. Eiselen & Lewis 1929:134–144; Korean translation, Ryu 1934:93–99) includes some liberalist elements like 'higher criticism' that the Old Princetonian missionaries in Korea of the time could surely regard as something dangerous and even demonic for Korean Christians.

the missionaries and their Reformed Orthodoxy or Old Princeton theology.[2] In the early years of his conflicts with the PCK, however, he focused himself mainly on criticising the Orthodoxy itself, not yet the American Korea missionaries. This means he did not yet have enough knowledge and justification to criticise the venerated American Presbyterian Korea missionaries themselves up until about 1955.

Secondly, by 1949 Kim came to know about H.R. Mackintosh's Barthian condemnation of the Reformed Orthodoxy, which became Kim's most convincing theological cause for his fights against the PCK's Orthodoxy as well as the American missionaries. From Mackintosh's book (1937), Kim got to know his Barthian triumph frame: the Reformed Orthodoxy of the 17th and 18th centuries was defeated by the liberalism of the 19th century, which was, in turn, overcome by the Neo-Orthodoxy of Karl Barth in the 20th century.

This almost fatal judgement against the Reformed Orthodoxy on the basis of the Barthian triumph frame was in fact what Kim, who had been fiercely fighting against the PCK's Orthodoxy, desperately needed. This is clearly shown in Kim's considerably grave address (Kim 1992, 1:376) in 1949 to a nation-wide gathering of young Korean Presbyterians, in which he for the first time presented the Barthian victory over the Orthodoxy, taking advantage of Mackintosh's Barthian triumph frame. Even whilst going through the terrible Korean War era (1950–1954), Kim (1955) translated Mackintosh's book into Korean, finally publishing his Korean translation of it in 1955.

Although Mackintosh (1937:8f.) puts emphasis on Karl Barth's triumph over the Reformed Orthodoxy and liberalism, Kim (1992, 4) stresses mainly the defects of the Orthodoxy, suggesting that the American missionaries' Orthodoxy is now certainly anachronistic and dogmatic or fundamentalist:

> [*I*]f we may refer to such dubious entities as 'laws of history', it appears to be something like a 'law' that on any great creative movement, such as the Reformation, there should follow a period of diminished originality but of larger discursive power, in which the gains of the larger time are, so to speak, catalogued, arranged, and valued. The mine having been opened by the Reformers, it became a duty to get out the ore and smelt it. In the process traditional orthodoxy emerged – a distinct historical phenomenon, characterized by the fatal tendency to attach an absolute value to dogmatic formulas, to consider faith and assent to creed as virtually one and the same thing, to harp upon the language of confession or catechism … (p. 300f.)

So by using Mackintosh's Barthian triumph frame, Kim (1992, 3:275, 313, 354; 1992, 4:4, 42, 70, 117) himself often criticised the PCK's Orthodoxy, yet rarely attacking the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries up until 1955, for he knew that the missionaries were greatly respected in Korea. But it was clearly in his address to the General Assembly meeting of his Presbyterian denomination in 1956 that he began his condemnation of the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries. Whilst talking about the historical identity of his 3-year-old Presbyterian denomination (*Hanguk Kidokkyo Jangrohoe*), Kim relentlessly criticised not only the PCK's Orthodoxy, but also the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries, who had fostered it in Korea. Then, Kim (1957) even heightened his condemnation of the missionaries by saying that they were 'fundamentalist' and 'indoctrinating':

> The late 19th century American Presbyterian missionaries from Princeton Seminary and their kind came to Korea. Planting their Orthodoxy in Korea, although it was about to be defeated in America, and making a 'curtain of iron' for it, they had indoctrinated Korean Christians under their tutelage for the first fifty years. (p. 6)

Here it is plain that Kim's condemnation of the missionaries and their Orthodoxy was founded on Mackintosh's Barthian triumph frame against the 17th-century Orthodoxy, as Kim (1968) quoted him:

> It was the Western [*mainly American*] missionaries of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries who disseminated Christianity in Korea. Having brought the so-called 'Orthodox' [*jeongtong*] theology of the 17th century, that is, the pre-scientific age, they indoctrinated Korean Christians. They taught that their 'Orthodoxy' was in itself Christianity, and that anything else was no true Christianity but a heresy. Having forced it alone for more than half a century, the missionaries brought about nothing but the 'dark age' of the Middle Ages in Korea. (p. 33)

In this way, in many places, Kim (1964:32; 1965:24) regarded the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries as medieval pope-like dictators, who made their Korean Christians 'captive' to their absolute, Orthodox dogmas. Kim (1957) also insisted:

> What the Korean church leaders learned from their missionaries for the first 50 years was nothing but their blind submission to the missionaries' indoctrinating, Orthodox teachings. There was no freedom or critique; neither anything personal, nor scientific studies [*between the missionaries and their Korean students or coworkers*] … [*It was like*] a dark age in which reason and conscience were trampled down. (p. 6)

Kim (1957:5) clearly assumed that the theology of the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries was by nature 'indoctrinating' and 'fundamentalist'. Their theology, nevertheless, was not exactly the 17th-century Reformed 'Orthodoxy', as Kim labelled, but the so-called Old Princeton theology emphasising the doctrine of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy, which, by nature, had a Biblicist – and, in a sense, fundamentalist – aspect. Whether the Old Princeton theology with a Biblicist orientation was significantly fundamentalist is a matter of controversy. But even if it was to some degree, it worked well in pre-modern Korea, where Confucian Biblicism (Neo-Confucianism) had been working well for centuries, as Hwang (2016) made it clear in his study of Korean Biblicism. This is why the missionaries pointedly stressed the doctrine of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy, even denying the modernist historical criticism of the 1930s and beyond. Still,

2.For a detailed description of the denominational conflict, see Conn (1967:175–182).

not seeing these positive aspects of the missionaries' Biblicist measures, Kim brutally condemned their Biblicism even as fundamentalist. Are his charges relevant? There is surely much more evidence against them than for them. The relationship between the American missionaries and their Korean co-workers and Christians was never as bad as Kim assumes. Numerous books and articles written by the missionaries or Koreans (Hwang 2014) reveal that the relationship between the two was wholehearted, reciprocal and democratic.

Jong-Sung Rhee

Dr Jong-Sung Rhee (1922–2011) went almost the same way as Chai-Choon Kim: getting to know Karl Barth and his profound influence in Japan, deepening his knowledge of Barth in the USA and disregarding the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries and their Old Princeton theology from his Barthian standpoint.

As the most influential theologian of the PCK from the 1960s to the 1990s, Rhee exerted an immeasurable influence in leading the next generations to depreciate the missionaries, on the one hand, and to promote Barthian theology, on the other hand. Through their combined influence, Kim and Rhee succeeded in replacing the Reformed Orthodoxy (Old Princeton theology) of the missionaries by a new, Barthian theology. Rhee seems to be considerably more sophisticated and informed than Chai-Choon Kim. Although they were theological rivals, having been the top leaders of the two competing liberalist Korean Presbyterian denominations, Rhee and Kim had a common, deeply embedded presupposition, that is, the Barthian triumph frame, resulting in the far-reaching depreciation of the missionaries.

Because Rhee and Kim were critically influenced by the Barthian predominance in Japan, we will examine it shortly. A Japanese theologian suggests that it was because of the Japanese Christians' guilty feeling about their religious involvement in the Shinto Shrine worships. In Japan before and after the Second World War, Christians were forced to participate in the Shinto Shrine worships, which meant the union of church and state. So, as a Japanese theologian (ed. Furuya 1997:84) insists, they wanted a theology that could 'guarantee [*the church's*] independence [*from the state*], and the purity of Christian faith in a non-Christian milieu. This is why Karl Barth's theology was welcomed so enthusiastically'. As a result, as a Japanese theologian (Furuya 1964) attests, in Japan Barth was:

> [*A*] kind of theological pope … Unlike the situation in America, for instance, where Barth has been considered one of the top theologians of this century, in Japan Barth has been regarded as the ONLY theologian. (p. 262)

It is unfortunately this Barthian dominance in Japan that deeply affected Chai-Choon Kim and Jong-Sung Rhee, as well as Dr Sung-Bum Yun, another staunch Korean Methodist Barthian. However, Rhee and Kim seldom talked about the Barthian predominance in Japan. Rhee (1993:3) said that he learned especially about the German theologians, including Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Paul Tillich, in Japan in the late 1940s, as if Barth was one of those theologians, although he was not. This is very important because it was surely the Barthian supremacy in Japan that led both Rhee and Kim to accept Barth as the theological standard. It was then and there in Japan with Barth's theology that both Rhee and Kim were ready to disregard the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries, whose Old Princeton theology seemed to be overcome by Barth's theology. Unfortunately for both Rhee and Kim, in the 1960s many Japanese theologians (ed. Furuya 1997:124–134) became aware of their captivity to Barth's theology and tried to 'break out of the "Barthian captivity"'. But Kim and Rhee scarcely let Korean theologians know about that, continuing to hold them in captivity.

Jong-Sung Rhee does not directly condemn the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries, as Kim did, but he indirectly condemns their Reformed Orthodoxy (Old Princeton theology). However, in so doing, he succeeds in leading Korean Christians to devalue who and what the missionaries were for Korean churches. So here we pay attention to how Rhee condemns the missionaries' Orthodoxy. In denouncing the Orthodoxy, Rhee shows the following five distinct tendencies. Firstly, Rhee also profoundly takes advantage of the Barthian triumph frame that Kim did dearly. Secondly, he uses scholarly and theological sophistries. Thirdly, he overly criticises the missionaries' Calvinist theology as a corrupt form of John Calvin's. Fourthly, he condemns the Orthodoxy, even by identifying it with fundamentalism. Fifthly and lastly, he denounces the missionaries in terms of their seemingly inferior theological education for Koreans.

Firstly, as Kim did, Rhee deeply utilises the Barthian triumph frame against the Reformed Orthodoxy, which naturally leads one to depreciate who and what the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries were for the Korean churches. Although the PCK's largest schism between its liberalist and conservative wings was still going on in 1959, Rhee (1959:82) definitely took the liberalist position and published his first detailed theological article, which principally criticises the missionaries' Reformed Orthodoxy within the Barthian triumph frame.

Here Rhee (1959:68f. and 80) emphasises the problems of the Orthodoxy: firstly, it was an 'intellectualist Phariseesm focusing on the predetermined dogmas', and secondly, it was 'ineffective in dealing with every day's real problems'. Then Rhee (1959:81) proudly proclaims that 'it was [*Karl Barth's*] Neo-Orthodoxy that had restored the worth of the [*Reformed*] Orthodoxy, which has become like an antique'. So based on the Barthian triumph frame, Rhee emphasises that the Reformed Orthodoxy or Old Princeton theology, which the PCK's conservative wing kept along with the missionaries, is dogmatic in its negative sense, fundamentalist, anachronistic and ineffective.

Secondly, Rhee significantly uses scholarly and theological sophistries in condemning the missionaries' Reformed Orthodoxy. Although Chai-Choon Kim uses mainly H.R. Mackintosh's criticisms against the Orthodoxy, Rhee sophisticates them by adding seemingly scholarly sentences and references. For instance, Rhee (1979) says:

> While Calvin understood the doctrine of predestination and election under the circumstances of the doctrine of grace [*or salvation*], the [*post-Reformation*] Calvinists treated it in their theological prolegomena, tending to make it a fatalist one. (p. 245)

Whether this judgement is true or not is a matter of controversy, yet with those supposedly scholarly and sophisticated sentences, it surely causes one to doubt the position of the Reformed Orthodox Calvinists.

Thirdly, Rhee (1979) excessively criticises the so-called Calvinists in the Orthodox era over against John Calvin, resulting in condemnation of the former:

> While Calvin said that all doctrines are to be tested by the contents of the Bible, the Calvinists said that the doctrines rule over the interpretations of the Bible; While Calvin emphasized the working of the Holy Spirit, the Calvinists did not do it, and became intellectualist; While Calvin did a lively theology, the Calvinists did a speculative one (Hyper-Calvinism). (p. 51f.)

By blaming the Calvinists for being 'intellectualist' and 'speculative', Rhee means that the Calvinists and their followers – the missionaries and the conservative wing of the PCK – are all following a corrupt form of John Calvin's theology.

Fourthly, Rhee, of course, tends to differentiate between the Reformed Orthodoxy of the 17th and 18th centuries and the fundamentalism of modern America, yet in important cases, he also tends to identify the one with the other. Whilst talking about the fundamentalism of the late 19th century, Rhee (1959:69 and 80) calls it the '19th-century Orthodoxy', meaning that the one is interchangeable with the other. Rhee also often regards the Reformed Orthodoxy and the fundamentalism as the same category. For instance, Rhee (1972:38f.) arranges the four centuries of post-Reformation history on the basis of the Barthian triumph frame: the Reformed Orthodoxy of the 17th and 18th centuries was defeated by the liberalism of the 19th century, which was, in turn, overcome by the Neo-Orthodoxy of the 20th century. In this frame, fundamentalism by the turn of the 20th century is simply included in the Orthodoxy, resulting in the identification of the one with the other.

Fifthly and conclusively, Rhee (1975:27f., 1982) is often notoriously stringent in appreciating the missionaries' theological educational works for Korean Presbyterian leaders:

> The missionaries lectured with their awkward and insufficient Korean. In Biblical studies, they focused themselves on Biblicist interpretation, and in systematic theology, they relied on confessions of faith. So the theological education for Korean churches was like that in a low-level Bible study school. (p. 45)

So the missionaries, Rhee believes, provided Korean students not only with an elementary theological education but also with a Biblicist – fundamentalist – and Orthodox (Old Princeton) theology.

The missionaries' theology was principally Biblicist and Orthodox (Old Princetonian), as Rhee said. But what else could they teach? Like everyone else, they were also the product of their own era – the era of the Old Princeton theology by the turn of the 20th century. The Neo-Orthodoxy, which is the theological standard for Rhee, came much later. Rhee is absolutely biased in judging against the missionaries from his own era's standpoint. On the other hand, the missionaries' Biblicist theology worked superbly for Korean Protestant churches' growth through the so-called Nevius Methods (self-propagation, self-support and self-government).[3] In the meantime, it might have also become a cause for schisms, as Rhee believes. Yet it is clear that the churches' *Korean* leaders of the time, not the past missionaries, were ultimately responsible for the schisms. And ascribing the responsibility to the missionaries is an immature and uncritical way of doing theology.

Korean church historians' ethnic nationalist anti-missionary movement: Kyung-Bae Min and Man-Yul Lee

Although Chai-Choon Kim and Jong-Sung Rhee depreciated the American missionaries with their Barthian triumph frame, they influenced their junior theologians to criticise them for another, Korean ethnic nationalist reason. Korea's 1980s saw some progressive and nationalist Korean theologians who had begun to devalue who and what the Western missionaries did for Korean churches by emphasising native Korean Christians' works and suffering experiences from their Korean ethnic nationalist perspective. The theologians were, in fact, Christian representatives of those intelligentsias who were consciously or unconsciously concerned with or participated in the so-called democratisation movements in South Korea in the 1970s and subsequent decades. Having been sympathetic to the democratisation movements under the allegedly dictatorial leadership of President Chung-hee Park (1963–1979), they naturally had a strong tendency towards a spirited anti-establishment nationalism. Their nationalism, nevertheless, was 'ethnic nationalism', having 'a strong sense of oneness based on shared bloodline and ancestry', as Professor Gi-Wook Shin (2006:223), an authority in the field, says. The Korean ethnic nationalism (*minjokjuui* in Korean) was believed to be what unified decimated Koreans over against the Japanese, and it definitely includes a sturdy anti-Japanese orientation. So it was a rationale for oppressed and deprived Korean people (*minjung*) to fight against the Japanese as well as the ruling establishments. The Korean

3.Rhee (1970:108) himself acknowledges Korean Christians' high view of the Bible: 'The *sola scriptura* spirit of the missionaries made Korean Christians root their faith in the [*unchangeable*] Bible that it provided them with an invincible power. Whether they were under the Japanese oppression or confused by many sectarian movements, the Korean Presbyterian church was not so much agitated, because its faith and life were based on its deep Biblical knowledge'.

ethnic nationalism, however, was dormant during the post-liberation and Korean War era (1945–1953) and its following and early authoritative years of President Chung-hee Park (1954–1970), but it began to sprout in the 1970s, when democratisation movements against the president and the establishments took place amongst those anti-establishment intelligentsias.

It was in this context that some Korean progressive and nationalist theologians began to see Korean Christians as the ruled versus the Western missionaries as the rulers. And some even more progressive theologians began to popularise the now-famous Korean word *minjung* (ruled and deprived, low-class people or grassroots) theology. Thus, taking advantage of the anti-establishment, Korean ethnic nationalism, the progressive and nationalist theologians regarded Korean ethnic national (*minjok*) Christians as the unsung heroes, who, they believe, sacrificed themselves for Korea's liberation and modernisation, as some scholars (eds. H. I. Pai & R. Tangherlini 1998:160–164) made it clear. Here we examine two leading Korean church historians, Dr Kyung-Bae Min and Dr Man-Yul Lee, who clearly held that Korean ethnic nationalist philosophy, which caused them to view the missionaries very negatively.

Kyung-Bae Min

As one of the most influential Korean church historians, Dr Kyung-Bae Min (1934–) has been arguably the first who has succeeded in rewriting the Korean church history from a Korean ethnic nationalist (*minjok*) standpoint, as the subtitle of his *History of the Korean Christian Churches: History of the Formation of the Korean Ethnic Nationalistic Church* (2017) clearly shows. In this book, Min unhesitatingly reveals his Korean ethnic nationalist position over against L. George Paik, Korea's foremost church historian and political leader, who, being his teacher, viewed church history as a mission history. Dr Paik (1929) was, in fact, the first Korean church historian, who wrote *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832–1910*, in English, which was originally his PhD dissertation at Yale University in 1927. According to Min (2017), however, Paik wrote his book from the Western missionaries' standpoint, ending up depreciating what native Korean Christians did and experienced:

> This history of missions in Korea, as the author [*Dr Paik*] acknowledges, is but a history of missions of the European and American churches in Korea. Accordingly, the majority of important historical concerns and sources are taken from the [*Western*] churches and authorities that have sent their missionaries to Korea. And in terms of historical sources and emotional circumstances, consideration is seldom given to Korean Christians' confessions and testimonies. (p. 19)

Min (2017:9) almost cries out that there has been no history of the Korean *minjok* (ethnic nationalist) church, in which 'experiences and lives of native Korean Christians are alive and waving like circulating blood'. So he ambitiously wrote his *History of the Korean Christian Churches* from a Korean ethnic nationalist perspective. Min, therefore, does not pay much attention to the Western missionaries and their works compared with native Korean Christians. However, the coming and working of some thousands of Western missionaries in the remote and pre-modern Korea was apparently the most important factor in establishing Korean Christian churches. In Min's view, nonetheless, the missionaries were nothing but a secondary and supportive agent, the main role being played by individual native Korean Christians.

Firstly, Min (2017:172–183) stresses that some of the earliest native Korean Christians such as Su-Jeong Lee (Rijutei in Japanese) and Sang-Ryun Suh did accept the Christian faith on their own even before the Western missionaries came to Korea, making a good contribution to the subsequent missions done by the missionaries.

Min (2017:431–463) also gives detailed accounts of anecdotal happenings of such leaders of Korean Christian sectarian movements as Jang-Ho Kim, Sung-Ok Byun and Yong-Do Lee, who were all against the disciplinary measures of the mainline churches, eventually founding their own sectarian churches.[4] This is surely in stark contrast to the fact that he seldom gives detailed descriptions of a Western missionary or a Korean Christian, who worked for the establishment, education and care of mainline churches. In this way, Min seems to be almost obsessed with those secondary, accidental and anecdotal things, simply believing that those things were good, only because they were done by native Korean – innocent and humiliated – Christians.

Secondly, Min has a strong Korean ethnic nationalist, utopian and unrealistic view of the church that there must be one unified, Korean ethnic nationalist church, which might embrace all Protestant denominations and mission organisations. Although he treats the historic establishment of the PCK in 1907, he (Min 2017:316) deplores that since the PCK as a particular denomination had already been founded, 'the [*unified*] Korean ethnic nationalist church was given up'. The erection of a unified, Korean ethnic nationalist church in those turbulent and revolutionary years before and after Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 was neither possible nor necessary. On the one hand, the Western missionaries themselves belonged to their own diverse denominations with different confessions and theologies, and their Korean churches were also very different not only in size and maturity but also in theology. On the other hand, Korean Christians still had a strong tribalist and regional factionalism. In fact, Korea has been a resilient tribalist factionalism-ridden country for centuries.

But having been lost in that hollow idea of a unified ethnic nationalist church, Min does not take seriously the socio-political limitations and characteristics of Korean people as well as the missionaries. He also does not see the importance

4.'Chapter 18. The Beginnings of the Korean Churches' Sectarian Movements and Union Movements'. This is in stark contrast to Min's treatment of the first President Dr Syngman Rhee, who was surely one of the most important Korean Christians who ever lived. Min does not write even a page concerning President Syngman Rhee's heroic efforts in the nation building of Korea as an independent country.

and magnitude of the existing churches, whether Presbyterian or Methodist. For instance, the PCK had quite a miraculous beginning and development, as an international Presbyterian polity consisting of the Korean Presbyterian leaders and the Western Presbyterian missionaries. Furthermore, Min does not even mention the historic establishment of the Unified Korean Methodist Church in 1930, which was also a wonderful and glorious event in Korean modern history. In this regard, Min's (2017:319) ethnic nationalist defect is clearly shown when he stresses only some minor flaws of the missionaries, whilst ignoring their great achievements of establishing, growing and caring for local churches, schools and hospitals.

Thirdly, Min (2017) devotes around half of his book to elaborate the Korean Christians' external responses to the Japanese colonialists and to social changes (especially chapters 15–19), eventually failing to see what the Korean Christians did inwardly in cooperation with their Western missionaries. Min (2017:233–256 and 316–319) surely praises Korean Christians' patriotic works rather than their religious ones, emphasising that the Korean Christians, who were innocent and powerless sufferers, fought resiliently against the evil, imperialist Japanese, although the missionaries were depoliticising Korean Christians to discourage their involvement in any political event. He thinks that what is at issue is nothing but Korean Christians' responses (persecution, on the one hand, and resistance, on the other hand) to the Japanese. In so doing, however, he fails to pay enough attention to the fact that the Korean Christians did something positive inwardly for their churches with and without their Western missionaries, a tragic result of a Korean ethnic nationalist theological position. Of course, Min (2017:419) also acknowledges the great and sacrificial works of the Western missionaries in a sense, yet he scarcely offers how they were done. Interestingly enough, he never talks about Koreans' responsibilities in losing their national sovereignty by the Japanese and in their brutal, factional and tribal conflicts in the political or ecclesiastical fields. For him, the culprits were too simply the Japanese or the foreign missionaries, not Koreans themselves.

Man-Yul Lee

Man-Yul Lee (1938–) has gone quite further than Kyung-Bae Min: whilst repeating anecdotal happenings of some courageous Korean Christians, he not only consciously devaluates what the missionaries did even in cooperation with their Korean co-workers but also has a definite tendency to highlight the Korean ethnic nationalism over against the Christian faith. Like Min, Lee (2014) also criticises Dr L. George Paik's *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832–1910*, regarding it as a foreign missionary-centred history of Korean Protestant churches:

> The historical studies like Paik's are based mainly on foreign sources, their historical standpoint being that of the missionaries or that of their mother churches in the West. So those studies naturally lack the responses of Korean Christians in the mission field. (p. 11)

Already having had this Korean ethnic nationalism from the 1980s, Lee (2003) even asserts that it was native Korean Christians who took the lead in bringing Christianity to Korea:

> It was pioneering Koreans that brought Christianity into Korea in the 1880s, but in other countries, it was the foreign missionaries that took the initiative. Christianity came to the vicinities of the Korean peninsula, that is, Manchuria and Japan, where the Bible was translated into Korean, some Koreans voluntarily accepting Christianity, and bringing the Korean Bible into Korea, and hence causing conversions to Christianity. Many other countries first accepted the foreign missionaries, who in turn did mission works, but in the case of Korea, it was Koreans themselves that accepted and spread Christianity. (p. 115)

According to Lee (2014:110), it was not only those early pioneering Korean Christians living in Manchuria and Japan but also the Korean colporteurs (or Gospel sellers) who played a decisive role in founding the Korean Protestant churches: 'Korean churches were established and grew up by the distribution of the Korean Bible. This shows the importance of the colporteurs who did it'. As a matter fact, the colporteurs (about 100 persons every year from the late 1890s to the 1930s) did a great job, not merely by selling Korean Bibles and tracts, but sometimes by teaching about them. Nevertheless, their role remained subordinate not merely to the missionaries, but, more importantly, to the whole Bible study system, which worked cooperatively by both the missionaries and their Korean co-workers according to the Nevius Methods. What was at issue was not just Korean colporteurs or even pastors, but the system itself, which worked extraordinarily under the leadership of the missionaries and their Korean co-workers, and which hence caused the Korean churches to grow explosively. Still, Lee persistently ignores the whole Bible study system, ending up stressing only secondary works done by the colporteurs.

What Lee says, however, is a distortion of the facts. Although they did quite significant works for the Korean churches, the pioneering earliest Korean Christians in foreign lands as well as the Korean colporteurs needed the missionaries to make their works effective through a nation-wide system. If those Korean Christians were left alone without any cooperation with the missionaries, they might not have become so fruitful, having no organisation and discipline at all. Lee (2014), however, does not see the cooperative aspects of both the Korean Christians and the missionaries, just emphasising the side of the Koreans, simply believing that they were good, innocent sufferers and *minjung* (oppressed low-class people):

> The colporteurs were role models for Christians, because they were proud fathers of faith, who journeyed bearing the yoke of the Gospel on their backs. They also tried to participate in the national suffering under the Japanese colonial rule as well in the *minjung*'s pains which were caused by the imperialist invasions. (p. 200)

Seeing almost everything in Korean church history from his Korean ethnic nationalism, he is insisting that ethnic Koreans are innocent and good, having fallen victim to imperial and

oppressive foreign powers, including the Japanese as well as the Western missionaries.

Moreover, Lee thinks that the Christian faith for Koreans is ultimately an instrument for their Korean ethnic nationalism, which, he thinks, should be the ethical and theological standard for Korean Christians.

Whilst speaking of a short history of Korean Christians, Lee (2003:118–144) stresses that what Korean Christians mainly did were their Korean ethnic nationalist, anti-establishment activities like anti-Japanese independence or democratisation movements. It is true that Korean Protestants before and after the liberation from Japanese colonial rule actually engaged in those anti-establishment activities, but these were still accidental and sporadic. Lee, however, does not see that what is important is not merely what Korean Christians did outwardly for some socio-political purposes, but, much more significantly, what they did inwardly within their churches. The Korean Protestant churches were, in fact, oases for desperate, poor and uneducated Koreans, not only because the churches performed some good nationalist or charity works, but, more decisively, because the churches themselves were the best loci, where education, modernisation and democracy were realised and provided under the leadership of the Western missionaries as rare experts in pre-modern Korea. However, Lee rarely sees these aspects, perhaps because he is too obsessed with his Korean ethnic nationalist ideology.

Concluding remarks

We have examined two different positions of Korean theologians' anti-missionary sentiment: the theological, Barthian-based one and the Korean ethnic nationalist one. Representing the former, Chai-Choon Kim and Jong-Sung Rhee condemned the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries for their Reformed Orthodoxy, or Biblicist, Old Princeton theology. They presumed that this theology was the primary culprit of the PCK's conflicts and schisms. Then, to condemn the Old Princeton theology of the missionaries and Dr Hyung-nong Park, the archrival of both Kim and Rhee, as well as to justify their own liberalist theology, Kim and Rhee took advantage of the Barthian triumph frame that the Orthodoxy and its subsequent Old Princeton theology were overcome by the Barthian Neo-Orthodoxy, even regarding it as a universal and irreversible law. Although Kim condemned the missionaries as dictatorial and indoctrinating, Rhee regarded them as fundamentalist, a tragic evaluation of those who were, in fact, their ecclesiastical and theological fathers and mothers. As the co-founders and co-builders of the Korean Presbyterian churches, the missionaries and their works encompassed more than half of the whole Korean Protestant history. What will remain if we eliminate them on the basis of what Kim and Rhee have said? Kim and Rhee have deprived Korean Christians of their own rich ecclesiastical and theological history, which was created by the missionaries.

The Barthian triumph frame, which was the unshakable foundation of both Kim and Rhee, has recently been proved by Richard Muller and others to be unfounded and biased. The frame emphasises the discontinuity between John Calvin and his Orthodox successors or the so-called 'Calvinists', overly simplifying both the former and the latter. Most of all, denying the concept of 'Calvin against the Calvinists', Muller (2003) says:

> Calvin was not the sole arbiter of Reformed confessional identity in his own lifetime – and he ought not to be arbitrarily selected as the arbiter of what was Reformed in the generations following his death. (p. 8)

Therefore, provided that the Barthian frame itself is an unfounded and false thesis, the concerned assertions of Kim and Rhee must not be accepted.

Min and Lee largely succeeded in presenting their ethnic Korean nationalist view of Korean church history, but in so doing, they made some profound mistakes. Firstly, their Korean ethnic nationalism certainly includes a martyr complex or a victim mentality, as Min and Lee are crying out that Koreans were innocent, falling victim to the imperialists, who were, in fact, not only the Japanese but the foreign missionaries. Whether this kind of ethnic nationalist crying out is true, it attracted a large following, simply because it appeals emotionally to the same ethnic Koreans of whom the majority was, in fact, victims under Japanese colonial rule. The Korean ethnic nationalist theology, therefore, has been very influential, and many Korean theologians and pastors have adopted it, naturally coming to regard the missionaries, too, as others, if not imperialists, like the Japanese.

Secondly, Min and Lee are surely against the law of cause and effect. It is undeniable that the Western missionaries in Korea were certainly the principal agents in establishing some central churches and organisations from which local churches were planted and guided. Here it is natural, necessary and never a shameful thing for Korean Christians to be followers and helpers of the missionaries. Both Min and Lee, however, seem to feel shame for Korean Christians being helpers, and they try hard to argue that they, not the missionaries, were the leading agents. The Korean Catholic and Protestant churches, as a matter of fact, were essentially the churches that were missionised by Western Catholic and Protestant missionaries. All Korean Christians in those early days, with no exception, had direct or indirect help and guidance from the missionaries and their mother churches in the West. Nay, the powerful and living presence of historical Christianity in the West itself was the source of hope and courage for all non-Western Christians, particularly in that unstable era.

Surely, the past Western missionaries tended to have what Bonnie Sue Lewis (2004) calls 'white missionary privilege', which has an imperialist element. And we may criticise it, especially because we are living in a post-colonial, 'post-missionary' era, as Sherron Kay George (2002) says. Yet criticising the past Western missionaries is one thing, and acknowledging and succeeding what they were is another, for their faith and works are the cornerstones on which their churches have stood, as Kenneth H. Vines (2019) suggests.

Acknowledging who and what the Western missionaries were in Korea is also critically important to understand the theological nature of Korean Protestant churches. For example, to figure out the theology of the Korean Presbyterian churches, one must understand the theology of the American Presbyterian Korea missionaries, simply because it was they who laid the churches' ecclesiastical and theological foundation. Nevertheless, Min and Lee lead us to fix our attention to what native Korean Christians did externally for socio-political purposes, resulting in indifference towards the missionaries.

Thirdly, Min and Lee have no deep understanding of what a church is. What they both want to do primarily in their writings is present anecdotal narratives of what some brave Korean Christians did without the weighty help of the foreign missionaries. Min and Lee seldom pay attention to the fact that Korean Protestant churches are the result of cooperation between the missionaries and their Korean converts. In fact, the PCK, the single largest Protestant denomination in Korea, was the cooperative organisation of four different Western Presbyterian missionaries (American Presbyterian North and South, Canadian and Australian) and Korean Presbyterians. Moreover, the Church as a cooperative organisation planted and organised numerous local Korean Presbyterian churches and led them to grow, even disciplining them sometimes. Min and Lee, however, seldom consider these critical roles of the church as an organisation: they seem to think that Korean Protestant Christians naturally and without any ecclesiastical polity and discipline came to form a faith community only in the name of their indefinite, ethnic nationalism.

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I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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