


# Christianity and Ministerial Ethic for Evangelism in Korea Context

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• 국문초록 •

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1990년대 들어서면서 한국 교회는 성장을 멈추고 성장속도가 둔화하기 시작했다. 교회성장의 위기 상황을 극복하고 부흥의 불을 살리기 위해 교회는 목회자의 윤리적 목회철학과 문화적 진도 방법을 교회성장의 새로운 모델로 삼아야 한다. 본 논문은 문화와 복음간의 관계를 정리하고 한국적 상황 속에서 문화 안에 자리잡은 한국고유의 세계관을 통한 새로운 진도 방법을 실천적 측면에서 연구하였다.

**Keywords** : worldview, evangelism ministerial ethic Christianity

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## I. Introduction

In 1994 Korean Church celebrated 200th years of Catholic Churches and 100 years of Protestant Churches. Now, we have Christian president, 25% of the population is Christian and the biggest church in the world. In the surface Christians in Korea accomplished many things for 200 years. However, many Christians thought 1990 was crisis of Korean Christianity, between 1970 and 1980, the annual growth rate declined to 12.5%. The annual rate of increase fell to 4.4% from 1980 to 1990. According to David Tai Woong and the government Ministry of Information, the average annual growth rate in the number of Protestants fell to 5.8% from 1985 to 1990. It continued to fall to 3.9% in 1991 and 0.6% in 1992, with an absolute decline of 4% in 1993.<sup>1)</sup>

Depend on this rate, in which most Korean churches have experienced stagnation or decline of membership since the late 1980s, the Korean churches have been struggling with how they can break growth barriers and resume growth patterns. Recently Korean church leaders have shown lack of confidence and knowledge about how to take the next steps for continual growth. Churches desiring growth and their leaders are desperately looking for solutions. This study can provide for them models for how to overcoming growth barriers and continuing growth.

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1) Stan Guthrie, "Korean Church Catches a Whiff of Trouble in the Air," *Evangelical Mission Quarter* 32, no. 2 (April 1996, pp 199-200)

In this paper, I want to speculate an issue related to evangelism: What is the effective method for evangelism in the Korean context? By integrating three topics that hold high interest for this paper, Gospel and culture, ministerial ethic in Korean culture, and evangelism, I would like to present a new model of evangelism appropriate to the Korean context.

## II. Gospel and culture

We as human beings are cultural beings. We create culture; we are created by culture. Through culture, we relate our biological makeup with our geographical and social environment Kraft defines culture as a society's complex, integrated coping mechanism, consisting of learned, patterned, concepts and behavior, plus their underlying perspectives(worldview) and resulting artifacts(material culture).<sup>2)</sup>

Every culture has worldview. James Sire defines worldview as “a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world.”<sup>3)</sup> Our worldview is like a lens. It colors, clarifies, classifies, or partially excludes the reality. It is passed on from generation to generation with minimal change.

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2) Charles Kraft H.*Anthropology for Christian Witness*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p.38.

3) James Sire,*The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p.17.

Kraft in his book *Christianity and Culture*, gives a more comprehensive understanding of worldview:

Cultures patterns perceptions of reality into conceptualization of what reality can or should be, what is to be regarded as actual, probable, possible, and impossible... The worldview is the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system. The worldview lies at the very heart of the culture, touching, interfacing with, and strongly influencing every aspect of culture.<sup>4)</sup>

For Kraft, worldview patterns deep, underlying personal characteristics 1)willing, 2)emotions, 3)logic and reason, 4)motivation, 5)predispositions. In addition, worldview patterns the assignment of meaning matter of interpreting and evaluating. worldview patterns how people respond to the meanings they make ways of 1)explaining, 2)pledging allegiance, 3)relating, 4)adapting, 5)regulating, 6)getting psychological reinforcement, 7)integrating and attaining consistency in life and the way it is structured.<sup>5)</sup>

Kraft describes the relationship between God, culture, and human beings. For him, God exists apart from culture. However, God relates to and interacts with human beings within culture.<sup>6)</sup> What is clear from Kraft is that God is above culture and working through it. God uses culture as a vehicle. The forms God uses are cultural forms. God wants

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4) Charles Kraft H.*Christianity and Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p.53.

5) Charles Kraft H.*Anthropology for Christian Witness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 52-63.

6) *Ibid.*, p.91.

us to reach each people group in terms of their own culture, just as He sought in biblical times to reach Hebrews through Hebrew culture and Greeks through Greek culture.

### III. Korean culture and worldview

Korean culture is supernatural world oriented. There is the invisible world of patterns and relatedness, and timelessness and oneness, of the spontaneous and the surprising, of that which is supposedly subjective.<sup>7)</sup> This is the no sensory world in which we participate. Korean people have known this invisible and no sensory world as the real world. In the Korean worldview, there is no sharp distinction between natural and supernatural worlds. Gods and spirits are as real as natural objects.

Korean people tend to hold things together. They associate various features of things with each other. They pay little attention to detail or difference. Instead, they emphasize similarities. They tend to integrate things into a whole.<sup>8)</sup> For Korean people, God and human beings, people and people, human beings and nature, are all connected ontologically.<sup>9)</sup> Korean culture emphasizes the relatedness of every existence within the universe.

7) James B. Ashbrook, "With All Your Mind," in *Faith & Ministry in the light of Double Brai.* ed., James B. Ashbrook, (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1989), p.4.

8) James B. Ashbrook, "Beyond Reason and Emotion," in *Faith & Ministry in light of Double Brai.* ed., James B. Ashbrook, p.267.

9) Young AE Kim, "From Brokenness to Wholeness," (Unpublished Dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1991), pp.143-144.

For Korean people, the most important value is to live in harmony with others. In other words, the Korean is fundamentally concerned with establishing good relationships with people. The value of the individual in the Korean culture depends on how well a person adopts communal norms. Thus, insisting one's own particularity is not valued. "Individuality, differences, and particularities are the most feared attributes for Korean people as these will facilitate isolation and separation from the community."<sup>10)</sup>

Choi points out that many different customs show the collective consciousness of Korean people.<sup>11)</sup> For example, fashions spread quickly and people order the same kind of food eaten by the other members of the group. People create a meal by mixing rice and soup together. One of the favorite dishes consists of mixing different kinds of vegetables in a bowl with rice. Or, people share one large plate of different kinds of food, including soup. Eating together means more than sharing food communally. It involves the same food in the same plate. In addition, instead of "my" or "mine," people use "our" or "ours" even when referring to their own spouses. Indeed, Korean culture emphasizes the group sense of "we-ness".

Korean people emphasize attending to and fitting in with others and the importance of harmonious interdependence with them. "Experiencing interdependence entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is

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10) Ibid., p.9.

11) Jai Seok, Choi, *Hankook Kajok Jaedosa Yunkoo*[A Study on the History of Korean Family]. (Seoul, Korea: Iljisa, 1983), p.85-129.

determined, contingent on , and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship.”<sup>12)</sup> Korean people feel good when they fulfill the tasks associated with being interdependent with relevant others: belonging, fitting in, promoting others’ goals.

#### IV. Confucianism in Korea

The vertical relationship comes from Confucianism. Confucianism was introduced in Korean peninsula from China during the early Kochosun period, started to spread in the later Koryo Dynasty, and became the state ideology for the Yi Dynasty. It has provided the ethical norm for Korean society and governed every dimension of the Korean people’s lives.

Fundamental to the Confucian ideology is the notion that a good life depends upon an observance of the proper behavior in interpersonal relationship. Five attitudes that must be observed in interpersonal relationship are: 1) between king and ministers, loyalty, 2) between father and son, intimacy, 3) between elder and younger, respect, 4) between husband and wife, distinction in position, 5) between friends, trust.

All relationship in the five Confucian norms are hierarchical, which set absolute boundaries and did not permit any transgression, except

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12) Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Rose Markus, “Culture and Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation,” in *Psychological review*. 1991, vol. 98. No. 2. p.227.

in the relationship between friends. The rigid hierarchical attitude demands complete obedience to persons of higher status, while demanding complete obedience from those of lower status.

Because of Confucian emphasis on family, family becomes sacred, and procreation becomes the most important method of continuing one's family. Korean culture is family oriented. Thus, the question of identification is not "who are you?", but "Where are you?" The family is the basic social unit in Korea. A person feels secure through family activities. In return, he/she must always adjust himself/herself to family demands. Family provides a value in which a person can be rooted. Self realization is not for the individual, but for the family name.

Of the five Confucian norms in interpersonal relationship, three father and son, husband and wife, and older and younger describe family relationships. In the Confucian norm, the father as the respected and unquestioned head of family rules with almost absolute power. He has full responsibility to feed the family, to find work for the members, to approve all moves, marriage, and the future life of the younger members of the family.<sup>13)</sup>

In Korean culture, elders must always be respected. To be called a grandfather, or a grandmother, is a sign of respect.<sup>14)</sup> In the presence of an elder, one must remain at attention. To sit relaxed and to cross one's legs while sitting in a chair before an elder or an important person is impolite.

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13) Ibid., p.32.

14) Ibid., p.36.

## V. Ministerial ethics based on Korea culture for Evangelism

I define evangelism as the overflow of God's love. That is, it is that the love of God overflows from the experienced person to those who have not experienced it. The overflow of God's love takes place through both word and deed. The person who is so full of the love of God speaks of God's love. Put differently, he/she proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition, he/she is patient and kind. He/she is compassionate. He/she suffers with other people. He/she is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. He/she does not insist on his/her own way. He/she is not irritable or resentful. He/she does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth (2 Cor. 13:4-6).

In the love of God, he/she proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ. Proclaiming the Gospel and loving activity go hand in hand. This is ministerial ethic for evangelism<sup>15)</sup>. The purpose of ministerial ethic for evangelism is to bring persons to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and to lead them to live by the love of God.

Evangelism is empowered by the Holy Spirit. God pours out His Spirit to give us power to both love other people and to proclaim the good news of Jesus. The most important step in evangelizing Korean people should be to identify with receptors. Green suggests that Korean Christians must maximize the common ground they have with the receptors they are talking to. Korean Christians must read the sort

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15) Emerito p. Nacpil, *Jesu Strategy for Social Transformatio* (Manila: Philippines UMC, 1998), p. 331.

of material the receptors read, be aware of the television programs they watch, experience some of the pressures to which they are subject.<sup>16)</sup> Korean Christians must be able to mix easily, naturally, and knowledgeably with them. Korean Christians must accommodate themselves to where the receptors are, not expect them to fit into our Christian system.<sup>17)</sup>

Jesus identified with His receptors. In His case, He was incarnated in the receiving society.<sup>18)</sup> Korean Christians cannot become incarnate, but should do their best to enter sympathetically into their receptors' way of life with understanding and empathy, even learning to participate with them to some extent and to share themselves with them in person to person self disclosure.<sup>19)</sup>

Before minister talk about the good news of Jesus, he/she must listen. In other words, before they share the gospel with receptors, they must diagnose and assess where the receptors are. They must find out where receptors live geographically, emotionally, and philosophically. Korean Christians should identify with receptors, laugh and cry with them, feel their pleasures and pains.

These identification processes are important to the Korean people who are similarity and interdependence oriented. They help establish a good and close relationship with receptors. Through the processes.

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16) Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson Books, 1992), p.135.

17) *Ibid.*, p.136.

18) Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p.443.

19) *Ibid.*, p.443.

Another important factor in evangelizing Korean people is to establish a trust and love relationship with receptors. In the relationship with them, Korean Christians must focus on needs felt by them, especially those they feel are not being met by their present way of life.

Covell points out that “particularly in Asian countries, truth must be tied closely with personal relationships and neatly packaged and closely reasoned arguments will take second.<sup>20)</sup>

## VI. Effective Evangelical Method through Korean Worldview

In the Korean context where is relationship oriented, first is to establish a good relationship. Then should follow proclaiming the Gospel. What is effective in the Korean context is that first relationship, then talking. For Korean people, *Kibun* influences one’s mind and behavior. McCune is right when he says that the Koreans are a emotional people, though naturally there are tremendous differences in temperament between individuals and it is difficult to generalize about them.<sup>21)</sup> Indeed, Korean people are *Kibun oriented*.

Argument methods of speaking of the Gospel are widely used in the

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20) Ralph Covell, “Jesus Christ and World religion,” In *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*. eds., Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p.169.

21) Shannon McCune, *Korea: Land of Broken Cal*. (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, INC., 1966), p.45.

Korean context where relationship and Kibun oriented is. From my psychological point of view, when we are involved in argument, an open and relaxed relationship between individual and individual becomes impossible, because of the aroused vigilance of our rationality and defense system. Through the argument process, significant relationships are broken.

Furthermore, the argument method fails to touch and change Korean people's Kibun emotional mind which provides the motivational source for their action. In this sense, argument style of talking about the Gospel is ineffective in evangelizing Korean people who live in relationship and Kibun centered culture.

When talking about the gospel, Korean Christians must use the language those who they are talking to speak. Jesus' primary concern was that those who heard and watched Him have a decent change to understand His messages. To that end He spoke a language they could understand and used cultural forms(e.g., parables, healings) that would be familiar and attractive to His audiences.<sup>22)</sup>

Green suggests: Most people today have no use for the abstract nouns that Christians love to use: salvation, justification, and the like. Such words mean little or nothing to them. They go for verbs and concrete nouns; and so must we. They think pictorially; and so must we. We need to be constantly illustrating what we have to say by concepts within their mental furniture.<sup>23)</sup>

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22) Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. p.443.

23) Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*. (Nashville: Oliver Nelson

Kraft views that “the original presentations of the most parts of Scripture were story told or sung.<sup>24)</sup> Jesus told stories to a story oriented society.<sup>25)</sup> I have observed that sermonized style of talking about the gospel is ineffective in evangelizing Korean people. The style focuses on providing information and knowledge. However, storytelling style helps meaning making process. Chatfield writes:

Humankind needs theological stories because human beings are fundamentally interpersonal and because, if the Christian God’s promise is true, then humankind is fundamentally related to God as person. Since story is the only means by which the interpersonal reality of humankind can be expressed in its cognitive and affective fullness and since our relationship to God is fundamentally interpersonal, it follows that story telling and story listening provide the most appropriate means of enabling us to live this relationship.<sup>26)</sup>

From my view, Korean society is a story oriented society. When talking about the gospel, Korean Christians must employ storytelling method. Reasoned arguments may make receptor’s *Kibun* bad. I suggest that storytelling is much more effective method of evangelism in the Korean context. The method conveys what is one’s heart to the heart of the other.

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Books, 1992), p.139-140.

24) Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. p.269.

25) *Ibid.*, p.271.

26) Donald F. Chatfield, “Left Handed Preaching,” In *Faith & Ministry in light of Double Brai*. ed., James B. Ashbrook, (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1989), p.60.

## VII. Conclude

Korean culture values person. The Koreans emphasize interpersonal relationship. They are motivated by a strong personal relationship. In the light of this fact, communicating God with receptors in a person to person way can be more effective. It seems to me that proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ by using mechanical things may be less effective. However, in Korea, there has been an increasing tendency of the replacement of person with material objects as evangelism method. In this reason, the direction of the church's future might depend on how the church can minister base on culture or worldview as their develop their values, life style and priorities.

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