Book Reviews

Perspectives on Christianity in Korea and Japan: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia

Mark R. Mullins and Richard Fox Young, editors.

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Reviewed by Thomas Dean, Temple University, Philadelphia

"Despite having so much in common and living together in close proximity, Japan and Korea have responded to Christianity differently. But why?" Thus do the editors introduce this volume of comparative essays on the fascinating, complex and seemingly paradoxical story of the divergent trajectories of Christianity in these closest yet most distant of neighbors in East Asia. The importance of the answer to this question goes well beyond the realm of religion, however, since Korea and Japan are still yoked by an unresolved past and a problematic future for reasons intimately related to the differences in the reception of Christianity in both countries.

On one level the histories of Christianity in these two countries share many things in common. Both countries were subjected to Christian missionary campaigns from the sixteenth century on, efforts pursued with renewed vigor at the onset of modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and again after the end of the Pacific War. The puzzle that needs to be explained is why, despite this apparently shared history, Christianity has experienced rapid growth in Korea, whereas in Japan, at least numerically speaking, it has remained stagnant.

In Korea, for example, it is Christianity that has filled the postwar role played by the so-called "new religions" in Japan. In Korea only five percent have joined the new religions, while 25 percent are Christian, a number that continues to increase. In Japan, on the other hand, the figures are almost the reverse: only one percent are Christian while 20 percent have joined the new religions. And so the question gathers added force: Why?

The Problematic of Indigenization

The question may be broken down into several lines of inquiry. Did the differences already exist at the time of initial contact, or did they arise only later? Were they due to differences in the internal political conditions in the two countries? Or was it that Christian missionaries reacted to indigenous religious traditions, or more broadly, the indigenous cultures and societies of Korea and Japan differently? What makes this latter question particularly significant is that, as one essayist observes, "the Korean case stands out among Asian churches as a rare case of indigenization."

The first and second parts of this volume, "The Transplantation of Christianity" and "The Encounter with East Asian Religion and Society," address these issues from a variety of perspectives. Coeditor Richard Young notes that in the initial encounters of Koreans and Japanese with Roman Catholic missionaries in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, there were "already significantly different responses." Japanese conversions

tended to be "sudden and culturally unmediated," whereas the Korean reception was "gradual and culturally mediated." Was this because, unlike the situation in Japan, the first missionaries in Korea were themselves Koreans, not foreign padres?

On the other hand, Christian missionaries, both foreign and indigenous, have for the most part adopted an oppositional stance toward the traditional religions of Korea and Japan—primarily Confucianism and Shamanism in Korea, Shinto and Buddhism in Japan. One particularly divisive issue in both cases, not only religiously but in terms of its larger cultural and social significance, was and continues to be the phenomenon of ancestor rituals. Are they to be taken literally as instances of idol worship, or should they be viewed symbolically as simply civil or state rites?

To the extent that foreign missionaries brought to this contest the Western model of "Christ versus culture," it could be argued that the statistical failure of Christianity in Japan, at least, was due to the attempt to impose a foreign pattern of faith on indigenous patterns of the relation of religion to culture. An indicator for such a claim was the relative lack of indigenous leadership, organization, or forms of worship in Japanese Christianity.

But, as the other coeditor, Mark Mullins points out, "If indigenization is the 'cure' for non-growth, one would expect to find indigenous [Christian] movements to be dynamic and growing." However, as the lack of postwar growth of such movements suggests, "it appears that the degree of indigenization (or failure to indigenize) cannot adequately account for the general lack of response to Christianity in Japan." If it cannot, then neither can it account, by parity of reasoning, for the opposite phenomenon of the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Korea, where the predominant model of the relation of the church to traditional Korean religions remains one of "Christ against culture."

It would appear, therefore, that we have to look elsewhere if we are to understand the historical and continuing differences in the stories of Christianity in Korea and Japan. But if success or failure in indigenization is not to be found in degrees of openness or hostility to indigenous culture or religions, how is it to be explained? If the traditional explanation in terms of acculturation or assimilation is found to be wanting, what alternative hypothesis presents itself?

The "Macropolitical" Hypothesis

It is in its answer to this question that the present volume makes its major and compelling theoretical contribution. By introducing a new explanatory paradigm, one that draws attention to what Mullins calls the "neglected dimension" of these discussions in the past, this collection of essays acquires conceptual unity and realizes its methodological aim of viewing the "Christianities" of Korea and Japan "holistically rather than as discrete and separate phenomena." At the same time it sheds light on the underlying reason why the import of the current volume extends far beyond the limited story it sets out to tell.

To understand the different trajectories of Christianity in Korea and Japan from the time of implantation to the present day, we must, says Mullins, look instead to the "macropolitical realities": the "intersocietal relations" that prevail at any one time. As social theorist Robert Montgomery argues, "the 'perceptions' of the receiving group are shaped largely by international political relations in which groups are divided into dominant or subordinate positions." There are two basic scenarios:

> If a religion is introduced from a source not perceived as threatening, while at the same time there exists some threat for which the new religion provides a resource for resistance, then a favorable condition is established for the reception of the new religion.... If, on the other hand,

> a group from which a new religion is being introduced is perceived as threatening the existence or distinctive identity of a society, then a condition encouraging resistance to the new religion is established.

This yields the following explanatory hypothesis: the differences in the fates of Christianity in Korea and Japan can be accounted for in large part by the salient differences in their "macropolitical," that is, their respective international political situations. Let us see how this theory helps to solve the puzzle with which we began: Why two countries, apparently having so much in common and living together in close proximity, should have "responded to Christianity differently."

The Colonial Difference

The time is 1919, the setting is Korea, a decade or so after its annexation by imperial Japan. Japan had recently established its credentials as the newest colonial power in East Asia. It had successfully undergone a crash program of modernization, and it had fought and won two wars, first over China, the power then dominant in Korea, and next over the major white power in East Asia, Russia.

Several of the Korean contributors explain what happened next. Before 1919, Christianity had already stepped into the vacuum created by the failure of neo-Confucianism and Buddhism to respond to the Korean people's desire for modernization. But now, with the rise of the Independence Movement of 1919, Christianity, along with messianic forms of Buddhism and other indigenous religious groupings, once again identified itself with Korean national aspirations and the struggle for the "recovery" of national identity.

The scene shifts to postwar Korea 1945, after the defeat of Japan and the occupation of Japan by the United States. It was Christian missionaries from America, once again, who, during the long Japanese occupation, held up the vision of democratic ideals and supported the struggle for Korean national independence against the hated oppressors.

Because of these repeated demonstrations by the Korean church of its solidarity with Korean national aspirations and struggles, Koreans did not feel they had to reject their culture and history by converting to Christianity. The church was not opposed to but rather "sought to preserve Korean culture and champion the aspirations of the Korean people in the face of oppression." It was this that "enabled Christianity to become truly Korean," to be not only "in" but also "of" Korea.

In other words, when viewed from this macropolitical level, it becomes clear why the story of Christianity's development in Korea differs from its counterpart narrative in Japan. The history of Christianity in both countries was shaped primarily by Japan's colonial policies. As one commentator notes: "The Korean experience is, in certain respects, the obverse of the Japanese.... The Japanese are the imperial nation for whom the Americans were the rivals, and the Koreans are the colonized nation for whom the Americans were liberators." For Korea, the colonial power came from the East, not the West. Thus, there was not the same association between colonialism and Christianity in the Korean mind.

To the extent, therefore, that "the Korean case stands out among Asian churches as a rare case of indigenization," it is in large part because of the intertwining of "indigenization" and nationalism in Korean opposition to Japanese colonial rule.

The Japanese Difference

But does this macropolitical thesis work to explain the relative failure of Christianity to take indigenous root in Japan? In the postwar period, with the defeat of Japanese ultranationalism, the collapse of State Shinto, and

American prestige at an all-time high, there was a spiritual vacuum waiting to be filled. Why was it the "new religions" and not Japanese Christianity which stepped in to answer this need?

As coeditor Young points out, while orthodox Christology has not made headway in postwar Japan, the figure of Christ has become a prominent feature in many of the mythologies of the newer religions. Nevertheless, there remains an overall ambivalence even about this "extra-ecclesial Japanese Christ."

According to the macropolitical thesis, however, this does not appear to make sense. Given the transformed international political relationship between Japan and the United States—the shift from rival colonial powers to partners in the construction of a new, democratic world order—the way should have now been open for Christianity, previously perceived as "foreign," to become a full-fledged indigenized religion of Japan. And yet this did not happen. Why?

The short answer is that, despite its shocking defeat in the war, a remarkable postwar economic recovery has brought Japan to a position of regional and global dominance. As a result, Japan today is experiencing a resurgence of nationalism. The essence of this new nationalism, however, as one essayist points out, "is not dependent upon revival of the political religion of the imperial cult." Rather, "the general public is searching for a national identity based on rational achievement...its reviving pride is now directing it towards some new and most probably innocuous form of nationalism...an inoffensive liberal Japanese nationalism of the future."

While Japan's regional and global nation-state partners may be relieved by this bit of sociological forecasting, the implications for the indigenization of Christianity in Japan are rather more sobering. Given the resurgence of national pride in their new-found prestige as a major world power, the fact is, as one essayist concludes, "Most Japanese do not see any way in which Christianity is superior to their own religious traditions."

Church Problematics: Korea

This brings us to the third and final part of the volume, "The Future of International Mission." What is the probable future of Christianity in Korea and Japan? What forms of collaboration with the West are desirable or realistic?

One issue immediately stands out. Despite the vastly different historical circumstances, it is one that is common to both Korea and Japan, and bears directly upon the future relation of Christianity in both countries to the churches of the West. That is the contestation, imported from the West and more or less present from the beginning, between two models of Christianity, two models of the relation of church to culture and society. Implicated in it are two models of the missionary context. On the one hand, there is the bible- and worship-centered model of traditional evangelism and individual salvation tending to a hierarchical and authoritarian structure. On the other, there is the orientation to social justice and political engagement, with social service (education, medical) falling somewhere in between.

These two models, especially of Protestant Christianity, continue even today to make it difficult for the churches of Korea and Japan to overcome the denominational divisions of transplanted Christianity and discover a unity of purpose in their respective social and cultural settings, to express, as it were, "the unity of the whole church." This continuing split is especially significant for both Korean and Japanese Christianity if they are to successfully meet the challenge of their different yet inextricably linked futures in Asia.

The situation is particularly crucial in Korea, the one "rare case of indigenization" in East Asia. As one Korean contributor dramatically observes, "Korea is no longer a

missionary country...the Christian Gospel has been indigenized in the soil of Korea." The Korean contributors are of one mind that the central task facing Christianity as they look forward to the twenty-first century is the realization of a unified Korean church in a reunified Korea. If so, this means that the future of Christianity in Korea once again appears to rest on a "macropolitical" linkage between indigenization and nationalism. But for this future to be realized, the Korean church must successfully overcome its own internal divisions.

One symptom of this division is the inferior status of women in the Korean church. Behind this lies the continuing difficulty of the Korean church to address its shamanistic elements. Christianity has had liberating effects for women, opening up, for example, access to higher education. Nevertheless theological education continues to follow male neo-Confucian patterns. As a result, women, who make up 60 percent of Korean Christianity, are the major vehicles through which Korean Christianity continues to be strongly influenced by shamanism. The unity of the Korean church, therefore, depends in part upon a constructive theological accommodation with the shamanistic roots of Korean Christianity. That in turn requires a transformation of a patriarchal and authoritarian structure based on an exclusivist model of "Christ against culture"—of Christ against women, who are "the *minjung* of the *minjung* [oppressed]."

Church Problematics: Japan

The situation brought about by this split in the church is only slightly less critical for the future of Christianity in Japan as well. Here too, if less dramatically than in the situation of a divided Korea, the linkage between indigenization and nationalism is at the core of the struggle between the evangelical and the social activist wings of the church. On the one hand, there is the fear, in the face of resurgent nationalism and memories of the recent and still unresolved past, that recent court decisions and publicly funded Shinto rituals are weakening the line separating state and religion in Japan. This has resulted in calls for Christian theologians to develop a constructive theology of "engagement with the state" a theological framework, however, that is not yet there. On the other hand, equally concerned but perhaps more moderate voices ask, "What is good about Japanese society and culture that can be affirmed or acknowledged in some way by the churches?" Why, in the new, transformed democratic Japan, continue to focus on points of "tension" rather than build upon points of "cultural continuity"?

There is a related area in which the future of Christianity in Japan also remains particularly problematic, The "Christian" identity of universities founded by Christian missionaries seem increasingly threatened by the forces of secularism. Among possible options (embrace secularism in the academy; hold out against it as long as possible; try to integrate faith and learning), perhaps the most promising is to identify areas where Christian universities can better address needs not being met in contemporary Japan. For example, through dialogue with Christian schools elsewhere in Asia, Christian universities in Japan could come to view their new mission context as one of helping Japan to see itself in a context that is distinctively Asian. At the same time, the critical self-reflection afforded by such intra-Asian/inter-Christian dialogue might help them to understand their own problematic relationship to Japanese culture and society in the past.

Postcolonial Christianity

The final essay of the volume suggests that there is a deeper identity crisis underlying the conservative-liberal split, not only in the churches of East Asia but in those of the

West as well, what may be called "the perplexities of postmodernity." These include a crisis in the legitimation of traditional authorities, the challenge of mass popular culture to the privileged status of modern intellectuals (including professional theologians of the West), the rise of new religious movements, the erosion of traditional codes of morality. It also includes the postcolonial erosion of the global structure of domination that characterized the imposition of Western modernization.

The introduction of Christianity into East Asia was part of the larger insertion of Western colonial power into the area. As a result, Christianity played a central role in the modernization of both Korea and Japan.

> Traditionally, Christian mission has been firmly based upon the principles of modernity...the assumption of the superiority of the West...it was the task of missionaries to take with them Western science and technology, Western medicine, Western education, Western social welfare, and Western ideas of democracy.

Now, however, the future of Christianity in East Asia, therefore, will be "inhibited" or "facilitated" by the macropolitical considerations that shape the emerging postmodern and postcolonial era in the region.

Both postmodern, postcolonial Korea and Japan pose a direct challenge to the assumptions of the superiority of Western modernity, though, as we have seen, for different reasons. In the new postwar democratic Japan, 99 percent of the people have chosen to reject Christianity. In postwar Korea, on the other hand, Christianity has become thoroughly indigenized. Thus, insofar as traditional patterns of Christian mission from the West were shaped by modernity, "there is simply little left to be done in either Japan or Korea." Rather, "Japanese and Korean Christians will be the ones setting the agenda and deciding the policies for mission in the twenty-first century."

The volume concludes that "theology and mission strategies will increasingly be defined by Christians in the non-Western world." In fact, it may very well be that "the West itself becomes the new mission field of the twenty-first century." The reality of Christianity in a postmodern, postcolonial world is that by the turn of the millennium "there will be more Christians in Africa and Asia than in Europe and North America combined." For the West "it will mean learning from, and perhaps taking orders from, those who are nonwhite, non-Western, and above all, non-American."

Again we see the power of the "macropolitical" hypothesis behind this projected scenario. The wider political and cultural consequences of Asia's economic success are already beginning to be felt. If East Asia is destined to play an even more important role in global affairs in the coming century, its expanded influence will be evidenced in the political and cultural arenas as well, not simply the economic. The era of colonialism is over. The emerging new world order will not be the traditional one of a hierarchical structure of dominance or hegemony. Power will increasingly be shared by a number of countries or regional groupings. It will no longer be a Western world in the once-familiar sense. It will be far more Asianized than has been the case since the rise of modernity. Global Christianity will be similarly transformed.

Central to any such postcolonial order in Asia is the relation between Korea and Japan. Here, because of their shared but inverse colonial past, the Christianities of Korea and Japan may have a unique contribution to make. The divergent-*because*-linked histories of Christianity in Korea and Japan bear painful witness to the need for better communication and collaboration between scholars and missionaries in these two countries. They also show why it is critical for these two nations in particular to strive together to overcome the bitterness of

the past and construct a different, mutually shared future. By joining this work of national and international reconciliation, the Christian churches of Korea and Japan may for the first time be able to "dwell together" as neighbors. For the first time they may have a truly common story to tell.

A Heart at Leisure from Itself: Caroline Macdonald of Japan

Margaret Prang
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Reviewed by Kathryn Tietz Treece, Tokyo

Caroline Macdonald started out her twenty-five-year career in Japan in 1904 as a YWCA missionary; she ended it as a highly-regarded mentor to a host of labor union leaders and social democratic politicians. However, she herself was most proud to be known as "the mother of prisoners," referring to her extensive work with incarcerated criminals and her international reputation in prison reform. Throughout the entire period, she was also a member of the Japanese church, originally at Fujimichō where she became the first woman elder, and later at the Shinanomachi Church, of which she was a founding member. Until her untimely death from cancer in 1931, her career in Japan was remarkable for its energy, nontraditional twists, talent for friendship, and depth of understanding of the Japanese people.

In this biography of Caroline Macdonald, Margaret Prang has written a well-researched book that seems to mirror Macdonald's own approach: immersion in, and mastery of, the political, social and religious ferment of the first quarter of the twentieth century in Japan. Like Macdonald herself, the book is straightforward, intelligent and without self-glorification. Indeed, Ms. Prang, a retired professor of history at the University of British Columbia, wrote the book to answer for herself: "Why do we know next to nothing about a person whose contemporaries thought her so outstanding?"

Macdonald was the fourth of five children born to Dr. Peter and Margaret Macdonald of Wingham, Ontario. The family's active and often discussed faith was "a liberal evangelicalism rooted in the Free Church Presbyterianism of western Ontario." Like other Canadian Protestants of the time, their church life had an interdenominational and ecumenical character, which tied in well with the great missionary movement of the last period of the nineteenth century.

Caroline found expression for her faith when she turned away from graduate study in physics and mathematics at the University of Toronto and instead took a job as the first university-educated general secretary of the Ottawa YWCA. Having heard many a sermon on "social Christianity," she now had the opportunity to combine personal evangelism with social service, the typical YWCA approach. A few years later, her vision expanded when the World's Committee called for development of "Y's" in foreign mission fields. Thus, in 1904, Caroline stepped onto the dock at Yokohama as the first YWCA secretary in Japan.

In her ten years of work with the "Y," she planned the first international conference of any kind ever held in Japan, the World's Student Christian Federation in 1907, with 600 delegates from twenty-five countries; oversaw the completion of the first and second permanent YWCA hostels in Japan in 1908–09; ordered all "Y" meetings to be conducted in Japanese, which she mastered; and on one of her furloughs, studied theology as the only female student at a seminary in Scotland.

These were all accomplishments to be proud of, yet even more impressive were the friendships she made. Her life story reads