

**FAITH SEEKING TRANSFORMATION:
THEOLOGY OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN POST-MINJUNG KOREA**

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INTRODUCTION

I have been involved in Korea in one way or another since first spending a summer there in 1980 shortly after the Kwangju massacre in May of that year.¹ More recently, as a member of a research grant project on the interrelation between religion and civil society in East Asia sponsored by the University of California Pacific Rim Studies program I did field research² in

¹This confrontation came in the wake of the assassination of President Park Chung Hee in October of 1979 and the ensuing movement towards greater democratization that has marked the nation since the fall of Syngman Rhee in 1960. While this movement was largely centered among university students virtually every area of Korean society has joined in this struggle in some form or another ever since. Obviously much progress has been made, as witnessed by the latest peaceful transfer of power from the outgoing President Kim Dae-Jung, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and one-time dissident politician condemned to death, to the current President, Rho Mu Hyun, whose administration is rethinking of the Confucianesque “big-brother/little-brother” (*hyung-dong-saeng*) relationship with the United States in the context of the ongoing challenge of peaceful reunification with Communist North Korea.

²The field research for this project was made possible through a generous grant provided by the University of California Pacific Rim Studies Program. My project was undertaken in

Korea in the summer of 2001, focusing on three principal areas of Korean society in which this interrelation between religion and civil society as been historically very strong.³ Initially we were hoping to find some sort of analogy with the similar research conducted in the 1980s by Robert Bellah and companions, but at least in Korea my research suggests that perhaps the framework division of “religion” and “society” may not be as helpful a heuristic construct there as it might be in the United States and I would conclude that “religion” and “civil society” in South Korea are neither strictly binomial nor dichotomous.⁴ Virtually none of my field-study respondents used concepts of “civil society” and “religion” (or even “faith”) in their discussions with me.⁵ The various social reform movements, whether of the student, labor, or farm-worker

conjunction with a larger grant project directed by Dr. Richard Madsen on the interplay between religion and civil society in East Asia.

³I lived and taught full-time at the Jesuit-run Sogang University in Seoul from 1982-85; and again in 1986. I have been back and forth for various summer stints frequently since.

⁴Nevertheless, there is still much in the Bellah school’s approach which can throw a significant amount of life on the Korean situation. For example, if contemporary Korean society can be described as “modern,” this can only be done in terms of Bellah’s “synoptic view” which looks at modernity as “a dynamic relationship between economy, polity, society, and culture” (Madsen et al., 2002, p. xiv).

⁵While there is a wide-spread Korean vocabulary for “social justice” (e.g. *sahoe chonui*) the terms one associates with “civil society” (including “citizen” “citizenship” and the like) are

variety are replete with what the well-known Protestant ethicist James Gustafson calls the “prophetic” variety of moral discourse (Gustafson 1988) and often it seems an individual’s self-understanding of faith-based discipleship, rather than a careful or complex social analysis is what initiates and nurtures continued involvement in the social arena.

The areas I studied were the farm workers movement in the rural areas of Korea, the university student movements, and the work among the urban poor, including the developing labor movement. While the whole of my research cannot be even summarized adequately in a single paper I would like to present a core thread that ran through many of my site visits and interviews with various respondents. This thread is a developing theology of social action which I call the theology of accompaniment. It is a praxis-based theological reflection that certainly owes a good deal to the larger tradition of contextual theology in Korea, including both Minjung theology and Confucian-Christian theology. Yet this theology of accompaniment is a genuinely new development that moves in a different direction from either of these two more established approaches. I believe that this theology of accompaniment is grounded, or at least has a strong resonance with a core Confucian Korean cultural paradigm, namely that social transformation begins with the individual’s own moral project of self-cultivation and moves out in successful

not widely used, and when one does find them it usually is in a rather technical sense, like applying for an identity card. “Religious” language likewise is not viewed as something which properly should be confined to ecclesial settings, or when one speaks of one’s own faith convictions.

layers throughout society, from the local to the regional, to the national, to the global (cf. Bretzke 1995, 1996).⁶

FARM WORKERS SITE VISIT

I traveled by bus to Sam-song-ri, a very tiny remote farming hamlet in North Chung-chung Province, where I met with Rev. Chung Ilwoo, S.J., a Korean naturalized citizen who has been in this farm since 1994; Mr. Lee Chae-hwui, 50, President of the Ch'ung-ju Diocese Catholic Farmers Association; Mr. Kim Kwan-shik, General manager of SOLMOI, a organic farmers association (and incorporated). SOLMOI is composed of about 13 families doing organic farming; and Mr. Kim We-yul, who graduated from Sogang in 1988 (after completing

⁶Like many East Asian societies, Korean culture loves wisdom sayings and proverbs, and one of the most frequently heard is *gae-kwa ch'on-son*, literally, "being aware of a fault one must turn toward the good." This 4-character Chinese epigram embodies well the Confucian notions of the inter-play among virtue, self-cultivation, and social change as expressed best in the canon of the Confucian classics. This interplay between moral self-cultivation and the commitment to change society is one of the foundational values which has not only marked Korean civil society in the past, but which continues to mark it deeply in the present. The manifestations of this value matrix are certainly varied, but it does seem to be the common thread that helps hold together the Korean understandings of religion, self, society, and the world. In Korea this religious-based aspect of conversion is not only individual, but often social as well, in its social dimension involves movements of both reform and/or revolution.

military service, etc.). He is the past president of SOLMOI and is now also the national auditor for the Catholic Farmers' Association and the local chapter president. All four men, including Fr. Chung, are engaged in full-time farming.

In the early days much of the history of the farm worker movement was connected with government farm policy and the overall national movement for great democratization. Since 1990 though the activities have dealt more with effects of globalization on farming and farming policy (e.g., the WTO) and internally many more activities of a more spiritual or religious nature are reported (e.g., groups or movements connected with building Christian communities and the like).⁷

Over a long lunch we had a far-ranging conversation and I learned that one farmer was baptized seven years ago (as an adult), one was born a Catholic, and one became a Catholic at the age of 9 when his whole family converted. There was not a great deal of overt faith-based talk, though towards the end of the conversation each did talk a bit explicitly about his own faith journey. The cradle Catholic said that he had a rather pious Catholic boyhood, but then became

⁷For some representative materials produced by these Korean farmers groups see *Hanguk Catolik Nongmin Hwae* [Korean Catholic Farmers Association], 1990, 1999, as well as the publications of the *Yo-Song Nongmin Ilto* ([Korean] Women Farmers Workshop, 1989, 1990. This may reflect the effect of the change of leadership and control in the farmers movement noted by my informants (i.e., transferring leadership from lay leadership to clerical control), or it may reflect a normal development in the farmers movement itself, or perhaps (and more likely) both.

a rather tepid Catholic in his university days, and then came back to a greater practice of the faith, and spoke “real faith” in reference to Jesus’ own relation to the farmers. The one who became a Catholic at age 9 began to read and reflect on the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, when he was a student, and to relate the Gospels to his own life situation. When he went to do his mandatory military service he took the Gospels with him and his interest increased for pastoral work and for society.

At this point Fr. Chung remarked somewhat mischievously “*Bok-um Chung-Shim Idan I Da*” (A gospel-centered theology is “heresy”)—a bit of a jab at the “institutional” church and its trappings in Korea. All smiled at this, and it did seem that the group all did share at least to some extent the impression that much of the institutional Catholic Church in Korea was more concerned with itself and not as faithful to the Gospels and Jesus as it should be. A related problem they articulated was that one of the big problems they saw with Catholicism in Korea was that it was centered more around priests rather than the community. One did say that this “priest-centeredness” though did reflect traditional Korean cultural values, especially those connected with *Yu-kyo Sa-sang* (Confucianism). While there was certainly less formality with the farmers than one might find in other settings (e.g., the university milieu or a business setting), the Confucian-grounded traditional Korean customs still prevailed.⁸ Whereas the farmers

⁸Mr. Lee, for example, was introduced to me and subsequently addressed only as *Hwae-Chang-Nim* (Honorable [Diocesan Farmers] Association Leader). (I had to get his name later from Fr. Chung). While this “title” may sound extremely formal to Western ears, it really is

strongly criticized the clerical nature of the institutional Catholic Church, this clericalism is reinforced and legitimized by the same Confucian tradition that is maintained in their own movement's organization and internal structure of relationships.

Returning to our conversation, it seemed to me that more than a “religious” question (despite Fr. Chung's introduction that I was looking to see “how faith moved out into society” [which was his take on my explanation of our project] what the farmers saw as the key issues were concerned with what might be called greater “democratization” (which in Korea can also express a desire for greater human rights and “human” treatment of the citizenry, especially in the time of the military dictatorships which were seen to be opposed to “democratization”).

The farmers turned their discussion from religion to civil society by saying that they simply wanted the government to treat them better, using the Korean word *dae-chop*, which carries relational connotations of hospitality and humaneness. A host should give good *dae-chop* to a guest and so on. It might not be incorrect to translate what they said (in terms of dynamic equivalence) that they simply wished that the government would treat them as human beings. While the farmers certainly did freely criticize the government farm policies, especially the *Sae Maul Undong* (New Village Movement) of President Park Chung-hee (1961-1979) as too much control and micro-management over how they farmed, at no point did they seem to use either the vocabulary or the theoretical framework of the social analysis suggested by Minjung theology.

quite ordinary in the Korean language. Yet the use of this type of honorific also shows something of a prevailing of internal contradiction in Korean society.

Rather, they used what Gustafson would call policy discourse in their critique of the government's farm policies.⁹

Family farms still are more or less the norm in Korea, though there have been some attempts to foster larger business-model farms, especially during the *Sae-gye-hwa* (globalization) policy of Kim Young Sam, the president prior to the outgoing president Kim Dae-Jung.

Comments about the Church and their faith were frequent but not elaborated at great length. The conversation tended to return to government policy and the concrete difficulties of farming. One comment that was made concerned the perception that in Korea it seemed that the believer was expected to live “for the Church” (*kyo-hoi wui ha-yo*) instead of the Church living for society. Fr. Chung said that he felt that the increasing “individualism” observable in Korean society comes from Catholicism, that earlier the tradition was much more focused on a community centeredness rather than a self-centeredness.

The conversation turned to the relation between the university students and farmers. In years past different groups of university students would spend part of their summer vacation working with the farmers, and the farmers plight was often a part of the issues university

⁹For example, they said that the government has tried to follow a Japanese model which emphasizes great control, but that this is not well suited to their own farming situation. They felt the government adopted the Japanese model because it was supposedly more “advanced” (this may fit in with Korea's “catch up” mental spoken of by Fr. Park Mun-Su, my informant in the work among the urban poor in Seoul. The farmers did allow though that the current government policy though is less control oriented than it once was.

students focused on in their various “democracy wall” treatises, articles in student-generated newspapers, and also in the student-led demonstrations themselves. Even though my own tour of the university campuses showed that the plight of the farmers is part of the litany of issues hung at the entrance gates, the farmers themselves felt that there was really very little interest or concern among the students for the farmers’ situation. Yet this complaint was not cast so much in terms of a class polarization, but just a lack of sufficient awareness of the reality of the farmers’ own situation. In this the farmers seemed to consider themselves more the poorer country cousins, than an oppressed under-class of the Minjung (Minjung is a somewhat invented Korea term which could refer to the common people or the proletariat, etc.).

Returning to the issue of the government farm policy (which did seem to be the loadstone of the conversation) the farmers did admit that there has been improvement from the time of Park Chung-hee to the present, though they expressed disappointment that Kim Dae-jung did not seem to be as involved in the life and concerns of the farmers as Kim’s earlier positions (as leading dissident politician) had led them to expect. Fr. Chung thought that Kim Dae-jung had become pretty a confirmed free-market capitalist, and while the others did not deny that claim, neither did they especially endorse it. In the whole conversation there wasn’t a great deal of extensive social analysis, but rather expressions that they wished more could be done for the farmers and a sort of over-riding dissatisfaction with the overall history of government policy for farmers. Perhaps one of their strongest complaints, at least in the sense of being verifiable, is that across society there was insufficient interest and attention to the reality of the farmers’ situation. The farmers complained a bit about the contemporary emphasis and interest in Korean society for

computers, the internet, and so on, yet technology has not completely passed them by: 2 of the 4 had cell phones which rang frequently during our lunch.

At present there is still a national Farmers Association, as well as associations in the various dioceses, but the lack the cohesion and energy the movement once had. Nowadays too there are several other related farmers movements and associations, such as an organic farmers association, and even one that seemed to stress a anti-technology, anti-electricity, etc. approach to farming as a way of living out a critique of contemporary culture. This last named group does not seem to be too large, and the farmers said that it would be unrealistic to think that one can live apart from the modern economy of the rest of Korea and the world. One final point they touched on was concern over seeds and especially genetically modified seeds. All the seed companies, save one, that sell seeds in Korea are owned by companies in the United States.

ARTICULATING THE THEOLOGY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

Back at his farm house, after all the good-byes had been said, I had the chance for a much longer conversation with Fr. Chung. In response to my question of how he saw the rationale for his life and work with the farmers in this remote section of Korea, Fr. Chung began by speaking of the “theology of accompaniment,” which he credits as the foundational insight of Jae Jong-gu (who died in 1999 from cancer, at about the age of 55), and with whom Fr. Chung had established a close living and working relationship. Fr. Chung himself was ordained in 1966, and had been teaching theology at Sogang and had served for a few years as socius (assistant) to the novice master, and then novice master himself. He said that at this time he felt he was living the Gospel “with his mouth” but that he was being called to do something different. In 1971-

1972 he heard about the slums in Seoul and asked his religious superior for permission to go and live in one for one month. Fr. Chung said that he was captivated by the humanity of the people there. Initially he feared that he'd be rejected because he wasn't one of them but he was surprised that none of that happened.

Fr. Chung met Jae Jong-gu in 1973 when Fr. Chung moved into a squatters' slum in Seoul. Jong-gu was already living there for two years, having been thrown out of Seoul National University (Korea's premier university) for student activism. Jae Jong-gu was arrested not too long afterwards and charged with various anti-government security laws and sentenced to 15 years in prison, but was released a little bit after a year later. Fr. Chung himself was expelled from the slums in April 1974, and then at the request of Cardinal Stephen Kim, then archbishop of Seoul, Fr. Chung worked from May to November 1975 as a priest at Myongdong Cathedral, and then in November 1975 moved into a second slum with Jae Jong-Gu. They lived there until April of 1977 when they were evicted and then they moved with 177 families to *Bogum-jjari* (an intentional double-meaning: "bird's nest," and/or "gospel place").

Fr. Chung and Jae Jong-gu came to the realization that much of the "social" work the church did for people like to the slum-dwellers was done on an individual basis and made the poor people individually dependent on the church. They had an individual relation to the church, but had no community. This fact came home to them when the members of the squatters section they lived in were evicted and scattered—it showed that the squatters had not developed any sense of community. This was a key realization for the work of Fr. Chung and Jae Jong-gu and would be foundational for those others that would come to adopt their basic program of living with and working with (rather than for) the poor. Fr. Chung illustrated this theological concept by

drawing two pictures for me: one was a pyramid model, with the “church” and its leaders giving aid in a “downward” fashion to the poor who lived below them. This model Fr. Chung characterized as the “charity” approach of the “theology of doing.” Their approach of the theology of accompaniment was different though: by immersing themselves and living among the poor they sought *not* to direct works of charity or social service, but to just remain in contact with the poor, to share their life, to witness to the dignity the Gospel spoke of as Good News for the poor, and simply to try and let people move through them—to animate whatever they could just by being neighbors—in short, to follow a “theology of being.”

Speaking of himself as a priest, Fr. Chung said that initially he felt that he had to answer all of people’s questions and to *do* something. Then he came to the realization that all he had to do was just listen to people because no one had ever asked them before as a human being what was going on in their lives. He gave as an example just using the customary greeting to one old Korean woman (“*Halmoni, annyung hashimnikka?* [literally, “Grandmother, are you at peace?”]) and then listening to her story for several hours. It seemed the woman had not felt that too many church people were *really* interested in the answer to the customary question “how are you,” and she found a receptive listener in Fr. Chung. This is a good example of how the theology of accompaniment uses *ingan dae chop* (human treatment) and relates back to the term used by the farmers to express their desires from the government--i.e., just to be treated as human beings. Fr. Chung characterized their work as “listening and waiting”; God is out front, doing all the work, and we are just to follow along behind. Fr. Chung said that is frequent prayer to God is the question “*Where* do you want me?” and *not* “*What* do you want me to do?” Chung and Jae experienced considerable government opposition, because to the government anyone who

worked with the poor probably were communists or at least communist sympathizers. Yet Jae Jong-Gu and Fr. Chung were awarded the Magsaysay Award in 1986 for community leadership and Fr. Chung believes that this award was given to put pressure on the Korean government. The award is named after a former Philippine president and is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Fr. Chung was at *Bogum-jjari* until 1991 when he was named assistant to the Korean Jesuit superior, which he continued until 1994. At that point Fr. Chung judged that the farmers seemed to be the most isolated group in the country and since he himself comes from a farming background, he felt this was the place to go for his new work. For Chung farming is not just a way of life, it's a statement on life, taking up anti-cultural values, etc., and he considers this to be more important than many other works.

THEOLOGY OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN URBAN MINISTRY

Christ the Worker and Fr. Kim Chong-dae

A Korean Jesuit much influenced by Fr. Chung and the theology of accompaniment is Fr. Kim Chong-dae, a 1985 Sogang graduate who converted from being a “traditional, non-practicing Buddhist,” to Catholicism in 1982. His family has become Catholic as well, and he is the middle son. Kim had been an engineer before entering the Jesuits, and was profoundly affected by a strike at his plant. He noticed that there was a great difference between the workers of his level and the manual laborers. The management attempted to coopt the workers at Kim's

level, but simply locked out the other blue collar workers. Kim points to this experience as producing a certain conversion towards the blue collar employees, and he began to fraternize with them more from this point on. When the strike ended Kim was particularly angered by punishments handed out to the blue collar labor movement leaders, and he began to go to church more from this point on, to read more, and to reflect on his life and Korean society. Kim said that he considered the Jesuits as people who lived with meaning, and also was influenced by his Catholic student friends. But here the influence was more by personal example than by conversion to class struggle.

Kim entered the Jesuits in 1990, and during his studies Kim worked with the JOC (Young Christian Workers) and recounts an anecdote of a young Korean woman who had not been able to go to the University and worked in a company in which she felt inferior to other workers. One day, however, this woman had a religious insight that she was a precious creation of God and this realization helped her deal with her life situation. Reflecting on this story Kim writes that “By listening to her story I became aware that the promotion of social justice is most effective when it flows from one’s life, particularly from an oppressed situation” (Kim, Chong-Dae, 2001). This sort of experience led Kim into extended involvement with Korean workers. Kim’s approach is a bit different, as he stresses, like Fr. Chun, that he does not primarily want to “do” or “accomplish” something as much as to “try to live in relationship with others as Jesus did.” This expression of solidarity is a key aspect of living the spirituality of the theology of accompaniment articulated Fr. Chung Ilwoo (who was very influential in Fr. Kim’s Jesuit life). Kim went on to say that larger society values jobs and abilities in such a way that “labor workers and factory workers often think their jobs and their lives are worthless.” This marginalization is

oppressive and one key that Kim sees is to change the marginalized persons' own self-perceptions.

Kim's motivations are strongly driven by a larger desire to grow closer to Jesus Christ: "Although we are sinners, we are called to be friends with Christ who is carrying the Cross. I believe that to make friendship with people is to make friendship with Christ. So sharing my life with the workers and being friends with them are concrete ways of making friends with Christ" (Kim, Chong-dae 2001). Kim also reflects contemporary Jesuit spirituality, especially the stress in the last 20 years on a faith that does justice and being a "man for others":

I was ordained a priest last year and since then have learnt something about being a 'good shepherd'. I experience this when I faithfully share my time and my life with others. In this sense, my life as a Jesuit priest is being a "man for others." But it is impossible to be a "man for others" without sharing my life with them, that is, I am a "man *being* with others." For me, this is what it means to be a priest—to be with others. Many people, especially poor people, come to share their stories with me. As a Jesuit and a priest, I can freely make relationships with them. I feel lucky to have this opportunity (Kim, Chong-dae 2001).

Echoing a bit Fr. Chung Ilwoo's distinction between a theology of doing and a theology of being, Fr. Kim spoke of one view of priest as looking on ministry and the people involved as "objects" of the ministerial endeavors. Kim contrasted this with his own view, which he said looked on ministry as living with the people and sharing their lives. Kim said that many religious-order priests shared this view, but that this was less so with the diocesan clergy. One example of this, Kim saw, was the issue of clerical attire. Kim himself was dressed in civilian

clothes, but the local bishop emphasized the desire that all priests wear at least the Roman collar, and that even some in the diocese wear the cassock. Kim criticized a mentality that was too concerned with such externals and a conformity mentality which was rather childish.

Part of the problem, or a related problem, is a concern for individual salvation, to the exclusion or diminishment of concern for larger social issues. For example, Kim spoke of a belief that the bigger the church, the better the church, or having a church with a bigger pipe organ than its neighbors, and so on. Kim also criticized the widespread practice of praying for material rewards (called *ki-bok sa-sang*, literally “prayer-blessings mentality”). Kim spoke of his pastor as rather work oriented, which he found a bit uncomfortable, and which probably represented for Kim more the “theology of doing,” rather than the “theology of being/accompaniment.”

Turning back to his own life, Kim said that as a priest he recognized the danger of falling into the priest class—the temptation of clericalism, and so he seeks to live and work with people in a normal way. Since Inchon is very industrialized there are lots of factories, and the whole area of the labor apostolate (*nodong samok*) is broad. Kim describes his own parish as middle to lower middle class. At one time the parish had been bigger, but now some apartment areas have been shaved off from the parish and its numbers are diminishing. Kim has given some thought to the possibility of learning some sort of trade (a *kisul*) and then going and living directly with the poor. In this hope he seems to mirror Fr. Chung’s life as a simple farmer. I asked Kim if he meant to be a worker priest, in the sense of the movement in France in the 1950’s (in which the priests worked in the factories, but anonymously—without being known as priests). Kim thought though that this sort of anonymity was not crucial; what was key was the idea of living with the

poor as one of them, and not as one ministering to them as a member of a clerical elite. Kim feels some tension at the present though, since at his current parish assignment he can't really do all the things that he would like to.

When I asked Fr. Kim about his hopes for the future of the Jesuits in Korea he said that the current hierarchical structure needs to be reformed. Though he didn't elaborate at great length about what that would entail, he did ask whether hierarchy was such a necessary element, e.g., in terms of the traditional Confucian distinction between the "elder" and "younger" in Korean relations (*sonbae/hubae*). Inculturation (*do-chak-hwa*) does not mean that the Church in Korea has to adopt all of Korean Confucian culture (such as the elder/younger relation of the 4th Confucian Relationship). One can be a genuine Catholic and a Korean at the same time. The church itself, however, should not be the priority, but greater attention should be given to larger social issues, e.g., taking care of children, looking at working conditions, and the like.

In responding to my question about what he saw as "religious" in Korean culture Kim pointed to Buddhist and Confucianist aspects in Korean culture, but he saw Christianity more in terms of commitment, though he admitted that not all believers would share his outlook. For some the church is like a "circle" (the name given to student organizations at the university), and that some approach their church membership in an almost automatic fashion. Kim concluded with recalling his period of the "practical work" portion of a Jesuit seminarian's training during which he lived in the *Hanmom* [One Body] community. This was a particularly good atmosphere he felt, and he felt energized and encouraged by the other Jesuits with him he lived, especially by the superior at the time, Fr. Chung. It was a community of hospitality, and he felt proud that this was the reputation the community had with others.

Hanmom Kongdongchae (“One Body” Base-Christian Community)

Hanmom is the name given to the Jesuit insertion community established in 1991 in and this community continues up to the present. It is comprised of priests and scholastics (Jesuit seminarians) who share the idea that the purpose of this community is to not only to aid the poor, but to share their lives and struggles by living among them and engaging in a variety of activities which the neighbors themselves can cooperate with. Thus, the *Hanmom* community members work in a number of different social service projects such as remedial education program for the children of broken families, providing a “study room” where neighborhood children can do their homework after school (such space being a luxury in most of the neighboring homes), work with teenage substance abusers, and care for the elderly abandoned by their families (one of the most marginalized groups in a Confucian society which traditionally honors and cares for the elderly).

The name *Hanmom* was chosen not only for its resonance with the Pauline theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, the prayer in the Catholic eucharistic liturgy that all become “one body, one Spirit in Christ,” but also (and perhaps most poignantly) because it would echo the slogan of a local community leader who was later killed while attempting to defend some of the urban poor from forced eviction. Fr. Park Mun-Su, a naturalized Korean citizen, spoke of a key value and impression Koreans have is that they tend to look on themselves as belonging to a “catch up” nation status, i.e., they have to work very hard to reach the level of England, France and especially the USA—the so-called “advanced countries” (*son-chin-guk*). This “catch up” ideology reinforces a strong national consciousness: as Koreans “we” have to catch up to the

“them” of the advanced countries. The government has capitalized on this ideology for several decades, and it affects how one values “development” and should be willing to “sacrifice” for the corporate good of *uri nara* (“our nation”—the colloquial term Koreans use among themselves to denote Korea). While these notions of “advanced” and “developing” nations have largely been discredited in the academy, Fr. Park maintains that most Koreans would hold them to be “true” and that this strong belief that Korea must play catch up, and that it can “succeed” accounts for a lot of the over-work, risk-taking in business and the lack of “private time.”

I attended Sunday Mass and had lunch at the Fr. Park’s Muak-Dong Catholic Community. About twenty-five people attended the Mass, and the group spilled out into the main room of the small three room apartment (which would be roughly equivalent to a medium-sized studio apartment in the U.S.). Fr. Park’s sermon related the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan (the Gospel for the 15th Sunday) giving three contemporary examples of how this Gospel could be applied or seen: one dealt with a girl in the neighborhood who was retarded and apparently well-known by the people there. He made the connection that some people would pass this girl by, just as the priest and the Levite did to the Samaritan, but that others might greet the girl, in which case she would smile broadly. Fr. Park then went on to make two other applications, one to the contemporary situation between Palestine and Israel, making reference to the cultural animosity which existed between Jews and Samaritans, and then he finished with a longer story about the recent assassination of a priest in Jamaica who was killed due to his work for the poor.

Those in attendance consisted of two elderly women, one who comes regularly, and a friend of hers who seemed to be there for the first time. At the other end of the age spectrum was a vocational student in his early 20’s (complete with New York Yankees baseball cap worn

indoors and backwards in the mode popular in the USA). Most of the people seemed to be in their 30's and 40's and one couple was not from the neighborhood itself but had worked with Fr. Park in some organization for the poor. Following the Mass we had a nice potluck lunch with contributions from many of those in regular attendance. The men and the women sat down together at the same tables (which would not be done traditionally, and often still is not done in similar gatherings among Koreans in the United States). Perhaps this lived out notion of accompaniment has small effects in a variety of ways in the interplay between faith and society.

CONCLUDING THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

As I stated in the beginning, there really is no bifurcation of “religion” and “society” in Korea. Harmony and integration seem to be key values, and conflict and tension seem to be the key realities (and therefore the most formidable challenges). The overall democratization movement in Korea, especially as seen in reference to human rights, the labor and farm-workers movement, shows a combination of motivating factors which inspired and sustained those involved in these struggles. Certainly for many their faith and biblical and ecclesial notions of social justice, the dignity and worth of the individual, understandings of the common good and so on helped form, articulate, and sustain direct involvement in these arenas. However, I would observe that these “Christian” understandings of social ethics merged with some important Confucian strains as well, most particularly an overall understanding of human society as grounded in harmonious and reciprocal relationships, perhaps seen most clearly with the First of the Five Confucian Relationships (between the King and the minister there is to be justice). The First Relationship was conceived as a means of maintaining a proper balance between power and

moral authority. Only when these two forms of power worked together could a government be said to be just. When a disjunction occurred it was often the responsibility of one or the other to bring affairs back into order.¹⁰ The role and influence of Christianity in the social arena is seen easily enough in a number of areas (cf. Bretzke 2001; Chang Yunshik 1998; Kang Wi-Jo 1997).

If religion does play a pivotal role in modern society (cf. Casanova 1994), then contemporary Korean theological reflection will be a helpful interpretive source. While virtually none of my respondents indicated any particular knowledge of, much less debt to, the established Minjung theologians, still it seems that there is a role which such theological reflection can play in helping interpret some of the implicit underpinnings of the theology of accompaniment. According to Suh Nam-dong (1918-1984), who is probably one of the best known and most influential Minjung theologians, theology must be done in a social way, portraying God as one who shares “his salvific mission especially with the weak and the oppressed who are then to extend it to all the classes of society without distinction. By associating himself with the moaning of the Minjung [the lower class], God awakens the dehumanized consciences of the powerful in their society and induces them to adjust or to transform the unjust system which suppresses the poor and instils in them a sense of defeat” (Ha, 1997, 112). Speaking of God in

¹⁰This restoration of justice was expressed by the Confucian concepts of the *T'ien-ming* (Mandate of Heaven) and the *Chong-myong* (Rectification of Names) and these concepts still function as what Victor Turner would call fundamental root paradigms, i.e., value systems that are so deeply ingrained in a society that they go largely unquestioned (cf. Biernatzki, 1987, 1991; Bretzke 1990).

this way leads to a doing of theology which will be better suited to the Asian context and will of necessity be less Western in its cast.

Without a doubt the development of Minjung theology is one of the most original and influential intellectual movements both within Korea and which has had a widespread impact outside as well (Bretzke 1991, 1997, 2000). Minjung theology also reflects well some of the key characteristics of a Korean understanding of the interplay between religion and civil society. Two aspects in particular which are foundational to Minjung theology are helpful in further illuminating Korean understandings of the relation between religion and society, namely the engagement with *han* and what I might term a pneumatological Christology, which focuses less on Jesus Christ who saved humanity once and for all in the past, and more on a Jesus who still lives among the community in its everyday sufferings and strivings. Both of these aspects seem to be found implicitly in the theology of accompaniment, even if this particular vocabulary is not used. In a pneumatological Christology the Holy Spirit aids the believers to discern correctly and then follow Jesus Christ. This following involves a real commitment to solidarity with the poor and oppressed and concrete action on their behalf. This pneumatological Christology helps Korean Christians to rediscover Jesus's redemptive events in the contemporary socio-political events and to avoid falling into the trap of a "faith in the past actions of Jesus without challenging Christians to walk in the Holy Spirit now as Jesus did then" (Ha, 76).

Though the theology of accompaniment does resonate with Minjung theology and other liberation theologies, there are some aspects of the lived practice that might move in a different direction. In my field research I found very little explicit reference to the sort of social analysis and/or conscientization process often associated with liberation theology. The theology of

accompaniment might call into question, or at least into further conversation, some of the assumptions and working premises of classics associated with liberation theology such as Paolo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and/or Ernest Cardenal's *The Gospel in Solentiname* (1976). While people certainly wanted their lives to improve there simply was not the same sort of rhetoric that one would find easily in the placards that are plastered over most Korean university campuses that denounce the evils of capitalism, militarism, the United States, while expressing great compassion for and identification with the "workers" and the "farmers." While university students continue to make immersion visits to the farms the farm-workers themselves did not express a great deal of positive feedback to these sorts of exchanges. Instead, what I seemed to hear over and over again was simply a desire for decent human treatment (*ingan daechop*) and less emphasis on concrete programs geared to concrete social change. One of the genuine developments of this theology of accompaniment may be the self-emptying on part of those living and working with the poor of the desire to try and fix things themselves. Instead, the theology of accompaniment would seem to put the accent on a "being with," rather than a "doing for," even if the "doing for" is accomplished in the context of a "being with." This theology of accompaniment may invite us to reconsider some of our understandings of the nature, processes, and goals of theologies of liberation.

We might also speak of the theology of accompaniment as an ethnographic theology, e.g., faith transforming society. This theology involves at least a reform, if not a real revolution of clerical status and practice. For example, Fr. Chung refused to turn his farm into a mission station (the *kong-so*) and he refused to be cast into the role of the sacramental dispensary. Fr. Kim was uncomfortable with clerical attire and preferred to work alongside the people of his

parish. The tension of cultural elites is still evident in Korean religious society, as evidenced by several of my respondents (most explicitly from Fr. Kim Chong-dae), and has been a very long-standing tension in dealing with the Koreanization or inculturation of Christianity in that culture.¹¹

There is a real richness in developing theologies such as the theology of accompaniment which have not yet found their way into much explicit academic reflection, whether of a theological, anthropological, sociological, or political variety. This the theology of accompaniment might be example of what theologian and missiologist Robert Schreiter outlines as a process of constructing local theologies, namely a third stage which goes beyond translation and assimilation to a more deep-seated adaptation (cf. Schreiter 1985, 1997). Coupled with the Korean Minjung theology, especially in its reflection on the social injustices, systemized and embodied in what Koreans call *han*, is a good example of the intersection between what we might call religion and civil society in Korea culture. While *han* is difficult to define, its strong sense of having been unjustly hurt, oppressed, victimized offers a profound challenge not only to civil society, but also to the role of religion in attempting to provide an effective resolution of this *han*. A willingness to share the *han* of other people is certainly one important hallmark of the theology of accompaniment, and is grounded in the passion of Christ.

¹¹There is a general love of uniforms in Korean culture, and Priests and religious often seem to enjoy wearing the Roman collar or religious habit, and those few groups which shun this distinctive attire seem to suffer.

Perhaps another avenue forward would be to turn more explicitly to the notion of conversion and metanoia adumbrated above. The classic Korean-Confucian adage of *Gae-kwa chon-sun* (correct the faults and turn toward the good) indicates first a stance, an attitude, and then a process, and finally a result. If this traditional Confucian adage can be joined to the religious concept of a pilgrimage—i.e., a journey which has a clear goal, but which journey itself is part of achieving the goal, then the role of religion will continue to play an important role in modern Korea. The developing theology of accompaniment may furnish some important guideposts along the way.

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