

Ministrial Ethics on Culture in Korean Context*

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• ABSTRACT •

복음과 문화는 신학의 중요한 주제이며 복음과 문화의 관계설정을 통해 한국사회와 교회를 설명하려는 노력을 많은 신학자들이 해왔다. 본 논문은 복음과 문화의 관계를 한국적 상황 속에서 정리하였으며 특별히 한국인이 느끼는 여러 감정 중 기분(氣分)이라는 단어의 개념 정리를 통해 한국문화의 특색을 정리하였다. 또한 본 논문은 전통적인 한국의 문화적 특징을 한국인의 세계관으로 정리하고 한국의 전통문화가 현대사회 속에서 어떻게 문화적 변화를 일으켰는지 고찰하였다. 이러한 문화적 고찰을 토대로 성숙한 한국 현대사회의 교회 문화 발전을 위한 목회 윤리학적 접근 방법을 소개해 보았다.

Keywords: Ministerial Ethic, Culture, Korean, Kibun, Modernization

I. Introduction.

What is the secular challenge in Korean context? Korea is moving rapidly in a modernizing direction. Most people in Seoul have been intimidated by modernization into believing that modern culture is good and our cultural way of life inferior. They are reaching out to become more and more modern with very little respect for their traditional cultures. From my point of view, the secular challenge in the Seoul context of Korea means modernization. I would like to begin this paper by describing about what Korean culture is. And how to related evangelism base on Korean culture

II. Kibun and Relationships in Korean culture

Korean culture is supernatural world-oriented. There is the invisible world of patterns and relatedness, Korean culture is *kibun* oriented. The word *kibun* means one's state of mind. Its rich meaning has no true English equivalent. Mood may come. But *kibun* includes much more meaning. It is closely related with one's morale, one's face, or self-esteem. It is mainly determined by the following factors the state of one's inner feelings, one's prestige, one's awareness of being recognized as a person, the deference one receives from his/her fellows.¹⁾ *Kibun* is the most important factor in interpersonal relationships, because it influences one's relations with others. Thus, making one's *kibun* good takes precedence over other considerations.²⁾ Crane says One tries, by all means, to operate in a manner that will improve the *kibun* both in oneself and in those with whom one has dealings. To damage someone's *kibun* may effectively cut off relationships and create an enemy. Thus one does everything in his power to preserve the *kibun*, for once the *kibun* is injured, future contacts may be difficult. One naturally does not like to associate with those who have damaged one's *kibun*.³⁾

Most cases of disturbance of *kibun* happen in relationship of lower persons with higher persons. Lower persons must try to keep higher persons from having their *kibun* upset. They usually do not express clearly what is felt. For Korean people appearance is considered important. In personal relationship and social life, appearance is more important than substance. Korean people have broad ego boundaries. Thus identification and projection of one person on to another occurs easily in interpersonal relationship. When a person's ego faces another,

1) Crane Paul S., *Korean Patterns*(Seoul, Korea: Kwangjin Publishing Co., 1978), 25

2) Ibid.,25.

3) Ibid.,26.

there is a ready identification with the other by taking on similarities or blurring differences.⁴⁾ Overlapping ego boundaries begin with close contact with one's family members. They also exist with others when one is close enough to a person. Even though Korean people do not express their inner feelings openly generally, there is no separateness between two persons when the relationship is close enough to be like kin.⁵⁾

There is little concept of equality among Korean people. All relationships are almost entirely vertical. People are in relatively higher or lower positions. Even in the church all are in the vertical relationships. It is essential for one to know the levels of society. One must always remember one's own place in the scheme of things. It is necessary to appear to be lowering oneself in selfless humility, giving to others the honor. One must assume an attitude of self-negation and self-effacement in social and business contacts. To put oneself boldly forward is considered uncouth, brutish, and worthy of scorn.⁶⁾

III. Modernization of Korean Culture

What the West brought into Korean cultural milieu is modernization. I identify modernization with westernization, which is the process by which Korean people adopt the forms of life, ways of thinking, values, and behavioral patterns of the West. Modernization is a new orientation in the life of Korean people. Korean cultural way of life is challenged by the invasion of the modernization. What is modernization? It is the result of intellectual developments in European culture over a period of several centuries based on the influence of thinkers such as Bacon, Newton, Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes, who established the scientific method and laid the foundations in mathematics and physics for modern science⁷⁾.

Modernization is characterized by individualism, rationalism, science, and technology. It highly values individualism. Individualism means one's self-concept, the image of oneself as an individual unit whose motivations and behavior are aimed at individual goals, as opposed, for instance, to a member of group whose behavior is directed toward smooth harmonious interpersonal relations⁸⁾. Individualism is so dominant in Western culture.

4) Young-Ae Kim, "From Brokenness to Wholeness", (Ph. D. Dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1991), 90.

5) Ibid., 92.

6) Crane Paul S., *Korean Patterns* (Seoul, Korea: Kwangjin Publishing Co., 1978), 29.

7) Shenk, Wilbert R., "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge", in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, eds, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 192.

8) Auguburger, David W. *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 86.

In American society today, the unquestioned assumption is that the individual takes precedence over the group. Freedom means individual independence. Civil rights means the individual's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The concept of organic community has been heavily eroded by technology, urbanization, political ideology, and legal definition. Even marriage and family are increasingly accepted as matters of individual contract and convenience. The group has become for us a collection of individuals created by individuals for their own individual advantage⁹⁾.

The conception of optimal personhood in individualism places a high priority on the traits of the autonomy, privacy, and uniqueness of each person. The fundamental core value is self-reliance. Indeed, individualism values the separateness of individual and devalues relatedness.

Modernization highly values human rationality. Ashbrook put it in this way: The modern world burst into history with the explosive power of reason and the scientific method, though its roots can be traced to the rationality of the Greeks.¹⁰⁾ People with rational human reason-oriented worldview tend to organize, understand, and interpret experience in terms of dichotomies. They polarize their total experience. They divide reality up into the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. They do not perceive reality itself.

They believe that there is the visible world of space and time, of cause and effect, of details and description, of the predictable and the permanent, of that which is supposedly objective. That is the sensory world which they observe from outside. They have called the visible world as the real world¹¹⁾. They understand values and religious beliefs as the realm of the superstitious and the subjective—that is, the unprovable—and thus are relegated to the private sphere¹²⁾. The rationalism on which modernization focuses can be collapsed from too many question and too much dissection. By itself reason fails to satisfy the longing for an experience of order and a vision of ideal of good and love. People have experienced the primacy of reason as the death of their soul¹³⁾. In the process of modernization, rationalism and scientific materialism go hand in hand. Modernization places its high value on science. According to Amaladoss, science is a search for the understanding of nature and its laws¹⁴⁾. In doing this,

9) Engen, Charles Van. *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 211.

10) Ashbrook, James B., "Beyond reason and Emotion", in *Faith & Ministry in the light of Double Brain*. ed., James B. Ashbrook (Bristol: Wyndham Hall Press, 1989), 265.

11) Ibid., 268.

12) Shenk, Wilbert R., "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge", in *The Good News of the Kingdom*. eds., Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 193

13) Ashbrook, James B., "Beyond reason and Emotion", in *Faith & Ministry in the light of Double Brain*, 266.

14) Amaladoss, Michael, "The Challenges of Mission Today", in *Trends in Mission*. eds., William

it follows two principles: rationality and immanence. The principle of immanence demands that one does not invoke supernatural causes to explain natural phenomena. The principle of rationality supposes that one can understand nature only if one can see and measure, experiment on, and control it¹⁵⁾.

Scientific method is inductive: it begins with observed uniformities and seeks to establish the general law that accounts for them.¹⁶⁾ Through the inductive method, science reduces reality and truth to what can be seen, measured, tested, and verified. Science reduces our lives to the visible and material. It may give rise to a general attitude that says that what one cannot see and measure does not exist. Thus science may lead to materialism.¹⁷⁾

Technology is one of the most amazing characteristics of modernization. It touches all human activity—intellectual, political, economic, social and psychological. All of us live, depending on it, are facilitated by it in our works, and profit from it. It devises the mechanical means to use the laws of nature discovered by science in order to control it.¹⁸⁾ O'Donnell points out that much technology is addictive. Initially at least, it is not only painless but pain reducing. It satisfies curiosity, power, prestige, and possessive instincts. It is addictive.

It says often accurately that: faster is better than slower, newer is better than older, now is better than later.¹⁹⁾ Technology values efficiency and control its development has decreased meaning in life.

IV. Cultural Transformation of Korea Society

Individualism, rationalism, science, and technology have profoundly influenced Korean culture and way of life. They have brought about a transformation in attitudes and values and in the consciousness of individuals and groups. These changes are more visible in the Seoul where is growing at an alarming rate through mass migration and urbanization.

Individualism has challenged family and group orientation. It have threatened the strong feeling of we-ness and relatedness. We have allowed ourselves to become individual oriented rather than family and group oriented. We have become individualistic.

In addition, rationalism and scientific method have challenged Korean people's

Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan (New York: Orbis Books, 1991),370.

15) Ibid.,370.

16) Green, Michael. *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (Nashville: A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 150.

17) Amaladoss, Michael, "The Challenges of Mission Today", in *Trends in Mission. eds.*, William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 370.

18) Ibid, 370.

19) O'Donnell, Desmont, "Evangelization: The Challenge of Modernity", in *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium. eds.*, William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan(New York: Orbis Books, 1991),120.

supernaturalistic worldview. That is, Koreans under constant influence from western rational, scientific, and naturalistic interpretations of reality have chosen to replace part of their supernaturalistically oriented assumptions with rational and scientific ones.

Western cultures are very impressive in technological areas. Korean people, however, though not nearly as accomplished in technological areas as the people in the West are, have developed truly admirable patterns of interpersonal, family, and group interaction and relationship. In present situation, they under constant pressure from western science and technology tend to be warped in the direction of technological accomplishments at the expense of interpersonal, family, and broader social relationships.

Science and technology have both positive and negative aspects. They provide adequate means for convenience of life. However, it does not seem to provide solutions for all of life problems. Koyama made the point I am trying to make. He said technology is not inherently destructive to human well-being. But when technology is used to serve human greed, its compounded efficiency will certainly impoverish and destroy the meaning of human life. The coming of highly efficient science-based technology challenges us to ponder the relationship between efficiency and meaning today.²⁰⁾ I believe that the well-being of people is not simply a control-the-environment-better thing.²¹⁾ We as human beings are person-seeking creatures and meaning-making creatures. We search for meaning in relationships, in community. Science and technology should be controlled by this fact.

V. Re-Thinking of Ministrial Ethic base on Korean Culture

I have discussed some impacts of ministrial ethic in Korea context. I have viewed them as the secular challenges. I will now consider the process of ministrial ethic for Korean people who are adopting the patterns of life, ways of thinking, values of modernization.

Jesus identified with His receptors. In His case, He was incarnated in the receiving society.²²⁾ I cannot become incarnate, but should do my best to enter sympathetically into my receptors' way of life with understanding and empathy, even learning to participate with them to some extent and to share myself with them in person-to-person self-disclosure²³⁾.

20) Koyama, Kosuke. *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: A Critique of Idols* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 129.

21) Kraft, Charles H. *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 177.

22) Kraft, Charles H. *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 443.

23) Ibid, 443.

Before minister talk, he/she must listen. In other words, before minister share the gospel with them, he/she must diagnose and assess where they are. The minister must find out where they live geographically, emotionally, and philosophically. Here is basic roll of ministril ethic for people.

Other way of ministril ethic is to establish a trust and love relationship with people. In the relationship with them, he/she must focus on needs felt by them, especially those they feel are not being met by their present way of life.

Green suggests: We must be flexible. Ministril ethic and apologetics are not a matter of intellectual fire-power and technique. They owe a lot more to friendly relationships and laughter, honesty and directness. Most people are not moved by reason alone, perhaps not even by reason primarily. The gospel of Christ is more often caught than taught. People are more touched by atmosphere, love, welcome, surprise—rather than argument. That does not mean we should neglect intellectual argument. It does mean that we should not rely on it alone. If we neglect the reasons of the heart, we shall never help people into the Kingdom of God. We shall certainly succeed in introducing them to the Kingdom by argument alone²⁴).

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.²⁵ I have learned from Covell that in the Korean context where is relationship-oriented, the first priority of ministril ethic is to establish a good relationship with people. Then follows proclaiming the gospel. This is effective ministril ethic for congregation. What is clear for me is that first relationship, then talking. When talking about the gospel, minister must try to plant doubts in their minds, doubt about whether their worldview is sound.

VI. Conclude

Many Scholars and Christians defined Christianity as 1990s crisis of Christianity in the Korea. 1970 they began to explored and only rapid growth take place. In 1980s Christianity makes it to the highest climax and in the 1990s the growth of congregation declared. So most Korean thought that it may be stop of the golden age of Christianity in Korea. That is true through 100 years a Protestant history and 200 years of Christian history. The Korean churches are boasting the rapid growth of numbers. More churches, more church members, more Bible College or seminaries and even more denominations.

24) Green, Michael. *Evangelism Through the Local Church*(Nashville: A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 141-142.

25) Covell, Ralph. 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, Paul Pierson(New York: Orbis Books,1993), 169.

In our crisis I noticed those problems caused us to ignore some ministrial ethic in communicating the Gospel and culture. We do not embrace the scandal of the Gospel and we don't proclaim gospel. We proclaimed ourselves in selfish purpose. When we stressed one part of the Gospel It means that we do not understand really the wholeness of the Gospel. And when the part which is stressed by the people is use for men's satisfaction, Which means that Christianity has become secularized. In this point, we can analyzed the problems of the Korean Church. With ambitions to make own big Church or big congregation the minister did not teach them the righteousness. They accept the church member's un-ethical people's cultural request. So, with those selfish minister in Korean Christianity we can not communicate Gospel in right way. Some times they more afraid of the people than they are of the Gospel. I think it s good opportunity from God for reform and repentance Korean christianity. Now, we have to look for ministrial ethics.

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