

# Liberation and Inculturation: Two Streams of Doing Theology with Asian Resources

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*The representatives from Korea to the Inter-Religio meeting in Jakarta (September, 1987) presented papers dealing with the current state of theological method and the history of attempts at indigenizing theological reflection. The two papers, prepared from a Catholic and a Protestant standpoint respectively, are reproduced in the following pages.*

## INTRODUCTION

Liberation theology and efforts at inculturation seem to form two streams of thought sprung from the same reality during the past twenty years of the history of the Catholic church in South Korea. The former deals mainly with the social and economic life of the people, while the latter concentrates on the religious and spiritual aspect. Since the human person or community is shaped by both aspects, and since inculturation” in its broad sense encompasses both, I will include both streams in this report on the inculturation of theology. This latter term itself is variously understood by different people, but here I will confine myself to a more concrete methodological explanation: when someone is doing theology with Asian resources, we will call what is done Asian theology.

When we look back on the 200 year history of the Catholic church in Korea, we see that it is during the first sixty years of its foundation that Asian resources were used creatively. First of all, we have two poems (one on the Ten Commandments, the other on divine worship) presumably written by the founding fathers of the church, Chōng Yak-Chōn 丁若銓 and Yi Pyok 葉蘖 in 1779, even before their baptism. Since the authorship and dating of these poems have not yet been clearly established, we cannot accept them as the earliest material. Still, it is clear that these and other founding Confucian scholars were deeply involved in academic discussions as well as spiritual probing for several years (1779–1784) and voluntarily became “Confucian-Christians.” From this Confucian-Christian milieu we have the first Korean catechism, *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* 主教要旨, written by Chōng Yak-Chōng 丁若銓 around 1795, and a long apologetic letter addressed to the prime minister composed by Chong Ha-Sang 丁夏祥 in 1839. These two theological writings by two martyrs (who incidentally happen to be father and son and to come from the well known

scholarly Chong family) are good examples of how native resources were used in doing theological activity in this early period.

During the following 120 years the church was led by the missionaries from France whose training reflected the strict Catholic orthodoxy of the time. The Western theological mold, therefore, was accepted with minor adaptations. From the middle of nineteenth to the early twentieth century, we have about 186 long popular poems written to express and encourage a faith under persecution. But these were mostly apologetic, portraying life as a military warfare, and took a negative attitude toward native values. The two decades since the Second Vatican Council have been a time for rethinking, reorienting, and accumulating experiences for the future. As yet no representative Korean theology has emerged from the Catholic community. We have only twenty years of praxis for liberation and some attempted comparative studies between Asian traditions and Christianity.

Accordingly, I propose to discuss the first sixty years and the last twenty years of Korean church history. For the first sixty years, I will consider the two texts referred to above, *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* and the "Letter to the Prime Minister." For the latter period, I will analyze a bimonthly journal published by the Catholic Conference of Korea since 1967, *Pastoral Theology* 司牧, because it has dealt with the theme of inculturation most closely for the past two decades. In order to perceive the current state of affairs more objectively, I sent a questionnaire in July of this year to Catholic seminaries, catechetical centers, Catholic universities, and major religious congregations of both men and women. By way of conclusion, therefore, I will try to interpret the 10 items of the questionnaire in order to get a better appreciation of the present situation of theological education, the available personnel, and the aspirations and fears currently surrounding talk of an "Asian theology."

Before setting out, I should like to explain that the reason I have chosen to look closely at the first years of the Korean church is not just that they are of historical importance. This foundational period, I believe, can offer us inspiration and guiding principles true to the spirit of the gospel, since those early Christians were deeply immersed in both traditional thought and the present realities of their time. This fact seems to me to get to the heart of inculturation and to point in the direction we must take in our efforts to do theology with our own resources, traditional and contemporary.

#### CREATIVE THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS

*The Essence of the Catholic Teaching* (主教要旨) is the first catechism written in simple Korean characters, the means of communication among the common people at that time, in order to spread the Christian faith to as many people as possible. In this sense it is not only a private theological activity but truly a representative work of the first Christian generation of the late eighteenth century. Huang Sa-Young 黃嗣永 wrote in his famous letter to the bishop of Peking:

Chōng Yak-Chōng wrote two volumes of *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* by drawing from various books on Catholicism from China and adding his own explanation. It is so clear and easy to read that even unlearned women and children can understand it without any doubts or ambiguities. Even Father [ 周文謨 ] praised it and used it.<sup>1</sup>

1 *The Silk Letter of Huang Sa-Young*, Chong-um-sa, p.47. The translation is my own.

The first volume of the Catechism explains the existence of God and the divine attributes; it rejects the errors of NeoConfucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and shamanistic practices; finally it portrays in detail the state of heaven and hell as the retribution for life on earth. The general structure and purpose of the first volume is quite similar to Matteo Ricci's *The True Meaning of God*. But the whole tone is much more popular, realistic, and without any direct quotations from the Confucian classics. Instead Chōng Yak-Chōng explains the mystery of the trinity and emphasizes the parenthood of God for all humanity:

Someone asked, "I can understand that the first man has originated from God, but now everyone is born from parents and does not need God."

I answered, "If the first man had not originated from God, where could the present human race have sprung from? Parents by themselves cannot give life to their children. When a craftsman makes a vessels, he is free to make it or not. He can either make it big or small, because he can make it as he wishes. But with parents, it is different. They want a son and give birth to a daughter; all parents like to have good-looking children, but they have no control over the matter. It is clear, therefore, that bestowing life is not in the power of man but is the "transformation" 造化 of God. The craftsman knows the principle of making vessels, but parents do not know it. . . It is rather the mysterious wisdom of God that provides all.<sup>2</sup>

This explanation can be understood at two different levels. First, we can take the story at face value and see the difference between the works of a craftsman and a parent, recognizing the providence of God as the first cause of human life. Based on the true parenthood of God it is then said that loyalty to parents or the king should be subservient to loyalty to God. The Christian demand for absolute loyalty to God was something quite strange and new in the East Asian cultural milieu.

We can also read the story from the Taoist background suggested by technical terms "transformation" and "craftsman." We are not certain whether Chong Yak-Chōng himself was aware of this, but since he was immersed in Taoist teachings before his conversion to Christianity, we may at least presume the workings of an unconscious inculturation.

The term "transformation" 造化 was widely used among Koreans, but it first appeared in Chuang-tzu 莊子 as the work of Tao in this phenomenal world of change. In chapter 6 of his *Inner Chapters*, Chuang Tzu even calls Tao the "Transformer 造化者, the "Maker" 造物者, or the "Great Craftsman" 大冶. The Taoists longed to be free, entrusting themselves to the Great Craftsman who makes the myriad things at will, namely to the transforming power of Tao. In *The Essence of Catholic Teaching*, the Craftsman, who knows the principle and works freely, is compared indirectly to God, and human life is explained as the transforming work of this mysterious Craftsman.

Not only the writer, but the readers of this catechism may also have been unconscious of the Taoist background in the story. Taoist thought had been ingrained for almost two thousand years, so that its terminology and modes of thought could have

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2 The Essence of Catholic Teaching, reprinted in *Martyrs and Witnesses* (in Korean), ed. by the Institute of Korean Church History (1982), pp. 12-13; translation mine.

been accepted naturally. In the same catechism, the notion of the Taoist pantheon is critically rejected, leading us to conclude that whatever Chōng Yak-Chōng's attitude to Taoism, it must have been dialectical. On the one hand, he accepts Taoist thought and terms in his theological activity, while on the other, he criticizes its erroneous concept of God. Not only Taoism but Buddhism also comes in for criticism. His basic stand is that Christianity should "supplement Confucianism and replace Buddhism," a position that began with Matteo Ricci and has continued in East Asia until the early part of this century.

Chōng Yak-Chōng has the same dialectical attitude toward shamanistic folk beliefs:

Once we know that there is only one Master, if we then offer sacrifices to various deities such as princely ghosts, generals, Indra, protectors of the castle, etc., and worship them and pray to them for blessings, isn't it like serving two kings? Human life and death, fortunes and misfortunes, all belong to God. How can other deities bestow blessings or send calamities at will?<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting that Chōng Yak-Chōng combines Christian faith in the absolute power of God with Confucian loyalty to a king. Faith in the Highest God is not something new in Korea—it is well known from the myths and ritual sacrifices to Heaven—but exclusive faith in God alone *was* something new, radically new. Chōng Yak-Chōng succeeded in making it acceptable to his fellow Koreans in the eighteenth by comparing it to serving a single master. While he rejected polytheistic practices, he drew on popular beliefs to prove the immortality of the soul:

In the world, once a man dies, his relatives go out and call back his soul. But if they believe that the soul also disappears after the death, how can they call the soul back? Even though the soul has a destined place and so cannot come back of its own will, people call the soul because the soul exists. Moreover everyone has a longing to live forever because the soul is immortal.<sup>4</sup>

The popular practice of "calling the soul back" 招魂 had been incorporated into the Confucian ritual for the dead. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chōng Yak-Chōng uses this example. But originally it was closely related with shamanistic rites as we know them from *Songs of the South* 楚辭 as well as from the present practices of shamans in Korea. It should be also noted that while he used the practice, he also added the Christian note: that every soul has a destined place and is not free to come back. In fact, the doctrine of the soul has been one of the most heated points of controversy between Confucian and West-em scholars. The focus of the controversy was not on the existence of the soul itself, but on its immortality and eternal reward. Chōng Yak-Chōng aptly defends the Christian understanding of the soul by illustrating the human longing for eternity.

Volume two of *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* opens with the question of original sin, progresses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and concludes with the doctrine of the final judgment. It is a standard catechism, but Chong's explanations and colorful commentaries from Korean customs give it a distinct flavor all its own.

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3 *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* p. 27.

4 *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* p. 35.

The final few pages, which contain his answers to questions brought to him no doubt grew out of his own experience as a catechist and leader of the early church.

It is interesting to note that God is repeatedly and consistently presented as “parents” 父母 :

God’s love for us is like the love of parents for their children. . . . God first made the heavens to cover, the earth to hold, the sun and moon to give light, the five kinds of grains and hundred fruits to nourish; and then God made humanity (33).

God gave the power to bear a child to the couple, so that they would have millions of descendants and all of humanity would love each other as brothers and sisters from one set of parents (34).

God is not referred to as “Father,” as we find in the bible. Chōng Yak-Chōng always refers to God as “Parents” or “Great Parents” 大父母. The father alone would probably not have been enough for the typical Asian understanding of God, but the image of a God who encompassing both fatherhood and motherhood continued through the popular poetry of the nineteenth century.

The typical expressions of heaven and earth, sun and moon, five grains and hundred fruits all come from the traditional world view of East Asia. And his final comment, that since all men and women come from the same set of parents we should love one another, has an East Asian background but represents a thoroughly christianized idea. The equality of human beings was something Chōng Yak-Chōng himself as well as the early church believed in and practiced. In fact, it was in these terms that the tiny Catholic community was conceived as a socially challenging and even dangerous group in the class society of Yi dynasty.

Thus the first Korean catechism written by a converted Confucian scholar who was also well versed in Taoist thought was rooted in Confucian, Taoist, and popular religious thought patterns and expressions of the time. At the same time, it offered a creative new outlook on the world, activated by the yeast of the Christian gospel. If the goal of theological activity is to establish such a new perspective, Chong Yak-Chōng may rightly be called the first theologian in the Korean church.

The “Letter to the Prime Minister” is an eloquent and apologetic theological treatise composed in the form of a letter that Chong Ha-Sang presented to a minister, Yi Ji-Yon 李止淵 in 1839, shortly before he was martyred. Since this letter was intended for the Confucian intellectuals and officials, it was composed in Chinese with quotations from the Confucian classics. With *The Essence of Catholic Teaching*, it shares the principle of “supplementing Confucianism and rejecting Buddhism,” and also conceives of God as the “Great Parents.” In addition, the letter shows a clear dialectic relationship between Confucianism and Christianity.

First, Chong Ha-Sang affirms that Christian ethical teaching is basically the same as the Confucian ethics of benevolence, rightness, propriety, and knowledge of good and evil, as are its practices of filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, and faithfulness. In explaining the Ten Commandments of Christianity, he insists that Christianity goes beyond Confucianism because it demands internal purity:

Human beings cannot violate any of these commandments; we not only forbid sinful actions but even sins in one's thoughts and heart. . . The commands of God govern both outward and inward matters.<sup>5</sup>

Even though he points to the thoroughness of Christian ethics, he emphasizes that Christianity agrees with Confucianism in the conviction that moral capacity is the endowment of heaven. In the same vein, therefore, he explains the character of the soul in terms of human nature 性 instead of primal material 氣. As he writes:

What the Doctrine of the Mean refers to in the statement, "What Heaven commanded is called nature," is this soul. When a baby is conceived in the womb of its mother, this soul is bestowed. How is it possible for such a mysterious substance to perish like other plants and animals?<sup>6</sup>

Chōng Ha-Sang is here accepting the orthodox Confucian teaching that because human nature has come from Heaven all men are moral, but he goes further to claim that the immortality of the soul is based on the mysterious character of the mortal soul. Because he is operating from a different frame of thought (immortal soul and perishable body, nature which is common to all humanity and eternal material 氣 which distinguishes individuals), his explanation does not fit perfectly. Still, the idea of equating human nature with the soul is ingenious in that it raises the status of the soul to the level of principle 理. How unfortunate that a creative thinker like he should have been executed at the age of 45!

The negative relationship between Confucianism and Christianity is sharply illustrated in the appendix to the "Letter to the Prime Minister." It takes up the question of ancestral rites and the wooden tablets. Chong Ha-Sang's logic in defense of the Catholic teaching of the time is extremely rational and shows a very literal interpretation of the rituals. He explains the reasons why the Catholics refuse to practice ancestral rites and keep the tablets:

Food is something for the body, but not even a loyal son will offer good food to sleeping parents. . . . How can we honor as our father and mother a piece of wood that has been made by a craftsman?"<sup>7</sup>

This obviously ignores the symbolic significance of any religious ritual, but at the same times needs to be understood within the context of the early Korean church, which had inherited the results of the rites controversy from China. The underlying force of Chong Ha-Sang's attitude can be read at the end of his letter: "Due to this refusal [of ancestral rites] I am willing to risk censure by the Confucian literati rather than commit a sin within the holy church of God."

We have discussed *The Essence of Catholic Teaching* and the "Letter to the Prime Minister" as two representative theological works stemming from the first 60 years of the Korean church. The official principle at work was to seek harmony with Confucianism while rejecting Buddhism; but looking more closely we find that the relationship of Christianity with all the traditional religions was dialectic. On the one hand, Confucian faith in the dictates of heaven and the endowment of a moral sense, the Taoist idea of transformation, the shamanistic practice of calling back the soul

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5 "Letter to the Prime Minister," *Martyrs and Witnesses*, pp. 126-127.

6 "Letter to the Prime Minister," pp. 127-28.

7 "Letter to the Prime Minister," p. 135.

and its appeal to healing power were all accepted in a most natural way. On the other hand, Confucian rites and the absolutization of the authority of the father and the king, Taoist faith in the immortals, and shamanistic polytheism and rituals were strongly rejected. Acceptance and rejection were both fruits of Christian experience and reflection for Chōng Yak-Chōng and Chōng Ha-Sang, who were well acquainted with their cultural tradition and actively participated in the life of people of their time.

When we compare this fact with the present situation of the Korean church, we are faced with the basic fact that today's Christians feel ignorant of their cultural heritage. What consoles us is the fact that part of Christian church has been actively involved in the life struggle of people, and the hope that these past twenty years of accumulated experience may become a stimulus for us to dig more deeply into our spiritual heritage as well.

#### TWENTY YEARS OF THE JOURNAL OF PASTORAL THEOLOGY

A review of the articles in *Pastoral Theology* that have used Asian materials for theological reflection suggests a division into two categories. First are pieces dealing with labor problems, farmers problems, human rights issues, and theoretical writings on liberation theology to provide these activities with a backing within the church. Second are those dealing with Korean culture and East Asian religious thought in relation to Christianity. In this latter we find group discussions, symposia, and individual comparative studies.

The Korean church began to engage itself actively in social and economic problems from 1967 when the Bishops' Conference issued its first statement on the labor issue. With the arrest of Bishop Ji in 1974, Catholic consciousness on problems of human rights was heightened. It was around this time that theological reflection began to take shape. In July of 1972 *Pastoral Theology* ran a special issue on "Social Justice and the Church," symbolic of this new awareness within the Catholic church. In November of 1973 the journal published an article by Father Park Sang-Rae on "The Political Involvement of the Church and Pluralistic Society." At the end of the article he made the suggestion:

In order to maintain objectivity and constant political choice, we need a research institute that will analyze political events scientifically, make materials available, and publish the results of their research.

Such an institute was not officially set up, but an Association of Catholic Priests for Social Justice was formed spontaneously in September of the following year. The organization has had to face complex problems and yet has contributed an important service to the more official Peace and Justice Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

In its January, 1975 issue, *Pastoral Theology* featured a special issue on "Social Participation by the Church," introducing the documents on human rights approved by the Synod of Bishops. In November it devoted an entire issue to "The Church and the Problems Facing Farming Villages." In May of 1979, the statements of the Latin American Bishops were published; in 1986 it published a series of articles on liberation theology by the Dutch theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx. This was followed in July by a special issue on "Freedom and Liberation of the Christians," which included

articles on the history of liberation theology and the themes of salvation and faith from the perspective of liberation theology.

Looking over this range of materials, what kind of a picture do we get of what may be called a “liberation theology” of the Korean Catholic church? First of all, it is an active movement of participation in human sufferings caused by injustice. Even when the theoretical works by Latin American or European theologians were introduced, this was done in order to clarify and ground the prophetic activity of the church in social affairs. Unlike our counterpart in the Protestant theological community, there was no clear theological attempt to formulate a new theology on the basis of the political reality of Korea. Even the rather popular name “*Min-Jung* (民衆) Theology,” coined by some Protestant theologians, has not been picked up in the Catholic circle. It may be that Catholic theologians working in this line are waiting for a more opportune moment; or it may be that they feel that Korean efforts for liberation in fact are similar enough in theory to be included in what is broadly understood to constitute “liberation theology.”

In a paper entitled “History and Witness of the Association of Catholic Priests for Social Justice” delivered at the April 1987 monthly colloquium of the Research Institute of Religion and Theology at Sogang University, Father Ham Sye-Ung 咸世雄 put it this way:

In the course of our activities we rediscovered the church within society; through our voluntary association we have gained a new awareness of the proud history of our church and have made the challenge of the gospel concrete. We have to confess, however, that we are lacking in the requisite efforts for theological reflection in its historical and contemporary aspects (20).

His appraisal seems to be accurate. Over the last twenty years, social participation has had a witness value and this experience can become a resource for theological activity. Judging from traditional standards, it has not reached the point of theological systematization, but I should like to present the writings of Father Chōng Ho-Kyong as a sign of hope for the future.

Father Chōng Ho-Kyong has been the director of Catholic Farmers’ Movement since its inception in 1966. Since 1980 he has been writing from his experience of sharing life’s sorrows and joys and partaking in the farmers’ struggle for human rights. We may focus attention on two of his writings in particular, a book entitled *Community of Sharing and Serving* (1984) and an essay on “Movement for a Life Community” (1986). In the introduction to the former, he notes that it is his aim to formulate an indigenous farmers’ theology:

“I ardently desire that the basis for indigenous farmers’ theology will be formed along with the beginning of farmers’ mission which works for the salvation of farmers in this land.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to form a farmers’ theology and in order for the church to be inculturated, Father Chong feels that we have to form communities of mutual trust in which people are free to express themselves honestly. He is convinced that the present recovery of humanity is much more important than the scholarly search for the roots of

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8 *Community of Sharing and Serving: Pastoral Theology for Farmers* (in Korean; Benedictine Press, 1984), p. 17; my translation.

our cultural tradition. Taking Jesus as the living example of pastoral care for people, he presents “a new interpretation of *kut*”<sup>9</sup> and “seeing the little God” in human beings.

“A new interpretation of *Kut*” is also called the “*Kut-pan* of Jesus,” that is, an environment in which healing and liberation are experienced as the saving power of Jesus:

Wherever Jesus made a place for *Kut*, many miracles of healing and liberation took place. How can this be? . . . First of all, he pierced through the hearts of people and felt with them their sorrows, their mourning, their deep wounds. It is because he was able so clearly to know the hearts of others that healing was possible. When we read our neighbor’s hearts correctly, healing takes place. Listen attentively to your neighbor’s stories, for we know that in the process of listening, a healing is going on. The reason is that the hidden power of God is at work within each of us.<sup>10</sup>

Father Chong calls this power of God the “image of God” or the “little God” within man. The expression “little God” reminds of us of a classical people’s movement of the nineteenth century known as “Eastern Learning” (東學). The movement grew out of the idea that ultimately heaven is in human beings, and that it is when we care for human beings that we truly serve God. This image, as well as the *Kut-pan* of Jesus, are good examples of how Father Chōng has taken the people’s ideas and practices and given a new Christian meaning to them.

If the basic images in *Community of Sharing and Serving* are folk oriented, his more recent article, “Movement for a Life Community” adds Buddhist stories and the theory of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>11</sup> He uses the well-known ten oxherding pictures to illustrate the point that the true value of liberation theology is that it comes from the realities of peoples’ movements and is not just the theoretical construct of intellectuals.

The Zen Buddhists divide the story of “The Ox and his Herdsman” into three stages. At the first stage, one communicates with ideas and logic; in the second stage, only words transcending logic (*kōan*) are used; in the third stage, even the *kōan* have to be let go of so that only silence remains. In other words, life is the source of words, and words are the source of logical thinking. We value the outcome, but the result is only a sign of the inexpressible. Father Chong closes the essay with another familiar Buddhist expression: “My story, too, is only a finger pointing at the moon.”<sup>12</sup>

He uses the theory of *yin-yang* (陽易), which belongs to the common inheritance of all schools of East Asia, at a critical moment to refer to his “life community” as “a *yin* movement.” According to Father Chōng, *yang* symbolizes the possessive and dominant power, while *yin* signifies the flexible and sharing life, the way of the common people. Up to now the *yang* principle has been too strong, which is why he wishes to stress the *yin* so that the balance might be restored and each recover its rightful place:

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9 Kut is the common noun for the shamanistic rituals in which the Shaman dances and goes into an oracles to the people, which usually have healing functions, both physical and psychological. But *kut-pan*, literally the place where the ritual takes place, has a wider meaning. It signifies any festive mood or party in which everyone participates and celebrates.

10 Community of Sharing and Serving, p. 93.

11 This article was first published in *Community Culture* 3 (1986), and was revised for presentation in March 28, 1987, at the monthly colloquium of the Research Institute for Religion and Theology, Sogang University.

12 “Movement for a Life Community,” pp. 111, 132.

The *yin* movement that I am talking about aims to provide the original place, the original image, the original function of *yin*, so that everything will find the way to be liberated from the disfigured state of the present which is oppressed by the power of *yang*. This way is not for conflict or dualism but for unification and harmony.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship of *yin* and *yang* is the same here as it is in the Chinese classic, *I ching* (易經). *Yin* and *yang* represent respectively the unpropitious time when the small man prospers and the auspicious time when the noble person can practice the way. The seeming conflict between them is resolved in the "Great Commentary," where *yin* and *yang* are understood as two complementary principles of an ever-changing cycle of life, like winter and summer, softness and strength, female and male, withdrawal and advance. While presenting *yin-yang* as principles of sharing and possession, Father Chong conceives of a final harmony and totality that embraces both. In this sense his is a typical East Asian world view. His theological reflections take the form of essays or storytelling. It seems to me we cannot characterize his writings as an Asian theology that has grown out of Korean realities, because they have not yet been given sufficient theoretical shape. Nonetheless, they do represent a kind of window through which we can get a glimpse of the future possibility of what will happen when the two streams of thought, liberation and inculturation, meet at a deeper level.

I would like now to turn to the second stream of thought which marks the Korean church of the last twenty years: the conscious encounter of traditional culture and the Christian gospel. Manifestations of this trend in *Pastoral Theology* were somewhat later than those of liberation theology. In March, 1977, the journal issued a special number on "Christianity and Culture," and the July issue showed the church's effort to listen to the voice of outsiders through a number of essays on the theme "What I Expect of the Korean Catholic Church." The editor of the journal remarked in a preface that in preparing for the 200th Anniversary of Christianity in Korea, the church should be ready for inculturation and establishment of Korean theology.

There are clear signs that the Catholic community was beginning to open its eyes to the need for inculturation. In January, 1978, *Pastoral Theology* ran a special issue on "Shamanism and Christianity" and in March on "The Religiosity of the Koreans." Both represent attempts to understand patterns of belief basic to Korean culture and to interpret them from a Christian perspective.

In July of 1979, the journal took up the theme "Catholicism and Korean Culture," dealing with the role of Catholic church within Korean culture. For the next few years scattered theoretical articles appeared, among them: "The Concept of Sin among the Koreans," "The Confucian Understanding of Man and Christianity," and "A Study of the Basic Problems of Inculturation of Korea." At the beginning of 1984, the year of 200th Anniversary, a group discussion on "Inculturation of the Gospel" was introduced. In March of the following year, *Pastoral Theology* published a future-oriented issue on "Facing the Third Century of the Korean church," and also published an official document of 200th Anniversary Pastoral Committee entitled "Pastoral Directives for Inculturation." In September of 1986 another special issue was run on "Christianity and Traditional Culture." This past spring (May, 1987), the

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13 "Movement for a Life Community," p. 124.

journal published the proceedings of a symposium, "Prospects for the Inculturation of the Korean Catholic Church," in which some 15 bishops and 60 representatives of theologians, pastors, and religious and lay leaders had taken part.

All of the above-mentioned symposia and group discussions, as well as most of the articles and documents, dealt with the need for and rationale behind inculturation. It has been noted out that all these efforts only amount to talk about principles and lack concrete examples to show how it can be done.

It is interesting here to compare the situation in the Protestant world, which has indeed produced not a few examples of indigenous theology. For instance Yoon Sung-Bum published a "theology of sincerity" as early as 1972, and more recently Ryu Dong-Shik has presented what he "the way of playfulness" (風流道) as the foundation of Korean spirituality. But the Catholics, it must be said, have been slow as a whole to enter into concrete attempts and continue to show their hopes and visions by reinforcing theoretical foundations for inculturation.

Within Korea's Catholic theology, the importance of feminine theology is rather insignificant, but over the last few years there have been some attempts to interpret Asian resources theologically. In its September, 1984 issue, *Pastoral Theology* took up the subject of "The Church and Women." Among the contributions was an article on "Women Throughout the History of the Korean Church," which tried to depict the image of woman from concrete examples in our own history. More recent issues (Nos. 105, 109, 112) have published articles on "The Confucian Understanding of Women," "The Taoist Understanding of Women," and "The Understanding of Women in China." These articles try to interpret traditional classics from the contemporary perspective and in harmony with Christianity. All these attempts, however, are still fragmentary, and we have to look to the future for an "Asian Theology" coming from the Catholic community of Korea.

#### VISION FOR THE FUTURE

On the national level I sent a questionnaire, "An Investigation of the Current State of Asian Theology in the Korean Church" to 12 Catholic educational centers (seminaries, catechetical institutes, and Catholic universities), 13 representative religious congregations (5 male and 8 female), and 5 lay leaders and others who showed special interests in inculturation. I received 10 responses from the first group, 8 from the second group, and 5 from the third group, giving an overall rate of response of 76.67% (23 out of 30).<sup>14</sup> I also had an hour-long interview with each of the academic deans of two oldest seminaries to add some depth to the questionnaire.

The 10 items of the questionnaire may be categorized in 4 areas. Items 1 and 2 seek to ascertain to what extent Asian spiritual traditions are being taught and what the response of the students is. The results of Item 1 appear in Table 1. Only 70% of Catholic educational centers are teaching anything on our spiritual heritage, and that mainly on the introductory level. This shows that education in religious traditions is

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<sup>14</sup> The respondents were academic deans, directors of novices, etc. They were all in their 40s and 50s, with the ratio of male to female being 16:7. Their family religious background was divided almost evenly between child baptism and adult conversion. This latter factor, however, did not appear to affect differences of vision.

neither widely spread (especially in religious communities) nor does it have the necessary depth.

At the same time, the responses of the students, shown in Table 2, are interesting. The affirmative statistics show that the students are generally favorable but felt the lack of in-depth study in traditional materials as well as the absence of an Asian theological outlook. In the interviews I conducted, this fact was confirmed. As one seminary professor told me, half of the seniors who come to him for their graduation thesis are choosing a topic related to inculturation.

Items 3 and 4 seek opinions on Asian theology and factors that prevent inculturation. The response to Item 3 (see Table 3) shows that the need for Asian theology is felt and agreed to by 95%, an overwhelmingly majority.<sup>15</sup> While the need is strongly felt, the obstacles to developing an Asian theology are not easily surmountable (see Table 4). Ignorance and lack of investment of funds and personnel are looked on as the biggest obstacles. This is in fact supported by the current state of educational programs in seminaries, novitiates, and elsewhere.

Items 5, 6, and 7 of the questionnaire (Table 5) ask about differences between Christianity and East Asian traditions in the concepts of God, humanity, and society. 15–25% of the respondents see that the world view of Christianity is in conflict, while 60–75% feel that the two are complementary and that Christians can learn from the traditional world views of East Asia.

Table 1

	Seminaries, Catechetical Institutes, Catholic Universities	Religious Congregations
Total	10	8
Affirmative Replies	7	6
Introductory Courses	5	4
Confucianism	5	3
Buddhism	6	1
Shamanism	3	1
Taoism	1	1
New Religions	0	1

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15 The *Social Analysis Report* prepared by the Pastoral Committee for the 200th Anniversary gives the following figures (p. 424): 46.9% of lay Catholic answering affirmatively for inculturation; 13.0%, negative; 19.2%, wait for things to develop naturally, and 20.0%, no response.

STUDENT RESPONSE TO ASIAN RESOURCES	AFFIRMATIVE
Felt that theological understanding was deepened by the study of East Asian traditions rooted in their own Culture	8
Felt that there would be a conflict of world views	0
Felt an inadequate understanding because of a lack of comparative study	10
Other / No response	4
Total	22

TABLE 2

	AFFIRMATIVE
It is enough for us to have the theology that we have received from the West	0
It is impossible to form our own theology because our culture is very Westernized and modernized	0
As thinking youth, we are interested in our roots. Just as those in other fields of the arts are searching for new modes of expression, the Korean church should develop an inculturated theology	22
Instead of talking about doing Asian theology, if we work for human rights and justice, and live a life of faith, our spirituality and will theology will develop naturally	8
Total	30

TABLE 3

To the heated issue of “Whether shamanistic petitions for *bok* (福, divine blessings) are also penetrating the Korean church and affecting the purity of the Christian gospel,” 19.05% answered in the affirmative, while 42.86% said that praying for blessings is a basic human longing which is acceptable as long as the petition includes the whole community. Some written comments on these items insist that we should not be surprised at the conceptual differences, nor should we rush to hastily to conclusions before doing further study. The caution was also voiced during the interviews that we should first understand traditional values correctly and thoroughly, and give them time to be digested and settle into our hearts.

	AFFIRMATIVE
I do not know where to start because of a lack of training in East Asian traditions	10
I am afraid of falling into heresy	3
Our leaders are not convinced enough of the need for an Asian theology to make the needed investments of finances and personnel	11
Other	2
Total	26

TABLE 4

	God	Humanity	Society
The conceptions of the two traditions are completely different	5	4	3
The two traditions are different but but complementary approaches to one and the same reality	14	6	15
Traditional concepts are changing the Christian gospel and need therefore to be rejected	0	4	3

TABLE 5

Items 8 and 9 (Table 6) concern the concrete resources available for Asian theology. Among the texts, the Confucian and Taoist Classics are most widely read and in a few places regular courses on them have begun. Among methods of meditation, Buddhist sitting is the best known. Among folk traditions, festivals and arts are looked on as acceptable. To the question of to which tradition they feel closest, respondents put Confucianism at the top (50%), followed by folk tradition (20%), Buddhism (15%), and lastly Taoism (9%). Interestingly, those who felt closest to Buddhism were those in the religious life. As one of them explained: "I feel close to the Buddhist monks because we follow a similar way of life and cultivate similar virtues. A living dialogue is going on individually between Buddhist and Christian religious, but no theological reflections have been forthcoming from the Catholic community."

Item 10 asked whether personnel are being trained professionally in East Asian traditions. There was an even distribution of those giving affirmative, negative, and

"under consideration" replies. A total of 8 persons were reported to be currently engaged in B. A., M. A., and Ph. D. programs. Even if we take into account those who did not respond to the survey, this number is really too small for the work that has to be done at every level of education, particularly given the rapid increase of the Catholic population. This low investment personal seems to confirm the fear that the Korean Catholic church as a whole, and decision-makers in particular, are not yet convinced of the need for inculturation. This uncertainty, unconscious and visceral though it be, may in turn explain why some of those writing on inculturation in the Catholic theological community have recently been insisting on the need to face the question squarely.

Finally, based on the comments of some of the respondents and the interviews, I would like to focus on two themes: the limitations of our cultural tradition and the need for a concrete educational program.

CONFUCIANISM	<i>Analects</i>	<i>Mencius</i>	<i>The Mean, Great Learning</i>	<i>I Ching</i>	<i>Quiet Sitting</i>
	13	9	12	5	11
TAOISM	<i>Lao Tzu</i>	<i>Chuang Tzu</i>			<i>Keeping the One</i>
	13	9			3
BUDDHISM	<i>Dhamma pada</i>	<i>Wreath Sutra</i>	<i>Prajnaparamita Sutras</i>	<i>Korean Texts</i>	<i>Son Sitting</i>
	7	3	5	1	16
FOLK TRADITIONS	<i>Eastern Classics</i>	<i>Kut for Unity</i>	<i>Farmers' Dance</i>	<i>Calligraphy</i>	<i>Others</i>
	2	8	5	7	1

TABLE 6

There is a growing concern nowadays as to whether we should limit our cultural heritage to things originating in Korea. If we become nationalistic to this extent, it not only narrows our vision but the definition of “Korean” itself becomes ambiguous. It is better for us to know the “Asian” spiritual tradition as a whole, especially concentrating on East Asian resources stemming from the “Chinese characters and chopstick belt” and associated with the “three religions” (三誠).

One theologian whom I interviewed specifically noted that we need to pay attention to epistemological differences between the East and the West. Both Taoism and Buddhism advance a higher knowing that transcends the subject-object dichotomy, and this way of seeing needs to be incorporated into Christian theology. He added that a study of the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition with its practical and spiritual theology would be helpful in this regard.

In order to perceive differences in modes of thought, it is best to read the East Asian classics in their original language. Seminarians, religious, and students in all of our Catholic colleges should be given the opportunity to study at least some of the most important classics.

Along with this textual study, it is important that we discipline ourselves to discern the work of God in the present world, in the lives and longings of people. It is suggested, therefore, that we should gather stories from among the people and use them as texts for our reflections from the historico-social, theological, and spiritual perspectives. Of course, no one person can do all of this alone. Only by allowing for specialists to be trained in particular areas can a total education be provided for the coming generation.

During the interviews some concrete suggestions were made concerning the needed educational program: For the four years of undergraduate study, along with the study of the scriptures, the *history* of the Christian church, and theology (rewritten from *our contemporary* East Asian standpoint), the spiritual heritage of East Asia should be taught by a professor versed in both Christianity and East Asian religions. Such a lecturer (if he or she is to be found) should communicate the significance of both traditions and help students achieve in their own persons a natural harmony between them. At the beginning level, a introductory courses might present an overview of the ideas and their historical background. At the higher level, classical texts should be taught in Chinese characters, so that students can immerse themselves deeply in the cultural milieu and encounter the thought-patterns ingrained in the texts.

At the graduate level, together with a deeper study of the scriptures and the history of the Christian church, East Asian traditions should be taught by specialists including historians of religions, philosophers, and social scientists. This will provide a proper and more accurate understanding of both Christian and East Asian traditions in their own terms. For the doctoral program, (provided the candidates have enough textual study as well as training in logical thinking and comprehensive understanding), study abroad either in another part of Asia or in the West is recommended. Among Asian countries, China (Taiwan) and Japan are favored by most Korean scholars. The doctoral program should offer opportunities for comparative study and synthesis, which in turn can be expected to bear good fruit for the future of Asian theology. Both academic deans I interviewed looked positively on the need for international cooperation to stimulate Korean scholars, but they felt that using English as

medium is helpful only for those who have already gained sufficient background in their home country.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the Korean Catholic church is on the verge of bringing the two streams of thought, liberation and inculturation, together into one. Enough has been said about the need and rationale for inculturation. It is time now to take concrete steps in the direction of theological reflection using Asian materials. It is also time to inaugurate well-organized educational programs for the present and future generations. The last twenty years of labors on behalf of social justice have borne fruit and brought the Church closer to the lives of the people. Based on this experience, we now need to probe deeper into our culture. Our Christian faith needs to undertake an honest encounter with the spiritual heritage of East Asia. When these two horizons meet consciously and are allowed to interpenetrate each other in the contemporary minds and hearts of Christians, a fresh interpretation will come about, and gradually a new theology will take shape. I was somewhat amused when the two theologians whom I interviewed, both of whom are known as strong supporters of inculturation, told me the same thing: that we should not be in too much of a hurry, since the process is going to take time, a century or two, maybe longer. Meantime, as we try to live the Christian life as fully as possible, we must make what effort we can to develop and encourage the advance of inculturation in ourselves and in the communities with whom we live.