

Protestant Spirit in Korean Mind: Korean Non-Church Christian Principles of Localizing the Universal Gospel

The Meaning of Korean Non-Church Christianity in the 21st Global Context

One of the keywords that represent our contemporary world would be “globalization,” which includes an intensively growing consciousness of the one world in which worldwide mutual interdependences are required. Rapid technological developments in communication and transportation have surely produced the world as a unified system. In the early period of globalization, especially along with the collapse of communist-socialist system, considerable numbers of scholars, represented by Francis Fukuyama,¹ anticipated globalization as a homogenous unification of the world, which they mostly meant *the* Western: politically liberal, economically capitalist, and culturally Euro-American world. In some aspects, it is empirically true that *the* Western/American culture travels on global scale, making tremendous influences on local cultures.

Our experiences in globalization, however, have also shown different aspects: reactions from locals, more than often accompanying violence, rather than a harmonious and homogeneous world order and life styles. Scholars who see such a complex reality have developed concepts that could explain different aspects of globalization. John Tomlinson, an expert in culture and communication theories, for example, suggests the concept of “complex connectivity” of globalization which made loose the connection of the locality and its local culture and increase the speed and density of mutual connectivity and dependency.² According to him, globalization does not mean the end of locality but modification of local culture in responding to exogenous elements of the global culture, of which results are various forms of hybridized local cultures and their influences on the direction of global culture.³

At this point, we might admit Peter Berger and his colleagues’ naming of globalization as “many globalization” which embraces homogenous process, hybridization, indigenization, and all other responses to make sense of locals in the global world.

¹ In his famous work *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), Francis Fukuyama showed a Hegelian optimism, interpreting the Western democratic order as the final stage of human development.

² John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, trans. Kim Sung-hyŏn and Chŏng Yong-hui (Seoul: Nanam, 2004), 12.

³ For this issue, consult with Tomlinson’s op. cit., especially 50-52, 123-125, 143-151, 174-184, 191-192, and 203-213.

According to *Many Globalization* research participants, who have field-studied cultural elements of different regions in encounter with the homogeneous global stream, the groups of “weak culture,” which means having low sense of local identity, tend to adopt the Western-originated global culture without any critical reflections. Whether being an active responder or a passive receiver of the global culture, they concluded, produces quite different results in local lives.⁴

If we see the contemporary Korean mainline Protestant churches from the perspective of *Many Globalization* researchers, we cannot help but to admit that they belong to a “weak” culture who becomes passive receiver group that has adopted, in some sense welcome, a homogenous global process of Western Christianity. In a recent research studying in the Korean Protestant churches that have numerically grown since 1990s, the time of a full-scale globalization, I could observe the great consensus among the congregations on the homogenous global contents of Christianity that have been formulated in American context, that is, religiously evangelical (and fundamental), politically conservative-democratic, and economically capitalist-friendly.⁵ It is not surprising, in fact, that Christianity, which has identified Westernization with modernization and Christianization since the dawn of emerging modernity, has showed a religious zeal to make a homogeneous world of Kingdom of God, of which economic system is capitalistic and political system is democratic-liberal. As Immanuel Wallerstein illustrates, the history of modernity has been that of Western, modern, Christian people’s ‘rude’ proclamation of their right to intervene in non-Western worlds, which they regarded as barbarian, irrational, and underdeveloped.⁶ This is what Wallerstein called “european universalism,” the universalized ideology of a particular (Western, modern and Christian) worldview.

Distinguished from “european universalism,” Wallerstein, along with increasing numbers of scholars who advocate the need for a new universalism for global coexistence, demonstrates that the next twenty to fifty years would be critical for world intellectuals to create “universal universalism,” which could be acquired through global conversations among all particulars in equal power relations.⁷ Of course, it would be quite ideal for all cultural groups to have equal rights or to find a place for conversing

⁴ For details, see Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington, eds., *Many Globalization*, trans. Kim Han-young (Seoul: I Field, 2005).

⁵ Soyoung Baik, “In Search for Meaning within Urban Protestant Life in Global Era: Focusing on the ‘90s-Type’ Trans-Denominational Evangelical Church Congregations in Metro-Seoul Area,” *Trans-Humanities* 2 (Spring 2009): 77–110.

⁶ For historical incidents, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power*. Trans. Kim Chae-oh (Seoul: Ch’angbi, 2008), 15–58.

⁷ Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power*, 56–57 and 146.

with one another in egalitarian relations. Nevertheless, it seems to be normative to create such a shared concept for living together in already-globalized world. Perhaps, his emphasis on “being historical” would be one way to make the ideal realized. “Universal universalism,” according to Wallerstein, allows us to reject any human attempt to essentialize a particular idea or an institution, to historicize all human products and creation, and to criticize the intervention of the strong to the life matters of the weak.⁸

Diagnosing the Korean Protestant churches’ reality of passive, non-reflective reception of Western form and contents of Christianity to be problematic and non-positive local way of living the global world, I would like to pay attention to Korean Non-Church Christian adherents, represented by Kim Kyo-sin (1901-1945) and Ham Sŏk-hŏn (1901-1989),⁹ who had practiced lifetime effort to distinguish what are universal from particulars in Christian tradition and to construct a historically concrete Korean community of Christian believers. Hoping that their lives and suggested principles could help contemporary mainline Korean churches to find their own epistemological and practical ways to make a local community that makes sense to the locals and contribute to making a “universal universalism” in the time of rethinking our present institutional life in the new world conditions.

Non-Church, Universal in Principles and Particular in Forms and Contents

Non-Church was initially started by Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1983) who denied

⁸ Ibid. 138.

⁹ Born in 1901 in the northern part of Korea, where Christianity was strong as a cultural and spiritual alternative, Kim Kyo-sin and Ham Sŏk-hŏn were leading figures in the KNCC group from the outset. Although six initial members got together sharing their common vision and faith confessions, it was Kim Kyo-sin who maintained the journal *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* and produced major articles as the representative of the first generation of KNCC. Inheriting the KNCC spirit and principles, Ham had continued the second generation of the KNCC examining localization of Christian Gospel in Korean context. Here I mainly consult with Kim and Ham’s works based on my understanding that both of them were representative thinkers and activists who showed the KNCC spirit and principles.

⁹ I partially introduced primary ideas about the themes in a seminar led by Ssialsasang yŏngu hoe (Associate of Ssial Thought) in June 2006, of which work was published as a collected work on Ham’s thought *Ssial, Saengmyŏng, Pyŏngwha* [Common People, Life and Shalom] (Hangilsa, 2007). Having brought the themes as major study object, here, I develop and extend the themes in a broader review of the KNCC and in relation with the 21st global reality of our contemporary world and the Korean churches in it.

denominational church organizations as the Western Christianity introduced. Uchimura was in a unique position in the history of Christianity because he was one of the first Asians to pursue the development of a local Christian community that reflected Asian cultural presuppositions. He believed that loving God and loving one's nation "complete and fulfill each other."¹⁰ Naming his own Christianity as "samurai Christianity,"¹¹ Uchimura went through great struggle to harmonize his Japanese and Christian identities.

To Uchimura, "non" (*mu*) in his Non-Church did not mean the destruction of the Christian faith community, but the destruction of universalized beliefs in particular ("wrong" in his eyes) statements about the church such as denominationalism, the tendency to make absolute human-made church doctrines and ecclesiastical orders, deification of the earthly form of the Church, and an exclusive assertion that salvation is available in the institutional churches alone. Uchimura called his Non-Church *ecclesia*, distinguishing it from the institutional churches. To Uchimura, every *ecclesia* is revealed as a historically concrete particular gathering, not the permanent and universal form, of Christian community. Through scholarly study of the original meaning of the term *ecclesia* in the New Testament, Uchimura ensured that Christ used the word to refer to "the gathering of the laity who is called [out of the church]."¹² "The original *ecclesia*," to Uchimura, "was a fellowship of individuals who had chosen to model their lives after the Christ, and thus it did not make a distinction between the sacred and the profane, between the act of worship and every day life."¹³ Uchimura was convinced that Non-Church is the best form of the Church in this world that satisfies his understanding of an ideal form of a historically concrete Christian gathering. He admitted, based on his Christian understanding of human nature as free but imperfect, that human beings are not able to accomplish the task of founding a perfect church on earth. The perfect form of Christian gathering would be achieved only in the final Kingdom of God. What has to be done on earth is to establish a better form of the church as a continuous process of denying any form of the church that becomes a fossilized organization. In this sense,

¹⁰ James T. Koder, "Uchimura Kanzō and His No Church Christianity: Its Origin and Significance in Early Modern Japan," *Religious Studies* 23 (Spring 1987): 387.

¹¹ Uchimura valued samurai virtues such as loyalty to the nation and sincere respect for one's teacher. In his works one can easily find positive description of samurai who showed loyalty to the nation and the feudal lord. Such persons were seen as perfect models for Japanese Christians. Uchimura stated that Japanese soldiers who happily accepted death for their family and nation had eschatological hope. Uchimura Kanzō, *Questions and Answers in Christianity*, trans. Ch'oe Hyōn (Seoul: Saminsa, 1985), 26-27.

¹² Uchimura Kanzō, *Zenshu* [The Complete Works], trans. Kim Yong-gōn and Kim Yun-ok, vol. (Seoul: Sōrusa, 1975), 8: 353-54, 369.

¹³ Carlo Caldarola, *Christianity the Japanese Way* (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 1979, 51.

Non-Church is “universal” in terms of its principle of continuous negation of any “universal” form of the church in history.¹⁴

In a Bible meeting led by Uchimura, the six Koreans (Kim Kyo-sin, Ham Sŏk-hŏn, Song Tu-yong, Chŏng Sang-hun, Yu Sŏk-dong, and Yang In-sŏng) met together and shared a vision for the reformation of Korea through Christian faith. They started their own Bible meeting in which they fostered not only biblical knowledge but also their patriotic concerns about Korea. Issuing the first edition of *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* (Bible Korea, the group’s written faith statements) in July 1927, the Korean Non-Church Christians (hereafter KNCC) set up the motto of the journal as “Bible to Korea and Korea on the Bible.” The KNCC adherents skipped the word “and” between *Sŏngsŏ* and *Chosŏn* when they created the name of journal because they could not prioritize between the two. Considering being a Korean to be equally important to being a Christian, they took out the word “and” that might separate the two from each other (Kim, 2: 20–21).¹⁵

The KNCC community did not agree with the mainline Korean denominational churches’ interpretations and practices of the Christian faith as given from Western denominational churches. The KNCC community understood that it should undertake a twofold task: to transform Korea in light of Christianity and to challenge Western-oriented denominational Korean churches in light of traditional Korean moral teachings. Although *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* was not a popular journal (with less than three hundred subscribers), it continued every month for fifteen years providing autonomous and creative interpretations on the Bible, critical reflections on their timely matters, and spiritual and moral tasks of Koreans in history. An episode in the 1942 *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* case, of which result was the stoppage of its publication, shows that intellectual and spiritual power of the KNCC was considerable. A Japanese police officer who investigated the *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* accomplices saw the potential power of KNCC: “You [the KNCC group] are the worst group that we have caught. Those who formulate social associations for the independence of Chosŏn are bearable. But, you are devious people who attempt to implant the spirit of Chosŏn people in the name of religion, a basis for independence a century or five centuries later.”¹⁶

Ham Sŏk-hŏn, one of the starting members of KNCC, inherited the initial passion for

¹⁴ Soyoung Baik Chey, “Korean Non-Church Christian Movement, 1927–1989: Transcending the World and Transforming the Church,” Boston University Th. D. dissertation, 2003, 95–96.

¹⁵ Kim Kyo-sin, *Kimkyosin Chŏnjip* [The Complete Works of Kim Kyo-sin] 6 Vols., ed. No Pyŏng-gu (Taegu: Ilsimsa, 1981). Hereafter I will put the volume number and the page numbers in the text at the end of cited contents.

¹⁶ Yu Tal-yŏng, “Kim Kyo-sin kwa han’guk” [Kim Kyo-sin and Korea] in *Kimkyosin kwa han’guk* [Kim Kyo-sin and Korea], ed. No P’yŏng-gu (Taegu: Ilsimsa, 1981), 167.

and concerns about the harmonization of their Christian (universal) faith and national (local) identity, and led the second generation of KNCC since 1945, the year of Kim's sudden death of typhus and of the national independence. Although conservative and fundamental line of KNCC, represented by No P'yŏng-gu (1912–2003), condemned Ham for his growing faith confessions in dialogue with Korean cultural and religious heritages, from my understanding, Ham was the person who kept the core KNCC principles through his lifetime and even went further to produce significant local religious intellectual contents in a deeper level than the first KNCC generation.

After reading *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* and KNCC members' works such as Kim's and Ham's *Complete Works*, I have categorized the principles into three major themes. 1) The first principle is the autonomy of *al* (a part/an individual) in correlation with *Han* (the Whole). 2) The second principle is protesting pacifism in concrete historical contexts. 3) The third one is an ongoing spiritual journey of learning Christian faith that should be ceased in a certain moment.

The First Principle: Autonomy of *Al* (the Singular) in Correlation with *Han* (the Whole)

The understanding of *al*, an individual who belongs to and is thus relational with *Han* (the One Great Divine) led the KNCC adherents to demonstrate autonomy and freedom of an individual believer who is able to seek God without any authorized institutions. Ham Sŏk-hŏn furiously emphasized this aspect of *al*'s autonomy: "The fundamental principle of life is do-it-by-itself. Since God is the Spirit of do-it-by-itself, God wants the world God has created to reach the life as do-it-by-itself" (Ham, 1: 48);¹⁷ "A life in history is supposed to become oneself as it is" (Ham, 1: 63).

The KNCC concept of *al* is, however, different from that of the self in the modern Western philosophy. The KNCC believed that *al* is not a being separated from *Han*, the world, and one's neighbors. *Al* is a relational being. The KNCC members shared an organic worldview in which every living thing is in a relational status of being. Although *al* is free from human-made institutions, *al* belongs ontologically to a bigger community of life as created by *Han*, the One Wholly Divine. Korean religious and cultural traditions, especially neo-Confucian teaching, had taught the KNCC members that the self is constituted by its relations to significant others such as parents, spouse, children,

¹⁷ Ham Sŏk-hŏn, *Hamsŏkhŏn Chŏnjip* [The Complete Works of Ham Sŏk-hŏn] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983). Hereafter I will put the volume number and the page numbers in the text at the end of the quoted contents.

friends, and furthermore all the myriad things in universe.

Based on his understanding of *al*'s capability to receive *Han*'s divinity, Kim Kyo-sin was convinced that Koreans and East Asians, as *al* of *Han* in Ham's language, are able to communicate with God even before the advent of Christianity on Korean peninsula. Confucius, Mencius, Lau Tzu, Chang Tzu were those who taught the teaching of God (Kim, 2: 202). Kim confessed that religious thoughts in East Asia were like the Old Testament, which reveals and prepared the Christian thought in the pre-Christian era. Kim sometimes expressed his preference for Confucian cultural presuppositions when Christian teachings that Western theologians produced did not make sense to him. One instance of this concerned the issue of "individual salvation." Convinced that God would ultimately save all living things, Kim rejected the idea of "Predestination" that says God would save parts of creation in an exclusive way. Kim even announced that, although his assertion is not orthodox in Christian tradition, he cannot accept his own salvation if there is no man who would not be saved (Kim, 1: 179-180). With a belief in an organic universe of God, Kim was convinced that God would save the whole humankind and all living things on "that day," the eschatological moment of universal accomplishment.

Ham also rejected the doctrine of individual's spiritual salvation, asserting that an individual cannot be saved if one does not complete one's own historical vocation given from God (Ham, 3: 15). Receiving insights from Yu Yöng-mo's (1890-1981) religious philosophical concept of *ssial* (seed),¹⁸ Ham developed a panentheistic idea of divine incarnation of *ssial*, the spirit of God, in every human mind. Influenced by Yu, later Ham considered Eastern teachings and Korean religious-cultural traditions as the main resources for his religious reflection. Most of all, Ham appreciated the shared religious mind of Koreans' worshipping *Hananim*, the One Wholly Divine, because it could become the ground of a peaceful, kind, inclusive, and harmonious collective consciousness among Koreans and other peoples. Although Ham did not develop a systematic theory of

¹⁸ As a religious thinker and ascetic who read the Bible in light of his deep understanding of Korean and Eastern religious traditions, Yu developed his own creative religious thought, which was quite different from orthodox Christian thought. To Yu, *ssial* is the same as the spirit or the seed of God on one hand, and as the common people in history on the other hand. *Han öl* is the name of the Spirit and God in Yu's thought. It is similar to Christ or logos in Hellenistic Christian tradition. Since Christ or *Han öl* is the divine principle or power from heaven incarnated in every human being, it cannot be existed solely in Jesus. In the intellectual structure of neo-Confucian cosmology, Yu asserted that God is *mugük* [endlessness], whom the existential entities can neither perceive nor fully explain. A human being is only able to experience and tell about *t'aegük* [the Great Absolute] as *Han öl*, who participates in the world of creation and reveal the Deity. Although God as *mu* is beyond human grasp, according to Yu, a human being is able to long for and (partially) understand God because God has planted logos, the seed of God, inside of every human being. Park Yöng-ho, *Tasök yuyöngmo üi saengae wa sasang* [The Life and Thought of Tasök Yu Yöng-mo] (Seoul: Munwha ilbosa, 1996), 1: 68, 164 and 375.

Han, his religious thoughts and practices were founded on the basic understanding of *Han* as the One Wholly Divine. Ham stated: “When one realizes that human beings originated from, belong to, and will return to *Hananim*, such awareness of the One True Self leads the person to be unified with the One Wholly Divine”(Ham, 4: 65). Ham’s *ssial* was not only the name of the Divine but also that of common people: “God and common people are one. If God is head, God’s feet are called *ssial*, the common people. The feel of the holy God, put on earth and being dirty by soil, is called the common people in history (Ham, 3: 147–148).

The awareness that *al* (*ssial*) as a free, autonomous, communal and divine individual who should establish the person’s own subjective faith confession led Ham to set forth his own interpretation of Jesus Christ. Ham now rejected the ‘atonement doctrine’ in its literal sense. To Ham, the word ‘atonement’ was regarded as invalid in modern times because the term was used in the period of slavery. Ham did not believe that one, even Jesus, is able to replace another’s personality which is subjective, free and autonomous. Accordingly, Ham thought that, in order to experience atonement, a Christian should be unified not with Jesus, a historical person, but with a permanent Christ, who exists not only in the mind of Jesus but also in the mind of all human beings. To Ham, the unique role of historical Jesus was to show the life of a free spirit, an instrument with which a person is able to perceive the Transcendent Deity and to reject any attempts to claim absoluteness of human-made religious systems. Ham concluded that only bare spirit that is free from human-made Christianity is able to enter the Kingdom of God (Ham, 6: 315–316). As found in Ham’s autonomous interpretation of Jesus Christ, free from given Western doctrinal contents, the KNCC’s first principle of the autonomy of *al* in correlation with the *Han* allows them to develop their religious thinking in local language.

The Second Principle: Protesting Pacifism in History

According to Ienaga Saburō, a prominent Japanese modern philosophical thinker, it was Jewish-Christian tradition that has brought “logic of negation” into the Western intellectual and religious heritages. By the logic of negation, Ienaga means “the denial of this world as the truth and the proclamation of the other dimension of the one, true, and transcendent entity as real.”¹⁹ Ienaga’s logic of negation may be closer to Weber’s

¹⁹ Ienaga insisted that, in the West, the logic of negation in Jewish-Christian thought denied “the logic of affirmation” in the ancient Western world that is represented by Greek philosophy. While Greek philosophy idealized God as the perfect reflection of humanity, the essential message of Christianity denied the possibility of human salvation through self-righteousness. The belief that

liebesakosmismus, which Robert Bellah translates into “world-denying love.”²⁰ While Ienaga’s concept of “the logic of negation” does not explain the aspect of historical participation of an individual believers to the world, the place of God’s providence, Weber’s concept of world-denying love allows a room for embracing an individual believer’s motivating power to participate in worldly affairs, not because this world is permanent and divine but because a religious person has a loving mind to participate in the world. Nevertheless, the concept still fails to show the historical obligation of an individual believer’s participation in this world in that God wants to complete God’s order of Creation. For that reason, I suggested in my doctoral dissertation the terminology “world-transcending historical consciousness,” as a salient characteristic of Jewish-Christian thought. The world-transcending historical consciousness as I defined is that: “a worldview or standpoint similar to that possessed by ancient Judaism and ascetic Protestantism, that is, the vertical dimension of a belief-system in God the Transcendent who is also immanent in terms of God’s main concerns on the world as the realm of God’s creation. This standpoint leads the beliefs to live with ethical responsibility in the world and history as the realms of God’s rule, keeping the ultimate pursuit in an alternative world, the Kingdom of God.”²¹ This “world-transcending historical consciousness,” as I believe, is what the KNCC inherited.

The KNCC adherents asserted that Christian belief in the world and history as the realm of God’s providence facilitates the believers to fight against any human practices against Godly will and order. Nevertheless, what Jesus taught to his disciples is that the fight should be always non-violent because even those who are against God share the seed of God as the created being. Nobody has a right to destroy the divinity in a person. For that reason, Christian’s spirit of protesting against any institutional and personal practices against God’s order should take the way of pacifism, professed the KNCC

God has absolute sole power for the salvation of human beings leads believers to deny optimistic views of human will and to negate perpetuity of the given world. While Greek philosophy teaches that the salvation of human being could be achieved through a gradual development of human’s eagerness for the truth, Christian doctrine says human salvation can be completed solely through one Divine-Man, Jesus the Christ, who paid for all human sins through crucifixion. Ienaga believes that the Christian message of radical negation of human capability and perpetuity of the world is surely the center of Christianity, which brought the notion of negation to the West. Ienaga Saburō, *Nihon shisoshi ni okeru hitei no ronri no hattatsu* [The development of logic of negation in the history of Japanese thought] (Tokyo: Shinsensa, 1983), 17-44.

²⁰ Max Weber, “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 330; Robert Bellah, “Max Weber and the World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* vol. 67, no. 2 (June 1999): 277-278.

²¹ Soyoung Baik Chey, “Korean Non-Church Christian Movement, 1927-1989: Transcending the World and Transforming the Church,” 51.

members. Believing that a Non-Church Christian is not a scholar that lives for academic concepts but a living person who lives in a real world, in which the person should find fighting counterpart in a changing situation (Kim, 1: 297), the KNCC members did not restrain their protesting spirit only in the realm of Christian communities. To find the timely counterparts, they kept analyzing the time, history, and the contexts of their lives.

Accordingly, Christian love, to KNCC adherents, was not merely “world-denying” but righteous love (*ũia*) which requires acute historical awareness of the time and locus (Kim, 3: 155–156). Identifying themselves inheriting the Jewish-Christian prophetic tradition, Kim and his colleagues insisted that practicing the righteousness of God requires a sharp analysis of one’s historical and social contexts (Kim, 2: 294–296). For that reason, the KNCC members criticized their contemporary Pentecostal sects in Korean churches, calling them as groups of Christian shamans emphasizing ecstatic faith without rational reflection on the Gospel. Kim asserted that Korean churches should learn to be “rational.” According to Kim, KNCC existed as a strong protest against present-day Korean churches, not because protest was the intrinsic nature of KNCC but because present-day Korean churches had strayed far from the authentic meaning of the church. The KNCC referred to the spirit that dominated denominational Korean churches as *kyohoechuĩ* (churchism)—the Church Christians’ compromising relationship to the world, ecclesiastical authoritarianism, the institutionalization of a living faith, and deification of the church (Kim, 1: 123–124).

Kim continuously guarded whether a Non-Church itself maintains its prophetic historical consciousness. In this regard, Kim once criticized Tsukamoto Toraji, the major leading figure in JNCC after Uchimura, for his “evangelism first” principle, which led to overlook the prophetic task of Christianity in history. Facing international wars started by Imperial Japan, Tsukamoto, instead of criticizing the national guilt, dichotomized Christian life into the secular and the sacred and emphasized that Non-Church Christians are evangelists who believed in spiritual salvation through faith alone. In his diary entry on 4 November 1938, Kim wrote with anger, ‘Even Non-Church has been helpless as it is getting old. Salt that has lost its taste should be abandoned and a Non-Church community that has lost its prophetic spirit should be discarded. Let it be exterminated you Non-Church, who is not a prophet any longer’ (Kim, 6: 125–126).

To KNCC adherents, the most severe sin was the failure of recognizing the divine seed in oneself, which leads one to recognize oneself as worthy and as a historical agent participating in the world to accomplish God’s will on earth (Ham, 3: 110, 119). For that reason, Christianity cannot be a private matter but “a continuous movement”

that redirects the wrong direction of human history in accordance with God's will (Ham, 1: 38, 52-53, 57). The Non-Church protestant spirit led the first generation of the KNCC to fight with Korean churches' churchism and imperial Japan's violent oppression over *ssial*, and Ham and his followers to fight with materialistic capitalist modern system of the twentieth century and military governmental power.

If the KNCC had a furious zeal to make the history right in accordance of God's will and order, what is the difference between current Christian fundamentalism's zeal for world renewal and the KNCC spirit of protest? To me, the major difference seems to lie on the understanding of God's will and of Christians the chosen people of God. To KNCC believers, God's will as revealed in the Bible is not the spiritual salvation of an individual. To them, God's will is to construct an egalitarian faith community of humankind on earth, in which all myriad things recover their created states and flourish the life. In such a community, which is symbolized by the Kingdom of God, there is no such thing like material inequality, political authoritarianism, and social discrimination. Non-Church members are open-minded to all kinds of spiritual experiments of individual believers to express their own faith expression. Nevertheless, they believed that all various faith expressions should be constructed on a common, universal ground of the Kingdom of God, the essential teaching of the Bible. They certainly distinguished false from differences.

To Ham, for example, capitalist system and its institutional order was the matter of false, not the matter of different way of living. It is false because it violates the universal principle of God who concerns on common people and the created world. In a capitalist system with its principle of free competition to earn material benefits, there is no room for Christians to construct a world and life style that takes care of common people, the incarnated form of God. By the meaning of "chosen," according to Ham, it does not mean that a Christian individual has been elected and will acquire eternal salvation on heaven, but mean that a Christian individual has been "chosen" to practice coming out from the God-absent worldly order, represented by modern capitalism, and live out an alternative life in accordance with God's order as revealed in the idea of the Kingdom of God (Ham, 9: 245-246). "God-centered life," to Ham and the KNCC adherents, does not to make all nations to convert into Christianity, a human-made religious system, but to participate in the movement for accomplishing God's order on earth, that is, flourishing free and autonomous life of all *ssial*. The very principle, not contents, which Non-Church demonstrates is universal.

The Third Principle: “Ongoing” and “Ceasing” in Spiritual Journey

Although a human being as an *al* in correlation with *Han* is able to perceive God, according to the KNCC adherents, it is always partial and limited because of the finitude of human nature. For that reason, they prohibit any human attempt to absolutize or doctrinize one’s own thought and a human-made institution, while encouraging an individual believer’s seeking God by oneself in one’s own existential and historical conditions. This is what Ham called “the spirit of continuous protestant,” the “ism” that rejects all kinds of “isms,” “the principle not to have a system forever,” and “the spirit to have a permanent youth” (Ham, 3: 123). Ham asserted: “The truth is something alive. It is the principle that grows. Thus it protests against anything that prevents a living truth from growing” (Ham, 9: 186). Witnessing denominational churches in Korea that had continued doctrinal debates while claiming the infallibility of their own doctrines, the KNCC members criticized the hardness of the Church as the spirit which is a more severe disease than arteriosclerosis. Kim stated that a true Christian’s attitude toward the Gospel would lead to an open mindedness in the lifelong journey towards truth. Since a human being is a “disqualified being” (*mujagyŏk ŭi chonjae*) who cannot proclaim one’s impeccability, there is neither a church nor a non-church under the heaven, a human-made institution, to proclaim that it is perfect and completed (Kim, 2: 104).

That is why the KNCC members had pinpointed the importance of continuous process of learning. They understood the Christian life as an ongoing spiritual journey of growth in faith. Just as Moses prepared for eighty years to lead the Israelite from Egypt and just as Confucius reached the status of *purhok* (absence of temptation) at the age of forty, Kim and other KNCC members highly valued the gradual intellectual and spiritual process of maturation of an individual Christian and Christian communities (Kim, 2: 154). The Confucian teaching concerning the need for continuous learning was Kim’s favorite verse for frequent citations: “Isn’t it a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals?” (*Analects* I, 1: 59)

Adopting the traditional Confucian notion of *chisŏng* (perfect sincerity) in interpretation of prayer, the KNCC members regarded prayer as a continuous sincere effort to communicate with God (Kim, 2: 169–170). The word *sŏng* (sincerity) is a central concept for the understanding the nature of and vision for a KNCC faith community. *Sŏng* is a Confucian virtue as seen in *The Doctrine of the Mean*. The book says that *sŏng* is the way of Heaven and the continuing effort to reach the state of *sŏng* is the way of human beings. It is also written, “He who possesses sincerity is he who, without an effort, hits what is right, and apprehends the exercise of thought—he is the

sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains to sincerity is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast.”²² KNCC adherents considered the KNCC *ecclesia* as a community of sincere Christians who continuously study the Bible and deepen the Christian faith until they finally achieve the state of perfect sincerity in the Kingdom of God.

Applying religious-cultural and historical background to their efforts to construct a Korean form of Christian *ecclesia*, Kim and his KNCC colleagues felt comfortable with voluntary small gatherings among lay Christians that resemble *sōdang*, the informal village school in which Confucian texts had been taught.²³ KNCC’s focus on “bookish learning” that excluded emotional involvement was one of the distinct characteristics of Confucian culture. Just as *sōdang* was managed by self-governing of local village people, the KNCC’s small-sized informal *ecclesia* was designed to be independent from central control of a denomination and to develop its community in response to the needs of the local congregations and of the broader community in which the *ecclesia* was located.

The KNCC vision for *sōdang*-like *ecclesia* is not always “bookish” in an exclusive scholarly community. It was also a community “diffused” into local daily lives.²⁴ The KNCC adherents wanted their *ecclesia* to become a living community that shares daily lives with local people. The KNCC adherents disliked the model of the church known as

²² *Four Books: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge (Shanghai, China: The Chinese Book Company, [1933]), 394.

²³ Kim’s Bible study meeting had affinities with the traditional *sōdang* system in terms that it did have neither a professional religious leader nor an established liturgical practice and simply gathered for reading and interpreting biblical passages. From the outset, the *sōdang* had always been an unofficial educational institution free from the control of the central government. Each *sōdang* was composed of one teacher, called a *hunjang* [a village schoolmaster] and small numbers of students (mainly male). The major teaching-learning methods of the *sōdang* included reading, memorizing, and interpreting Confucian texts. Kim Kyo-sin himself compared his Bible study group to an old-fashioned Korean village school in which they used to study the Confucians’ *Analects* or *The Great Learning*. Kim was proud of the gathering for its intensive and intellectual study of the Bible and for the absence of emotional preparation for worship service such as singing and playing musical instruments and psychological methods of preaching to manipulate the audience. Kim’s KNCC community simply paid attention to the biblical text (Kim, 5: 10).

²⁴ C. K. Yang, using Joachim Wach’s typology of two religious groups, the “institutional” and the “diffused,” observed that East Asian religions belong to the category of “diffused” religion. Institutional religions have well-established theologies, rituals, and organization, whereas diffused religions have no structural, theological, and ritual independence from societal life as a whole. Diffused religions are part of secular social institutions. C. K. Yang, “Diffused and Institutional Religions in Chinese Society,” in *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), 294–295.

“Noah’s Ark” which drew an exclusive line between the secular world and the church. Kim and other KNCC members understood *ecclesia* as a community of sacred people who live in the secular world.

Kim never considered his *sōdang*-like *ecclesia* to be the single proper form of Korean *ecclesia*. Kim encouraged various assessments of KNCC *ecclesia*, allowing for the possibility of a horizontal *koinonia* different from one teacher-his pupils system, which the KNCC members felt comfortable due to their Confucian heritages, and of a new form of Bible meeting working at farms or orchards (Kim 1: 311-312). Perhaps, from 1957 to 1973, Ham’s practice of creating a small religious community in which Korean common people live daily life in accordance with a religious worldview could be in a new form of the KNCC *ecclesia* (Ham, 4: 72-73). Getting up at six o’clock every morning to engage in still meditation and Bible study, and attending to the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in the Ssial Farm, Ham and his followers hoped that place be the birthplace of raising hard-working common people who have both religious beliefs and historical consciousness, and who lead a movement for recovery and sustenance of life as given from God.²⁵

What a community of Christian believers can do in history is to construct an *ecclesia* approximate to the Kingdom of God, believed the KNCC members. Just the KNCC allows various approaches to make an *ecclesia* because of human autonomy and finitude, so they admonish the closing of the community when one dies or get old for the same reason. It is because every human being, each historical context, and different local situation would lead a different form of an *ecclesia*. To me, for the very principle of ceasing of an *ecclesia*, rather than autonomy to build one’s own *ecclesia*, the KNCC could hold universality as the name of potential ideal church on earth. *Sōngsō Chosŏn* was ceased by force in 1942, Ham’s *Ssial ui sori* (the voice of common people) was also stopped by the governmental pressure in 1980. Song Tu-yong stopped his journal *Sōngsō Sinae* (Faithful Love of the Bible) in 1980, six years before his death. No P’yōng-gu stopped his Bible meeting in 1999 and died in 2003. To them, the KNCC is universal not because of its particular form or contents but because its principle of ceasing an autonomous but disqualified person’s free spiritual journey on earth.

²⁵ In spite of Ham’s dream for constructing a community of religious common people, evaluates Kim Sung-su who wrote a doctoral dissertation about Ham, the Ssial Farm primarily attracted intellectuals whose main purpose in joining the community was to benefit from Ham’s intellectual achievements, which became one of the reasons for the failure of the farm management. Kim Sung-su, ‘An Examination of the Life and Legacy of A Korean Quaker, Ham Sōk-hŏn (1901-1989): Voice of the People and Pioneer of Religious Pluralism in Twentieth Century Korea,’ Ph. D. diss. (Center for Korea Studies, School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield, 1998), 111-113.

Concluding Remarks: For the 21st Task of Localizing the Universal Gospel

Ham in his later days envisioned a universal religion as “round, colorless, and penetrating,” by which he meant a religion which embraces all living things on earth, which does not have any distorted, biased perspective, and which includes ongoing human efforts to realize the will of God on earth in history (Ham, 3: 222–235). By Ham’s vision of a universal religion, however, it was not universalization of a particular (Korean or Eastern) religious tradition. In fact, Kim Kyo-sin, as a teacher of geography, once demonstrated the role of Korea as a peninsular would be the most beneficial place to deliver ideas and thoughts to the world and to produce noble thoughts for the world (Kim, 2: 36, 67–69). However, Kim’s vision was not spiritual imperialism. Witnessing suffers of Koreans under the colonial rule and their failure to practice autonomous capability, what Kim wanted was to encourage his fellow Koreans to take a pro-active attitude in going forward to understand and accomplish historical task of their own, which might contribute to the communal coexistence of the world. The shared attitude of Kim and Ham, along with other KNCC adherents, was to take their locality seriously in communication with universal teaching of Christian Gospel. Their KNCC principles, i.e., autonomy of *al* in correlation with *Han*, protesting pacifism in history, and ongoing-ceasing in spiritual journey, give us an insight to rethink Korean ecclesia in the midst of global rush of a homogeneous American-originated Christian movement that tends to universalize its form and contents. What are the most urgent historical tasks of the contemporary community of Christian believers, first as Korean and second as global? Who are the timely counterparts of the contemporary Korean and global community of Christian believers? What would be the local faith expressions, using Korean symbols and languages, which explain the universal concerns of God over the universe? We do not have time to loose since the world is already full of particulars’ violent attempts to universalize their own ideology and religion. We should take the KNCC principles seriously to learn how to distinguish what are particulars (locals) from what are universal.

This article starts with an awareness of twofold task in the global world, i.e., to establish local identity in encounter with a Euro-American homogeneous global product and to create “universal universalism,” in use of Wallerstein’s terminology, not as a universalism that make a particular idea or institutional life universal, but as a metaphysical common ground for the global citizens living together in egalitarian and harmonious relations. Diagnosing our contemporary mainline Korean Protestant churches, which have become passive adopters of Western Christian form and contents, fail to perform the task, this study values the Korean Non-Church Christianity and its principles to make a balance between their local identity and the universal aspects of Christian teaching. The KNCC adherents, represented by Kim Kyo-sin (1901-1945) and Ham Sŏk-hŏn (1901-1989), were those who attempt to build a local ecclesia that performs its historical, local, and universal tasks. The KNCC principles, that is., 1) autonomy of *al* in correlation with *Han*, 2) protesting pacifism in history, and 3) ongoing-ceasing in spiritual journey, had been firm guiding poles for them to distinguish what the intrinsic elements of the Christian faith community from non-intrinsic formalism in the Church, and to distinguish universal messages in the Gospel from human-made doctrines that the Western Christian religious authorities have been universalized and absolutized. Urging a normative task for Korean Christian faith communities to contribute to make “universal universalism,” this article takes the KNCC principles seriously for an assessment of Korean ecclesia which holds universal statements of truth in local languages.

Keywords

Korean Non-Church Christianity, Ecclesia, Universal universalism, Globalization, Euro-American global culture, locality, Kim Kyo-sin, Ham Sŏk-hŏn, Uchimura Kanzō, Yu Yŏng-mo, *Ssial* (spiritual seed of God), *Han* (the One Great/Wholly Divine), Protesting Pacifism, Ongoing-ceasing in spiritual journey, Chosen people.