

# Religion, Nationalism, and State Policy

## The Conflict Between Christianity and State Shinto in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945

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IT IS A COMMONPLACE remark for writers on the history of the Third World or of mission history to associate negatively the advent of Christianity with the advent of European colonialism. It is often assumed that this association runs counter to the nationalisms within the newly emerging countries of the Third World or is contrary to the religious concepts and ethics of non-European peoples. It is taken for granted that Christianity must be seen as a Western cultural imposition on the peoples of the non-Western world. Ideas such as these ignore the fact that the center of Christianity is no longer in Western Europe or North America, but in Africa and Asia, the so-called Third World.<sup>1</sup> Such commonplace views also ignore historical cases, such as Christianity in Korea and particularly Protestant Christianity, which have strong nationalistic and patriotic associations.

In this paper, I will attempt to illustrate the very different directions in which Christianity in Korea and Japan have gone, especially with regard to the question of nationalism. Christianity is a major factor in the cultural, social, and religious scene of Korea, which it is not (in terms of numbers) in Japan. In the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Catholic and Protestant Christians together account for about one-quarter of the total population. Christians in Korea tend to be urban, well educated, and generally politically aware. Although conscious of

the fact that Christianity came from the West, Koreans do not view it as an alien religion. This point of view is due in part to the way in which Protestant Christianity was brought to and established in Korea, in part due to the social and geopolitical conditions existing in northeast Asia at the end of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries, and in part due to the attempt by the Japanese colonial regime to suppress Christianity in Korea.

The association of faith and nationalism is a unique characteristic of Korean Christianity that has its roots in the pre-colonial era. The attempt by the Japanese colonial authorities to suppress the Christian church only strengthened and made more explicit a feeling that was already there. The period of the 1930s, the heyday of the "Shinto shrine question," forged a link between Korean nationalism and Christian faith that remains strong to this day. Christians in Korea, perhaps unlike fellow believers in Africa and elsewhere, have never had to answer the question of religious subservience to colonial authority.

### THE ADVENT OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY IN KOREA

At the end of the nineteenth century there was a peculiar set of circumstances that would predispose Koreans toward a favorable interest in Christianity.

*Spiritual and Sociopolitical Conditions*

The first circumstance was the existence of a spiritual and philosophical vacuum that was the result of the effective demise of Confucianism and the lack of any other alternative religious belief or philosophical system. When considering the intellectual and cultural history of Korea, it is important to remember that Confucianism dominated the Korean religious and philosophical scene for five hundred years. There was no society or nation in East Asia that was as thoroughly Confucian as was Korea during the Choson period (1392–1910). All aspects of society and government were made to conform to Confucian concepts in a way that was significantly different from Confucian influence in either China or Japan. Choson Korea was a state obsessed with concern for Confucian orthodoxy. Confucian thought was focused solely on the thought of philosopher Chu Hsi (1130–1200), of the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127–1279), to the exclusion of any other Confucian system. In addition, the interpretation of Chu Hsi by the great Korean Neo-Confucianist T'oegyre Yi Hwang (1501–1570) was accepted as being *the* orthodox understanding of Neo-Confucian thought. By the nineteenth century this constrained philosophical system had become arid, leading many persons to look for other sources of values and ideals (Grayson 1990, 141–51).

At the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhism could not be a factor in the spiritual and philosophical revival of Korea because of the suppression of that religion throughout the entire Choson period. At the outset of the dynasty, Buddhism had been perceived as being politically too closely associated with the Mongol court during the era of the Mongol domination of Korea and, in addition, was thought to be a superstitious cult. From the very beginning of the Choson state, the Confucian establishment had rigidly controlled the numbers of

monasteries permitted to be opened and the numbers of persons permitted to enter monastic orders. At one point in the late fifteenth century, an attempt was made to eradicate Buddhism altogether by forbidding the future ordination of monks and nuns. Socially, monks and nuns were classified with the outcaste butchers and prostitutes (Grayson 151–5).

Likewise the native religion, a form of Siberian shamanism, had been strongly suppressed during the Choson era as a superstitious cult and would not be seen by progressive intellectuals in the nineteenth century as a source of a religious or philosophical resurgence.

In the late nineteenth century, Roman Catholicism was not a significant religious factor either, although Catholic Christianity had been present in Korea since at least the mid-eighteenth century. The stand taken by the church against the performance of the Confucian ancestral rites (seen as idolatrous ancestor worship) led to its violent suppression by the Confucian establishment. Beyond fears of political entanglements with foreign powers, Roman Catholicism was perceived by the government and Confucian literati to be undermining the basis of Confucian morality. The *chesa* (ancestral ritual) was considered the centerpiece of Confucian morality, and anyone who did not perform these rites—or worse, burned the ancestral tablets—would be denying the whole basis of Confucian ethics and, by extension, the entire Choson social system. Due to these persecutions, the Roman Catholic Church went underground and became the religion of the most oppressed level of society.

Because of the severity and extent of the suppression, including the deaths of thousands of Catholic believers between 1786 and 1871, the Catholic Church developed a ghetto mentality from which it did not emerge until the mid-1960s (Grayson 178–84, 211–12).

Economically, socially, and politically, the condition of the Choson state declined dramatically from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Throughout the last century, Korea suffered various plagues, notable famines, and several major peasant rebellions. The state was weak politically, and the government was debilitated by bureaucratic corruption and the nepotism of the great families that attempted to control the levers of power. The internal strife within the country and the enfeeblement of the monarchy caused Korea to become particularly vulnerable to external threats. By the end of the century, from the 1880s onward, the state was increasingly threatened by the emergence of geopolitical conflict between Ch'ing China, czarist Russia, and Meiji Japan. Unable to defend itself, Korea was no longer capable of maintaining its status as the "hermit kingdom" that excluded all foreign contact. These social, economic, and political problems led many young Koreans to search for not only new and more scientific knowledge but also for a new set of values as well (Lee 1984, 247-66).<sup>2</sup>

Thus by the end of the nineteenth century, many Koreans in all classes of society sensed a spiritual vacuum within the conditions of notable social, political, and economic decay. Faced with these circumstances, large numbers of Koreans became favorably disposed toward the advent of Protestant Christianity, viewing it as a new source of spiritual and ethical values. The emergence of Protestantism during the twilight years of the Choson state set the stage for the dramatic growth of Christianity during the Japanese colonial era (1910-1945).

#### *Early Mission Initiatives*

It was not only the ripeness of the times that accounts for the early and rapid growth of Protestant Christianity in Korea but also the missionary methods that were used. There

were three factors: 1) pre-missionary evangelization by Koreans; 2) early institutional mission work by the first generation of missionaries; and 3) the resonance of certain Christian values with the Confucian ethical code.

It is an interesting fact of Korean Christian history that there were established Korean Christian communities in the peninsula and in Manchuria before the advent of Protestant missionaries in the mid-1880s. In 1882 John Ross (1845-1915), a missionary of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Mukden, translated the first portions of the New Testament into colloquial Korean using *hangul*, the Korean alphabet. The entire Korean New Testament was published in 1887 and remained the only complete version of Christian scripture for a generation, until 1906. Portions of the New Testament, individual gospels, the letters, and Acts began to circulate among the Korean communities along the north side of the Yalu River (at that time officially Korean territory) and even to penetrate into the peninsula through the agency of Chinese medicine merchants, who acted as colporteurs. Because it was written in the Korean alphabet and in colloquial rather than literary Korean, the Ross version of the New Testament was responsible for the rapid dissemination of Christian knowledge and consequently for the creation of Christian communities, before the coming of missionaries. The effect and importance of the Ross version cannot be overstated, for it created a Christian community that from the beginning placed an emphasis on local rather than foreign missionary evangelization. Further, it revived interest in and use of the Korean alphabet, which had largely fallen into disuse due to the disdain of the phonetic script by the Confucian literati (Grayson 1990, 195-6).<sup>3</sup>

Partly because of the initial restrictions placed on missionary work and partly because of the social concerns of the early

pietistic missionaries, the first generation of missionaries who began to arrive in Korea from 1884 turned toward institutional mission work. It was thought that medical and educational work—the establishment of hospitals, clinics, schools, and colleges—would create an atmosphere of Christian concern that would provide the basis for evangelistic work. It was certainly true that advanced and more effective medical treatment created natural good will. It was also true that Koreans had an extraordinary appreciation of the value of education, a residual influence of the Confucian emphasis on learning and knowledge. The need for modern education resonated both with Confucian values and with a recognized need for new knowledge to deal with significantly changed social and economic circumstances. Although the earliest schools were established by the first Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries, within less than a generation there were numerous schools that had been set up by Korean Christians themselves. By the time of the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, there was a complete system of Christian-run education from primary level to university level. Christian belief was seen as a means for the spiritual and social revival of the nation. The case of Ehwa Woman's University is particularly instructive as it was founded for the sole purpose of social change for the elevation of the social and intellectual status of women. As such, it has become a major social force within the nation. It is also of interest to note that of the five most prestigious universities in Korea, three are of Christian origin (Paik 1971, 158–67).

The metaphysical system that Chu Hsi created from Confucian philosophy provided a universalistic and spiritual basis for the ethical teachings of early Confucianism. The five relationships, the origins of feelings and sentiments, the relationship of principle and matter, and other great con-

cepts of Confucianism became linked to T'aeguk (the Great Ultimate). Thus transgressions of the moral and ethical code, which in the earlier form of Confucianism would have been viewed as a social transgression or error, in the Neo-Confucian system became transgressions against the Ultimate—error in the most profound sense. This system developed a very detailed and rigid moral code that governed all aspects of social life. Because of the *hyangyak* (village code), these Neo-Confucian concepts took firm root at all levels of society from the early sixteenth century on (Grayson 1990, 140, 148–50).

The Protestant missionaries who came to Korea from the mid-1880s had been strongly influenced by the pietistic revival of the late nineteenth century in North America. They were not liberal Christians but held to a simple belief in salvation through repentance of sins and adhered to a simple and rigid code of ethical behavior. Although their theological doctrines and ethical teachings were different in detail from those held by Neo-Confucianists, there was a resonance between Confucian metaphysics and Christian theology, and a parallel could be drawn between the two ethical systems. Thus Neo-Confucianism prepared the ground for the rapid growth of Christianity. In addition, Christianity presented the Ultimate as God, a personal, father-like being who offered the hope of salvation—concepts missing in impersonal Confucianism (Grayson 1985, 101–28).

It is important to remember, in this context, that Confucianism and Protestant Christianity shared a common view of the value of education. Because Protestant missions appeared to have a high regard for education, members of the Confucian culture were more ready to listen to the teachings of the missionaries and Korean Christianity.

In the generation from the mid-1880s to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Christianity became firmly im-

planted in Korea. In 1910, the year of the annexation of Korea to the Japanese Empire, Protestant Christians alone numbered one percent of the population. The church was largely self-propagating, with new churches and schools being opened at a rapid rate. Although the Christian community included among its members some of the most educated, socially progressive, and patriotic members of society, it was established in all parts of the nation and among all classes. Thus as a group, it constituted the one organized social bloc that could oppose the Japanese imperialists on social, intellectual, and spiritual grounds (Grayson 1985, 115–16).

#### EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORY IN COLONIAL KOREA

The annexation of Korea by Japan was never really accepted by the majority of the Korean people. So from the beginning, the Japanese administration (the governor-general) was extraordinarily sensitive to criticisms of Japanese rule or any hints of a Korean independence movement. Perceiving the Christian church to be the one organized body that might oppose their rule, the Japanese authorities attempted to remove the threat in two ways: by the direct suppression of Christian dissent, and by the support of the revival of Buddhism to act as a counterforce to Christianity.

It is recorded that the authorities were suspicious of hymns such as “Onward Christian Soldiers” and nervous about organizations such as the Salvation Army (Clark 1971, 187). This state of paranoia early led to attempts to suppress Christian political and social activity. In October 1912, students and staff at the Presbyterian Kyongsin Boys High School in Seoul were arrested on suspicion of subversive activity. Later, in the northwestern city of Sonch'on, more than one hundred persons were arrested on suspicion of participating in a plot to assassinate

Governor-General Terauchi Masatake (1852–1919) as he passed through the city on December 29, 1910. Of the 125 persons brought to trial, 98 were Christians. Although there was a paucity of evidence against these defendants, 105 persons were sentenced to jail terms. Upon appeal, all but six were released. The convicted persons, all Christians, were sentenced to prison terms of ten years in an attempt to save the governor-general's prestige. It is obvious that incidents such as this “conspiracy case” were intended to cow the Christian community to acquiesce in the Japanese domination of their country. The unintended effect of this oppression was to associate Christianity with Korean nationalism in the minds of the ordinary Korean person.<sup>4</sup>

Even before the formal annexation of Korea by Japan, during the period of the resident-general (1905–1910), the Japanese attempted to control the educational system not only by regulating the curriculum but also by attempting to limit Christian influence on Korean education. In 1908 an edict was issued by the Office of the Resident-General that all Korean schools should conform in practice to the Imperial Rescript on Education. The intent of this document—to make loyal subjects of the emperor—was innocuous enough in its own cultural and political context, but in the context of a Korea encroached upon by an imperialistic Japan, it became a goad to Korean nationalism. The edict was revised in 1915 to include mission schools, which had been initially excluded from its provisions. Two provisions of the edict were of special concern. The order stated that school instruction had to be in the national language, i.e., Japanese. Moreover, there was a general stipulation that teachers in private (i.e., Christian) schools had to have proper qualifications, an obvious open-ended phrase that could be interpreted in any way to suit the policy of the moment. Further, although it was not explicitly stated in the

decree, it was made clear privately that non-state schools would not be permitted to teach any religious subjects or to hold services of worship. This caused a great division in the mission community, which had finally reached an agreement through the assistance of the American Consul. Generally Methodists tended to accept Japanese certification of their schools, while Presbyterians remained opposed. The situation altered completely after the March First Movement of 1919. In an attempt to placate Christian opinion, the governor-general created a two-tiered system of "certified schools" and "designated schools." Mission schools were in the latter category, and it was clear that the designation was intended to classify them as being inferior. Through this subtle practice, Japanese authorities hoped to turn Korean opinion against Christian schools and Christianity (Clark 190-6; Grayson 1985, 116).

Christians had a high level of political awareness, a fact that is no more clearly seen than in the composition and organization of the March First Movement of 1919, one of the watersheds of Korean history. Koreans, as many other colonial peoples, were greatly excited by the Peace Conference that followed the conclusion of the First World War and by the enunciation of Woodrow Wilson's principles of the right of peoples to the self-determination of their national destinies. Many Koreans saw this as an opportunity to shake off Japanese oppression. A group of men came together and created an organization that spread to all the major towns and cities of Korea. Many of the members of this organization were Christians who utilized the established links of the Christian churches to filter down information about the planned peaceful demonstration against Japanese rule. In fact, it was Christian insistence on nonviolence that gave the March First Movement its peaceful character. The Christians refused to participate unless the movement was non-

violent. Using the day of the funeral of the late King-Emperor Kojong (r. 1863-1907) as the moment for the onset of the Independence Movement, thirty-three "representatives of the people" signed the Declaration of Independence, went to Pagoda Park in Seoul, read out the Declaration, and turned themselves in to the police. Fifteen of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Protestant Christians (Lee 338-45; Choy 1971, 173-8).

Beginning on that date, massive nonviolent demonstrations took place throughout Korea, each starting with a reading of the Declaration of Independence. Statistics show that approximately ten percent of the population took part in these demonstrations. As it is estimated that fifty-seven percent of the participants were farmers, the movement was not one of the intellectual elite. The organization of this movement was so carefully and quietly done that it took the Japanese administration completely by surprise. Consequently, the reaction was swift and brutal. Japanese government statistics alone record that the police killed more than 7,500 persons. More than twice that number were wounded, and forty-six thousand people were sentenced to prison. Compared with the population of the time, these staggering figures give a clear indication of the ferocity of the Japanese suppression of the movement and are a good indicator of why Koreans have a strong distrust of the Japanese. Churches were singled out for particular punishment. Forty-seven churches are known to have been burned down. In one well-attested incident, villagers were herded into the local church, which was then set on fire. News of this brutal suppression of an undeniably peaceful movement was brought to the attention of the world through missionaries who went into China to take out word about Japanese atrocities (Lee 338-45; Choy 173-8).

Again, the link between Christianity and Korean nationalism was strengthened by the strong Christian participation in the Independence Movement, Christian influence on the character of the movement, the singling out of persons because they were Christians, and world attention on the brutality of the Japanese through information supplied by Christian missionaries. Unfortunately, one of the results of the violent suppression of the movement was the creation of a mood of quiescence among the Korean population and the Christian community. During the decade of the 1920s, the strand within the church that emphasized personal piety and shied away from direct social action came to dominate the leadership of the church. This mood was encouraged by the policy of cultural accommodation promoted by the new governor-general, Saitō Makoto (1858–1936). None the less, the link between Korean nationalism and Christianity remained firm and unbroken (Min 1973, 254–70).

Another policy used by the Japanese administration throughout the colonial period was the encouragement of Buddhism. A shabby former shadow of itself, Buddhism in late Choson times seemed about to disappear. That it did not do so is in part due to the efforts of the Japanese colonial government to reorganize and strengthen Buddhism. This was not done for strictly altruistic reasons but for the purpose of creating a counter religious force to Christianity. Buddhist political and social activity until very recently has been slight indeed. This may be attributed to the way in which the governor-general created structures to strengthen and control Buddhism, gave large sums of money to support Buddhist publications and cultural activities, and gave substantial tracts of land in order to ensure the financial security of the Buddhist order. Even though there were patriotic monks who resisted these interferences with Buddhist internal affairs, it is

incontrovertible that the Japanese tried to use Buddhism as a tool to further the colonial domination of Korea. In turn, this created an impression that Buddhism was not patriotic (Grayson 1990, 221–2).

#### CONFLICT: CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND SHINTO NATIONALISM

From the late 1920s on, Korea as the principal dependency of Japan suffered greatly from the internal political changes that were occurring in the metropolitan nation. Although at the beginning of the decade it appeared that government by political parties might finally take root, by the end of the decade it was becoming clear that the Japanese military and its various factions were beginning not only to control the levers of governmental authority but also, in some cases, to act independently of the government. The strength of the military continued to increase from the late 1920s to the 1940s. By the early 1930s there were attempts to provoke a military takeover of the government, such as the incident of May 15, 1932. The polite indulgence with which the defendants tried for this insurrection were treated is some indication of the acceptability and power of their jingoistic ideas in Japan at that time. Within the army there emerged two principal groups: the Imperial Way Faction led by General Araki Sadao (1877–1966) and General Mazaki Jinzaburo, and the Control Faction led by General Nagata Tetsuzan (1884–1935). The latter group took a more practical view toward the *zaibatsu* (plutocrats) and the government, in order to build a militarily strong Japan, while the former group had a more mystical view of divine imperial rule. Although these factions differed in many ways in terms of their political outlook and policies, the rise of these jingoistic military factions helped to cultivate the rise of a nationalism based upon State Shinto. This form of nationalism, which following certain

Korean scholars I will term Shinto nationalism, in turn fostered the further development of the political parties and their jingoistic policies (Schirokauer 1978, 505–8 and 517–22).

From the late 1920s, as Shinto nationalism came more to the fore, Korean Christians were increasingly faced with the question of how they should respond practically and theologically to this new factor in the colonial rule of their country. The beginning of this new colonial situation may be dated from the erection of the central Shinto shrine for Korea in Seoul in 1925 and the enforced attendance at the shrine's ceremonies by students and ordinary citizens. This was not the first Shinto shrine erected in Korea. The first was probably the one erected to Amaterasu Omikami in Inch'on in 1883. Shrines such as these, however, were intended for the use of Japanese residents in Korea and were not officially considered to be State Shinto shrines. Shrines given the latter designation were not legally considered to be religious structures but were said to be places for the performance of patriotic rites associated with the ancestors of the imperial family and the nation. With the construction of the *Chosen-jingu* in 1925, the religious situation changed dramatically. It was plain that, in the future, all Koreans could be expected to perform patriotic acts at one of these shrines. By the end of the colonial era in 1945, there were a total of 1,140 shrines associated with the State Shinto cult. Thus during the colonial era, the shrines of the allegedly neutral (i.e., patriotic) cult were pervasive throughout Korea, visibly reminding Koreans of the fact of colonial domination (Vos 1977, 218–24).<sup>5</sup>

The effect of these shrines has been succinctly stated by J. T. Coppleson, a historian of Methodist missions. "The shrine question was especially difficult for the Korean Christians, for it touched them both as Christians and as patriots. All aside from

its alleged religious implications, Shintoism was an expression of the national culture of Korea's conquerors; if it was incompatible with Christianity, it certainly was anathema to Korean nationalism" (1973, 1195). The Shinto shrine question touched Korean Christians both as patriots and as Christians. It was an offense both nationally and theologically. Objection to the performance of the patriotic rites on either grounds or both would be considered, as intended, a political offense punishable by law and not merely as a misdemeanor or oversight in behavior. Thus the ground was laid for what was to become a major political, social, and religious conflict of the 1930s. Overtly, the conflict could be interpreted as a conflict of beliefs between Christian faith and Shinto belief. Covertly, it was a conflict between two nationalisms: Korean patriotism and Japanese jingoistic nationalism. It is a significant historical fact that a recently missionized, clearly foreign religion had accommodated itself so quickly in Korea that it became the standard-bearer of Korean nationalism in little more than a generation. It is also interesting to note, in this context, that whereas it had previously been the more theologically liberal Christians who had been involved in the confrontation with the Japanese authorities, in the 1930s it was the theologically conservative wing that opposed the power of Japanese colonialism.

The reaction of Japanese Christians to the rise of Shinto nationalism and the requirement of attendance at Shinto ceremonies is instructive for its differences from the Korean Christian reaction. Coppleson notes that for the Japanese Christians, shrine practices were a part of their general culture and not *prima-facie* alien to them. Furthermore, since the Japanese Christians were loyal to Japan, their leaders realized that radical rejection of shrine obeisance would attach to them the false and unnecessary stigma of being unpatriot-



ic. That would have had the potentiality of provoking the authorities to ban the entire Christian movement as subversive (1197). Thus for the Japanese Christian, familiarity with the allegedly secular and patriotic nature of the rites would have been conducive to an acquiescence in the Japanese government's interpretation of the rituals. In addition, the fear of appearing to be unpatriotic and even fear of the suppression of the public profession of Christian faith led many to be silent on the issue of the Shinto shrine question. This problem facing the Japanese Christian is not unlike the problem that faced German Christians with the creation of the German Christian Church. It is instructive here to note that there was no equivalent of the confessing church in Japan. For Koreans, the situation was very different because the Shinto rites were both alien and unpatriotic, in addition to which, for Christians, they were pagan and therefore anathema.

In 1925, Governor-General Saitō, who recognized that there would be resistance to attendance at shrine rituals, issued a statement that the State Shinto rites were dedicated to the nation's ancestors and were therefore patriotic and not religious in character. He stated further that prescribed attendance at the rituals was not being used as an attempt to compel Koreans to practice Japanese religion and affirmed, moreover, that all school pupils would be required to attend such ceremonies. This affirmation created a further and more explicit problem for Christian schools, which were already struggling with the question of "designated schools." It is noteworthy that this policy would seem to be a contradiction to the general trend of Saitō's administration, which in the aftermath of the March First Movement had tried to appease Korean citizens by a policy of cultural accommodation and support. While on the one hand seeming to encourage the development of and interest in Korean culture, Saitō also

appeared to be forcing upon the Korean nation a prime symbol of Japanese colonial exploitation (Copplesone 1196).

From the early 1930s, with party politics in Japan going into abeyance and the power of the military taking firmer control of the government, the stricter enforcement of student attendance at shrine rituals became an increasing problem for Christians, which affected both the missionary and the Korean Christian. By 1935, pressure was building to remove from schools and colleges those missionaries who opposed the Shinto practices. The first to be forced out was Dr. George S. McCune, president of Union Christian College in Pyongyang, who left Korea in late 1935. Maintaining open schools under these conditions became such an acute problem that the Northern Presbyterian missionaries in Pyongyang voted in June 1936 to close their college and schools. The Southern Presbyterian mission likewise closed its schools in September 1937. These reactions to the threat of Shinto nationalism were not, however, wholeheartedly accepted by the parents of students who had been sent home. There was considerable opposition to this loss of one of the best opportunities for Korean children to obtain a good education. Mindful of these problems, the Methodists took a different approach to the shrine question. Schools were placed in the hands of Korean Christians, and the Methodist Mission in Korea adopted a resolution in 1937 accepting the governor-general's interpretation of the patriotic nature of the rites, which was subsequently confirmed by the Mission Board in America in June 1938. This enabled the Mission to continue to conduct education and provide Christian religious instruction, although later it could be seen to have seriously compromised the position of Korean Methodists (Copplesone 1196).

From the mid-1930s, measures taken by the Japanese authorities to control mission schools and education was paralleled by

their attempts to control the actual denominations themselves. One of the most dramatic incidents concerned the 1938 General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church. Key commissioners had been approached by the police prior to the event and threatened. Using selected stooges, the Japanese authorities had a resolution brought to the assembly that expressed approval of the attendance of Christians at the patriotic rites of State Shinto. The general assembly convened in a very tense atmosphere with the doors to the hall guarded by policemen "dressed," as one eye witness put it, "as for a riot" (Blair 1977, 93). The police also intervened to eliminate contrary motions and procedural objections. The assembly passed the resolution approving of attendance at shrine rituals and also a further resolution approving conformity to a law requiring that worship occur only in places issued a government permit. These resolutions were important for the enforcement of a Shinto nationalism. Until the general assembly had passed these resolutions, it would have been possible for a Korean Presbyterian to say that attendance at shrine rites went against the tenets of his faith and the practice of fellow believers. After the assembly, a Presbyterian could no longer do so (Blair 92-5; Min 343-53).

Perhaps one of the saddest cases of this period is the example of the bishop of the Korean Methodist Church, Chong Chun-su (1875-1955), a senior Methodist layman who, under extreme police pressure, became a puppet of the Japanese authorities. He became bishop, originally a position held for one term only, in late 1939. In early 1940, almost immediately upon assumption of office, he placed on a list of inactive members virtually all the prominent church leaders, because they were perceived to be anti-Japanese and pro-American. One of the strangest resolutions that this man promulgated during his administration was the forbidding, in

January 1944, of the use of any of the books of the Old Testament and the Revelation of John, probably because they were thought to contain politically subversive material. Although the Methodist Church was organizationally compromised, the witness of those men and women who had been proscribed, along with others, gave evidence of a strong rejection of political interference in the church (Sauer 1973, 101-9).

Just as the Japanese authorities attempted to control the institutional church through manipulation of key members of the establishment, they likewise attempted to control individual Christians' expression of opposition to State Shinto. A missionary present during most of this period claims that he has documented evidence of thirty persons who were martyred for their Christian faith (Blair 96); another missionary says he knows of more than fifty persons (Clark 230). Undoubtedly, these figures represent just a few of those Christians who died for their faith, in prison or as the result of brutal treatment by the Japanese colonial police, or the *kenpeitai*. Koreans throughout the country gave their witness to Christianity and against what they saw as idolatry, but the strongest areas of Christian dissent were in the northwestern part of the peninsula, the furthest corner of the southeast, and those areas in Manchuria where the Korean Diaspora lived. Those parts of the Korean peninsula mentioned above were the strongest centers of Christianity and were the parts of Korea that had been allocated to Presbyterian missions by the Comity Agreement of 1908. Following the disastrous general assembly of 1938, several Presbyterians withdrew from the church, some fleeing to Manchuria. In northern Manchuria this group and other Koreans living there drew up a covenant that put forth the biblical teaching on idolatry and condemned those Christians who had compromised on this issue (Blair and Hunt 99-100). This group, in effect, formed a

church body similar to the confessing church of Nazi Germany.

Actions such as these were typical of many Christians from the late 1930s. As a result, large numbers of Christians were imprisoned over the shrine question, and many died for their faith. It is because these conservative Christians opposed the imposition of State Shinto, resisting the most potent symbol of Shinto nationalism, that they have become heroes to Korean nationalism. It is important to stress, however, that none of these Christians, eminent or humble, was directly making a political point. Their protest was exclusively a religious one. While it is certain that many if not all of them also harbored feelings against Japanese colonial rule, what motivated these martyrs for Christianity was their faith and their faith alone. It was also their Christian beliefs that sustained them under extreme persecution to the end—particularly their knowledge that if they were to die, they would return home to God. It is not because of their perceived political protest that they have become nationalist heroes but because of their religious protest. The firmness of their commitment to their religious cause under brutal persecution has helped to give Korean Christianity a deep patriotic cast. While in the early part of the century liberal patriotic Korean Christians built schools and engaged in social and political activity, lending Korean Christianity a patriotic character, it was the religious protest and sacrifice of mid-century conservative Christians that further deepened the patriotic image of the church. One could say that, because the protests of the 1930s were strictly religious in character, the patriotism of the Christians was of a purer type, in that it eschewed the violence of the political activists. In turn this quality created a climate favorable to the growth of Christianity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The case of Korean Protestantism is an interesting study in the relationship between Christian political protest and nationalism. In many ways it forms a uniquely instructive case.

First, Protestant Christianity became implanted at a very early period in Korea. During the period of accommodation with Korean society, Protestantism became associated with progressive political and scientific ideas that were thought to be capable of revitalizing the nation. Protestantism thus obtained a patriotic character by extension.

Second, the generally perceived patriotic character of Protestantism would be true equally of the more theologically liberal and conservative branches of the church, although the periods in which these factions were associated with political protest were not the same.

Third, the Shinto shrine question was a conflict between two forms of nationalism that was, in a sense, disguised as a religious conflict.

Fourth, in the case of the governor-general, Shinto nationalism was a conscious and deliberate use of a religious faith for nationalistic purposes. Attendance at shrine worship was used by the Japanese authorities as a tool for the colonial government to mold the thoughts of the Korean people and to control their behavior. It was additionally a means to cow the Christian community—a potential source of alternative ideas—into conformity.

Fifth, in the case of the Korean Christians who protested against shrine worship, their protest was unconsciously political and nationalistic. Their protest was primarily religious and secondarily political. Whereas Shinto nationalism was a deliberate and perhaps cynical use of religion for political purposes, the Korean Christian protest derived its nationalistic aspect from the context of its protest rather than its intention.

Following liberation from Japan on August 15, 1945, the religious scene changed dramatically. State Shinto and Sect Shinto both ceased to function. Among Christians of all denominations, there were acrimonious debates and conflict between those who had conformed and those who had not. There was much debate in all the churches about repentance and reconciliation with regard to the shrine question. Resolutions were passed by assemblies and accusations exchanged. In addition, whole groups separated themselves from their main denominational bodies, one of the most important of which is the so-called Koryo-pa Presbyterians, who refuse to have fellowship with any of the conformers. In the view of an American historian of Korea, the controversy over participation in the shrine rituals is the source of much of the fractiousness of the contemporary Korean church (Clark 1986, 13).

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Walbert Buhmann first discussed the idea that the church in the Third World, what he calls the "third church," would become the church of the future. The center of gravity of Christianity, he predicted, was shifting from West to East, from the "First World" to the Third World. (See Buhmann 1976, especially Chapter One).

<sup>2</sup> For further details, see Choy 1971, 97-124.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed description of John Ross and his work, see Grayson 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Blair 1977, 83-4; Clark 1971, 186-90; Grayson 1985, 115-16; Min 1973, 235-44; Kang 1987, 16-21.

<sup>5</sup> For the fullest discussion of the Shinto shrine question, see Lee 1966.

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