

**A Distinctly Korean Re-Reading of John 14:6:  
Jesus Is the *Kil* ('Way') to the Father**

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PhD**

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**A Distinctly Korean Re-Reading of John 14:6:  
Jesus Is the *Kil* ('Way') to the Father**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a distinctly Korean re-reading of John 14:6, over against the present, popular reading within Korean Protestantism (KP). This new reading challenges, in particular, KP's predominant reception of the Johannine passage so as to indicate 'Jesus' own claim' to be *the only* way to (the salvation of) God.

This project emerged from two disconcerting phenomena pertaining to predominant, fundamentalist exclusivism within KP. First, the often aggressive and occasionally violent, exclusivist behaviour from within KP in recent decades, resulting in equally aggressive anti-KP reactions among Korean citizens. Second, the lack of awareness and development of distinctly Korean biblical understanding and theological expressions within Korean churches.

The thesis establishes its use of the term, 'distinctly Korean,' in its literature review by engaging in scholarly disputes about the nature of the present Korean Christianity. This is followed by a section which will introduce the methodology for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic with its three-fold focuses: Jesus, spirit, and Korea. The new Korean reading both respects and suspects established Western theology and biblical readings, by utilizing the accomplishments of Western scholarship, whilst pursuing an alternative, distinctly Korean biblical hermeneutic.

As a part of the methodological structure of the thesis, the word 'way' in John 14:6—"I am the *way* to the Father"—is reviewed both from within the biblical tradition and also the East-Asian or Taoist tradition (which Korea is part of). The purpose of this task is two-fold: to appraise a traditionally-Korean—hence, allegedly 'non-Christian'—concept, '*to*' ('way'), as a hermeneutical tool, and to utilize the findings of both reviews for the reading of John 14:6.

The basic, literary-critical reading of John 14:6 asserts that the main audience of the

saying is Jesus' disciples, and the major force, pastoral. The observation of the speech-effect of Jesus' being the 'way' identifies an ongoing reminder for the then-believers of Jesus: walk as Jesus walked. Associated with the Korean word, *kil* ('path') emerges the significance of theological themes such as sojourning, returning, and companionship. The popularly-received, 'exclusivist' message of the saying is newly interpreted as a (parallelistic) reiteration of Jesus' *being* the 'way,' emphasizing the necessity of participating in Jesus' holistic life.

This Korean reading of John 14:6, together with newly-emerging *kil* Christological and soteriological insights, may contribute to Johannine scholarship and global theology. The demonstration of a Korean *and* biblical reading of John 14:6, together with Korean theological and hermeneutical methods, may serve to encourage other local/contextual theological ventures to honour one's own culture and spirituality. Furthermore, biblically-based, *kil* missiological principles potentially strengthen a more peace-full, Christian path wherein faithfulness to Christian faith and respect for other religious faiths are compatible.

437 words

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## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

November 29, 2016

Juan Kyongae Withington

**JKWithington**

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# A DISTINCTLY KOREAN RE-READING OF JOHN 14:6: JESUS IS THE *KIL* ('WAY') TO THE FATHER

## INTRODUCTION

### **Thesis Goal**

This thesis aims to achieve a distinctly Korean reading of a biblical passage, John 14:6. This will be a re-reading of the passage over and against its present, popular reading by Korean Protestant churches. It is also hoped that from this new Korean reading of John 14:6, some new theological insights—especially Christological, soteriological and missiological—may emerge. There is a background to this project, which needs to be given.

### **Autobiographical Theology**

I, the thesis writer, am a Korean New Zealander who lived my first 30 years in the Republic of Korea (otherwise known as South Korea).<sup>1</sup> Born into a typically Korean, traditional, Shamanist-Buddhist-Confucian family, I became a Christian at the age of twenty. The newly-begun Christian faith primarily meant to me a recognition of the God who had always been with me and loved me, and a wholehearted return to the eternal father God through the way of Jesus. Not an entrance to a religion but a deep realization, this faith helped me to live the then-meaningless life with newfound meaning and hope. I remained active in Korean Protestant churches, obtaining first-hand experience of Korean methods of evangelism and Korean non-Christians' general view of Protestant believers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, all references to 'Korea' will pertain to South Korea, unless otherwise specified, for the sake of convenience. On occasions where South Korea and North Korea are both addressed, this generic use of 'Korea' to denote South Korea will be avoided.

<sup>2</sup> The accounts of typically-Korean methods of evangelism and Korean non-Christians' general view of Protestant believers, which will be introduced in this thesis, stem not only from written sources but from the first-hand experience of the thesis author.

My life that followed involved two other countries: (emigration to) New Zealand and ('mission' work in) Bangladesh. My many years of life experiences in these two countries helped me to identify some of the uniquely Korean ways. While studying theology in New Zealand, I came to recognize, for the first time, the Westernized form of Christian faith that most Korean Christians have received, which led me to seek a path of a distinctly Korean theology. Four years' pastoral leadership and experience in a Korean congregation in New Zealand further helped me to identify persistent, particularly Korean characteristics among my compatriots. A major portion of the time I spent working on this thesis was lived in the deep countryside of Bangladesh. The agricultural, still-premodern society offered me precious opportunities to see glimpses of biblical culture of the New Testament. Observing certain major biblical perspectives being echoed in both Bengali culture and Korean traditional culture encouraged me to walk deeper into a distinctly Korean theological path.<sup>3</sup>

Mirroring a statement of Lee Jung Young, I believe that "theology is autobiographical."<sup>4</sup> No theology is free from personal background; historical, political, socio-cultural, traditional-religious, educational, psychological, familial backgrounds determine a personal theological view. The above paragraphs have broadly introduced the thesis writer, who is a meaningful part of the thesis context.<sup>5</sup> As will be revealed in several parts of the thesis, these autobiographical experiences contributed to the formation of the theological and hermeneutical lens of the author of the thesis.

### **Context: The Impetus For This Thesis**

Two phenomena in relation to Korean Protestantism (KP) in recent decades precipitated this thesis project: the emergence of exclusivistic violence from within KP, and the lack of awareness and stunted growth of distinctly Korean theological expressions and biblical understanding within KP. A brief introduction to Korean Christianity will help establish a basic context for these disconcerting phenomena.

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<sup>3</sup> The similarities between biblical worldview and East-Asian (or Korean) worldview will be fully discussed in Part III (The Biblical 'Way' and the Taoist 'Way').

<sup>4</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Marginality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 2, 7.

<sup>5</sup> See, regarding the significance of the exposure of the researcher, "the Role of the Researcher" in J. Swinton and H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 58-61.

Korean Christianity is a relatively recent religion in the long, four to five thousand-year history of Korea; Catholicism was first introduced in 1783 and Protestantism in 1884. By the end of the twentieth century Christians had become the largest religious group in Korea;<sup>6</sup> at least twenty-five percent of the whole population is actively Christian in belief and practice. Among Korean Christians, Protestants constitute a larger body than Catholics. Timothy Lee informs us that KP became ‘the most successful religion’ in the religiously pluralistic society of Korea by the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> This thesis will exclusively focus on this highly influential Korean Protestantism (KP), and not extend to Korean Catholicism.

Christian influence in Korean society has become so noticeable that Yun Kyöng-no, a Korean historian, states: “it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the future of Korean society depends on Korean Christianity.”<sup>8</sup> Among KP’s strengths and outstanding characteristics, activism and evangelism come first. Seoul, Korea’s capital, contains eleven of the world’s twelve largest Christian congregations. In addition, Korea provides the world’s second largest number of Protestant Christian missionaries—at least twenty thousand in number.<sup>9</sup> This unusually rapid growth of KP is such a rare phenomenon in the world that much research as to the cause of such growth has taken place.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success: How Korean Evangelicalism Fared in the 1990s,” *Religion and Culture Web Forum* October (2007), 1. Source: [https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/102007/beleaguered\\_success.pdf](https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/102007/beleaguered_success.pdf) (accessed June 25, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 2. Lee clarifies his use of the term, ‘successful,’ on the first page of his article, as “the attainment of wealth, position, honors, or the like.”

<sup>8</sup> Yun Kyöng-no, “기독교적 시각에서 본 한국 근현대사” [Korean Modern History from a Christian Perspective], in *기독교와 역사해석 [Christianity and Interpretation of History]*, ed. Asian Center for Theological Studies and Mission (Seoul: Sönggwang Press, 1994), 153. Yun made this statement in 1993, and Christianity’s influence, both positive and negative, has not decreased in Korea since then. See, for a detailed illustration of Christian influence in Korean society during the latter half of the twentieth century, Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success.”

<sup>9</sup> Among various sources which offer slightly different statistics, it can be safely noted that Korea is one of the top three missionary-sending countries, worldwide. Source: Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, ed., *Operation World*, twenty-first century edition (Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 2001), 747-52; Rob Moll, “Missions Incredible,” *Christianity Today*, March 1, 2006. Source: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/march/16.28.html> (accessed October 9, 2012). For a factual survey and analysis, see, for example, Steve Sang-Cheol Moon, “The Protestant Missionary Movement in Korea: Current Growth and Development,” *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research* 32/2 (2008): 59-64.

<sup>10</sup> For a fairly recent and carefully documented discussion of what has been termed “the puzzling” or “unusual success of Protestantism in Korea,” see, for example, Danielle Kane and Jung Mee Park, “The

Theologically, the majority of Korean Protestant churches maintain a conservative evangelicalism, with a fundamentalist bent.<sup>11</sup> This theological tendency has a close connection with ‘soteriological exclusivism,’ a theological understanding of the reception of divine favour (especially ‘salvation’) in restrictivist categories such that Christianity becomes ‘the only way’ for any person to receive divine favour and eternal salvation. The later decades of the twentieth century saw this theological exclusivism of KP being sometimes expressed through aggressive intolerance to other religious groups.

In the 1980s and 1990s, certain individuals within KP were responsible for the destruction of Buddhist temples and Buddha images as well as Korean traditional heritage objects such as *Tan’gun* images. These incidents alarmed Korean society, alerting them to the violence that may arise from religious exclusivism. Alongside such religious hostility, many Korean social commentators have also noted moral failings of Christians from KP background. The combination of these two phenomena has rapidly resulted in ridicule and contempt for exclusivism within KP from Korean citizens, and served as a basis for negative stereotyping of Christians in Korean popular media.<sup>12</sup>

Another disconcerting phenomenon concerns the identity of KP’s mainstream theology. Discernable in the theology is a Western theological framework, namely, US-style fundamentalism. As will be argued in Part I of the thesis, the majority of KP has considered this particular form of Western Christianity and biblical understanding as Christian orthodoxy or the complete and final form of Christianity.

The thesis author posits that these two phenomena—aggressive exclusivist behaviours and apparent moral failings associated with KP, and the lack of indigenous theological thoughts within KP—are interconnected. Hence, an impetus for the author, as a KP theologian: perhaps it is time to seek some new, distinctly Korean biblical understandings, a new Korean reading of John 14:6, for instance.

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Puzzle of Korean Christianity: Geopolitical Networks and Religious Conversion in Early Twentieth-Century East Asia,” *American Journal of Sociology* 115/2 (2009): 365-404.

<sup>11</sup> This generalized term, KP, and KP’s theological features will be fully explicated in Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> All these phenomena will be explicated more fully in Chapter 2.

### **Thesis Assumptions, Vision, and ‘Intended Audience’**

The thesis topic, a ‘distinctly Korean reading of John 14:6,’ contains a few basic assumptions: that there is such thing as a reading which is distinctly Korean; that there are methods through which to achieve such a reading; and that KP’s present reception of the passage may not be a distinctly Korean reading. Hence, a new, Korean re-reading of John 14:6 might challenge the popular claim within KP that the passage substantiates Christological and soteriological exclusivism. This possibility of a new, distinctly Korean understanding about John 14:6, and of its positive contribution to KP and, further, global Christianity, in fact forms the major hypothesis as well as the vision of this thesis.

As evidenced by the assumptions and vision of the thesis, this research envisages an ‘intended audience.’ As will be seen in various places throughout the thesis, the thesis writer makes an appeal to KP members, those who receive John 14:6 in the present, popular way, in particular, to consider the biblical readings and theological insights presented in the thesis. Having said this, the thesis also commends to other readers a Korean Christian’s understanding of the message of John 14:6 as well as the why and the how of such endeavour.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to explain at this juncture what the thesis does not envision or intend to achieve, so as to mitigate any possible misunderstanding about this thesis project and certain terms the thesis employs, ‘Western theological,’ for instance. The thesis’ discontent with the Western form of KP’s mainstream theology should not be taken as an intention to criticize or compete with Western theologies as a whole. The thesis writer is sufficiently aware of *diverse voices* in Western theologies, those of post-modern theologies, in particular. In addition, the various arguments of this thesis find their echoes in the thoughts of certain Western theologians and theological movements, some of which will be mentioned below. Moreover, the vision for a distinctly Korean theology itself would not have been formed if not for the established, Western (and other global) theologies; a Korean perspective is made distinct and meaningful because of the presence of various Western theological paradigms, to many of which the thesis will present distinctly Korean counterarguments.

The thesis author does not naïvely think, either, that the new reading—even if it were substantially different from KP’s present, popular reading—would solve the

aforementioned problems within KP. Any positive change would be the result of a series of complex factors, and, moreover, as will be argued at points throughout the thesis, a person's heart and the work of the spirit of truth are far more instrumental factors than any new theology in engendering positive change. Nonetheless, I still consider it a worthwhile, and even necessary, task to re-read this well-known and oft-quoted biblical passage, John 14:6. Perhaps this new, Korean reading might help certain individuals, Christians and non-Christians alike, within Korea and even beyond, to finally identify some of the reasons behind their unexpressed questions and doubts in regard to the prevalent, traditional Christian ideas based on the mainstream reading of John 14:6. The reading might help such people, in Korea in particular, to gain confidence to profess their (Christian) faith even if the faith content might not conform to KP's popular theology.

### **Why John 14:6?**

First, John 14:6, in which Jesus is reported as saying "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," stands among the biblical texts as perhaps the single most-quoted passage in defense of a Christian exclusivism.<sup>13</sup> Rowan Williams also argues: "As an isolated text, this [John 14:6] is regularly used to insist that salvation depends upon explicit confession of Christ, and so as a refutation of any attempt to create a more 'inclusive' theology of interfaith relations."<sup>14</sup> In support of the passage's popular interpretation, Moberly contends that the words in John 14:6 clearly indicate the particularity and exclusivity of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> To turn back to KP, Christological and soteriological exclusivism within KP is also often based upon the biblical passage, John 14:6. For instance, Pak Myöng-nyong, the pastor

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<sup>13</sup> Citing the New Revised Standard Version of the Christian Bible. Unless specified otherwise, biblical quotations are from this translation, indicated, where necessary, by the abbreviation 'NRSV.'

<sup>14</sup> Rowan Williams, "The Bible Today: Reading & Hearing," Larkin Stuart Lecture, Toronto, Canada, April 13, 2007. Source: [http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons\\_speeches/070416.htm](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/070416.htm) (accessed August 1, 2012). See also Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010), 291-92. This thesis acknowledges that there are those among Western scholars, besides Williams, who take a critical stance about the exclusivist use of John 14:6 vis-à-vis other religious faiths. For instance, Chapter 10 of the thesis introduces Hans Schwarz and Paul N. Anderson.

<sup>15</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, "Johannine Christology and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, eds., Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 47.

of *Künnamu* ('Big Tree') Church, gave an apologetic sermon, expounding why one should only believe in Jesus to be saved. Pak begins with lengthy critique about soteriological pluralism before he defends the divinity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. As the first point of defense, he says, "In the Gospel of John 14:6, Jesus claims that he is the one and only passage that leads to God."<sup>16</sup> In an expository sermon on John 14:6 at Pusan First Bible Baptist Church, it was emphasized that "the path to a mountain can be many but the way to salvation is only one: through Jesus," in direct opposition to Christian 'pluralism.'<sup>17</sup> The late Ok Han-ŭm, previously one of the leading Christian pastors in Korea, warned of the dangers of the pluralist view, emphasizing the necessity of entering the narrow way, the way to believe in Jesus only, "as John 14:6 says."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, some of the commentators of exclusivist interpretations of the passage, both Korean and Western, will be introduced in the section, 'an exegesis of John 14:6 within the immediate context,' in Chapter 10.

The second reason for the selection of John 14:6 concerns the word, 'way,' in the passage: "I am the way." As will be elaborated in subsequent chapters, the 'way' is rendered as 길 ('*kil*') in Korean Bibles, and this Korean word, *kil* ('path'), has a special feature, being very familiar to Korean people as well as deeply philosophical and religious in its implications. Hence, it has the potential to be an effective linguistic tool for a Korean hermeneutic of a biblical passage. Furthermore, this originally-Korean word, *kil*, shares religio-philosophical implications with the Chinese-origin, *Korean* word, 'to' which is equivalent to the Chinese 'tao' ('way' or 'path').<sup>19</sup> The interrelationship between a Taoist perspective (the Taoist 'way') and a distinctly

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<sup>16</sup> Pak Myöng-nyong, "기독교론: 왜 예수만 믿어야 구원받나요?" [Christology: Why Salvation Is Received Only Through Faith in Jesus], *목회와 신학 [Ministry and Theology]* 8 (2013): 192-199. Source: [http://moxin.duranno.com/ebook/autoalbum/page/201308/RealData/192-199\\_설교%20박명룡.pdf](http://moxin.duranno.com/ebook/autoalbum/page/201308/RealData/192-199_설교%20박명룡.pdf) (accessed July 20, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Sunday sermon at Pusan First Bible Baptist Church, February 19, 2014. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO4eaF97WF8> (accessed June 28, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> That being said, Ok Han-ŭm also warns against faith without action, saying that "eternal life is not guaranteed for those who 'believe' only." Ok Han-ŭm, "당신은 좁은 길로 걸어가고 있는가?" [Are You Walking the Narrow Path?]. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6Jc-10-8rM> (accessed June 28, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> The introductory section of Part III (The Biblical 'Way' and the Taoist 'Way') will clarify the complexity surrounding the three words—'*kil*,' 'to,' and 'tao.'

Korean reading of John 14:6 ('Jesus is the *kil* to the father') will be demonstrated as the thesis develops.

### **What The Thesis Is Built Upon**

The thesis writer has benefitted much from countless theologians from all across the world, having received from them encouragement and help during her theological journey, *albeit* indirectly. To name *only a few* groups and individuals: other Asian contextual theologians (Mukti Barton, Kosuke Koyama, Peter C. Phan, Aloysius Pieris, Kwok Pui-lan, C. S. Song, R. S. Sugirtharaja), Latin American Liberation (Gustavo Gutiérrez), Euro-American Feminist (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Sally McFague, Sandra Schneider), Black Womanist theologians (Stephanie Y. Mitchem), Western inclusivists (Clark H. Pinnok, Karl Rahner), pluralists (John Hick, Paul Knitter), universalists<sup>20</sup> and comparative theologians (Del Byron Schneider, Keith Ward). Each group has its own historical background and continues to diverge into new theological paradigms and expressions. The theological products of these theologians (and many others) not only broadened my theological horizon but also offered a unique example of doing theology at the margin, not from the center, of the great tradition of Christianity.

The idea of doing theology from where one is situated, independently from predominant Western theologies, is also encouraged by empirical insights of Western missiologists. Paul G. Hiebert, for instance, introduces 'self-theologizing' as 'the fourth self' which should be added to missiologically-relevant three 'self-principles'—'self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing' of the local church.<sup>21</sup> Doing theology from one's own context has now become not only permissible but considered by some as imperative; Stephen B. Bevans contends that "to do theology outside of our concrete situation today is no longer an option."<sup>22</sup> It is meaningful to this thesis project

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<sup>20</sup> Universalists base their convictions on the biblical promises that God wills all to be saved and that in the end God will be all in all (check p 215). See, for more information, Morwenna Ludlow, "Universalism in the History of Christianity," in *Universal Salvation: The Cultural Debate*, eds. Robin Parry and Chris Partridge (Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 2003), 191-218.

<sup>21</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, "The Fourth Self" in *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 193-224.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 187.

that all theologies, including Western theologies, are contextual, and that there are diverse methods which theologians adopt consciously or unconsciously.

Interacting with Christian scholars worldwide, and perhaps stimulated by the spirit of the truth, Korean Christians within Korea and in the Korean diaspora elsewhere strove to express various Korean Christian thoughts since as early as 1910.<sup>23</sup> Ch'oe Pyŏng-hŏn, Yi Yong-do, Yu Yŏng-mo, Ham Sŏk-hŏn, Yun Sŏng-bŏm, Kim Kwang-sik, Pyŏn Sŏn-hwan, Ryu Dong-shik, Ahn Byong-mu, Sŏ Nam-dong, and Jung Young Lee are a few examples among many.<sup>24</sup> Most of these Korean theologians, however, have been marginalized within KP, and a few excommunicated from their denomination. This thesis has been much inspired by and built upon these (and many more) Koreans' vision, courage and accomplishments. As will be explained more fully in the literature review section, distinctly Korean theological efforts so far have mostly focused on theological discussion rather than on biblical hermeneutics.<sup>25</sup> This thesis hopes to make some advancement in the distinctly Korean theological path by engaging more in reading biblical texts (the Gospel of John).

### **Various Challenges and Responses**

There exist multiple challenges in the path of this project. One of the challenges is an ontological suspicion about both the existence of local biblical reading and its distinctive methodologies. To be sure, there are several positive, Western influences upon this project, as presented above. However, the thesis writer has encountered other Western groups who challenge a unique, Korean theological path: those who claim to have what they call 'pure' Christian thoughts, being suspicious of contextual theologies and multifaith hermeneutics which will feature prominently in this research.

From a very personal experience, where I previously pursued a research project to read John 14:6 through a Taoist framework, the proposal was rejected by Western scholars, one of whom gave the following feedback:

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<sup>23</sup> The historical overview of Korean theology will be presented in Chapter 4.

<sup>24</sup> The names, Ryu Dong-shik, Ahn Byong-mu, are presented in the way they appear in their articles or books written in English, and published overseas.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 4 (Pages 73-77).

The first task of hermeneutics is to try to read a text on its own terms, but your proposal appears to circumvent this step and to consider the text *through a framework of a very different culture*. To bring two cultures into discussion with one another is an important thing to do, but your methodology involves something rather different, namely to determine the meaning of a textual concept through a semantic framework imported from elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

A possible response to this kind of challenge includes a countering critique of such view. To demonstrate, I could argue that the objection above arises from distrust of the non-Western religio-cultural tradition, in this example, Taoism. Traceable in such suspicion are the following inter-related and consecutive assumptions:

Non-Western countries are of non-Christian origin;  
Their traditional religious or philosophical thoughts are non-Christian;  
Non-Christian equates to non-biblical;  
Non-Christian and non-biblical thoughts are likely to hamper genuine Christian and biblical thoughts;  
One must not bring Asian-born concepts to the reading of the biblical texts.

This train of logic seems to carry several faulty ontological and epistemological assumptions:

There exists such a thing or things describable as inherently Christian or non-Christian; non-Western traditional thoughts are inherently non-Christian.

There exist purity and impurity in Christian theologizing; Western theologies retain purity but non-Western theological thinking lacks it.

Syncretism occurs when Asian theologians employ their traditional religious concepts in doing Christian theology; Western theologians are relatively free of syncretism.

Conclusions reached from such practice are consequently unbiblical.

The problem I see here is that the critics are unaware that their own framework is also 'imported'; that traditional Western theologies are influenced by Greek philosophy has

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<sup>26</sup> This is an excerpt from an email that I received on February the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 from a Western scholar (emphasis added).

been observed and argued by many.<sup>27</sup>

One of the leading counter-critics of Western criticism suspicious of Asian theological methods is a Korean-American Jung Young Lee. Lee encountered people in his theological journey who were suspicious of his theological method. For instance, there were those who questioned why Christian theology should employ the Eastern concept of 'change' (based on the Chinese classic, *The Book of Change*) or those who considered it a betrayal of the Christian faith to employ an idea out of another tradition. Lee's response to them was the following:<sup>28</sup>

A variety of metaphysical systems have served as vehicles for the Christian faith. Christian theologians have used Platonic, or Aristotelian, or Kantian, or Cartesian, or Hegelian metaphysics to convey the idea of the ultimate reality, and in no case do we consider their metaphysics a betrayal of their Christian faith. If Christianity is truly not a sect but a universal religion, we have no reason to reject a clear and comprehensive interpretation of change simply because it originated in China. Chinese philosophy is as acceptable a vehicle for Christian faith as Greek philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

Some Western scholars warn against the foundational assumption that Western thinking is Christian and biblical; one such voice states:

Western biblical interpretation has no right to assume that all its insights are 'the standard,' while those from other continents are 'contextualized.' The West is also a context—and not necessarily a better or a worse context for understanding and interpreting the text of the Scriptures than anywhere else on the planet. Recognizing this has led somewhat to the demise of western hegemony over exegesis and hermeneutics.<sup>30</sup>

My response to the aforementioned critique will be to incorporate in this thesis a comparative review of the biblical 'way' and taoistic 'way,' otherwise known as '*tao*'

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<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 177; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 718; Mark Allen Dejong, "The Dao, the Truth, and the Life: Jesus and Laozi in Ethical Dialogue." Source: <http://hereticalrhetoric.wordpress.com/2011/05/12/the-dao-the-truth-and-the-life-jesus-and-laozi-in-ethical-dialogue/> (accessed June 2, 2012), no page.

<sup>28</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change: A Christian Concept of God in an Eastern Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 25.

<sup>29</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Interpreting the Bible among the World Religions," *Themelios* 25/3 (2000): 50.

or 'to.'<sup>31</sup> This comparative review may inform how far or close the 'non-Christian' East-Asian 'traditional semantic framework' around the word, 'to,' is to the biblical 'way.' This will serve to evaluate a Korean traditional, "non-biblical," framework as a hermeneutical tool.

The second challenge in this research is how to sufficiently develop distinctly Korean perspective in this thesis. This challenge is by no means a new one and was indeed faced, with more intensity, by early Korean theologians. Jung Young Lee (1935-1996), who studied most of his life in America, expressed his observation and concern about the fact that many non-Western theologians continued to cite the work of Western scholars "to support and validate their claims."<sup>32</sup> Lee went on to say that "their theologies, therefore, become not only supplementary to traditional Western theologies but also less creative in their work."<sup>33</sup> Upon realizing it, Lee took the liberty to choose his preferred theological method and actively spent "more time in meditation than in library research and more time in rereading the Bible than reinterpreting existing theological works on the Trinity."<sup>34</sup>

In a similar vein, Ahn Byong-mu (1922-1996) recalls the experience of many Korean Minjung theologians (including himself) who studied "Western theology": "Frequently our own thoughts remained underdeveloped; we learned as passive students."<sup>35</sup> Through this kind of realization, Korean Minjung theologians encouraged themselves to be free from Western theological categories, logic and mode of inquiry that would restrict their thinking. Instead, they allowed their own reality to lead their theologizing, by letting their thought evolve as the minjung or poor people evolve, their reflection change as the minjung change.<sup>36</sup>

With respect to this thesis, there is no way to deny Lee's observation and concern: this thesis seeks support and *validation* from Western theological and

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<sup>31</sup> The difference between 'tao' and 'to' will be explained in the introductory section in Part III.

<sup>32</sup> Lee Jung Young, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>33</sup> Lee Jung Young, *The Trinity*, 12. Lee's words come to Korean theologians as a 'legacy,' for he passed away in the same year this book was published.

<sup>34</sup> Lee Jung Young, *The Trinity*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> This was quoted in Lee Jung Young, ed., *An Emerging Theology in World Perspective: Commentary on Korean Minjung Theology* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), 197.

<sup>36</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Emerging Theology*, 24, 197.

academic frameworks by engaging in their language, logic and framework; this is not completely satisfactory but an unavoidable reality in Korea (and elsewhere in the world). As a result, there *is* a risk that authentically Korean thoughts may not develop as deeply as they should, a risk expressed by Ahn above and a lingering fear of the author of this thesis.

The scarcity in the work done with a view to read John 14:6 in a distinctly Korean way is another challenge. While Burge is right when he recommends that whoever reads a Johannine commentary should treat it as a volume “in conversation with decades of Johannine research,”<sup>37</sup> this statement entails a problem: decades of Johannine research is mostly of Western origin. This appears to be not only a problem associated with Johannine research but also general biblical hermeneutics worldwide, as Rynkiewich reports: “Despite all the talk in missiology over the last two decades about the local hermeneutical community doing critical contextualization, we have few examples.”<sup>38</sup>

Distinctly Korean theologies that have been achieved thus far within KP remain mostly systematic-theological rather than biblical-hermeneutical. Turning to hermeneutical works done by Korean biblical scholars, most existing Korean commentaries on the Gospel of John heavily rely on Western scholars’ commentaries, referring to their works and arguments to establish the meaning of passages. Such commentaries are not genuinely Korean hermeneutical products; they are closer to summarized translations of certain Western scholars’ works. This disadvantage—the apparent lack of existing Korean hermeneutical works on John 14:6—ironically became an advantage, informing me that this project for a new reading is all the more necessary, and, thus, merits effort.

### **Hermeneutical Delimitation and Focuses**

The challenges mentioned above as well as the context and characteristics of this project make it necessary to set up certain limitations and focuses in the hermeneutical scope (of Chapter 10). First, this thesis reading is more Korean theological than biblical exegetical with respect to the global setting. Thus, this new reading will not meet the

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<sup>37</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Interpreting the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 33.

<sup>38</sup> Michael A. Rynkiewich, “Mission, Hermeneutics, and the Local Church,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1/1 (2007): 57.

usual academic expectations for a biblical exegesis, such as studies of the original (Greek) words in the Gospel of John, or exhaustive discussions with scholarly voices from diverse Christian groups.

Second, in extension to the first, I will favour engagement with those biblical scholars who belong to conservative and evangelical Christian circles, especially in the initial reading of Chapter 10: “An Exegesis of John 14:6 within the Immediate Context.” This is because these particular groups have the most influence on KP’s present, popular reading of John 14:6; KP’s mainstream theology appears to lack dialogue with a broader spectrum of Western Christian thoughts.

Third, in order to make the best use of the Korean word, *kil*, this reading will give special attention to the word, ‘way’ among the three predicates of the subject ‘I’ in the passage – the way, the truth, the life. In addition, the reading will examine if the passage carries, as KP’s popular reading claims, any exclusive and restrictive message against other religious people. From there, the ideal end-product of this hermeneutical work should include: a new Korean biblical reading of John 14:6, with a specific focus on the word, ‘way’ or *kil*, and a contention for and against an exclusivist claim of the speaker (the Johannine Jesus) as the only ‘way’ to the father.

### **A Distinctly Korean Reading: Methodology**

How, then, shall the thesis accomplish a *distinctly Korean* reading of John 14:6? There are a few necessary tasks that must precede the hermeneutical work of the passage. First, two chapters are prepared in the first stage of the thesis (Part I), which will review the diverse spirituality within KP during its 130 year history, and examine the background of the theological exclusivism that has become a dominant feature within KP. Through this historical review, the thesis will provide evidence with which to argue that KP’s present, dominant theological position is not ‘distinctly Korean’ but heavily influenced by a particular stream of Western theological and doctrinal reading, which is conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist.

Second, the phrase, ‘distinctly Korean,’ employed in this thesis, will have to be defined, for the reason that the present, popular reading of the passage by KP *is* also a Korean reading, shared by the majority of Korean Christians. For this purpose a chapter will be prepared, reviewing scholarly disputes over the nature of present-day Korean Christianity. Some scholars view that the present KP *is* typically-Korean Christianity,

Christianity that has been formed through adherence to Korean culture. Others view that it is *not* Korean Christianity, as it lacks serious and honest theological thoughts developed from distinctly Korean minds. Through this discussion, the precise meaning of the term, 'distinctly Korean,' *as it is used in this thesis*, will be established.

Third, the methodology that will enable a distinctly Korean hermeneutic must be presented. This constitutes *the* methodology of the new Korean reading in the narrow sense. Each specific methodological focus will be accompanied by a concrete example of its application to the reading of John 14:6.

The last stage before the reading of John 14:6 concerns review of the biblical 'way' and the Taoist 'way.' These two, independently accomplished reviews will then be compared with each other in their soteriological implications and effects, as preparation for a Korean biblical reading of Jesus being the 'way.'

### **Structural Constructs**

The main body of the thesis consists of five parts. The first part (Part I) will function as an extension of the introduction of the thesis. The first chapter will identify historically-formed fundamentalism as a widely-prevailing feature of KP, within its diverse spirituality and denominational variety (Chapter 1). The following chapter will illustrate and describe the public appearance of theological exclusivism within KP and the reactions to it in Korean society, by Christians as well as non-Christians (Chapter 2). The final chapter will examine the multi-faceted factors that led to and presently maintain this exclusivism (Chapter 3). Thus, the context and rationale of the thesis will be further developed in Part I. It should be noted that Part I—Chapters 1 and 3, in particular—also constitutes part of the literature review of the thesis.

The major methodology section will make up the next part (Part II), which consists of two chapters: literature review (Chapter 4) and methodology for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic (Chapter 5). Chapter 4 will introduce scholarly disputes over the nature of KP and its theology, questioning whether it is distinctly Korean or not. This comes under the literature review section because, as was mentioned above, distinctly Korean readings of John 14:6 are scarce, and, thus, establishing Korean identity becomes an essential and crucial task in the project. As mentioned above, the other necessary content such as the historical review of KP's theologies and theological exclusivism within KP, which might normally be dealt with under a single 'literature

review' section, are instead presented in two chapters of Part I. The result is a somewhat scattered formation of the literature review, which is inevitable, as the thesis needs to develop sufficient context for itself. The methodological section will present a three-fold Korean hermeneutical focus, which will elaborate the hermeneutical framework for the new reading.

Part III will be a comparative review of the biblical 'way' and Taoist 'way'—'tao' or 'to.' This section shall serve as the thesis' response to the aforementioned Western-born suspicion about non-Western hermeneutical methodology, with an aim to evaluate a Korean traditional, "non-biblical" framework as a hermeneutical tool. Conversely, it also offers another significant benefit to the thesis: the findings of both reviews will be utilized, informing the *Korean* reading of a *biblical* passage, John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life"). Three chapters will be employed to do the following tasks: review of the biblical 'way' (Chapter 6), review of the Taoist 'way' or 'to' (Chapter 7), and contextual comparison of the two 'ways' (Chapter 8).

The new reading of John 14:6 will occupy Part IV. This section will start with a chapter that discusses some selective hermeneutical issues such as the authorship, historicity, setting and language of the Gospel of John, the Johannine Jesus and 'the historical Jesus,' and the literary device of parallelism (Chapter 9). The following chapter will consist of the central task of the thesis: a new Korean reading of John 14:6 (Chapter 10). In this exegetical chapter, I will approach the focused passage from four directions: (a) from within the immediate literary context, (b) through the lens of memoir or the context of a later time, (c) through the lens of the Korean *kil* or 'way,' and (d) examining the passage in regard to the exclusivistic content within it. After this, the major messages of John 14:6 will be tested against the backdrop of several other sayings which also carry soteriological imagery within the same gospel (Chapter 11). This additional work, which looks beyond the immediate context to the wider, is another hermeneutical enterprise by which to understand the Johannine Jesus in a more *holistic* way, which the methodology establishes as an important Korean hermeneutical method.

With the completion of the hermeneutical work, the last part of the thesis (Part V) will present new theological insights in correspondence with KP's present, popular theology based on John 14:6. Hence, the final chapter of the thesis offers some alternative, more Korean, Christological, soteriological and missiological

insights that emerge from the new reading of John 14:6 (Chapter 12). Although the thesis focuses on Korean Protestantism, there are globally-relevant implications for the tasks of contextual theologies and wider inter-religious relations.

### **Additional Notes**

All the Korean texts including poetry quoted in this thesis are translated by the thesis writer, except those otherwise specified. Titles of Korean books and articles are introduced first in Korean, followed by the translated English titles placed in square brackets. The romanization of the Korean words used in the thesis will follow the M-R (McCune–Reischauer) system, except for words that are already widely used in a different form, e.g. Seoul, Park Chung-hee, Lee Myung-bak. Korean names will be given in full in the references because there are relatively few Korean family names. Also, the full names will have the surname precede the first name, which follows the Korean custom. Several Korean scholars' names, however, will appear in the way they are used for their own books published overseas in English, and thus, follow the Western convention. The romanization of the Chinese and Greek words used in the thesis follow respectively the Wade-Giles system and ALA-LC (American Library Association—Library of Congress).

## PART I

### THEOLOGICAL EXCLUSIVISM OF KOREAN PROTESTANTISM: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Continuing from the introduction of the thesis, this section will inform what remains to be explained in regard to the theological exclusivism of Korean Protestantism. First of all, a definition of ‘exclusivism’ should precede any further elaboration. In a much simplified picture, the various stances toward other religions within Christianity are categorized into the following three ‘groups’: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.<sup>1</sup> Among these three, exclusivism may be defined as “a stance to view all the other religions except one’s own (Christianity) as both theoretically and functionally unable to save people and thus to practically deny their existential values.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, Christian exclusivism entails the soteriological exclusivist stance.<sup>3</sup> An extreme form of exclusivism further views that other religions are enemies of (Christian) God and even come from Satan, and, for that reason, should be eliminated.

Part I consists of three chapters. The first chapter will review the diverse spirituality within KP during its 130 year history, and present the historical background of theological exclusivism that has become a dominant feature within KP (Chapter 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “종교간의 갈등현황과 그 해소 방안에 대한 연구” [Present Religious Conflicts and Ways to Overcome Them], in 아레오바고 법정에서 들려오는 저소리: 김경재 정년퇴임 기념 논문집 [*The Voice We Hear from the Areopagus Court: A Compendium of Essays in Honour of Kim Kyong-jae*], Kim Kyong-jae (Seoul: Samin, 2005), 335.

<sup>3</sup> A brief introduction to the other two positions might allow this exclusivism to better stand out by contrast. Inclusivism, which some might call a (post-Vatican II) Roman Catholic inclusivist approach, is a Christian position in which non-Christians are understood to obtain salvation through the mysterious presence of Christ. It is generally received that Karl Rahner, an eminent Catholic theologian, pioneered this position. Pluralism is yet another Christian perspective, typically theo-centric rather than Christo-centric, which views that all religions are effective mediators of a universally available spiritual transformation or salvation. Paul Knitter and John Hick are among the proponents of this theory. For further information about these three positions, see A. U. Light, “Only One Way? Three Christian Responses on the Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Plural World – By Gavin D’Costa, Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange,” *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 19 (2012): 436–39.

This will be followed by a chapter that describes and analyses the emergence of aggressive exclusivism from within KP in the public domain and its reception by Korean society, among Christians and non-Christians (Chapter 2). The examination of possible reasons behind this exclusivism will make up the final chapter of this section (Chapter 3).

## CHAPTER ONE

### SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY OF KOREAN PROTESTANTISM: DIVERSITY AND SINGULARITY

#### SPIRITUAL DIVERSITY OF KOREAN PROTESTANTISM

KP, in its 130-year-long history, has enjoyed diverse spirituality. To overview KP's diverse spirituality, I will critically engage in church historian Pae Tök-man's article, "Church as a Holy Communion: Seeking a Distinctly Korean Spirituality." In the article, Pae Tök-man introduces the major spiritual traditions of KP, together with analytical information about the historical background of each tradition and an appraisal of each.<sup>1</sup>

First, there is 'shamanist spirituality' which may be equated with Korean people's 'collective unconsciousness'<sup>2</sup>; it is the most resilient spirituality, still exercising its power upon Korean Christians to this day. This spirituality is often manifested through believers' keen interest in the spiritual world, which is ironically tied with material interest, and is typically individualistic, less concerned about others and community.<sup>3</sup> These features, according to Pae, carry in them the potential to contribute both to the blooming of prosperous theology and ethical failure within KP; hence, Pae argues that "this spiritual orientation is a great contributor to Korean

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<sup>1</sup> Pae Tök-man, "거룩한 공동체로서 교회: 한국적 개신교 영성을 추구하며" [Church as a Holy Communion: Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality], in 공동체, 성경에서 만나고 세상에서 살다 [Communion, Meeting at the Bible and Living in the World], ed. Bible Korea (Seoul: Taejangan, 2015), 27-50.

<sup>2</sup> Pae Tök-man, "Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality," 29; Kim Kyong-jae, "한국오순절 성령운동의 신학적 평가" [A Theological Appraisal of Korean Pentecost Spiritual Movement], in *The Voice*, 114.

<sup>3</sup> Ahn Byong-mu contends that the fault of Korean Shamanism lies in its individualistic orientation, driving to solve individual *han* or deep suffering. Ahn Byong-mu, *민중신학 이야기* [Stories of Minjung Theology], revised edition. (Seoul: Han'guk Sinhakyö'n'guso, 2005), 123.

Protestantism both in its rapid growth and its more rapid deterioration.”<sup>4</sup>

‘Evangelical spirituality’ within KP was a gift from the early Western Protestant missionaries to Korea at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Most of these missionaries were deeply influenced by contemporary Reformed theology and/or Wesleyan sanctification movements in their homes.<sup>6</sup> A few major influences they have left upon KP bear mentioning. Calvinist Reformed theology upholds absolute respect for the Bible and yearning for the holy spirit. As a result, within KP, far greater emphasis is given to literalistic reception of the Bible and its application to life than to a critical reading of it. Spiritual yearning is implemented through everyday daybreak service, frequent prayer meetings and regular revival meetings. Influenced by the Wesleyan movement comes the emphasis on sanctification and eschatological interest.<sup>7</sup> It is understandable that early KP members welcomed dispensational premillennialism and the second coming of the Lord, given their suffering under Japanese oppression (1909-1945). It was through the leadership of the pastor, Kil Sŏn-ju (1869-1935), who is considered the “first person who started the daybreak prayer meeting”<sup>8</sup> and champion of apocalyptic eschatology, that the historic 1907 Pyongyang repentance-revival took place.<sup>9</sup>

A leaning towards what would later come to be known as a ‘pentecostal’ style of spirituality has existed in Korea even as early as the late 1920s, led by pastors such as Yi Yong-do (1910-1933).<sup>10</sup> However, it is the Korean War (1950-1953) that truly accelerated the growth of ‘pentecostal spirituality’ in Korean churches; people who were exhausted both in body and soul came to the church with hearts opened to the spirit, and consequently received the gifts of healing and speaking in

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<sup>4</sup> Pae Tŏk-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 31;

<sup>5</sup> Min Kyŏng-bae, 한국기독교회사 [*The History of Korean Christianity*] (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2007), 149-50; Pae Tŏk-man, Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 4.

<sup>7</sup> Pae Tŏk-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 32.

<sup>8</sup> Pak A-ron, 새벽기도 이야기: 새벽기도문화와 새벽기도 신학 [*The Story of Early Morning Prayer: the Culture and Theology of Early Morning Prayer*] (Seoul: Christian Literature Crusade, 2011), 53-54.

<sup>9</sup> Pae Tŏk-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 32.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “한국신학의 태동과 흐름” [Birth and Movement of Korean Theology], in *The Voice*, 71, 73; Pae Tŏk-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 39.

tongues. The 1960s saw the emergence of Paul Yong-gi Cho, who was undoubtedly the key figure of this spiritual movement. Most leaders of Presbyterian churches, which remains the largest denomination within KP, view this movement with suspicion, based on the theory of ‘cessation of spiritual gifts’; hence, this pentecostal spiritual movement still remains a ‘hot potato’ issue within KP.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, such spirituality carries with it the danger of distorting the essential Christian message by preferring ‘experience’ to the word of God, ‘power’ to sanctification, and ‘glory’ to suffering. Nevertheless, this pentecostal spirituality within KP has demonstrated most dramatically that the supernatural ministries of the New Testament times are still a living reality; moreover, it has empowered KP with spiritual revival and quantitative growth.<sup>12</sup>

There is also ‘capitalist spirituality’ working in KP.<sup>13</sup> This spirituality is a direct product of the period of historical-political turbulence in Korea – the liberation from Japan (1945), followed by the Korean War (1950-1953) with the consequent division between the North and the South (1953), and the beginning of military dictatorship headed by Park Chung-hee (1963). Park’s dictatorship propelled Korea forward with two powerful wings of ‘anti-communism’ and ‘economic growth’; the zeal for economic growth disregarded democracy, and the ideology of anti-communism settled down firmly in the soil of South Korea alongside ‘pro-Americanism’ or ‘Americanization.’ Most Christian leaders in the South at this time were those who had survived the cruel persecution of communists in the North, and who, for that reason, considered communism as nothing less than the reality of evil.<sup>14</sup> These leaders played a significant part in the establishment of this ideology in South Korea. The Korean church in general became eager to be like the American church, which they saw as an ‘unmistakable example of God’s blessing,’ receiving from America theories of church growth, positive thinking, and prosperity theology. The effect of this position included the Korean church’s “moving away from the democratization movement and into a

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<sup>11</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 40. Presbyterian lay practice may nonetheless include Pentecostal elements.

<sup>12</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 40-41.

<sup>13</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 34.

<sup>14</sup> Pastor and evangelist Kim Chun-gon (1925-2009) is an exemplary figure of this anti-communist sentiment. Kim will be further introduced below.

non-political, more purely religious involvement.”<sup>15</sup> During this period, KP achieved its maximum growth, an occurrence as miraculous as its economic growth, alongside the emergence of several mega churches in wealthy areas in Seoul. These positive accomplishments carry in them, however, a seed of ‘self-destruction’: the biblical truth that says one cannot serve both God and Mammon is paid little attention, and the church largely fails to participate in the suffering of the time, i.e. social and economic injustice inflicted on the poor or minjung.<sup>16</sup>

There was, however, a minority group of ‘progressive’ Christians during this period who stood up to fight against the military dictatorship on behalf of the poor and the unjustly imprisoned. Ignited by the self-immolation of a poor labourer, Chon T’ae-il, on November 13, 1970, this ‘minjung theological spirituality’ left its ivory tower to participate in the suffering of the nation’s poor, the minjung.<sup>17</sup> As a result, many of these Christians became imprisoned and/or lost their jobs. Minjung churches in Korea partially restored the prophetic role of the church in Korea by raising voices against the ‘bad shepherds’ who neglected their duty to care for the weak and the powerless in society. A further achievement that KP obtained through this form of spirituality is the contribution to a distinctly Korean theology by theologizing the concrete context of Korea.<sup>18</sup>

The 1990s began to see the rise of a new interest among Korean Protestant Christians. This is the period where the popularity of KP in society noticeably declined and some of its members sought alternative ways for their spiritual nourishment.<sup>19</sup> These people took interest in the writings of Catholic spiritual writers such as Thomas Merton and Henry Nouwen, which were previously considered as ‘non-orthodox’ by conservative KP groups.<sup>20</sup> Further positive influence from Korean Catholicism upon KP includes the emphasis of silence and listening in prayer life, meditation on the words of

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<sup>15</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 36.

<sup>16</sup> Kim Sung-ho, “Rapid Modernisation and the Future of Korean Christianity,” *Religion* 32.1 (2002): 32; Pae Tök-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *Minjung Theology*, 341.

<sup>18</sup> This will be elaborated more fully in Chapter 4 (Literature Review).

<sup>19</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success.”

<sup>20</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 42.

the Bible, and appreciation of the Lord's Supper in a new way.<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon of 'monastery spirituality' seems to have resulted from a serious re-thinking of the 'evangelical' and 'capitalist-pentecostal' spirituality which has been prevalent in KP.<sup>22</sup>

With the coming of the new millennium, a group of Protestant 'conservative' leaders who claimed to pursue 'holistic spirituality' began to catch the attention of KP members. Referring to themselves as the 'evangelical left' or 'radical evangelicalism,' these leaders place emphasis on Christian engagement in various social issues which 'evangelicalism' has previously overlooked.<sup>23</sup> The stability of democracy in Korea might have contributed to this new phenomenon, by offering the freedom for individuals to profess their own politico-theological ideas.<sup>24</sup> It also seems that the present status of KP, as a major influential religion in the nation, encourages these leaders to seriously respond to the various problems of Korean society.

We may draw two conclusions from this brief review of diverse spirituality within KP. First, KP has become what it is now, with its strengths and weaknesses, through its responses and reactions to the historical changes in Korea; hence, KP is in part a significant historical product of modern Korea. Second, each spiritual tradition, when met with the need of a specific historical period, has had a positive, immediate effect, but, at the same time, left certain negative influences. Therefore, it is necessary for KP to do a critical analysis of each spiritual tradition and discern what to hold on to and what to let go of.

## **DENOMINATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL DIVERSITY**

As Protestantism in the West is known for its schismatic tendency, so KP has gone through many divisions and schisms. To provide a quick sketch of KP's divisions, three major ones need to be noted. The first one is in relation to the correct approach to

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<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon is not unique in KP but has occurred within American and other Western forms of Protestantism.

<sup>22</sup> Pae Tök-man, "Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality," 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> Pae Tök-man, "Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality," 45.

<sup>24</sup> Pae Tök-man, "Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality," 46.

dealing with the leaders who, during the Japanese occupation of Korea, capitulated to Shinto worship (1951-1952); the second is due to the theological difference in regard to the use of various criticisms in biblical hermeneutics (1953); and the third is due to differing views about the ecumenical theology of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (1959-1960).<sup>25</sup> These divisions are the direct result of theological differences. In addition to these three major schisms, further on-going schisms have resulted in the existence of about 300 denominations in KP.<sup>26</sup> Until recent years, all these divided groups could be grouped into two large, overarching Christian bodies: the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCK).

The Christian Council of Korea (CCK), which is often called by its Korean acronym, *Han'gich'ong*, was by far the largest alliance of churches in Korea, up until 2012. Since its birth in 1989, CCK represented 69 denominations and 20 Christian organizations in its body, and its fervour for mission has led to South Korea ranking as the world's second largest missionary-sending country. Theologically, CCK seeks to maintain conservative evangelicalism, having aligned itself with the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) since 2009. The present president of CCK, Yi Yöng-hun, states in his 'welcome address' that he will "strive to keep conservative evangelical faith tradition, and to stand against the radical, progressive and left-wing theologies."<sup>27</sup> The "Common Faith Statement" of CCK contains the belief in infallibility of the Bible (Statement 2) and in Jesus as the God-Man and the one and only Saviour (Statement 3).<sup>28</sup>

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCK) presently has 9 denominations and 5 Christian unions as members. It is worth noting that both the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK) otherwise known by its popular name, *Kijang*, which has led progressive theology in Korea since the 1953 schism, and the Korean Methodist Church (KMC) which have taken the lead in the development of Korean indigenous theology, belong to NCK. With its ecumenical vision, "NCK does

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<sup>25</sup> Kang Kün-hwan, "한국교회 신학의 흐름과 전망" [Theological Trends Developed Through the Historical Stream of the Protestant Church in Korea]. Source: <http://sgti.kehc.org/data/person/kang/1.htm> (accessed June 7, 2015); Myung Hyuk Kim, "Christian Unity and Reconciliation in the Korean Context," *Ecumenical Review* (2014): 36-37.

<sup>26</sup> Myung Hyuk Kim, "Christian Unity and Reconciliation in the Korean Context," 37.

<sup>27</sup> Source: <http://www.cck.or.kr> (accessed May 25, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Source: <http://www.cck.or.kr> (accessed May 25, 2015).

not insist on a particular doctrine/dogma or regulations, and respects and appreciates the true and valuable experiences of all the member churches.”<sup>29</sup> As its name highlights, NCKK shares its main theological views with WCC, and has manifested various efforts in line with ‘interfaith dialogue.’

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 saw the birth of the third body of KP: the Communion of Churches in Korea (CCIK) or *Han’gyoyŏn*, which was the result of a further schism within CCK.<sup>30</sup> CCIK presently claims to be a Christian union of 34 denominations and 10 institutions. In passing, it seems ironic that this new ‘union,’ which breaks off from CCK, claims that its primary goal is the “unity and communion of Korean churches.”<sup>31</sup> As understood from the official statement, the theological position of CCIK appears hardly different from that of CCK. A few days after the birth of CCIK, 16 Christian organizations made a statement together, expressing their concerns about this new Christian body: the emergence of CCIK does not in any sense bring about the renewal of KP but results in yet another major split among Korean churches.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, theologically viewed, there are still two overarching bodies within KP. The two major bodies—the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) and the Communion of Churches in Korea (CCIK)—represent ‘evangelicalism’ or ‘conservative Christianity’ in Korea and the minor one—the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK)—‘progressive Christianity.’<sup>33</sup>

In addition to this denominational difference, individual differences exist among KP members even within the same body or denomination; of course, there is no way to determine each member’s precise conception about salvation and attitude to other religious groups. Further, there is a gap between the creed that a KP member

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<sup>29</sup> See NCKK’s “Purpose and Vision” at <http://www.kncc.or.kr/eng/sub01/sub01.php> (accessed May 25, 2015). True to its ecumenical vision, NCKK welcomes the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, Salvation Army Korea and the Anglican Church of Korea as its members.

<sup>30</sup> The apparent reason for this split is the unacceptable result of CCK’s general election for the general secretary; CCK’s election process has long been criticized for its politically-motivated monetary misuse.

<sup>31</sup> Source: <http://www.cciik.kr/sub.php?Tid=20&Ctnum=21&Ctid=HM21> (accessed May 25, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> These 16 Christian organizations, under the name of the “Christian Network for the Closure of CCK,” are united in their vision to reform Korean Protestantism. The statement appeared on April 3, 2012. Source: <http://www.ecumenian.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=8825> (accessed May 25, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “한국진보신학의 오늘과 내일” [The Present and Future of Korean Progressive Theology], *신학과 교회* [*Theology and Church*] 2 (2014): 123. In spite of these dividing schisms within KP, the majority of KP members are neither interested in nor aware of which body they belong to.

confesses and the actual life that the person lives, which may be termed as his/her 'living theology.' For instance, there are those who speak exclusivist doctrinal languages with respect to their faith, but act and live in more inclusive ways. In a similar manner, those who belong to more 'progressive and open' denominations may behave in more discriminatory ways towards the 'others.' That the 'living theology' or theology of life is a more accurate witness to faith than any verbal or written theology adds more complication to the critical stance of this thesis toward exclusivism within Korean Protestantism.

### **KOREAN-STYLE FUNDAMENTALISM: SINGULARITY OF KOREAN PROTESTANTISM**

As was observed above, KP has had a long history of diverse spirituality, and there are individual and denominational differences in theological views and expressions within KP. There is, however, an outstanding theological and ideological tendency within KP toward 'fundamentalism' or KP-style evangelicalism. Timothy S. Lee remarks on the dominant status of evangelicalism within KP thus:

In terms of numbers and church influence, Evangelicals overshadow their non-Evangelical counterparts. In fact, Evangelicalism so predominates the Korean church, and its success or growth so influences Korean Protestantism as a whole, that Evangelicalism and Protestantism are more or less synonymous in Korea.<sup>34</sup>

Based on a few prestigious religious surveys in Korea, Lee reports that "toward the end of 1990s, 95 percent of all Korean protestant churches were Evangelical."<sup>35</sup> Lee also describes the general character of Korean evangelicalism as "quite conservative, that is, fundamentalistic and practical."<sup>36</sup> This view is echoed by Chŏng Yong-sŏp, who submits that "if the theological feature of KP were to be described in one word, it would be 'fundamentalistic.'"<sup>37</sup> Chŏng goes on to say that most KP

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<sup>34</sup> Timothy S. Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 2.

<sup>35</sup> Timothy S. Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 8.

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 116.

<sup>37</sup> Chŏng Yong-sŏp, Daegu Bible Academy Online Lecture 41: "기독교와 한민족" [Christianity and Korean People]. Source: <http://dabia.net/xe/study2/597401> (accessed May 2, 2015).

members adhere to fundamentalist ideas *regardless of* the difference in their denominations.<sup>38</sup> For these reasons, KP-style fundamentalism merits further discussion.

On what bases does one argue that the Korean Protestant church is strongly fundamentalist? What does KP-style fundamentalism look like? These questions may be approached through a critical examination of concrete Korean practices in three realms: theological, ethical and social.<sup>39</sup>

First, theologically viewed, KP holds tightly onto their fundamentalist tradition by supporting biblical inerrancy, premillennial dispensationalism or the second coming of the Christ, anti-pluralism, and anti-evolution theory.<sup>40</sup> Among these, biblical inerrancy stands at the forefront as a non-negotiable element of faith.<sup>41</sup> As noted before, CCK, the largest body within KP, publicly declares its adherence to the inerrancy of the Bible. According to the Centennial Comprehensive Study of the Korean Protestant Church survey in 1982, 84.9 percent of the clergy and 92.3 percent of the lay people answered affirmatively the question that asked whether they believed every word of the Bible to be God-inspired.<sup>42</sup> This view of the Bible inevitably yields certain hermeneutical practices such as uncritical, literal reading of the Bible and objection to biblical criticisms.<sup>43</sup> The other features of KP-style fundamentalism include 'justification by faith [alone]' and an antagonistic stance toward other religious

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<sup>38</sup> Chŏng Yong-sŏp, "Christianity and Korean People."

<sup>39</sup> Pae Tök-man, "한국교회의 허와 실, 근본주의" [Fundamentalism: the weakness and strength of the Korean Church], *기독교사상 [Christian Thought]* November (2011): 55.

<sup>40</sup> Pae Tök-man, "Fundamentalism," 55.

<sup>41</sup> Chŏng Yong-sŏp, Daegu Bible Academy Online Lecture 42: "근본주의란 무엇인가?" [What is Fundamentalism?] Source: <http://dabia.net/xe/study2/597403> (accessed May 1, 2015); Keel Hee-sung, "한국기독교의 배타성은 어디서 오나?" [Where Does Korean Exclusivism Come From?], speech at the first combined academic conference of the Methodist, Anglican and *Hanshin* Theological Seminaries with the theme of "the exclusivism of Korean Christianity: its foundation and phenomenon," in September, 2008. Source: [http://saegilchurch.or.kr/SGS/31\\_11.pdf](http://saegilchurch.or.kr/SGS/31_11.pdf) (accessed June 24, 2015); Kim Myŏng-nong, "성경무오설, 신학적갈등의 핵심" [The Theory of Inerrancy of the Bible Sits at the Core of Theological Conflicts], speech under the topic of "Korean Church and Fundamentalism" at the fifth Aimhigh Korea, a Korean Methodist Pastors' Forum. *Yŏllim* Church, Seoul, June 19, 2014. Source: <http://www.christiantoday.co.kr/view.htm?id=273018> (accessed June 12, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Timothy S. Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 6. This point will be expanded further in the section, "Missional-theological Dimension," in Chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, "The Present and Future of Korean Progressive Theology," 114.

traditions. KP's exclusivist stance toward other religions, in particular, is closely tied to their fundamentalist, literal reading of the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

Fundamentalist exclusivist soteriology based on 'biblical inerrancy' finds its greatest enemy in religious pluralism.<sup>45</sup> In attempting to understand the anti-pluralistic stance of KP, it should be acknowledged that such stance was originally necessary; Christianity as *the newest, persecuted religion* unavoidably had to defend its uniqueness in the midst of the religious pluralistic society of Korea. This stance was probably analogous to the early, minority Christians' passionate statement as it is recorded in the New Testament (NT): "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It is also undeniable that behind the miraculous growth of the Korean church was the zealous faith held by many KP members.

This being said, however, the thesis writer wishes to carefully observe what the present KP, which exhibits its power through its large number of adherents, wealth and social status, has been doing, particularly since the 1990s. Antagonistic stance toward other religions within KP— *Han'gich'ong*, the largest Christian body within KP—has been observed in incidents such as the destruction of Buddhist temples and statues,<sup>46</sup> a group of Christians' 'prayer and praise' at the *Pongūnsa* Buddhist Temple,<sup>47</sup> and demonstrations against the 2013 Pusan WCC gathering, in opposition to WCC on the grounds that the theological stance of WCC is "leftist and pluralistic" and consequently non-orthodox.<sup>48</sup>

Ethically, Korean-style fundamentalism presents itself to society through its anti-smoking and drinking views, values of male headship and female subordination, and firm stance against homosexuality, abortion and evolution (which are longstanding issues in American conservatism). For instance, *Han'gich'ong*, declared on April 7,

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<sup>44</sup> Timothy Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea*, 116-18.

<sup>45</sup> Pae Tök-man, "Fundamentalism," 56.

<sup>46</sup> This will be further illustrated and described in Chapter 2.

<sup>47</sup> Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSRvStwL\\_u4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSRvStwL_u4) (accessed August 19, 2015); the national news MBC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE2DmVmugkU> (accessed August 19, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, "기독교와 이웃종교간 만남과 대화는 가능한가?" [Encounter and Dialogue between Christianity and Neighbouring Religions—Would It Be Possible?]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=552&page=1&ftype=6&fval=&backdepth=1> (accessed July 14, 2014).

2003 that “homosexuality, which played a major part in bringing God’s judgment of fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah, still contributes to family destruction, and is the main culprit behind societal problems such as AIDS.”<sup>49</sup> It is a sad irony that while the most sizable body of KP condemns certain behaviours of others ‘on the basis of’ Christian Scriptures, many KP members have failed to be ethical in the eyes of others in the more basic areas of honesty, faithfulness, respect and concern for others, and economic and social justice.<sup>50</sup>

Socially, Korean-style fundamentalism manifests itself through social activities based on the ideologies of anti-communism and pro-Americanism. This may be seen, among many other instances, in the fact that the birth of *Han’gich’ong* in the year of 1989 was a reaction to the publication of the theologically more progressive “NCKK Statement on the National Unification and Peace” in the previous year, 1988.<sup>51</sup> When Kim Dae-jung became the president of South Korea in 1998 and implemented the Sunshine Policy in relationship with North Korea, *Han’gich’ong* used its full force to fight against the perceived ‘leftist government’ led by Kim. Among the forefront of this movement was pastor Kim Chun-gon (1925-2009) who founded the Korean CCC (Campus Crusade for Christ) in 1958 with the encouragement of Bill Bright, the founder of CCC in America. Kim Chun-gon was deeply traumatized by the ‘cruelty of communism,’ having borne witness to communist soldiers killing his own family members in an inhuman fashion during the Korean War.<sup>52</sup> This horrific experience undoubtedly contributed powerfully to Kim’s passionate anti-communist sentiment and activities.<sup>53</sup> Kim was responsible for the birth of Korean Christian party (2004), a concrete example of the New Right movement in Korea.<sup>54</sup> Anti-communism and pro-

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<sup>49</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Fundamentalism,” 57.

<sup>50</sup> This will be described in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>51</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Fundamentalism,” 58.

<sup>52</sup> Kim Chun-gon, *예수칼럼 [The Jesus Column]* (Seoul: Sun, 1983), 247, 325.

<sup>53</sup> Kim Chun-gon, *예수칼럼 [The Jesus Column]* (Seoul: Sun, 1983), 247, 325. In fact, Kim Chun-gon is only one of the many Christians who underwent opposition and persecution from communists during the Korean War. Many of such Christians later became church leaders in South Korea, among whom Han Kyöng-jik is the most well-known and respected.

<sup>54</sup> Being at the centre of the mass evangelical gatherings of KP during the 1970s and 1980s, Kim Chun-gon’s life was dedicated to campaigns such as ‘evangelization of the whole nation of Korea,’ ‘evangelization of the whole army,’ ‘dedication of the whole city to God,’ and even ‘evangelization of the

Americanism reached their climax in February, 2008, through the presidential election of Lee Myung-bak, an elder of *Somang Church*, one of the mega churches in a wealthy area of Seoul. The majority of Korean Protestants still retain a staunchly anti-communist political stance.<sup>55</sup>

This brief overview of evangelical fundamentalism, the dominant stream within KP, and its theological, ethical and social features and appearances, has made one thing quite clear: the settlement of fundamentalism in Korea is an almost unavoidable historical outcome, just as the division of Korea was. Put differently, the fundamentalist ideology and lifestyle is a “natural and necessary choice that arose as a survival mechanism from within contemporary life circumstances.”<sup>56</sup> Fundamentalism in America, likewise, emerged as a reaction (of self-protection against the perceived danger) to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism and liberalism.<sup>57</sup> A reaction itself is a natural and necessary phenomenon; this thesis project arose in part as a reaction to exclusivism within KP.

At the same time, through closer inspection of the problematic and even dangerous phenomena that have manifested from KP-style exclusivism in recent decades, one may identify the ‘shadows’ of fundamentalism. From this recognition, Pae Tök-man comments that “it is a real historical irony that KP-style fundamentalism, which was a positive factor behind the growth of the Korean church, has now turned into the main cause for crisis within KP.”<sup>58</sup> In the next chapter (Chapter 2), the thesis will look at the exclusivist actions that emerged from within KP-style fundamentalist exclusivism in recent decades, together with the consequent reactions.

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world’ within KP. Kim was also responsible for the ‘prayer with breakfast’ initiative within parliament.

<sup>55</sup> See, for the arguments about the interconnection between the Korean Protestant church and anti-communism, Pae Tök-man, “Fundamentalism,” 59; Kang In-ch’öl, *한국 개신교와 반공주의* [*Korean Protestantism and Anti-communism*] (Seoul: Chungsim, 2007), 57-140; Yun Chöng-ran, *한국전쟁과 기독교* [*The Korean War and Protestantism*] (Seoul: Hanulacademi, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Fundamentalism,” 54.

<sup>57</sup> For a historical review of Fundamentalism, see Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Interpretation* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1968).

<sup>58</sup> Pae Tök-man, “Fundamentalism,” 60.

## CHAPTER TWO

### KP-STYLE EXCLUSIVIST ACTIONS AND THEIR REACTIONS

#### EXCLUSIVE ACTIONS

Various antagonistic actions have taken place in Korea in recent decades, often based on a specific exclusivist stance wherein faith in Jesus entails the denial of, or objection to, all other religious faiths. For this reason, a new term, EKP (exclusivism within KP), will be employed in this chapter to illustrate destructive actions that arose from within KP.

The negative attitude of EKP toward other religions, Buddhism, in particular, came to prominence during the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, a number of violent, destructive *actions* were undertaken by members of KP.<sup>1</sup> Some 30 incidents including the burning of Buddhist temples, and destruction of Buddha images and paintings were initiated by certain over-zealous KP members.<sup>2</sup> Most of these cases were at first excused as crimes committed by a small number of extreme Christian fundamentalists or emotionally unstable people. However, the incident that occurred in *Cheju Wŏnmyŏng Sŏnwŏn* Temple (June 26, 1998) where a KP member broke off the heads of 750 Buddha images, contributed to the beginning of a national-level anti-Christian movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The thesis author acknowledges that this project only focuses on the negative sides of the relationship between KP and Korean Buddhism in recent decades. To be sure, there are also positive influences of KP upon Buddhism, resulting in the emergence of laity movements within Buddhists, which imitate Christian rituals of worship (singing to the tune of Christian hymns), prayers (over meals), and the running of charitable institutions. See Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 296.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, "Present Religious Conflicts," 318-19.

<sup>3</sup> This specific case is carefully researched and criticized in Juan K. Withington, "Is Destroying Buddha Images a Just Action? A Critique of Korean Protestantism's Exclusivism and *Pangiryŏn's* Anti-Christian Movement," MTh paper, Laidlaw College, Auckland, 2009. In fact, numerous people have offered their critiques about this incident. See, for example, Kim Kyong-jae, "Present Religious Conflicts," 318-20; Timothy Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 20; Yi Ch'an-su, 한국 그리스도 비평: 그리스도교, 한국적이기

To be sure, all these incidents are still considered as the unwise actions of a hostile minority within KP. However, as Yi Ch'an-su points out, "the problem is the general attitude of Korean Protestantism, which is so inward looking that it does not realize the severity of these aggressive and destructive incidents."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, KP's overall silence about such incidents—without public apologies, for instance—could be interpreted as a quiet 'approval' of them. Korean Buddhists' response toward such repeated actions from Christians is mostly disregard and avoidance of Christians. A Buddhist scholar, Yun Yŏng-hae, comments that "Korean Buddhists maintain a 'cold war' with Christians in Korea; they just hope to have nothing to do with Christians."<sup>5</sup>

The general antagonism of EKP is not only directed toward other religions but also toward its own traditional cultural heritage. To demonstrate this point, some background information of this phenomenon shall be given. Korea has always been a multi-religious society where indigenous religious pursuits of Shamanism and the other imported 'three religions'—Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism—have co-existed.<sup>6</sup> It is, therefore, inevitable that Korean *traditional spirituality* contains elements, thoughts and practices influenced by those religions. The popular stance of EKP, which opposes any religion other than Christianity, consequently looks at one's own *traditional spirituality* as something 'unclean,' even as anti-Christian or anti-Christian God. The action of breaking down statues of *Tan'gun* (a semi-mythical figure who is considered to have begun the nation of Korea in 2333 BCE), which are located in numerous places in Korea, comes from the perception that *Tan'gun* is an idol, against God.<sup>7</sup>

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위하여 [*Criticism of Korean Christianity: Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*] (Seoul: Ihwa Press, 2009), 282-83.

<sup>4</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 283.

<sup>5</sup> Yun Yŏng-hae, "한국불교의 기독교 바라보기" [How Korean Buddhists View Christians], *불교평론* [*The Buddhist Review*] 10 (2002): 104-11.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 1; Keel Hee-sung, *보살예수: 불교와 기독교의 창조적 만남* [*Bodhisattva Jesus: A Creative Encounter between Buddhism and Christianity*] (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 2004), 25-26; Kim Kyong-jae, "Present Religious Conflicts," 313; Yi Kyu-t'ae, *한국인의 의식구조 2* [*Korean People's Frame of Thought 2*] (Seoul: Sinwŏnmunhwa, 1983), 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Tan'gun* images (usually located in public places such as schools and parks) were damaged by Christians 'for the honour of God' in early 2000. Source: "머리잘린 단군상에 전운감도는 종교계" [Suggestions of Religious War over the Beheaded *Tan'gun*], *Han'guk Ilbo* Newspaper (16-01-2006). This article informs that since the 1980s, there has been tension between the voice of Christianity and that of both Korean traditional religions and civic movements because of the beheading of *Tan'gun* images throughout the country. Source:

The violent, exclusivist actions of extreme EKP members alone might well have caused angry reactions among Korean people, not only from non-KP members but also some within KP. However, a further problematic issue has been observed in relation to KP, namely, 'moral collapse.' The phenomenon of moral collapse frequently observed within KP has, since the beginning of the 1990s, resulted in the regular rise of "Jeremiads" against Korean churches.<sup>8</sup> The critics firstly target church pastors in regard to their love for money and power as well as their teaching of distorted Christian faith.<sup>9</sup> Lay Christians also demonstrate similar problems such as lack of honesty in dealing with customers in their work/business, and selfish prayer for God's 'blessing' upon them with little consideration whether such wishes might cause trouble or loss to others.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, extravagant financial expense on church buildings, 'stealing sheep' from other churches, and frequent quarrels in meetings, both verbal and physical, are all actions that KP members have been criticized for by many in Korean society.<sup>11</sup>

## REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

All these phenomena have resulted in diverse opposing reactions in Korean society. First of all, the loss of respect for and trust in KP, and consequent decrease of church growth. For several years, KP has been the least trustworthy and least liked religion in

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<http://media.daum.net/society/affair/view.html?cateid=1010&newsid=20060116162805091&p=hankooki> (accessed July 8, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Lee presented his talk with the title, "Jeremiads against Korean Evangelicalism," at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religions (for Korean religions group), Atlanta, GA, November 23, 2015. Lee introduced in his presentation twenty-five books, written from the period of early 1990s till present, that severely criticize Korean Protestant churches for their love for money and power, and moral collapse. There are in fact many books other than those introduced by Lee, which equally criticize Korean churches. The above was reported by somebody who participated in the "Korean religions group" discussion.

<sup>9</sup> Chŏng Chong-hun, "목회윤리적 접근" [The Ethics of Church Ministers], in 위기의 한국교회, 진단과 대안 [*Korean Church in Crisis: Diagnosis and Response*], eds. Hŏ Ho-ik and others (Seoul: Tongyŏn, 2010), 49-78.

<sup>10</sup> See, for a few concrete examples, Timothy Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 15-16; Son Pong-ho, "한국교회 미래가 있는가?" [Is There Future for Korean Church?], public speech at the fourth YMCA forum, Seoul, September 22th, 2011. Source: <http://jongnoforum.tistory.com/10> (accessed August 10, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> See Kim Seyoon, "한국교회의 새로운 개혁을 위하여" [For the New Reformation of the Korean Church], *Christian Thought* 12 (2008): 48-55.

Korea.<sup>12</sup> Many KP members became Catholics out of disappointment with KP, as demonstrated by statistics on the on-going ratio change between Protestants and Catholics among Christians in Korea: 75 percent Protestant (25 percent Catholic) in the 1995 survey, 73 percent in the 1997 survey, and 64 percent in the 2005 survey.<sup>13</sup>

In Korea, televised dramas often acutely reflect the views held within society. Since the 1990s, Korean dramas and films began to use church elders or ‘Christians’, who use Christian jargon such as ‘hallelujah’ or ‘amen’, as common archetypes.<sup>14</sup> As Kang Yŏng-an points out, “Protestantism has become a target of ridicule by public media in Korean society.”<sup>15</sup> Timothy Lee rightly calls the 1990s a “decade of beleaguerment” for KP.<sup>16</sup>

One of the reactions to this phenomenon is the emergence of an unprecedented, anti-Christian movement among the citizens of Korea. This is extraordinary in that any judgment and persecution of a certain religion in Korean history has typically occurred at a government level, but this anti-Christianity movement in Korea arose from common citizens. Chi Sŏng-su comments with respect to this new anti-Christian sentiment: “The Korean church is going through two

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<sup>12</sup> According to a survey of people’s trust in religions conducted by the Religious Forum in November, 2010, 40% of participants expressed trust in Catholicism, with 33% in Buddhism, and 17.6% in Protestantism. Source: Son Pong-ho, “Is There Future for Korean Protestantism?” According to the 2015 Gallup Korea report on Korean religions, the preference of religions by people with no religion is as follows: Buddhism 25%, Catholicism 18%, and Protestantism 10%. Protestantism was the least-favoured, too, in the 2004 Gallup Korea report. Source: <http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportDownload.asp?seqNo=625> (accessed September 17, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 2. The statistics of 2005 are based on the report of the Bureau of Statistics in Korea in November, 2005, which was presented and discussed in the Ecumenical Press in Korea. Source: <http://www.ecumenicalpress.co.kr/article.html?no=39177> (accessed October 9, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> There are many TV dramas and films wherein corrupt and deceitful behaviours of Christian leaders are explicitly described. One of such is a 2011 Korean film that is based on a true story, *도가니* (Crucible), which entails the discovery of a history of sexual and physical abuse at a school for hearing-impaired children that claims to be run in accordance with Christian ethics (the principal is a church elder). Pastor Kwak Chae-uk wrote an article after watching the movie, Crucible, expressing sadness and shame about how Christianity was being portrayed in public media—the “enemy of society.” Pastor Kwak Chae-uk, “‘도가니’에 빠진 한국교회” [Korean Church Fallen into a ‘Crucible’], *기독교공보* [Christian News], October 21, 2011. Source: <http://www.pckworld.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=50998> (accessed June 22, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Kang Yŏng-an, “종교다원적 상황에서 그리스도인은 무엇을 해야 할 것인가?” [How Should Christians Behave in the Context of Religious Pluralism], *Hanmokhyŏp* (The Korean National Association of Christian Pastors) the 12<sup>th</sup> public discussion, *Yonsei University*, Seoul, October 16, 2008. Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV\\_yKSFkPvc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV_yKSFkPvc) (accessed December 15, 2015) and <http://www.kpastor.org/news/articleView.html?idxno=165> (accessed January 22, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 14.

extraordinary socio-cultural experiences. One is the experience of the most rapid expansion of Christianity and its subsequent, equally rapid, decline in church history, and the other is the encounter of the unprecedented, strong anti-Christianity movement.”<sup>17</sup>

One such anti-Christian movement, *Pan’giryŏn* or ‘Anti-Christianity Civil Union,’ goes so far as to state that KP, wholesale, is a “poison” or “cancer” in society. Borne out of this extremely negative judgment about KP, *Pan’giryŏn* takes an equally exclusive and violent stance, arguing that KP should be eradicated in order to save the nation of Korea from falling into ruin.<sup>18</sup> New current vocabulary in relation to Christianity such as *Kaedokgyo* (‘*kae*’ means ‘dog’) for *Kidokgyo* (Christianity), *Kaedokin* for *Kidokin* (Christian), and *mŏksa* (‘the one who gorges’) for *moksa* (pastor), are also products of *Pan’giryŏn*. *Pan’giryŏn*’s distrust is not limited to the attitudes and behaviours of Christians but ultimately extends to the Bible itself, convinced that the Bible is “the very source of inherently and characteristically exclusive faith.”<sup>19</sup>

Within *Pan’giryŏn*’s critiques about KP, there are several points that KP members might be wise to heed. At the panel discussion of “Dialogue with Anti-Christianity,” Yi Ch’an-gyŏng, the chairperson of *Pan’giryŏn*, compared *Pan’giryŏn*’s ‘anti’ attitude with his perception of KP’s: “While our ‘anti-ness’ is limited to Christianity only, Christianity is *anti*- all other religious values (including atheism) in society barring itself.”<sup>20</sup> Yi then appealed to KP: “I sincerely wish that Christians present here will put themselves into our shoes and think about how we, ‘others,’

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<sup>17</sup> Chi Sŏng-su spoke, as one of the presenters at the panel discussion, the KOACC (Korean Association of Church Communication) endeavor toward “Dialogue with Anti-Christianity,” *Yŏndong* Church, Seoul, November 23, 2007. Source: <http://blog.daum.net/sydneytaxi/9399379> (accessed June 14, 2011; this is the blog owned by Chi himself). See, for the panel discussion, “Dialogue with Anti-Christianity”: [http://www.newspower.co.kr/sub\\_read.html?uid=10389&section=sc4&section2](http://www.newspower.co.kr/sub_read.html?uid=10389&section=sc4&section2) (accessed May 17, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> *Pan’giryŏn*’s internet blogs (<http://www.antichrist.or.kr>) proclaim three statements: “Christianity is only harmful to society. It should be destroyed for the sake of humanity. Joining the Anti-Christianity movement is a way to love the nation [of Korea].”

<sup>19</sup> Source: <http://www.antichrist.or.kr>.

<sup>20</sup> The speech of Yi Ch’an-gyŏng at the panel discussion, “Dialogue with Anti-Christianity.” Source: <http://café.daum.net/soongsari/8yWn/1722> (accessed May 17, 2010). Seeing that the ‘root’ of Christianity, the Bible itself, is inherently exclusive, *Pan’giryŏn* does not believe in any hope for Christianity. Because of this, its members do not appreciate the efforts of Christian minority groups who seek dialogue with them; the effort of such Christians would only deter the termination of ‘cancerous’ Christianity.

might feel when you address other people's precious faiths and values as 'devil,' 'satan,' and 'idol worship' and aim to destroy them."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps KP members should revisit their own prayer meetings and try to see them through the eyes of non-Christians. KP's organized prayer meetings, which are often held under the slogan of 'Christianization of the whole nation' or 'offering the whole city to God,' may well be interpreted by other Koreans not only as the denial of their own religions but also of their own dignity and rights as human beings.<sup>22</sup>

Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim discern that even in the early twenty-first century, "South Korean society could not be described, as could Western societies, as post-Christian; rather, it was post-Buddhist or post-Confucian."<sup>23</sup> Kim and Kim further address the practical struggles that Korean Christians have faced: "In the twenty-first century, conversion still caused family difficulties and Christians continued to seek freedom for their faith on a day-to-day practical level."<sup>24</sup> The notion that South Korea is not a post-Christian society, however, deepens the concern of this thesis; Korean Christianity, at this relatively early stage, should manifest its truth, goodness and beauty to the nation, instead of inviting criticism or ridicule from the public through their actions.

How have members of KP responded toward this anti-Christian movement? At the least, KP has become aware of the presence of anti-KP movements in Korean society. Rev. Yang Pŏng-hi, the president of CCIK, says in his recent 'welcome address' that he will defend Christianity from the anti-Christian movements in Korea.<sup>25</sup> Some KP leaders have publicly acknowledged the "fallen state" of KP and have made appeals for repentance and reformation. Son Pong-ho, as one of the leading critics of KP, speaks that "it is right for citizens of Korea to criticize and condemn KP about its ethical

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<sup>21</sup> The speech of Yi Ch'an-gyŏng.

<sup>22</sup> There are Christian prayer groups in Korea who pray for the destruction of Buddhist temples. In one such group, a Christian pastor and evangelist speaks on the worthlessness of Buddhism. Source: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYByc6\\_-6lo&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYByc6_-6lo&feature=related) (accessed June 8, 2011). See also <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5dUw1YDPDs&feature=relmfu> (accessed June 8, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 298.

<sup>24</sup> Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 298.

<sup>25</sup> Source: <http://www.ccik.kr/sub.php?Tid=1&Ctnum=2&Ctid=HM2> (accessed May 25, 2015).

depravity, for it does harm to society.”<sup>26</sup> Kim Seyoon, quoting a Pauline critique (Rom 2:24), states that “God’s name is blasphemed among Gentiles because of you [KP],”<sup>27</sup> and argues that the task of purging KP’s moral collapse would require nothing short of the second Reformation.<sup>28</sup> Keel Hee-sung goes so far as to say that “the only way for the renewal of Christianity seems to be KP’s ‘death’ or closedown; only then would the spirit of Jesus be revived, and the nation of Korea benefit.”<sup>29</sup> Some leaders have taken concrete actions toward reform and launched new organizations such as “Union of Church Reform and Practice.”<sup>30</sup>

Opinions about how to rebuild the Korean Church vary, and there are two different overarching approaches to the how. One group focuses mainly on KP’s ethical problems and seeks restoration of Christian morality. Son Pong-ho discerns that KP’s ethical ‘failure’ is because of the love of money, which many churches fall into, and appeals as the advisor of *Kiyunsil* (Christian Ethics Movement of Korea) that Korean churches return to the teachings of Jesus and *live them out*.<sup>31</sup> Kim Seyoon, with an international reputation for Pauline theology, views that KP’s present predicament is due to a fundamental misunderstanding of Pauline/Lutheran ‘justification by faith alone.’<sup>32</sup> Sin Kwang-Ŭn, a Baptist pastor and theologian, likewise, contends that recent happenings within KP, which appear morally ‘senseless,’ have their root in KP’s popular, ‘distorted’ soteriology. Sin newly terms KP’s popular soteriology ‘Arvinism,’ an extraordinary amalgam of Calvinist and Arminian theologies to fit its own interest and

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<sup>26</sup> Son Pong-ho, “Is There Future for Korean Church?”

<sup>27</sup> Kim Seyoon, “New Reformation.”

<sup>28</sup> Kim Seyoon, “한국교회/비뚤어진 칭의론부터 고쳐야” [Correction for the Korean Church: the Distorted ‘Justification by Faith Alone’], speech at the autumn seminar, Christian Alliance for Church Reform (<http://www.protest2002.org>), July 11, 2011, Seoul. Source: <http://www.newsnjoy.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=36202> (accessed August 10, 2011), no page.

<sup>29</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 31. It is out of his deep concern and sadness in relation to KP’s present shape that Keel utters this; this should not be taken as an exclusivist intention, excluding KP from Christianity. “There will be rebirth only through dying to self”—is Keel’s sentiment. Son Pong-ho conveys a similar sentiment to Keel’s. See Son Pong-ho, “한국교회 개혁과 미래” [Korean Church: Its Reformation and Future], special theological lecture, Evangelia University, Anaheim, CA. August 2015. Source: <http://www.ecornerstone.org/Message/121343> (accessed May 10, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> This union was founded in 2002. Source: <http://churchreform.tistory.com/> (accessed May 1, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Son Pong-ho argues that “reform of Korean church will not occur until the church begins to despise money.” Son Pong-ho, “Korean Church: Its Reformation and Future.”

<sup>32</sup> Kim Seyoon, “Correction for the Korean Church.”

preference.<sup>33</sup> Kang Yöng-An, a scholar of philosophy and elder of the most conservative *Kosin* denomination within KP, appeals for “orthopraxis” or right behaviour for “the resolution of the current state of KP.”<sup>34</sup> All these critics who centre on KP’s ‘ethical failure’ are theologically conservative Christians.

The other group, mostly hailing from more progressive theological backgrounds, connect the problematic behaviours from within KP with its mainstream, exclusive theology and understanding about the Bible. Kim Kyong-jae views that hermeneutical immaturity is behind the negative exclusivism within KP.<sup>35</sup> Chöng Yang-mo and Keel Hee-sung invite Korean Christians to revisit their Christological understanding.<sup>36</sup> In regard to KP’s general conflicts with other religions over the years, Timothy Lee comments that “there is no question that much of this conflict stemmed from Evangelicalism’s exclusivist soteriology and the way it demonized the traditional religions of Korea.”<sup>37</sup> Such elements in Christology and soteriology, then, affect KP’s popular missiological stance.<sup>38</sup>

There are still others, in basic accordance with all the above opinions, who find a specific link between KP’s present crisis and KP’s popular theological expressions, which are formed primarily through a strain of Western Christianity, i.e, American-style, conservative, fundamentalist Christianity.<sup>39</sup> As elaborated in the introduction, the thesis author stands by this view, and seeks to retrieve the wisdom and truth that has long dwelled among the people of Korea for the reading of biblical texts. As a concrete project, this thesis seeks a *distinctly Korean* understanding of John 14:6, a biblical passage which has much significance, Christological, soteriological and missiological.

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<sup>33</sup> Sin Kwang-ün, 천하무적 아르뱅주의: 한국교회가 발행하는 면죄부 [*Undefeatable Arvinism: The Indulgence That Korean Churches Sell*] (Seoul: P’oiema, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Kang Yöng-an, “How Should Christians Behave in the Context of Religious Pluralism.”

<sup>35</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “Present Religious Conflicts,” 329.

<sup>36</sup> Chöng Yang-mo, 내 글 보고 내가 웃는다: 정양모 이야기마당 [*I Laugh Reading What I Wrote: Chöng Yang-mo’s Story*] (Seoul: Haetbit, 2011), 303. Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 111-12.

<sup>37</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 20.

<sup>38</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Where Does Korean Exclusivism Come From?”

<sup>39</sup> This will be fully elaborated in the ensuing chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SEEKING CAUSES FOR KP-STYLE EXCLUSIVISM

The phenomenon of exclusivism is an ancient, and perhaps even universal, one. Scholars observe that a typical characteristic of the monotheistic ‘religions of revelation’ such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam is an exclusivist tendency.<sup>1</sup> Keel Hee-sung notes the extreme irony that a monotheistic religion, believing in the ‘only one’ and ‘universal’ God, embraces from the start both universalism *and* exclusivism.<sup>2</sup> History witnesses that Christianity, which comes off the boundary of the ‘Jewish election’ and spreads to the whole world, has frequently exercised exclusivist practices, often accompanied by power and violence, wherever it reaches.<sup>3</sup> Both those outside of the church and those within it find the origin of Christian exclusivism within the Bible.

Keel Hee-sung argues that “the foundational reason for the exclusivism within Christianity lies in the Christology which makes Jesus the God figure.”<sup>4</sup> Catholic priest and scholar Chŏng Yang-mo also views that the exclusive attitude manifested within Christianity is rooted in monotheistic theology and the Christology that holds Jesus as the only medium for human salvation.<sup>5</sup> Given this ‘typically Christian’ exclusivist tendency, one may ask whether there is any uniquely Korean context behind KP-style exclusivism. The first chapter of the thesis introduced a brief historical background behind the development of KP-style fundamentalism and exclusivism. This current chapter will further examine the possible causes for the exclusivism within KP by

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<sup>1</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Where Does Korean Exclusivism Come From?” 104. Chŏng Yang-mo, *Chŏng Yang-mo’s Story*, 303.

<sup>2</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Where Does Korean Exclusivism Come From?” 104.

<sup>3</sup> By ‘Jewish election,’ it is not meant that Judaism is an exclusivist religion; there also exists a universalist strain within Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Where Does Korean Exclusivism Come From?” 111-12.

<sup>5</sup> Chŏng Yang-mo, *Chŏng Yang-mo’s Story*, 303.

looking at various dimensions such as politico-cultural, missional-theological, socio-economic, psychological, and also Korean people's characteristics.

## **POLITICO-CULTURAL DIMENSION**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, despite considerable struggle to keep Korea/*Choson* a "Hermit Kingdom," Korea was losing her way.<sup>6</sup> Both within Korea, among the common people, and outside of Korea, there was a strong push for *kaehwa* or reformation, by opening Korea to the rest of the world.<sup>7</sup> The time for *kaehwa* finally came and the first modern treaty with a foreign country (Japan) occurred in the year of 1876, under the name of the Treaty of *Kanghwa*.<sup>8</sup> Only a few years after this official 'opening up' of Korea did Horace G. Underwood and Henry G. Appenzeller, who are known to be the first Protestant missionaries to Korea, enter the country.<sup>9</sup> It seems significant that the Korean *kaehwa* and the first entrance of Western Protestant missions in Korea were contemporaneous.

Following the opening of Korea to several other foreign nations<sup>10</sup> came forth changes in various socio-cultural domains. The changes include: the alteration of some of the traditional (Confucian) rites and customs, breakdown of unhelpful superstitions, the women's rights movement, the beginning of modern (Western) medicine and education, and literacy programs in villages. Protestant missionaries were involved

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<sup>6</sup> *Choson* was the name for Korea during this period. The "hermit kingdom" became a nickname for *Choson*, a completely unknown country at that time, following William Elliot Griffis' book, *Corea the Hermit Nation*, an introductory book about Korea/*Choson*, which became so popular that it went on to the ninth edition in America. William Elliot Griffis, *Corea the Hermit Nation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882).

<sup>7</sup> The *Kaehwa* designates, in particular, the socio-politico-cultural reform that took place nationwide in Korea at the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>8</sup> *Kanghwa* is the name of an island in Korea at which foreign ships could berth.

<sup>9</sup> It is generally agreed that the first foreign Protestant mission in Korea started in the years of 1884-1885 when two American missionaries arrived in *Chemulp'o*. Prior to this, there had been several occasions when Christianity was introduced from as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. However, they were sporadic and unsustainable. Hence, the 'first' Protestant missionaries are referred to as such because their work was sustained and joined in by many other foreign missionaries since then. Min Kyöng-bae, 한국기독교회사 [*The History of Korean Church*] (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1981), 155.

<sup>10</sup> England (1883), Germany (1883), America (1884), and France (1886). Min Kyöng-bae, *History of Korean Church*, 124-25.

directly and/or indirectly in these revolutionary *kaehwa* activities. A number of these reforms were borne out of the felt-need of the majority of Korean people and therefore bore positive fruits.

The *kaehwa* movement, however, has left a negative legacy in many Korean people's minds. Kŭm Chang-t'ae, a scholar of Confucianism, contends that the modernization of Korea played a significant role in forming the negative perception about Korean tradition in general, which viewed traditional culture as 'pre-modern,' 'less good' and 'non-Christian.'<sup>11</sup> Many of those who were actively involved in the reform movement were Christians; most new Christians came to view the forsaking of Korean traditional culture (including traditional religious thoughts) as a necessary part of 'Christian conversion.'<sup>12</sup> This way of thinking is still active or at least latent within the mentality of many KP members.

## **MISSIONAL-THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION**

Many scholars see a connection between KP's general animosity toward Korean traditional religions and the characteristics of the Christian faith which early missionaries brought with them to Korea. For this reason, we will briefly revisit the features of faith owned by early missionaries to Korea. In case the present discussion might appear to approach the works of Protestant missionaries rather negatively, I would like to express my deep gratitude for their lives and works, and their acts of Christian love to Korean people, in particular. The pietistic, evangelistic fervour they brought with them was manifested through their incredible self-sacrifice and hard work, adapting themselves to Korean food, costume and language, and serving Korean people primarily through medical and educational services. The sacrificial lives of missionaries (and their family members) and their positive contributions to the

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<sup>11</sup> Kŭm Chang-t'ae, *유교사상과 한국사회* [*Confucian Thoughts and Korean Society*] (P'aju: Han'guk Haksuljŏngbo, 2008), 34.

<sup>12</sup> To early Christians in Korea, becoming a Christian often meant leaving behind all 'traditional religious cultural heritage and custom.' It is widely acknowledged that most 'converts' in Asia resulting from Christian evangelism, undergo this conflict in their local environment.

modernization of Korea should not be minimized by any negative influences they unintentionally left behind.

In the discussion about the “spiritual diversity of Korean Protestantism” (in Chapter 1), the “evangelical spirituality” within KP was introduced as that which was the result of influence by early Protestant missionaries.<sup>13</sup> Arthur J. Brown reported in 1919 that Protestant missionaries seen in the early twentieth century in Korea were typically ‘Puritan,’ keeping Sunday ‘holy’ and considering dancing, smoking or playing cards as sin.<sup>14</sup> (Some of these Christian ethics are still alive and active among most KP members as was discussed in Chapter 1.) Regarding theology and biblical criticism, they were very conservative, holding on to the fundamentalist view of the Bible, such as ‘biblical inerrancy.’<sup>15</sup>

The kinds of faith and teaching of early Protestant missionaries left both positive and negative legacies for KP. Their dispensational premillennialist emphasis of the second coming of the Christ, for instance, comforted the poor, hopeless Korean people of the time; on the negative, it led to over-emphasis of other-worldliness and consequently to a political apathy.<sup>16</sup> Political apathy, in particular, keeps most Korean Christians distant from political matters and silent about social injustice; they only focus on ‘spiritual’ matters which, to them, concern what happens within the church.<sup>17</sup>

Even though early missionaries came to Korea from many different countries of the West (Canada, Wales, Scotland, Australia, England, the Netherlands, to name a few), it is American mission that influenced KP the most. It seems that America, since the 1884 treaty between Korea/*Choson* and America, has not lost her influence over

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<sup>13</sup> See “evangelical spirituality” in the section, “Spiritual Diversity of Korean Protestantism,” in Chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur J. Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919), quoted in Min Kyöng-bae, *History of Korean Church*, 137.

<sup>15</sup> Min Kyöng-bae, *History of Korean Church*, 137.

<sup>16</sup> Ch’oe Hyöng-muk, “한국기독교의 보수화, 힘을 향한 부적절한 동경” [Conservativization of Korean Christianity: Inappropriate Longing for Power], in Ch’oe Hyöng-muk, Paek Ch’an-hong, and Kim Chin-ho, 무례한 자들의크리스마스: 미국복음주의를 모방한 한국 기독교 보수주의, 그 역사와 정치적 욕망 [*Christmas of the Rude: Korean Conservative Christianity Which Imitates American Evangelicalism, Its History and Greed for Political Power*] (Seoul: Common Life Books, 2007), 17-20.

<sup>17</sup> Certain scholars, such as Min Kyöng-bae, view that the ‘near-absence of socio-political involvement’ was not a new thing in Korea, especially for the intelligentsia in Korea who, carrying with them aristocratic and stoic mentality, tried to detach themselves from the socio-political world of the time which, to them, was the very ‘field’ of temptation for money and power. Min Kyöng-bae, *History of Korean Church*, 149-50.

Korea. America's involvement in the political-ideological dimension of modern Korea is well established. However, less known is America's influence on the theological and ecclesiological dimensions of KP.<sup>18</sup> To elaborate, South Korea's ongoing political dependence on America (during the Korean War and since then) and the material and mental support from American missions in Korea significantly contributed to the beginning of a peculiar phenomenon in KP: many KP members began to see America as a 'saviour' nation.<sup>19</sup> Kim Chin-ho even goes so far as to say that "whether it is church life or the academic world, the carbon copy of American-style Christianity has become the norm."<sup>20</sup> There is even a self-deprecating saying among Koreans that Korea is an overseas state of America.

To review the theological influence of American Christianity on KP, scholars almost unanimously agree that KP's theology and faith closely resemble American-style evangelicalism, more specifically, fundamentalism.<sup>21</sup> Yi Suk-jin contends that the root of KP's theology is found in the fundamentalism which early missionaries from America possessed.<sup>22</sup> According to a report from Arthur Judson Brown, the executive secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A (from 1895 to 1929), American missionaries imposed on Korean churches an American brand of religious fundamentalism.<sup>23</sup> For the present discussion, we shall narrowly focus on

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<sup>18</sup> Han Wan-sang, 예수없는 예수교회 (*Jesus-less Christian Church*) (P'aju: Kimyöngsa, 2008), 208-209; Paek Ch'an-hong, "미국제 복음주의와 한국 교회" [American-style Evangelicalism and Korean Church], in *Christmas of the Rude*, 138-39.

<sup>19</sup> Paek Ch'an-hong, "American-style Evangelicalism," 195. This has happened both consciously and unconsciously.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Chin-ho, "권력을 향한 욕망, 그 배타적 실천" [Desire for Power, and Its Exclusivistic Practice], in *Christmas of the Rude*, 201-02.

<sup>21</sup> To introduce only a few: Paek Ch'an-hong, "American-style Evangelicalism," 110-97; Yun Kyöng-no, "Korean Modern History from a Christian Perspective," in *Christianity and Interpretation of History*, 165; Ham Sök-hön, 뜻으로본 한국역사 [*A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*] (P'aju: Han'gilsa, 2003), 369-371; Kang Wön-yong, 내가 믿는 그리스도 [*The Christ Who I Believe*] (Seoul: Taehan Kidokgyosöhoe, 2005), 264.

<sup>22</sup> Yi Suk-jin, "한국 교회사에 나타난 기독교 배타주의" [Christian Exclusivism Manifested in Korean Church History], speech at the first combined academic conference of the Methodist, Anglican and Hanshin Theological Seminaries with the theme of "The Exclusivism of Korean Christianity: Its Foundation and Phenomenon," in September 2008. Source: [http://freeview.org/bbs/board.php?bo\\_table=g001&wr\\_id=70](http://freeview.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=g001&wr_id=70) (accessed June 24, 2015). See also Kim Kyong-jae, "Present Religious Conflicts," 327-28, 331.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 540. Quoted in Kim Heung Soo, "Is Christianity a Korean Religion?" Brown's position has been contested; see, for instance, Sung Deuk Oak's view below (footnote 32).

the hermeneutical practice of fundamentalism, which bases itself on the theory of ‘infallibility of the Scripture’ and (over-reactive) opposition to biblical criticism.<sup>24</sup> By ‘infallibility of the Scripture’ it is meant that the Bible is a revelatory scripture of God in which every letter is inspired by God’s spirit, and therefore, has no fallacy in it.<sup>25</sup>

This kind of reception of the Bible has become established as the ‘orthodoxy’ within KP, through theological disputes started from the 1930s, pushing away the stream of progressive theology as ‘heretics.’ At the frontier of this fundamentalist theological ‘defense’ stands Pak Hyöng-nyong, who, while studying in America, received mentorship from J. Gresham Machen, the epitome of American fundamentalism.<sup>26</sup> Some of Pak’s statements in regard to the Christian stance toward other religions include: “The attitude of the religion that bears the name of Jesus Christ [to other religions] is not compromise but clash and conquest”; “Christianity’s most appropriate relation to other religions is not compromise but conquest.”<sup>27</sup> It is unfortunate that this statement of Pak’s has the potential to be misused to justify violent actions against other religions.<sup>28</sup>

Korean Christians in general receive the teaching of ‘infallibility of the Scripture’ with little resistance due to their natural respect for religious scriptures. This fine strength of Korean people—respect for scripture—is sometimes misdirected especially when the Bible is read in an uncritical and overly literal manner.<sup>29</sup> For example, when one reads a biblical passage such as “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol” (Deut 5:7-8) in this manner, one cannot help but see Buddha statues as other gods or idols which should be broken down, in order to

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<sup>24</sup> The “infallibility of the Scripture” is one of the five ‘fundamentals’ in Christian fundamentalism that include: the sovereignty of God, the limited atonement, the unrepeatability of regeneration and the perseverance of the saints.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “Present Religious Conflicts,” 328-29. Not all US-educated Korean theologians carry such a fundamentalist theological stance, however. For instance, Kim Chae-jun (Kim Chai Choon), who studied in US during the same period as Pak, came to be one of the proponents of progressive theology within KP. Kim’s life and theology may be read in the English version, Hwang Sung-kyu, ed., *The Life and Theology of Changgong, Kim Chai Choon* (Seoul: Hanshin University Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Min Kyöng-bae, *History of Korean Church*, 496

<sup>27</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 20.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy S. Lee, “Beleaguered Success,” 20. Lee observes that the incident of the beheading of 750 Buddha statues was an action which took Pak’s message literally. Similarly, Kim Kyong-jae, “Present Religious Conflicts,” 327.

<sup>29</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “Present Religious Conflicts,” 329.

remain faithful to God.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, as Kim Kyong-jae contends, “hermeneutical maturity” should supplement KP’s special love for the scriptures.<sup>31</sup>

The present argument intends to point out the existing connection between the missional-theological inheritance within KP and KP’s general disdain for Korean traditional religions.<sup>32</sup> Of course, it is ultimately Korean Christians, not foreign missionaries, who are responsible for any destructive attitudes and behaviours toward other religions.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSION**

Around the mid-1960s, Korea began to see a remarkable economic growth, alongside rapid industrialization and urbanization. Such swift change pushed people into a “market place” or “market situation” in which ‘competition’ was a prime force occupying people’s thoughts and driving their actions.<sup>33</sup> In the midst of this ideological shift, the church was not an exception; each church saw itself in an environment of competition and conflict with other churches. Accordingly, many Korean churches, driven by the economic development of the 1960s and 1970s, began to regard the quantitative growth of the church and personal success of its members as the

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<sup>30</sup> This specific passage is, together with John 14:6, one of the representative verses in the Bible that EKP uses to validate and encourage its exclusivist stance.

<sup>31</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “Present Religious Conflicts,” 329.

<sup>32</sup> This ‘traditional’ argument is not without opposition. In his recent book (2013), *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876-1915*, Sung Deuk Oak argues that the first-generation North American missionaries and Korean Protestant Christians were not “fundamentalist destroyers of Korean religious cultures” but rather “moderate evangelicals whose fulfillment theory paved the way for the indigenization of Protestant Christianity in Korea” (xvii). They were sensitive to the indigenous culture and religions while maintaining their conservative theological identity. S. Michael Ahn, review of *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876-1915*, Sung Deuk Oak, *Themelios* 39.3 (2014): 621-622. Source: <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/the-making-of-korean-christianity-protestant-encounters-with-korean> (accessed May 11, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “Present Religious Conflicts,” 331. A “market place” or “market situation” is a term used by Peter L. Berger, a well-known sociologist of religion, whose main interest is in the relationship between social-economic change and culture which covers beliefs, values and lifestyles. For a brief review of some of Berger’s major thoughts, see “Epistemological Modesty: An Interview with Peter Berger,” *The Christian Century*, October 1997, 972-978.

demonstration of God's will.<sup>34</sup> During the same period in America, a new 'church growth theory' was marketed by scholars of 'Fuller's School of World Mission,' such as Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner.<sup>35</sup> When the theory was introduced to Korean church, many received it with eagerness; the theory aptly fit the 'spirit of the age' in Korea, with its strongly pragmatic and quantity-oriented principles.<sup>36</sup> This was a period wherein most Korean churches were strongly influenced by 'capitalist spirituality,' if we may borrow Pae Tök-man's terminology.

The emergence of several mega churches in Seoul became a point of pride for many within KP, but behind such accomplishment is also much temptation toward 'mammon worship'; the goal of many churches was to become another mega church. This has been met, however, with regular criticism from within KP.<sup>37</sup>

Further economic growth in Korea during the 1970s and 1980s benefitted Korean people substantially; as the people's quality of life improved, self-confidence and optimism also grew. In the midst of this, a significant change occurred in relation to KP: *the social status of Christianity changed* dramatically, from minority to majority, from marginal to central, and from impoverished to wealthy. KP, with its quantitative growth, wealth and power, became a majority group in society, and boldly exercised the liberty and power of the majority group, by manifesting publicly their exclusivist faith.

Son Pong-ho is convinced that this 'success' of the later period of KP has become the very reason for the 'failure' of KP.<sup>38</sup> Yi Man-yŏl observes a pattern of religious corruption in Korean history: when a religion comes to gain power and wealth, turning from its original state as a marginalized minority, it becomes corrupted

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<sup>34</sup> Paek Ch'an-hong, "American-style Evangelicalism," 195-96.

<sup>35</sup> See, for a brief introduction about McGavran and the basic principles, development and appraisal of the 'Church Growth Theory,' David J. Valleskey, "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation," paper delivered to the Ohio Conference at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg, PA, October 15, 1990. Source: <http://www.wlssays.net/files/ValleskeyGrowth.pdf> (accessed September 8, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, "Present Religious Conflicts," 332; Pae Tök-man, "Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality," 36.

<sup>37</sup> One of the leading opponents of such phenomenon is Sin Kwang-ŭn, the writer of *메가처치 논박* [Critiques about Mega Churches] (Seoul: Chöngyŏn, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Son Pong-ho, "Is There Future for Korean Church?"

and loses its authentic spiritual power to save people.<sup>39</sup> Buddhism and Confucianism, originally new religions in Korea, also underwent similar transitions, and it appears that Christianity is now following the same pattern.<sup>40</sup>

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Another factor in relation to the general exclusivism within KP pertains to a psychological dimension of Korean people. While this may be a more minor factor than those previously mentioned, the author nonetheless deems it worthwhile to examine. Kim Chin-ho observes that KP's popular evangelism style resembles the general characteristics of Christian education in Korea. Kim describes an outstanding feature of Korean Christian education:

The education is a monologue, not a dialogue. It does not communicate or discuss with others or compromise with different opinions. Instead, it considers the different 'other' as an enemy who needs to be forcefully controlled so that there will always be one idea, one attitude, and one faith."<sup>41</sup>

KP's popular evangelism also occurs as a monologue, overlooking other people's preferences, plans and thoughts, which has led to the public perception of KP as a "religion of the rude," argues Kim.<sup>42</sup> Kim also submits an interesting observation: the aggressive and forceful type of evangelism demonstrated by EKP does not seem to be as much of a problem in a Korean setting as it would be elsewhere. To be sure, rudeness and aggressiveness create some unpleasantness and discomfort among Korean people. However, such attitudes seem to also offer them a sense of familiarity,

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<sup>39</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, "기독교와 한국문화의 전망" [Prospect of Christianity and Korean Culture], in *Christianity and Interpretation of History*, 278. Pae Tök-man views that the present situation of KP is very similar to the corruption of the Church in the late Middle Ages in its greed for money, hereditary succession of church leadership, and passion for grand church buildings. Pae Tök-man, public lecture on the Reformation. Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlaazN6o\\_98](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlaazN6o_98) (accessed August 19, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, "Prospect of Christianity and Korean Culture," 281-82.

<sup>41</sup> Kim Chin-ho, "Desire for Power," 207.

<sup>42</sup> Kim Chin-ho, "Desire for Power," 207-08. This view is by no means owned exclusively by Ch'oe. See Kim Kyong-jae and others, *무례한 복음 [Rude Gospel]* (Seoul: Sanch'aekja, 2007).

safety or even comfort on a subconscious level.<sup>43</sup> Kim then speculates that this peculiar phenomenon could possibly be one of the results of a long-inhabited ‘passive mentality’ among Korean people, a sensibility developed in a colonized land during Japanese oppression (1909-1945) and under the successive dictatorships which lasted until fairly recently (1948-1993).<sup>44</sup>

The author finds that Kim Chin-ho’s speculation cannot be dismissed offhand, especially when considering certain general characteristics shared by most Korean people, the next point to be addressed.

## KOREAN PEOPLE’S CHARACTERISTICS

All the factors presented so far, even combined together, would not satisfactorily explain the often-extreme exclusivism manifested by many KP members, unless certain typically Korean characteristics are to be examined. Hence, a few key features of Korean people’s general characteristics will be discussed.

The first one is ‘exclusivistic we-ism.’ Several scholars argue that exclusivism has always existed as one of the strong features of Korean people.<sup>45</sup> One of the Korean linguistic habits, in which the personal pronoun ‘we’ is used much more than ‘I,’ reveals that Koreans are naturally ‘group-oriented.’<sup>46</sup> Yi Kyu-t’ae calls this the ‘we-ism’ of Korea, which is in contrast to ‘me-ism.’<sup>47</sup> Ch’oe Chun-sik adds that this group- or family-centredness in Korea is typically ‘exclusivistic.’ The attitude toward those who are *in* and that toward those *outside* is often quite different; Koreans are committed to the care of those who belong to their group, but tend to be indifferent to those who

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<sup>43</sup> Kim Chin-ho, “Desire for Power,” 208.

<sup>44</sup> Kim Chin-ho, “Desire for Power,” 208-09.

<sup>45</sup> To introduce a few: Ch’oe Chun-sik, 한국인에게 문화는 있는가? [*Do Koreans Have a Culture?*] (P’aju: Sagyejŏl, 1997); Yi Kyu-t’ae, 한국인의 버릇 1: 버리고 싶은 버릇 [*Korean People’s Habits 1: The Habits They Want to Get Rid Of*] (Seoul: Sinwŏnmunhwa, 1991), 242-49.

<sup>46</sup> Koreans do not say: my country, my school, my family. They are always presented as ‘uri’ (our) country, our school and our family. Even when one talks about one’s husband or wife, ‘our wife/husband’ is used; it does not mean the husband is shared with other women.

<sup>47</sup> Yi Kyu-t’ae, 한국인의 의식구조 4 [*Korean People’s Frame of Thought 4*] (Seoul: Shinwonmunhwa, 1983), 29. See also Yi Ö-ryŏng, 흙속에 저바람속에: 이것이 한국이다 [*In This Earth & In That Wind: This is Korea*] (Seoul: Munhaksasang, 1986), 120.

do not belong to them. There is in fact an invisible 'fence' or boundary in their mind, which divides the people who are in the group from those outside of it. This boundary can be set based on a family clan, one's own school, hometown and even religion.<sup>48</sup> The clear distinction between 'in' and 'out' appears to be a deeply ingrained element in the Korean worldview.<sup>49</sup> Within the tenets of this theory, it would not be difficult to imagine the same happening within the church, a 'faith community'; there is a clear segregation between 'those who believe' (Christians) and 'those who don't believe' (non-Christians), and also, to a degree, 'those in our church' and 'those who belong to other churches.'

The second characteristic of Korean people is a tendency toward extremism.<sup>50</sup> This predisposition is closely related to some other propensities of Korean people such as 'inflexibility,' 'avoidance of uncertainty,' 'intolerance to difference,' and even 'shamanistic energy.'<sup>51</sup> Due to this tendency, any new thought or ideology turns into its extreme form when it lands in Korean soil. Neo-Confucianism, Communism and Christianity, for example, have all met such a fate. For instance, Neo-Confucianism was introduced to Korea/*Choson* in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century; Korea has since become "the most Confucianized country" in South-East Asia, even more Confucian than China which is the original place of Confucian thought.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the internal 'war' to claim Confucian orthodoxy among Confucian scholars during the Yi dynasty is well-known.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kŭm Chang-t'ae counterbalances this theory. According to Kŭm, Korean 'family-centredness' is easily expanded to outside of one's own family. This expansion is seen especially in the Korean way of addressing other people: a Korean addresses any old person in the same way he/she addresses his/her own grandfather or grandmother. Kŭm Chang-t'ae, *Confucian Thoughts and Korean Society*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> There is a typical distinction between *an* and *pak* or 'inside' and 'outside.' This 'inside' and 'outside' distinction has demonstrated its effect in various ways in Korean history. One such illustration is that wives, whose roles were to remain inside the house, are called *ansaram* (literally 'inside-person'), while husbands, who were supposed to work outside, are still called by their wives *pakkatyangban* (literally 'revered outside-person'). Yi Kyu-t'ae, *The Habits They Want to Get Rid Of*, 242-49. As the title of Yi's book denotes, this customary discrimination is one of the most harmful habits of Korean people. This 'in-out' differentiation may be human rather than exclusively Korean; however, Korean-style separation between 'in' and 'out,' together with 'clean' and 'unclean,' almost resembles the OT custom of separating 'clean' and 'unclean.' This perhaps deserves further examination.

<sup>50</sup> Ch'oe Chun-sik, *Do Koreans Have a Culture?* 214.

<sup>51</sup> Ch'oe Chun-sik, *Do Koreans Have a Culture?* 235-36.

<sup>52</sup> Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 89.

<sup>53</sup> Donald N. Clark comments on "the neo-Confucianist tendency to split hairs over doctrine and to condemn deviations, a tendency manifested in political purges during the Yi dynasty" – a tendency

Communism, upon its arrival in North Korea, quickly became the extreme form we see today. Christianity, which has flourished in South Korea, can be seen as almost equal to Communism in the North insofar as its zeal, inflexibility, extremity and exclusivity are considered.<sup>54</sup>

Another feature to consider is the Korean people's tendency to be conservative rather than progressive. Yi Suk-jin brings to our attention that while fundamentalism in America has been challenged by other theologies in America, its counterpart in Korea has never been effectively challenged and thus stands firmly as the Christian orthodoxy.<sup>55</sup> An analysis of this phenomenon reports that fundamentalism has remained the mainstream of KP theology because the majority of KP allies itself to political conservatism.<sup>56</sup> Over the last 400 years of Korean history, the conservative party has not lost its power and influence in society.<sup>57</sup>

The last characteristic to address here is the trait of long-inhabited *sadaejuŭi* or 'serving the bigger-ism' among Korean people. For instance, the attitude of KP members toward America reveals this *sadaejuŭi*. Yi Man-yŏl defines *sadaejuŭi* as a "tendency to feel inferior about one's own resources and to receive uncritically theories, manners and logics from others who are perceived to be 'the stronger.'"<sup>58</sup> Historically, Korea maintained the attitude and practice of *sadaejuŭi* toward China during the Yi dynasty or *Choson* (1392-1897/1909). It is because this *sadaejuŭi* weakens the spirit of Korea that Ham Sŏk-hŏn identifies that one of the main tasks of Christianity as a 'new' religion is to break such harmful *sadaejuŭi*.<sup>59</sup> The new religion, Christianity, however, has failed to do that. The *sadaejuŭi* spirit of Korea simply altered

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which has been revived in modern Korean church. Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 51.

<sup>54</sup> Ch'oe Chun-sik, *Do Koreans Have a Culture?* 214, 229-34.

<sup>55</sup> Yi Suk-jin, "Christian Exclusivism."

<sup>56</sup> Kim Sung-ho, "Rapid Modernisation and the Future of Korean Christianity," *Religion* 32/1 (2002): 32.

<sup>57</sup> Sin Yŏng-bok contends that since the *Injobanjŏng* in 1623, when the conservative party forcefully replaced the politically progressive and radical king *Kwanghae* with one of their persons, *Injo*, the conservatives have held power in Korea. Sin Yŏng-bok, *담론: 신영복의 마지막 강의 [Discussions: Sin Yŏng-bok's Last Lectures]* (P'aju: Tolbegae, 2015), 392-93.

<sup>58</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, "Does the Korean Church Have Its Own Theology?"

<sup>59</sup> Ham Sŏk-hŏn, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 369-371. The other tasks, according to Ham, are the dismantling of Korean-style 'caste system' and 'superstitious fatalism.'

its direction during the twentieth century, orienting it toward America, and received the American fundamentalism as the Christian 'orthodoxy.'

These theories seem to inform us that the exclusivist tendency manifested in KP does not belong to KP only; KP has not invented it or even started it. Instead, an almost inherent trait of Korean people has manifested in full force, as KP grew in number and socio-economic influence, through many KP members' expressions of their faith. In fact, Yi Kyu-t'ae provides a similar analysis in regard to Korean people's inclination to hierarchy. Yi does not agree with the popular view that Confucianism, which was introduced to Korea from China, created hierarchical systems in Korea. Instead, Yi argues that people in the Korean peninsula had an affinity for hierarchy from the beginning.<sup>60</sup> When Confucianism entered, its emphasis on the hierarchical order was readily absorbed by Koreans, and consequently cemented itself more deeply in the people's mindset.

Of course, many would view 'we-ism,' hierarchy and conservatism as inherently human traits. There have been powerful counter-influences to such ideas in the West. Some of them ironically came out of modernism, with the idea of justice and universal human rights, for instance. Such traits, however, still remain largely unchallenged in Korean society. This thesis, therefore, concludes that the prevalent fundamentalist exclusivism within KP is a strong feature of Korean people.

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<sup>60</sup> Yi Kyu-t'ae, *Korean People's Habits* 1, 249. Hierarchical inclination is naturally developed within people groups who live in the same place, and work in the same field (mostly agricultural work) all through their lives. This is because such people groups need an established social order to behave appropriately in every kind of human relationship. This constitutes a typical 'agricultural worldview.'

## SUMMARY AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

This thesis begins with the title: “A Distinctly Korean Re-reading of John 14:6: Jesus Christ is the *Kil* or Way to the Father.” The first section of the thesis (Part I), functioning as an extension of the introduction, consists of three descriptive and analytical chapters about dominant, fundamentalist exclusivism within KP. The first chapter presents the historically-formed KP-style fundamentalism, overviewing spirituality and theology of Korean Protestantism in its diversity and singularity (Chapter 1). The diverse spirituality and denominational variety within KP are introduced, and individual difference among its members is acknowledged. The thesis then presents fundamentalism as a singular feature within KP, one which has spread its influence over theological, ethical and political realms in Korean society.

The second chapter describes KP-style fundamentalist exclusivism with reference to its concrete appearances in Korean society in recent decades, and analyzes various reactions to this problematic social phenomenon (Chapter 2). Insensitive and at times violent ‘evangelistic’ practices, coupled with moral deficiency, brought “beleaguered success” to KP, alongside ridicule and mistrust from others. Some reactions from outside the church to these recent phenomena within KP are equally aggressive, with the organization *Pan’giryŏn* or Anti-Christian Civil Union proposing the destruction of Christianity itself. Reactions from within the church vary, from desertion of KP to active involvement in the reformation of KP, and from ethical appeals to a serious re-examination of KP’s theology. The response of this thesis is hermeneutically directed, identifying the present problematic phenomena within KP as a by-product of the lack of a distinctly Korean understanding of central biblical themes, especially those concerning Christ, salvation and mission.

The third chapter is dedicated to finding some possible causes behind KP’s exclusivist orientation (Chapter 3). The result of this examination reveals that the 130-year-old KP is a product both of Korean history during the same period as well as of Korean ethnicity. First, *kaehwa* or the political-cultural reformation, which began at

the end of the nineteenth century in Korea, was intermingled with the new arrival of Protestantism. One of the resulting phenomena from the reform was the despising of one's own cultural heritage, including traditional religions. Second, in the missional-theological realm, KP is strongly influenced by the theologies of early missionaries. Worthy of particular mention is the powerful, lasting impact of the inseparable pair of pro-Americanism and American theological fundamentalism upon KP. The theory of biblical inerrancy, in particular, is well received within the Korean tradition of respect for religious scriptures. The result is fundamentalist, doctrinal and literalistic reading of the Bible; Deuteronomy 5:7, for instance, is read to view all other religions as 'other gods' or 'idols' which should be avoided, if not broken down. Third, KP's socio-economic success, aligned with Korea's rapid economic progress during the 1970s and 1980s, has changed its status in society from the persecuted minority to the powerful majority through which many KP members become involved in often rude and aggressive, and occasionally violent, 'evangelistic' actions. Besides these primarily external factors, certain characteristics of Korean people such as 'exclusivistic we-ism,' 'tendency for extremity and conservatism,' and '*sadaejuŭi* mentality' are also identified as possible factors behind KP-style exclusivism. All these factors are inseparable from, and even reinforce, each other.

The findings in this section (Part I) identify that the present KP, with its dominant, fundamentalist and exclusivist theology, *is* a Koreanized Christianity, responding and reacting to the particular historical context in Korea. Amongst various other factors that might have contributed to the unique growth rate of Korean Christianity, a persuasive view remains: "Koreans must have wanted it."<sup>1</sup> For better or worse, KP is a significant part of Korean culture. As Timothy Lee states, KP is not only in Korean society but *of* it.<sup>2</sup>

From this perspective, an argument may be made that KP's present, popular reception of John 14:6 is also Korean. Then, what does the author mean by a 'distinctly Korean *re-reading* of John 14:6' in this thesis? Are there other people who argue that KP is not yet a Koreanized Christianity or that KP theology is not a Korean

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<sup>1</sup> Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 106.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy S. Lee, "Beleaguered Success," 22.

theology? Is it possible to accomplish a distinctly Korean understanding of a biblical passage? What is the methodology that may enable such reading of John 14:6? The following section (Part II) will begin to respond to these questions.

## **PART II**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The previous section (Part I) has established that fundamentalist exclusivism is a prominent feature of Korean Protestantism (KP). This mainstream, fundamentalist exclusivist theology of KP naturally influences the reading of John 14:6, which has yielded the present popular, apparently exclusivist reading of it. For the purpose of re-reading the passage, I will first look at three, largely different positions within KP as well as outside of KP regarding how to view the identity of present-day Korean Christianity (Chapter 4). At the end of this chapter, the specific term, 'distinctly Korean,' in this thesis will be made clearer. Second, I will present the methodology for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic in discussion with predominantly Korean scholars in this matter (Chapter 5).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will introduce scholarly disputes over the nature of KP and its theology, questioning whether it is distinctly Korean or not. Naturally, the arguments are divided largely into two, conflicting positions: KP *is* a Koreanized Christianity, and KP is *not* yet a Korean Christianity. A third position is indifference. We shall review and discuss each of these three positions. As pointed out in the introduction of the thesis, the review about the Koreanness of KP comes under this literature review section for the reason that establishing Korean identity is an essential and crucial task in the project.

#### INDIFFERENCE

A common ‘response’ to questions such as “Is Christianity a Korean religion?” or “Is Korean Protestantism a Koreanized Christianity?” would simply be ‘indifference.’ This is a position that is uninterested in the identity of KP and further feels uncomfortable with the notion of a ‘distinctly Korean’ or ‘indigenous’ theology. In the author’s experience, a great number of KP members unconsciously hold this position. However, if asked whether KP has its own theology, they would respond affirmatively.

One of the reasons for this phenomenon may be found in the uncritical reception of Western Christian teachings taught by early missionaries.<sup>1</sup> Most Korean Christians believe that theological ‘mega themes’ such as ‘original sin’ and ‘substitutionary atonement’ make up the essential content of Christianity;

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<sup>1</sup> This point was already explicated in detail in Chapter 3.

Christological and soteriological orthodoxy is found only in such thoughts and terms. Any Christian gospel that is presented using content outside of such mega themes is “another gospel,” different from the Christian gospel. That the minjung theological approach to the gospel has largely failed to attract attention from KP members is one example of this. As Kim Heung Soo observes, “While minjung theologians are advocating the church's involvement in social change, minjung [masses] of the Korean churches would rather choose a comforting and reassuring message of Christian religion in this troubled society.”<sup>2</sup> To be fair to KP members, distinguishing the essential content of Christianity from its form would not be a simple task for *any* people group.

It is perhaps somewhat unrealistic, too, to expect KP lay people to take interest in a distinctly Korean theology. Evangelism and other Christian activities such as prayer and Bible reading are far easier to grasp. Kim Heung Soo points out this phenomenon: “the majority of the Korean churches are concerned mainly with the task of fishing out souls from a non-Christian society. In this case, it does not matter whether Christianity is culturally and theologically a Korean religion.”<sup>3</sup>

Another reason for discomfort with an indigenous theology is psychological; a certain anxiety seems to exist in the minds of Korean Christians and theologians, an anxiety about the possibility of impurity or dilution of the Christian gospel triggered by any addition of ‘non-Christian’ thought. Peter Enns observes that this kind of anxiety is not scientific or even theological, but connected to group identity and fear of losing what the identity offers.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon is obviously not exclusively Korean but rather universal. Because the Christian faith is tied to its sacred book, any challenge to how that book should be understood is bound to be threatening and to elicit strong reactions. Enns offers an example; the mere suggestion that the Adam story in Genesis is a non-historical account, no matter how gently put, presents a real

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<sup>2</sup> Kim Heung Soo, “Is Christianity a Korean Religion? One Hundred Years of Protestant Churches in Korea,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30/2 (2006): 167.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Heung Soo, “Is Christianity a Korean Religion,” 168.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 45.

threat to some Christians because it is *perceived* to undermine the trustworthiness of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

Kim Kwang-sik, a Korean theologian who has sought a Korean-owned theology, recalls the reactions of many conservative theologians and pastors to the new terminology, *t'och'akhwa* or inculturated theology, in the early 1960s in Korea: “The conservative theologians and pastors immediately associate *t'och'akhwa* theology with a distortion of the Christian gospel. However gently approached, they just would not listen.”<sup>6</sup> Kim adds that the reactions seem more emotional than rational. The thesis writer has encountered a significant number of Christians who instantly offer a puzzled or suspicious look after hearing the qualifier, ‘distinctly Korean,’ in front of the words, Christian theology or biblical understanding.

This first position seems to exist even among KP leaders and theologians. Hence, when observing numerous incidents that are regarded as “ethical failure” within KP, they appeal for a return to the early Christians’ lifestyle, that is, poverty and morality, or to revisit the traditional frame of salvation—justification by faith alone—and restore its “original” or “true” meaning.<sup>7</sup> This means that they seek revival and renewal only *within* the established Christian theological words and content.

## **KP IS A KOREANIZED CHRISTIANITY**

The second group consists of the people who positively affirm the Koreanness of KP and KP’s theology. As will be seen, this position comes from the observation of four phenomena in KP: the influence of Korean traditional religions upon KP, the nature of the earliest evangelism in Korea, the existence of an ‘original Korean Christian culture’ (which potentially contributes to world Christianity), and KP’s strong

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 45, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Kwang-sik, “토착화신학의 길” [The Path of Enculturated Theology], in 한국신학 이것이다 [*This is Korean Theology*], ed. Kim Kwang-sik (Seoul: Handŭl, 2008), 338-39.

<sup>7</sup> As introduced in Chapter 2, Sin Kwang-ŭn, Kim Seyoon and Son Pong-ho are among this group.

nationalistic sentiment ever since 1884 (the year of Protestantism's official arrival in Korea).

### **The influence of Korean traditional religions**

Koreanization of Christianity often means the active interaction of Christianity with Korean culture, traditional religious thoughts or customs, to be specific. Interestingly, non-Koreans seem to discern this Koreanness of KP more clearly than Koreans do.

Donald N. Clark, for instance, asserts:

Today's church is a Koreanized church, with theological and organizational undertones that echo Korean tradition. The ancient shamanist strain is there. So are Confucian ideas of harmony, reciprocity, hierarchy and authority. So, too, is the neo-Confucianist tendency to split hairs over doctrine and to condemn deviations, a tendency manifested in political purges during the Yi dynasty.<sup>8</sup>

Colin Lewis examines the dynamic relationship between Christianity and Korean traditional religious beliefs and practices. Lewis' conclusion notes that "the [Korean] Church has, whether it wants to admit it or not, been shaped and fashioned by the Korean culture in a profound way."<sup>9</sup> Lewis finds, for instance, deep influence of Korean Shamanism on Korean Christianity in its craving for this-worldly material health and wealth through the medium of pneumatological experience. Neo-Confucianism's value of authority and hierarchy, coupled with its emphasis on ethical life, are reflected in Korean church's high clericalism, absolute respect for the Bible ('infallibility of the words'), and emphasis on sanctification. The remaining hallmarks of Korean Christianity, namely, instantaneous conversion and attainment of eternal life, are strongly reminiscent of typically Korean, *Sŏn* Buddhism's emphasis on an immediate and intense moment of enlightenment in which suffering ceases and true reality becomes attainable.

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<sup>8</sup> Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Lewis, "The Soul of Korean Christianity: How the Shamans, Buddha, and Confucius Paved the Way for Jesus in the Land of the Morning Calm," Honors Projects paper, Seattle Pacific University, 2014, 60. Source: <http://digitalcommons.spu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=honorsprojects> (accessed August 5, 2015).

Thus, Lewis affirms that Korean Christianity is now “a thoroughly indigenized and contextualized Christian faith.”<sup>10</sup> Lewis’ observation and analysis of the hallmarks of Korean Christianity, both in doctrines and practices, serve as a valuable resource which perhaps only non-Koreans can offer. It also appears that Lewis approaches syncretism as a natural, legitimate and even positive phenomenon that happens when a new religion is introduced. Because of the visible, rapid expansion of Christian faith in Korea, Lewis takes a very positive stance on highly-syncretistic Korean Christianity;<sup>11</sup> Lewis posits that it could serve as a model of successful indigenization and contextualization for world Christianity.<sup>12</sup> However, this very positive view about Korean Christianity remains mostly silent about any negative results from the syncretism.

In contrast to Lewis’ outlook on Korean Christianity, there exists a view that carries concerns about the ‘overtly Korean’ Christianity in Korea. Peter Pattison, a long-term missionary to Korea, shares his concern in his book, *Crisis Unawares*:

Traditionally in Korean society, administrative responsibility carries with it status and power. Others are expected to conform to the wishes of the one who holds the keys and he has little bureaucratic tricks to ensure that his authority is enforced. We were to see this pattern repeated constantly in church and many Christian organizations.<sup>13</sup>

Pattison is obviously concerned about the hierarchical and authoritarian practices which he sees as widespread in Korean churches, and indicates the negative influence of the traditional (Confucian) mannerism upon Korean churches.

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<sup>10</sup> Colin Lewis, “The Soul of Korean Christianity,” 2.

<sup>11</sup> The word, ‘syncretistic,’ is intended as a neutral term in this thesis; syncretism is viewed as a natural, legitimate phenomenon that happens when a religion is newly introduced into a culture. According to Kim Kyong-jae, syncretism is a “value-free academic term which expresses individual person’s and also cultural group’s hermeneutical work and its development process.” Kim Kyong-jae, “다문화 다종교 시대의 교회의 선택” [Church’s Choice in the Multi-Cultural and Multi-Religious Age]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=520&page=1&ftype=6&fval=&backdepth=1> (accessed December 1, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Colin Lewis, “The Soul of Korean Christianity,” 60-62.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in John R. Davis, *Poles Apart: Contextualizing the Gospel in Asia* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1998), 249.

A few Korean scholars pay attention to the syncretistic tendency among Korean people. David Chung discusses the working of syncretism inside Korean Christianity as well as in other traditional religions in the following words: “Korean society, fundamentally shamanistic, received and grafted these religions [of foreign origin such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Christianity] onto her own and made a remarkable tapestry of beliefs, rites, and values in a comprehensive pattern.”<sup>14</sup> By this, Chung effectively supports Yi Kyu-t’ae’s argument that inherent in Korean people is the tendency to assimilate and compromise, rather than dissimilate and conflict, with any new thoughts or practices, which no doubt yields both positive and negative effects.<sup>15</sup>

In my view, Korean Christians all have contributed together to transform the new religion of Christianity into a typically-Korean, syncretistic Christianity. Because the ‘contribution’ was made unconsciously, it would be difficult for Korean Christians to recognize such a fact, and perhaps harder still to agree with it, especially because most of them think unfavourably of the traditional religions. Lewis’ phrase, “whether it [Korean Church] wants to admit it or not,” seems to imply his awareness of such reluctance.<sup>16</sup>

This unconscious indigenization in Korean Christianity is captured by a Korean scholar as a point of argument, contending against any ‘intentional and programmatic’ Korean theological effort. Kim Seyoon contends that any true work of indigenization or contextualization in Christian theology should happen in a ‘natural and automatic’ way, thus rebutting any theological work with overt intention for indigenization.<sup>17</sup> From this vantage point, Kim believes that indigenization of

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<sup>14</sup> David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), xi. See also Chung Chai-sik, *Korea: The Encounter Between the Gospel and Neo-Confucian Culture* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Yi Kyu-t’ae, *한국인의 의식구조 2 (Korean People’s Thought Structure 2)* (Seoul: Sinwŏnmunhwasa, 1983), 56-65.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Lewis, “The Soul of Korean Christianity,” 60.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Seyoon, “기독교와 한국문화” [Christianity and Korean Culture]. Source: <http://theology.ac.kr/institute/dtdata/신학일반/김세윤%20기독교%20문화.htm> (accessed August 5, 2015), no page.

Christianity has already occurred in Korea, sufficiently and successfully at that.<sup>18</sup> Kim, then, offers several examples of how Korean Christianity has been influenced by Korean traditional religions, which overlap considerably with the observation offered by Lewis above.<sup>19</sup>

### **The nature of the earliest evangelism in Korea**

The argument for KP's truly Korean Christianity is also made on the basis of *the origin of Christian 'evangelism' in Korea*. James Huntley Grayson notes for both Protestantism and Catholicism that "the first characteristic to note about the Korean church is that from the beginning it was self-evangelized."<sup>20</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi also reminds us that the earliest evangelism in Korea happened *before* any formal evangelistic work of foreign Protestant missionaries started; a small group of Korean people translated two of the four gospels into the vernacular of Korea from Chinese.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Korea is a rare case in the history of Christian mission in that the Christian scriptures existed even before missionaries arrived.

In addition, Koreans began to read the Bible through their traditional narrative paradigm.<sup>22</sup> This means that Koreans responded to the Bible out of their own, Korean spirituality, without foreign missionaries' teachings on Christian doctrines or the historical critical information.<sup>23</sup> Chŏn, therefore, suggests that "the view that the root of Korean Christian theology lies in Western theology should be

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<sup>18</sup> Kim Seyoon, "Christianity and Korean Culture."

<sup>19</sup> Kim Seyoon, "Christianity and Korean Culture."

<sup>20</sup> James Huntley Grayson, "A Quarter-Millennium of Christianity in Korea," in *Christianity in Korea*, eds. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006): 9, 13, 22.

<sup>21</sup> The translation work of the NT was started by a team of four Korean people under the supervision of John Ross (1842-1915), a Scottish missionary working in Northeast China, and by 1882 the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John were available in *Han'gul*, the Korean language, which was, in comparison to the Chinese language, far easier for uneducated Korean people to learn to read. Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "초기 한국 기독교의 복음선포에 있어서 민중의 이야기 전통과 문자적 성경 읽기의 역할" [The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition and Literal Reading of Scripture in the Early Korean Christianity], *한국기독교신학논총 [Korean Christian Theology Theses]* 86 (2013): 232-33; Grayson, "A Quarter-Millennium of Christianity in Korea," 13.

<sup>22</sup> This will be explained further later; see the section, "Spirit-Centred," in Chapter 5.

<sup>23</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition," 237.

corrected.”<sup>24</sup> In facing the criticism about KP for its receiving Western Christian theology and culture as “the original and the most right form of Christianity,” Chŏn offers his view in the following words:

This [westernization] is a result of KP’s choice as KP grows into ‘mystical faith based on prosperity gospel,’ ‘materialistic and growth-oriented faith,’ and ‘individualistic faith focused on the forgiveness of sin and salvation’; this is, however, not the root of Korean Church. A careful observation of what Korean churches thought and did during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would support this argument.<sup>25</sup>

### **The existence of an ‘original Korean Christian culture’**

The existence of a typically Korean ‘Christian culture,’ which will potentially enrich global Christianity, is behind the argument for unique Koreanness of Protestantism in Korea. ‘Early morning prayer culture’ within KP is introduced as such by Pak A-ron, who is a leading figure in conservative Protestantism in Korea.<sup>26</sup> This ‘culture’ is uniquely Korean because this custom was first initiated by Korean pastor Kil Sŏn-ju (1869-1935) of *Changdaehyŏn* Church in the city of Pyŏngyang in 1906.<sup>27</sup> More importantly, Pak believes that KP’s customary, early morning prayer is the very reason for its phenomenal growth and success.<sup>28</sup>

Pak establishes his argument that KP’s custom of early morning prayer is a ‘cultural event or phenomenon’ in Korea, based on Paul Tillich’s thesis, “Religion is the substance of culture; culture is the form of religion.”<sup>29</sup> Pak sees the ‘New England Puritan culture’ and a ‘Wesleyan Holiness culture’ in North America during the

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<sup>24</sup> Chŏn Ch’ang-hi, “The Role of Minjung’s Narrative Tradition,” 230, 235.

<sup>25</sup> Chŏn Ch’ang-hi, “The Role of Minjung’s Narrative Tradition,” 236.

<sup>26</sup> Pak is the eldest son of Pak Hyŏng-nyong who is the ‘god-father’ of conservatism in KP, and seems to follow his father’s theological line.

<sup>27</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 53ff. By ‘early morning’ it is meant between 4:30/5:00—6:00 am.

<sup>28</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 49-50.

<sup>29</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 55. Even though Pak’s basic argument is based on Tillich’s insight, Pak criticizes, in the rest of the book, that Tillich’s ‘ecumenical’ and ‘new-creation’ theology is distant from the ‘biblically-based’ theology and sanctification. See *Early Morning Prayer*, 128-30, 136-37, 253.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as exemplary Christian subculture.<sup>30</sup> Convinced that KP's early morning prayer also has created a successful subculture, Pak embarks on his original suggestion: "the marketing of KP's excellent product, 'early morning prayer,' by making it an attractive 'export package' and advertising it effectively to the world Christian market," is in fact the "great mission given to KP by God."<sup>31</sup> Pak introduces as the "first successful export" case the 'buying of the package' by the Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia which in turn practices early morning prayer gatherings.<sup>32</sup>

The thesis writer has a few reservations in relation to Pak's confidence in KP's culture of early morning prayer. First, the highly positive and uncritical view that Pak has about the present KP; throughout the book there is no real concern about KP's problems. Pak views the present decrease of KP membership as "a very rich person's temporary struggle." Pak anticipates, "with thanks and glory to God in advance," that "the next hundred-years will be the golden age for Korean Church with realization of more miraculous revival than in the last one hundred years, if Korean Christians continue to trust in God for His faithful aid and help."<sup>33</sup> This kind of confident notion, however, appears overly optimistic, considering the apparent disparity between KP's successful culture of early morning prayer and the many examples of ethical failure within KP.

Another point of reservation concerns the theology of early morning prayer that Pak elaborates. Pak sees a close relation between the zeal for early morning prayer and a theology which he introduces as "traditional *yugidoknon* ('monochristology')" (coupled with "belief in the existence of heaven and hell"). Pak immediately links this monochristology, 'faith in Jesus alone,' with the denial of salvific functions of all other religions.<sup>34</sup> In my view, however, this linkage is not

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<sup>30</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 56-58.

<sup>31</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 77, 80-90, 97.

<sup>32</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 90-96.

<sup>33</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 48-49.

<sup>34</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 124-31. Among the four biblical passages he presents as a proof-text is John 14:6. The rest are Acts 4:12, John 3:16, and Rom 1:16.

necessary. Pak goes on to argue that since the beginning of KP history this exclusivist faith in Jesus alone has been the backbone of the life of those who love the early morning prayer and, consequently, helping them to persevere through all manner of suffering in their lives. I would argue that Pak should have considered the radical change of the social context wherein KP finds itself. It was necessary for early KP members, as a 'persecuted minority,' to have exclusive faith, in order to follow no other authority on earth except Jesus; as they faced "all manner of suffering," they found solace in 'crying out to God' in the early morning. However (as pointed out in Chapter 3), the status of the present KP little resembles that of the earlier KP: "*the social status of Christianity changed dramatically, from minority to majority, from marginal to central, and from impoverished to wealthy.*"<sup>35</sup> Perhaps KP's early morning prayer should be reappraised with a question about *what* the prayers mainly pray for; content of prayer is more important than the quantity or manner of prayer.

A large portion of KP members appear to support Pak's arguments;<sup>36</sup> KP now owns a 'product' which can be promoted to other Christians in the world. That the product is manufactured entirely in Korea and proved to be very successful supports the argument that KP is a distinctly Korean religion.

### **Nationalistic sentiment**

KP has been called a Korean religion because of *its expression of love for the nation of Korea* and, ultimately, for the welfare of Korean people. Terms such as "nationalistic Christianity" or "Christian nationalism" have been used to argue such a theory.<sup>37</sup> This was particularly the case *during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century* when Korea was under the oppression of Japanese colonization. Son Pong-ho views that Christianity in Korea does not appear to be a Western religion as in other Asian countries because

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<sup>35</sup> See the section, "Socio-Economic Dimension," in Chapter 3 (Page 47).

<sup>36</sup> Pak's book, *Early Morning Prayer*, receives many supports and compliments from several mega church pastors in Korea; see *Early Morning Prayer*, 5-16.

<sup>37</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *민중신학 이야기 [Story of Minjung Theology]* (Seoul: Han'guk Sinhakyŏn'guso, 1988), 17. Kim Seyoon, "Christianity and Korean Culture"; Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 187-88.

Korean Christianity is characteristically a nationalistic religion.<sup>38</sup> Son's view seems to be based on the earlier history of KP, when Christians, a persecuted minority, lived their lives *for the sake of* the nation and the people. To elaborate, KP members participated actively in various movements for independence from Japan, and read the Bible with the vision and prayer that the God who freed the ancient Hebrew people from the cruel hand of Pharaoh would free Korean people from Japanese occupation.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting here that, from the beginning, the 'enemy' of KP was the 'enemy' of the Korean nation; this 'enemy' was a neighbouring Asian country, Japan, and not any of the Western nations that approached many other countries in Asia, both with the Christian gospel and colonization interest.

In his book that explores the apparent but complicated relationship between Korean Protestants and nationalist movements during the period between 1896 and 1937, Kenneth M. Wells, a historian of Korea, states that "Protestants were involved in most phases and streams of the nationalistic movement in Korea and abroad."<sup>40</sup> This statement may well apply to the whole history of KP, from the beginning till now, though it is waning somewhat. KP's shared sentiment for the nation is in fact recognized as one of the major factors for the growth of KP. Having proposed the following question, "Why did the evangelistic campaigns [of the 1970s and 1980s] appeal so powerfully to South Koreans in the first place," Timothy Lee offers a decisive answer: it is in "the way evangelicalism became positively identified with the Korean nation and participated in Koreans' collective aspirations and sentiments."<sup>41</sup> Lee reminds us that KP "participated in Korean nationalism, especially during the dark years under Japanese colonialism, and in South Korean anticommunism, which became the entrenched ideology in the South well into the 1980s."<sup>42</sup> Daniel J. Adams, one of the long-term missionaries in Korea, also asserts that the paradigm shift within

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<sup>38</sup> Son Pong-ho, "Is There a Hope for Korean Protestantism," main speech at the 4<sup>th</sup> Seoul YMCA Chongro Forum, September 22, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *Story of Minjung Theology*, 14, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea 1896-1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>41</sup> Timothy Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea* (University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 113-114.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Lee, *Born Again*, 114.

KP, “from ecclesiology and concern with the institutional church, to nationalism and concern with the recovery of national identity,” was a significant contributor to church growth and “has enabled Christianity to become truly Korean.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Some critiques**

To summarize what has been discussed, KP’s syncretic-nature Christianity, indigenous evangelism in the earliest period of KP’s history, Korea-originated Christian culture of ‘early morning prayer,’ KP’s nationalism, as well as the sheer size of Christianity within Korea, have all been advanced as arguments that KP is a distinctly-Korean Christianity, forming a meaningful part of Korean culture and history.

Each of the points raised, however, is open to critique or alternative perspective. For instance, as mentioned earlier, most KP members are unaware of the syncretic nature of their Christian faith and would deny it. As such, it is problematic to call distinctly Korean an element of KP that most of its members would deny. Regarding the second contention, KP’s humble beginning, as a movement involved in distinctly Korean-style Bible reading, does not appear to have continued, which is the reason why Chŏn Ch’ang-hi appeals to KP to return to its original manner of reading scripture.<sup>44</sup>

More seriously, the third argument—the marketing of the Korean product of early morning prayer—raises further concerns, besides the reservations previously stated. To be sure, early morning prayer is precious to many KP members; to some, it is a lifeline. However, instead of pertaining to any idea of a uniquely-Korean Christianity, early morning prayer speaks more to Korean people’s traditional spiritual orientation, something which existed long before Christianity first appeared.<sup>45</sup> Pak himself acknowledges the existence of a theory that KP’s early morning prayer is a continuation of the practice of Korean Buddhists, but quickly

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel J. Adams, “Church Growth in Korea: A Paradigm Shift from Ecclesiology to Nationalism,” in *Perspectives on Christianity in Korea and Japan: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia*, eds. Mark R. Mullins and Richard Fox Young (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>44</sup> Chŏn Ch’ang-hi, “The Role of Minjung’s Narrative Tradition,” 237-38. This point will be discussed fully in the section, “Spirit-Centred,” in Chapter 5.

<sup>45</sup> Kim Kwang-sik, “Path of Indigenous Theology,” 348-49.

defends that it is actually Korean imitation of the habit of Jesus (Mark 1:35).<sup>46</sup> However, as Kim Kwang-sik questions, if it was fundamentally biblically-based, why do only Korean churches—all of them at that—practice such a biblical custom?<sup>47</sup> In addition, the apparent ‘marketing’ of the ‘Korean product’—early morning prayer—is disconcerting. This is strongly reminiscent of the American ‘church growth theory,’<sup>48</sup> which might suggest that KP is still under the influence of American Christianity. Moreover, such religious commercialization is quite alien within a more aesthetic and self-effacing, traditional Korean religio-cultural tradition.<sup>49</sup>

The contention that KP is a Korean Christianity based on KP’s nationalistic political ideology has ironically been used against the search for indigenous Korean theologizing. Those who are suspicious about the indigenous Korean theological effort often argue that such effort is too “nationalistic.” Pak A-ron, for instance, considers such effort as being “jingoistic, that is, against all other people in the world.”<sup>50</sup> Kim Seyoon suspects that Korean indigenous theological movement is a product of the ‘dangerous’ movement of ‘cultural nationalism’ in Korea which began at the beginning of 1960s.<sup>51</sup> Because Kim takes pride in KP’s patriotic nationalism since the beginning of its history, he calls this newly-arising nationalism “another kind of Christian nationalism,” and criticizes that the new ‘Christian nationalism’ or indigenous Christian theological effort puts the nation of Korea before the spirit of truth, and national pride before faithfulness to Christian truth or passion for effective

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<sup>46</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 54. Pak bases his argument on biblical records such as Mark 1:35 (“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed”) or Luke 5:16 (“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” TNIV). It seems to me that there is certain gap between Jesus’ practice of prayer and KP’s early morning prayer. According to the passages Pak quotes, Jesus’ habitual prayer appears to be done alone in lonely places rather than KP-style, ‘in a big group and with loud voices.’ There is also a clear emphasis from Jesus about prayer, by oneself and seeking God’s will (Matt 6:5-8).

<sup>47</sup> Kim Kwang-sik, “Path of Indigenous Theology,” 349.

<sup>48</sup> See the section, “Socio-Economic Dimension,” in Chapter 3.

<sup>49</sup> This ‘traditional Korean religio-cultural tradition’ will be presented in “The Review of Taoist ‘Way’” (Chapter 7) and in “Reading through the Korean Word ‘*Kil*’” (Chapter 10).

<sup>50</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 115.

<sup>51</sup> It seems that Kim does not take this cultural nationalism positively because such new nationalist movement is, in his view, initiated by Korean dictators for their own political interest, to strengthen hierarchical order and obedience, for instance. Kim Seyoon, “Christianity and Korean Culture.”

Christian evangelism.<sup>52</sup> This critique is not a fair one, as I will argue in the section on methodology for a distinctly Korean reading (in Chapter 5).<sup>53</sup>

Ahn Byong-mu challenges KP's common understanding that Protestants were at the front of the resistance movement against the Japanese occupation, and consequent contention for the superiority of Christianity over all the other religions in Korea:

Some people praise Christianity that it has made a great contribution to the development of Korean people's nationalism and the corresponding activities such as the March the First Resistance Movement in Korea [in 1919]. However, I ask, 'were those Christians [who were involved in such movement] the people raised by Christianity or the natural Koreans who chose Christian faith?' I myself have no hesitation to say that the latter is the case.<sup>54</sup>

Through statements such as the above, Ahn makes effort to re-balance the relationship between Christianity and Korea, from 'Christianity *over* Korea' to an equal relationship of 'Korea *and* Christianity' or even 'Korea *over* Christianity.'<sup>55</sup>

With these critiques about the contention that KP is a Korean Christianity, we shall move on to the third position.

## **KP IS NOT A KOREAN CHRISTIANITY**

There are those within KP who insist that KP is not a Korean Christianity *yet* or that KP's theology is not distinctly Korean. It is of great importance to understand what these people mean when they use the words "Korean" or "distinctly Korean" in this context.

First of all, the scholars who fall under this category do not handle the term, 'distinctly Korean,' lightly. Yi Ch'an-su, for instance, says, "that which is distinctly

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<sup>52</sup> Kim Seyoon, "Christianity and Korean Culture."

<sup>53</sup> See the section, "Spirit-centred," in Chapter 5.

<sup>54</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, "기독교화와 서구화" [Christianization and Westernization], *Christian Thought* 15/12 (1971): 62.

<sup>55</sup> This notion will be revisited and discussed further in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

Korean cannot be easily defined. The very effort to define it might be problematic, for it is a deep and dynamic reality which sustains itself through continuous change.”<sup>56</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, likewise, argues that Korean culture is best described as a “living tree of life”; for culture itself is a “living and breathing entity.”<sup>57</sup> After acknowledging the nature of the distinctly-Korean, Yi argues that the task of describing it is still necessary.<sup>58</sup>

### **Lack of theological stewardship**

A focal point of this third view is *the stewardship of Korean people in doing theology*, both in a narrow and broad sense. From this view arises a major critique about KP that many of its members lack self-reflection, self-respect and self-confidence, not acknowledging they are the *subject* of Korean theology; they do not pay appropriate attention to their national identity. Yi Man-yŏl, for instance, contends that the present KP does not have its own theology; the theology which KP presently possesses is an ‘imported theology,’ originated from the Western Christian world. In addition, Yi sees that this theological foreign-ness is a major reason for the present ethical crisis of KP.<sup>59</sup> Yi’s critique is based on his own scholarly conviction that the most important methodological element in any academic discipline is ‘discernment of problems or major issues’ in one’s own life context. Judged from this theory, KP has not reached an awareness of its own problems, and consequently not wrestled theologically with the specific context and major issues in Korea. Instead, KP has received as its own other people’s questions together with their answers. Such ‘answers’ will not go very far in terms of solving KP’s own problems. It is from this vantage point that Yi commends minjung theology even though Yi does not agree with all of its theological positions; the theology looks into the socio-political issues of

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<sup>56</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 165.

<sup>57</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “Christian Faith and Culture: A Hermeneutical Approach to a Theology of Mission,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 19/2 (2005): 433, 439.

<sup>58</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, “한국교회, 자기 신학이 있는가?” [Does Korean Church Have Its Own Theology?], Yi Man-yŏl Column 252, *복음과 상황* [*Gospel and Context*], December 8, 2011. Source: <http://www.goscon.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=27979> (accessed February 20, 2012).

Korea and theologizes regarding justice matters in a way that speaks for the suffering of innocent minjung or poor people (during the 1970s and 1980s, in particular).

As a historian, Yi appraises Korean theological development within the history of Korean Christianity: 230 years of Catholicism and 130 years of Protestantism. It is a shameful fact, observes Yi, that the Korean church still does not have her own authentic theology after this many years. Yi compares this ‘unsatisfactory’ phenomenon with the development of Korean Buddhist thought. Buddhism is officially received in 527 CE in the *Silla* Kingdom (57 BCE -935 CE) of the Korean peninsula, and within 100 years, Wŏnhyo (617-686 CE), a well-known Buddhist monk, scholar and evangelist in the Kingdom, began to develop uniquely Korean Buddhist thoughts. His writings subsequently influenced the Buddhist world throughout Asia.<sup>60</sup>

A similar view to the above is held by Ham Sŏk-hŏn when he discusses the strengths and weaknesses of Korean people. After affirming Korean people’s strengths as being ‘merciful’ and ‘swift,’ Ham points out the ‘lack of thinking power’ as the major weakness of Korean people.<sup>61</sup> Deep and vigorous thinking would have helped Korean people to know who they are and what their calling is, and to transform their unique ancient religious sensibility—shamanistic religiosity—into a ‘noble religion.’<sup>62</sup> In reality, however, habitual forgetfulness of the ‘self’ and quick imitation of others have resulted in the lack of one’s own unique thoughts and religion in Korea.<sup>63</sup> Hence, Ham considers that Christianity, as well as all other existing religions in Korea, cannot be called a distinctly Korean religion.<sup>64</sup>

### **Unbalanced relationship between Christianity and Korean culture**

Those who think that KP is not yet a Korean religion in the deeper sense of the meaning see an *unbalanced or unhealthy relationship between Christianity and*

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<sup>60</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, “Does Korean Church Have Its Own Theology?” Even Pak A-ron, one of the conservatives within KP acknowledges the authentic work of Wŏnhyo as he reviews the religious traditions of Korea before the introduction of Christianity. Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Ham Sŏk-hŏn, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 115-30.

<sup>62</sup> Ham Sŏk-hŏn, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 126-27.

<sup>63</sup> Ham Sŏk-hŏn, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 129-30, 178.

<sup>64</sup> Ham Sŏk-hŏn, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 126.

*Korean culture within KP*. Their specific critique concerns KP's overall theological method within which Korean culture has been dealt with. In his book, *Criticism of Korean Christianity: Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, Yi Ch'an-su undertakes a comprehensive investigation into existing studies about Korean Christianity which are carried out by Korean Christian scholars, both Catholic and Protestant.<sup>65</sup> Yi then reports that almost all the existing books have been written out of the writers' covert 'evangelical' motivations and 'self-defending' positions, hence in deficit of critical observation about Korean Christianity.<sup>66</sup> The common evangelical zeal of most writers tends to treat Christianity as a subject and the nation of Korea an object in their studies. This means that Korea, with her culture and people as well, is always treated as an object that should be enlightened and transformed by the power of Christian gospel.<sup>67</sup> Due to this, there are Korean historians and people outside the church who assess the Christianity of Korea as, in the words of Yi, something which is "still Western, so non-Korean, and a de-societal, religious phenomenon."<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps it is pertinent at this stage to make a few comments on the distinctly Korean theological works accomplished by a minority group within KP. Scholars are in agreement that Ch'oe Pyöng-hön (1858-1927), who tried to interpret traditional Confucianism in the light of Christianity, is the first Korean contextual theologian. Also agreed is that noticeable Korean indigenous theological efforts only began in the 1960s. Keel Hee-sung considers that the new upsurge of Korean indigenous theological efforts of the period were in part influenced by contemporaneous theological developments in the West such as Paul Tillich's theology of culture, radical theologies of the sixties such as the theology of secularization, the death-of-God theology, and the WCC theology of mission.<sup>69</sup> In addition to these Western influences, the emerging Asian theologies also stimulated some Korean theologians

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<sup>65</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 21-92.

<sup>66</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 90-92.

<sup>67</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Keel Hee-sung, "Korean Theology: Past and Present," *Inter-Religion* 12 (1987): 86. Source: <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/3362> (accessed June 17, 2015).

to boldly experiment in their theological thinking.

Among the Protestant theologians in Korea who have participated in these new theological activities, two Methodist theologians—Ryu Dong-shik and Yun Söng-bȫm —stand out.<sup>70</sup> To give a very brief introduction to their theological works, Ryu Dong-shik tried to understand the traditional religions of Korea, Shamanism in particular, from the perspective of the gospel, and presented his own *P'ungnyu* theology based on his perception of the archetypal Korean spirituality.<sup>71</sup> Yun Söng-bȫm, “whose name was for some time almost synonymous with ‘indigenization theology’ in Korea,” attempted an interpretation of the Korean traditional Tan’gun myth with its three key figures (Hwanin, Hwanung, and Hwan’gȫm or Tan’gun) in the light of the doctrine of the trinity.<sup>72</sup> In his *Korean Theology* (1972), Yun constructed a Korean theology of his own on the basis of the central Confucian concept of ‘sȫng’ (sincerity) and thus sought a Christian understanding of Confucian thought. Observing the nature and substance of their works, Chȫng Kyȫng-il terms their theology the “theology of dialogue” (with Korean traditional religious tradition).<sup>73</sup>

Alongside the *t’och’akhwa* (indigenous) theology, minjung theology deserves to be called a Korean-owned theology. Kim Kyong-jae observes that these two theological movements within KP are like the two wheels that pull forward ‘progressive theology’ which stands as a challenging voice to the much larger ‘conservative theology.’<sup>74</sup> The specific names given to minjung theology such as the “theology of resistance,”<sup>75</sup> “secularization group,”<sup>76</sup> “bearer of prophetic roles,”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 86-88; Kim Kwang-sik, “Path of Indigenous Theology,” 339. There are two commendable books which introduce the life and theological works of exemplary Koreans who do theology in distinctly Korean way: *Studies for Korean Cultural Theology*, ed., *This Is Korean Theology* (Seoul: Handül, 2008); Kim Sȫng-su and others, eds., *한국신학의 선구자들* [*The Pioneers of the Korean Theology*] (Seoul: Nȫüi Owȫl, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 87; Kim Kwang-sik, “Path of Indigenous Theology,” 339.

<sup>72</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 87.

<sup>73</sup> Chȫng Kyȫng-il, “한국‘안의’ 신학에서 한국‘의’ 신학으로” [From Theology ‘within’ Korea to Theology ‘of’ Korea], *Theology and Church* 1 (2014): 290.

<sup>74</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “The Present and Future of Korean Progressive Theology,” *Theology and Church* 1 (2014): 123.

<sup>75</sup> Chȫng Kyȫng-il, “From Theology ‘within’ Korea to Theology ‘of’ Korea,” 286.

“distinctive Korean liberation theology”<sup>78</sup> or “minjung-oriented socio-political theological movement”<sup>79</sup> indicate minjung theologians’ resistance to socio-political injustice and empathetic participation in the suffering of minjung.

It is worth noting that minjung theologians’ passion for freedom, liberation and equity within Korean society seems to extend to wider ‘theological freedom.’ A leading minjung theologian Ahn Byong-mu emphasizes a “de-westernization of theology” or liberation from the tradition of Western doctrinal interpretation.<sup>80</sup> Ahn accomplished a rare, distinctly Korean biblical reading by approaching the Gospel of Mark with a specific focus on the dynamic relationship between Jesus and *ochlos* or the poor people of the day, a particularly relevant concern in Korea during the 1970s.<sup>81</sup> Keel Hee-sung, therefore, appraises Ahn Byong-mu as an eminent biblical theologian in Korea who demonstrated better than most others—including the aforementioned Ryu Dong-shik and Yun Sŏng-bŏm—the hermeneutical significance of Korean identity for theological indigenization.<sup>82</sup>

Despite their significant contributions to KP, the two theological movements have also received criticism. For instance, scholars consider it a major problem that *t’och’akhwa* theology has not reached the majority of KP members, remaining at the boundaries of academia.<sup>83</sup> This is, at least in part, because their theological products often are perceived to sound “artificially constructed,” “very subjective,” or “based on forced arguments.”<sup>84</sup> In addition, the arguments are “difficult to understand”

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<sup>76</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, “Rough Road to Theological Maturity,” in *Asian Voice in Christian Theology*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976), 172-73.

<sup>77</sup> Pae Tok-man, “Seeking a Distinctly Korean Protestant Spirituality,” 39.

<sup>78</sup> Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 239.

<sup>79</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “The Present and Future of Korean Progressive Theology,” 120.

<sup>80</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *Minjung Theology*, 42-43; Ahn Byong-mu, “한국적 그리스도인상의 모색” [Seeking an Ideal Korean Christian], *신학사상 [Theological Thought]* 52 (1986): 48-50.

<sup>81</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *Minjung Theology*, 42-43; Ahn Byong-mu, “Seeking an Ideal Korean Christian,” 48-50.

<sup>82</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 88.

<sup>83</sup> Ch’a Chŏng-sik, “한국에서의 신학의 길 찾기—예수의 ‘길’에 기대어” [Finding the Way of Theology in Korea: Leaning on the ‘Way’ of Jesus], *Christian Thought* 562 (2005): 264-281. Source: <http://cchtimes.co.kr/lib/resources/8350> (accessed August 8, 2013), no page.

<sup>84</sup> This is a part of the result of a survey which Keel Hee-sung has done. Keel reports that most of the

because they are often based on *philosophical* concepts of Confucian scholars of an earlier era. Kim Seyoon criticizes that Yun Sŏng-bŏm’s major theological tool for a “Korean theology,” namely, Confucian philosophical concept of ‘*song*’ (誠) or integrity, is almost as unfamiliar and difficult to modern-day Korean people as the Greek philosophical concepts of ‘substance’ and ‘persona.’ Kim goes so far as to say that “Yun’s intentionally constructed Korean theology does not achieve its original purpose but ends up being another ‘foreign’ theology to Koreans!”<sup>85</sup> The fate of minjung theology is similar to that of *t’och’akhwa* theology, but for different reasons; minjung theologians’ theological views often sound too radical, and their practices are costly, too hard to follow, often resulting in imprisonment, for instance.<sup>86</sup>

In my view, however, many of these ‘weaknesses’ are hardly the shortcomings of the concerned theologians. First of all, as was argued before, the popularity of a theology is not necessarily a sign of theological maturity. More importantly, most of the theologians persevered through opposition, often bearing alienation and suffering related to their theological stances.<sup>87</sup> Each ‘weakness’ primarily reveals an inevitable limitation of any theological movement or individual theologian at any time or place in history. In this sense, it is the task of those who can see such ‘weaknesses’ to fill in the gaps and advance things forward. I contend that the time is now ripe, thanks to the theory-centred achievements of the ‘forerunners’ on the distinctly Korean theological path, to proactively read the Christian scriptures through a distinctly Korean hermeneutical lens, thus progressing from philosophical theological discussion to biblical interpretation. In addition, picking up one of the perceived ‘weaknesses’ of the previous indigenous theological works—“difficult to

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Korean theologians who have responded to the survey indicate the need for a Korean theology that reflects the religious concerns and cultural traditions of the Korean people. This affirmative attitude toward the idea of a Korean theology, however, is counterbalanced by reservations of several kinds, some of which are presented here. Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 90.

<sup>85</sup> Kim Seyoon, “Christianity and Korean Culture.”

<sup>86</sup> Yi Yŏng-mi, “경험과 성찰, 그리고 소통의 해석학” [Hermeneutics of Experience, Reflection, and Communication], *한국기독교 신학논총* [*Korean Journal of Christian Studies*] 64 (2009), 24; A. Sung Park, “Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology,” 1-2, 11. Source: [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-4\\_001.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-4_001.pdf) (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> The repeated imprisonment of Ahn Byong-mu, and excommunication of Pyŏn Sŏn-hwan are two examples among many.

understand”—this thesis will employ a word, *kil* or path, which is a very familiar word to Koreans, as a part of its Korean hermeneutic method.

From within this perspective, I will pay more attention to a different critique about Korean theological efforts, raised by Keel Hee-sung. In his article, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” Keel appraises that, despite various commendable, pioneering theological efforts and achievements, almost all the works reveal more of missiological than Korean theological concern.<sup>88</sup> Both Ryu and Yun’s theological efforts, for instance, aim to “understand the traditional religions of Korea from the perspective of Christian gospel *rather than the other way around*.”<sup>89</sup> For this reason, Keel concludes that “Korean theology has no real chance of developing in Korea until Korean theologians can get beyond the missiological concerns that so far have characterized their approach to Korean theology.”<sup>90</sup> Echoing Yi Ch’an-su and Ahn Byong-mu, Keel affirms that “the Korean people, with their long and profound religio-philosophical tradition, constitute the subject of theology, not the mere object of evangelization. They are the ones who should hear the gospel and understand its meaning in their own way with their own theological reflection.”<sup>91</sup> This argument for “Korea-centredness” will comprise one of the three, major hermeneutical focuses for a distinctly Korean reading (in Chapter 5).

### **Lack of contribution to the essence of Christianity**

The third reason why some do not view KP’s theology as distinctly Korean is related to a vision shared by those theologians who seek a distinctly Korean Christianity: “for Christianity to become more Christian”<sup>92</sup> or “to present the Christian gospel as the real good news to Korean people.”<sup>93</sup> To be sure, these visionary statements require

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<sup>88</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 88, 91.

<sup>89</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 87.

<sup>90</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 91; Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 6-7.

<sup>91</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Korean Theology: Past and Present,” 6-7.

<sup>92</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 11.

<sup>93</sup> Kim Kwang-sik, 언행일치의 신학 [*Theology of Word-Deed Accord*], third edition (Seoul: Chongno Books Bible Publishing, 2000), 33.

of Korean Christians *a deep thinking about the nature of Christianity and their understanding of the good news*, as well as ongoing discussion with other Christians in the world. This kind of vision is not necessarily realized in the quantitative growth of the church. KP may be acknowledged as a successful case of syncretism, as Lewis notes, and KP may continue to encourage other Christian groups in the world toward proactive prayer and evangelism, as Pak A-ron anticipates. However, ‘the successful case’ of KP has not necessarily made a meaningful contribution toward the enrichment of world Christianity; mainstream of KP is still ‘reluctant’ to offer Koreans’ unique voice about the essence of the Christian message.

Has the essence of the Christian message already been expressed fully? Many would respond to this question affirmatively, but not all are in agreement with this. Yi Man-yŏl contends that “true identity of Christianity will be fully known only when all cultures and civilizations in the world participate in this.”<sup>94</sup> Yi goes on to say that “those who seek this essence will long to hear the voices of other cultures and civilizations.”<sup>95</sup> In my view, Korean Christians have not offered much in the way of distinctly Korean biblical interpretation or theological expressions of such nature. Closer to the truth is that efforts for distinctly Korean theological and biblical understandings have been shunned by the majority of KP members. That most KP members have neglected to read the Bible intentionally through the unique spirituality given to them is evidenced by the fact that most commentaries on the books of the Bible written by Korean scholars are based on Western biblical scholars’ readings; they frequently comprise summarized, reorganized translations of good works of Western commentaries.<sup>96</sup> For this reason, it is hard for some to accept that Christianity in Korea has become truly Korean.

It should be noted, however, that the lack of distinctly Korean biblical understanding does not indicate in any way a lack of love for the Bible. On the contrary, Korean Christians revere the Bible and most Korean churches run several

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<sup>94</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, “기독교와 한국문화의 전망” [Prospect of Christianity and Korean Culture], in *Christianity and Interpretation of History*, 264-65.

<sup>95</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, “Prospect of Christianity and Korean Culture,” 264.

<sup>96</sup> Some such commentaries will be introduced in the exegetical chapter (Chapter 10).

Bible study programmes. Moonjang Lee makes this point as he speculates about why “the Bible is not usually questioned or challenged among Asian Christians, except by those under outside influence from training in Western critical scholarship”; it is because of “the religious and intellectual tradition in Asia” where “those writings given the name of ‘sacred book’ are accepted as writings that contain fundamental truths about the universe.”<sup>97</sup> This love and reverence for the Bible, together with their natural obedience to eldership/pastors, make Korean Christians eager to hear ‘God’s words’ preached from the pulpits Sunday after Sunday. However, neither critical thinking (Ham’s notion of ‘deep thinking’) nor presentation of one’s *own* thought has been encouraged in Korean society; they have not become important values or virtues yet.<sup>98</sup>

Having grown up in this kind of environment, perhaps Korean scholars and theologians themselves have been more eager to receive the wisdom of Western scholars than to think independently and critically. Perhaps there is not much time or energy left for them to pursue their own thoughts as they are already struggling with their studies, often overseas through the medium of foreign languages such as English or German. It is also a possibility that the thoughts of Western scholars touch their hearts, and make sufficient sense that they do not feel the need of thinking alternatively. Whatever the reason, the reality remains: KP’s dominant theological thought and biblical understanding is still mainly foreign, not yet incarnated into something distinctly Korean.

As already pointed out in Chapters 1 and 3, the Christian theology that most Korean churches hold on to is that of Western theology, especially that of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. The alleged theological mega-themes such as original sin, substitutionary death of the Christ, justification by faith, the trinity, Jesus the God-Man, are based on the creeds and doctrines transmitted from Christian tradition, which are the products, mental and spiritual as well as socio-historical and

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Archie C.C. Lee, “Contextual Theology in East Asia,” in *The Modern theologians*, eds. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 150.

<sup>98</sup> To introduce a very personal example, when I was in my late-twenties, my own father offered me a piece of proverbial advice after I had expressed, for the first time, a view (my own) different from his: “The best presentation of a different opinion [to an elder] is still not as good as a quiet obedience.”

political, mainly of the Western people. A problem arises, as Moonjang Lee deftly comments: “The critical response of Asian scholars arises from the awareness that these themes, however helpful in illuminating the biblical text, cannot answer contemporary questions and the pressing concerns of local people.”<sup>99</sup> Korean Christians, through their reading of the same Bible, could find some other important themes such as original good, full-humanization, return to and union with God, Jesus as the best son and eldest brother.<sup>100</sup> However, most KP members have not received these themes as Christian thoughts yet. Hence, Kim Heung Soo argues that “Christianity *is* a Korean religion, but it remains foreign to the Korean people because of its alien creed and its exclusive attitude towards Korean culture.”<sup>101</sup>

### **Lack of contribution to the formation of Korean people’s general character**

Another contention is based on a search into *whether Christianity has influenced the making of Korean people’s personality*. This is a very high standard against which Christianity is judged as a true Korean religion or not. This is reflected in Kim Heung Soo’s question about the present Korean Christianity: “Although Christianity is now a Korean religion in a number of ways, the question remains as to what degree it has formed and developed the personality of the Korean people.”<sup>102</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that Shamanism and Confucianism have contributed to the formation of general characteristics of Korean people. By living their daily lives within the value system of filial piety and obedience based on hierarchical order, Koreans show that they are Confucians. By their keen interest in spirits and seeking earthly blessings with the help of spirits, Koreans reveal their Shamanist worldview.<sup>103</sup> Buddhist influence is “subtle but deep,” as evidenced by Koreans’ continued adherence to karma-based thinking: one shall reap what one

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Lee Archie C. C., “Contextual Theology in East Asia,” 152.

<sup>100</sup> This will be fully discussed in Chapter 12.

<sup>101</sup> Kim Heung Soo, “Is Christianity a Korean Religion,” 168.

<sup>102</sup> Kim Heung Soo, “Is Christianity a Korean Religion,” 168.

<sup>103</sup> Ch’oe Chun-sik, 무교: 권력에 밀린 한국인의 근본신앙 [*Shamanism: A Faith Fundamentally Korean but Ostracized by Power*] (Seoul: Mosinŭn Saramdŭl, 2009), 95, 97; Ryu Dong-shik, 한국문화와 풍류신학 [*Korean Culture and P’ungnyu Theology*] (Seoul: Handŭl, 2002), 31.

sows.<sup>104</sup> Koreans' natural affinity to and friendship with nature seems to stem from Taoist tradition.<sup>105</sup> The religious plurality which has long existed in Korean history is also largely due to Taoist pathos.<sup>106</sup> By these tendencies and strengths a person is known as Korean, and a Korean is typically a Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist-Shamanistic person.

Then, by what aspects of Christianity is a Korean known to be a Christian? Presently, customs and rituals of the church serve as 'Christian signifiers': regular attendance to Sunday church service, offering of tithes, prayer in Jesus' name, and Christian forms of weddings and funerals. Christians are also actively involved in public services such as visiting orphanages and caring for foreign labourers who have come to Korea (to support their families), as well as in overseas aid programmes. Unfortunately, there are other features by which people are also known to be Christians in Korean society: 'self-righteous' and 'exclusivistic' (for only theirs is the truth),<sup>107</sup> 'talkative' (probably developed for the sake of evangelism) and 'argumentative.'<sup>108</sup>

Beside the apparently Christian rituals, good deeds which are not exclusive to Christians, and some uniquely Christian notoriety, are there any traits of character among Korean people that show they are uniquely Christian? If Christianity is truly incarnated among KP members, there should be characteristics demonstrative of their faith. The response from this third group of commentators is not positive. Despite the visible and influential existence of the religion of Christianity in Korea, the essential messages of Jesus or Christian spirit have not entered deep into many KP members' hearts, for their lifestyles do not show them. For this reason, Ryu Dong-

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<sup>104</sup> David Chung, *Syncretism*, 126.

<sup>105</sup> This point will be fully expanded in Chapter 7.

<sup>106</sup> Chŏng Chin-hong, *경험과 기억: 종교문화의 틈 읽기* [*Experience and Memory: Reading the Gaps of Religious Culture*] (Seoul: Tangdae, 2003), 123-25.

<sup>107</sup> Chŏng Yang-mo, *Chŏng Yang-mo's Story*, 303.

<sup>108</sup> A current joke goes: "Two people happen to be arguing loudly with each other in an office, and the third person comments: "Hey, guys. You are confused; this is not a church. So, stop fighting!"

shik contends: “The Korean church has not been successful in grasping the true Christian gospel.”<sup>109</sup>

The present question, which asks whether Christianity has contributed to the making of Korean people’s general character and lifestyle, is an important one because, on the one hand, it touches on the ‘essence’ of Christian teaching or the message of Jesus. On the other hand, this question probes more deeply, asking about the meaning of the religion of Christianity in the span of Korean history. A few, co-related questions may arise such as:

- (1) Has Christianity (Protestantism) primarily accomplished the task of filling in the ‘vacuum’ of religious power in Korea that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century?
- (2) As other religions such as Buddhism regain their vitality, will Christianity remain as a religion among others?
- (3) What unique contribution has Christianity made to Korean people’s spirituality which no other religions ever could provide?
- (4) Does Christianity supersede all the other religions that existed in Korea before Christianity, as many ‘evangelical’ KP members and theologians believe?

The thesis writer, along with others, would respond affirmatively to the first two questions. Yi Ch’an-su observes: “Both the reception and growth of Christianity in Korea have resulted from Korean people’s urgent need for survival and concern for their nation; they are not necessarily the result of Korean people’s good understanding about the superiority of Christianity over other religions or the depth of Christian truths.”<sup>110</sup> The third question awaits suitable answers, as Koreans continue to value each traditional religion appropriately and come to understand the unique contribution of Christianity. In my view, the supersession of Christianity over all other religions (the fourth question) is neither possible nor desirable in a Korean context.<sup>111</sup> As Kim Kwang-sik views, “Korean cultural archetype is *yubulsŏn* [the three-religion of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism], Korean people’s spiritual

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<sup>109</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, *P’ungnyu Theology*, 30.

<sup>110</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 192.

<sup>111</sup> To be brief, supersessionism is a term developed in Protestant scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, often referring to the concept that the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament, and that Christian church supersedes ancient Israel or even Judaism.

home which we can always return to, to think deeply about ourselves.”<sup>112</sup> That the ‘home’ cannot be replaced by any new place is one point, and, that the path of a distinctly Korean theology is not a one-sided superseding of the other or others, but a mutual transformation, is another.<sup>113</sup>

Examining the effect of Christianity upon the construction of Korean people’s character may give a warning to a triumphalist view of Christianity within KP. Kenneth Wells critiques a current attitude shared by many KP members, describing it as follows: “it is not now their own nation but the ‘decadent’ and spiritually enervated Western nations which need to relearn this lesson. They are the New Israel, the nation God will use to spread renewal through the world.”<sup>114</sup> However, as Yi Man-yŏl points out, “Christians have become small in number in the West but Christianity is still there, incarnated in the forms of systems, laws and ethics in their societies.”<sup>115</sup> Therefore, without serious self-reflective and critical work within KP, “Christianity in Korea may disappear or diminish even without imprinting its authentic presence in various areas in Korean society,” warns Yi Mal-yŏl.<sup>116</sup>

## SUMMARY

To summarize the present discussion, there are largely three different positions about the nature of Korean Christianity. First, indifference: the development of a distinctly Korean theology or biblical reading is outside of the interest or concern of most KP members. Some may actively resist the quest for a distinctly Korean theology on the grounds that it is unfounded, unwise, even un-Christian.

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<sup>112</sup> Kim Kwang-sik, “Path of Indigenous Theology,” 347. See also Chŏng Chin-hong, “한국의 종교와 한국인” [Religions of Korea and Korean People], in *Experience and Memory*, 109-38

<sup>113</sup> This point will be fully developed in the final chapter of the thesis (Chapter 12).

<sup>114</sup> Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation*, 176.

<sup>115</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, “진통하는 한국사회 속에서 한국교회의 나아갈 길” [The Way Forward of Korean Church in Korean Society at the Childbirth Pain], the main speech at the new year seminar of *Hanmokyŏp* (The Korean National Association of Christian Pastors), *Sarangŭi* Church, Seoul, January 29, 2004. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcDPUFH26ls> (accessed August 24, 2015).

<sup>116</sup> Yi Man-yŏl, “The Way Forward of Korean Church.”

Second, positive affirmation: some, among Koreans and non-Koreans, affirm that the present form of KP *is* a distinctly Korean Christianity. This appraisal is often based on the examination of dynamic relationship between KP and Korean culture and history. Hence, KP's syncretic-nature Christianity, indigenous evangelism in the earliest period of KP history, Korea-originated Christian culture such as 'early morning prayer,' KP's nationalism, as well as the sheer size of Christianity within Korea, all support the second position that contends that KP is a nationalistic religion of Korea or distinctly Korean Christianity.

Third, 'negative' evaluation: KP is *not* a Korean Christianity yet or, alternatively, KP's theology is *not* distinctly Korean. To those who hold this view, including the thesis writer, 'distinctly Korean' should mean firstly to allow Korea and Korean people to be the subject or host of theology. This would reverse the current priority of KP, from Christianity to Korea and Korean people, and require Korean Christians to be more self-confident as well as self-critical and reflective as Koreans. For Christianity to be truly Korean, Korean Christians should be able to present their own understandings about the nature of Christianity or essential messages of the Christ in distinctly Korean expressions. Moreover, Christianity—the essential messages of Jesus or Christian spirit—should be incarnated into Korean people's general character. Since these aspects are not readily apparent within KP, the third group cannot but argue that Christianity in Korea is not genuinely Korean yet. Many of these points (presented by the third group) will become bases for a distinctly Korean hermeneutical methodology, which will make up the ensuing chapter (Chapter 5).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHODOLOGY FOR A DISTINCTLY KOREAN HERMENEUTIC

#### THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Rynkiewich points out that “every culture already has a set of hermeneutical principles and processes, though most are not yet described in the literature.”<sup>1</sup> Describing the methodology for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic is the goal of this section, which is accompanied by a hope that Korean hermeneutical principles will continue to be developed and described by others. First of all, it needs to be mentioned that a distinctly Korean hermeneutic has a close relationship with a distinctly Korean theology. Further, there exist a few foundational assumptions behind the pursuit of a distinctly Korean theology. It is necessary to present these here, as the pursuit of a distinctly Korean hermeneutic also bases itself upon the same assumptions.

The first assumption is theological, with a basic belief in the existence of God who is the Creator. A more specific theological tenet concerns God’s relationship with all people groups on earth; *God the Creator has been involved in all human histories*. This is in fact consistent with the theological stance upheld by WCC, which acknowledges that “among all the nations and peoples there has always been the saving presence of God.”<sup>2</sup> God, who created Korean people, has loved them and revealed God-self to them steadily all through their history. A Korean theologian, Ryu Dong-shik, may well represent all the Korean theologians who have pursued a Korean-owned theology when he argues that “He [God] is not a ‘foreign God’ who

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<sup>1</sup> Rynkiewich, “Mission, Hermeneutics, and the Local Church,” 49.

<sup>2</sup> The Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality (WCC, 1990). Source: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/baar-statement-theological-perspectives-on-plurality> (accessed January 22, 2016).

followed western missionaries into this country only a few years ago. He has always been present in Korea, working as the Lord of creation within our culture and history.”<sup>3</sup> From within this perspective, to define Korea as a ‘traditionally non-Christian country’ or Korean tradition as a non-Christian tradition is likely an overly black and white point of view. It would be more accurate to state that Korea did not have the religion of Christianity until recently but nonetheless had the steadfast grace and truth of God.

This first assumption influences the way we see each nation or people group in relation to their Creator. When facing a well-established, biblical and Christian notion that the ancient Hebrew people are a ‘chosen’ people, there is no reason to object to such argument unless it demonstrates exclusivity. A Korean theological assumption expands such conviction and uses the same word ‘chosen’ for every other nation or people group. Korean people, for instance, are chosen as meaningfully as Hebrew people are, and Bengali people are as equally favoured by their Creator as Koreans or Jews are by the same Creator. Thus, our second belief states that *each culture is not only ‘unique’ in the general use of the word but ‘chosen’ and blessed by the Creator.* This way of thinking does not support the view which sees ancient Jewish people alone as the chosen people, typically designated as the ‘people of the Covenant.’

Perhaps it is pertinent at this juncture to make some comments about ‘general revelation.’ For this purpose I will turn to an analogy of the fruit-bearing tree to express the universal presence of God’s life and truth.<sup>4</sup> Each culture *in its best elements* is viewed as a unique ‘fruit-bearing tree’ which grows in its own ‘soil,’ a specific geographical environment and climate. When each culture, like a ‘tree’ which is planted and grown in its unique soil, has a different mode of spatial existence, the fruit of the tree or culture should naturally be different, too. As a concrete illustration, fruit which grow well in New Zealand include apples, oranges and kiwifruit, while

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<sup>3</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, “Rough Road to Theological Maturity,” 174. Archie Chi Chung Lee states that “the first step to moving beyond the communication mode to the construction stage of doing authentic theology is the recognition of divine activity in East Asian history.” Archie Chi Chung Lee, “Contextual Theology in East Asia,” 530.

<sup>4</sup> In regard to the tendency to use of indirect way of expressing truths such as using analogy, see the section, “Soteriological Effects,” in Chapter 7.

Korean soil and climate produce persimmons, pears, and watermelons as well-loved fruit. When it comes to a tropical country such as Bangladesh, mangoes, bananas and jackfruit benefit the people of the land.<sup>5</sup> These three sets of fruit look different, smell different and taste different to each other. There is, however, one commonality: each set of fruit has been a source of nourishment and joy to the people who eat them. Put differently, *each set of fruit has sustained the life of a specific people group*. Therefore, it would be unwise for people with a certain set of ‘fruit’ to judge that the other kinds of fruit are not as good as their own, or to insist that the kinds of fruit with which they are familiar should be representative of all fruit.<sup>6</sup>

The picture of a uniquely grown ‘tree’ encourages those who walk the path of a contextual theology. This illustration, for example, helps Korean Christians to experience the sense of confidence, gratitude and joy, by suggesting that the planter of the unique tree of Korean culture is God and that this tree has been cared for and considered ‘good and beautiful’ in the eye of the Planter. Korean Christians should be eager to find such truth, goodness and beauty, and on finding them, “render songs of praise and worship to the God, who, in his providence, created all that is true and beautiful in Korean experience.”<sup>7</sup>

The fruit-bearing tree analogy speaks to the path of a local hermeneutic as well, by challenging the traditional hierarchy of theological sources. The Bible, for instance, has long occupied the highest authority within Christian theological sources, received as ‘God’s words.’ There is no question that the Bible is the ‘food’ that has sustained and nourished many lives in the world. More specifically, the Bible takes on a particular importance for people of the Western world because of “its formative role in the development of what is now Western civilization and its central place in the great religions of the West, both past and present.”<sup>8</sup> Then, how should Korean

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<sup>5</sup> These three countries are chosen because the thesis author, having lived in each country more than ten years, has some genuine exposure to each culture.

<sup>6</sup> Jackfruit, for instance, is seen almost everywhere in Bangladesh. The fruit offers not only the fruit or flesh but the seed inside for food to Bengali people; no wonder it is the ‘national fruit of Bangladesh.’ Jackfruit, however, is disliked by most foreigners in the country allegedly due to its unique texture and scent.

<sup>7</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, “Rough Road to Theological Maturity,” 174.

<sup>8</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Old Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon,

Christians consider Buddhist, Confucian or Taoist scriptures which have contributed to their spiritual formation, the scriptures that have helped Korean people to reach their *telos*—*to live their (already-given) lives well and in harmony/peace*—since the beginning of their history? The fruit-bearing tree analogy encourages Korean theologians and biblical scholars to have confidence in uniquely Korean sources or what is given to Korean people, and employ them as theological sources and hermeneutical tools.

With these basic assumptions laid bare, a methodological discussion for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic will begin. It should be noted at this juncture that the term, ‘hermeneutic,’ in this thesis is used in a broad sense. The term in the present chapter indicates a more basic, human work of ‘interpretation,’ accessible to Korean, non-theologians’ *readings* of biblical texts. In Chapter 9, the term is also used to denote, in a more classical academic sense, the theory and methodology of the interpretation of biblical texts, in discussion of some selected ‘hermeneutical’ issues. As concluded in the previous (literature review) section, ‘distinctly Korean’ Christianity should firstly allow *Korea* and *Korean people* to be the subject or host of theology, encouraging Korean Christians to be more *self-critical and reflective* as well as self-confident as Koreans. Furthermore, for Christianity to be truly Korean, Korean Christians should be able to present their own understandings about essential messages of *Jesus* or the nature of Christianity in distinctly Korean expressions. Following these conclusions, the methodology for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic will be presented under the three sub-headings: Jesus-centred, spirit-centred, and Korea-centred.

## **JESUS-CENTRED**

Jesus-centredness is crucial in Korean hermeneutic. This is because the ultimate purpose of reading the Bible for Korean Christians is *to ‘meet’ with Jesus, listen to him, and follow him*. This life-long goal takes priority over other goals such as respect

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1986), 32.

for the great tradition of Christianity, agreement with the creeds and doctrines, or preservation of the gospel taught by early missionaries from the West. As they read the Bible, Koreans should be encouraged to listen to (the spirit of) Jesus and think about him independently from other people's information and instruction, and to express what they hear in their own words, phrases, metaphors and illustrations. I will further elaborate this 'Jesus-centred' hermeneutic, and also present some practical hermeneutical applications for the reading of John 14:6.

### **Response to existing 'portraits' of Jesus**

First, a response to the kind of question which might ask "what shall we do with the already-drawn 'portraits' of Jesus?" The two-millennia-long church history has produced plenty of descriptions and theories about Jesus. A distinctly Korean hermeneutic will turn to them as a good resource but not take them as "*kyogwasö*" or "textbooks with the answers in them."<sup>9</sup> Helpful here is an analogy of hospitality employed by Yi Ch'an-su.<sup>10</sup> As a good host does, so Korean Christians should welcome with respect the 'guests' or theories of Jesus brought to them through missionaries, and learn whatever is truthful and good about them. Many kind-hearted 'guests' have visited Korea with special gifts of Christian theologies, doctrines, creeds, biblical interpretations, and ecclesiastical theories. These are all precious resources for Koreans to receive and make the most of.

Chöng Kyöng-il affirms that the path of a distinctly Korean theology surely has sought rediscovery of what is inside us as well as connection with what is outside of us, thus seeking Koreanization as well as globalization.<sup>11</sup> As such, Korean indigenous theological efforts should not be "jingoistic"<sup>12</sup> or "unnecessarily and unfairly hostile to Western Christianity," as some scholars have criticized.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, "to be distinctly

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<sup>9</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 160.

<sup>10</sup> Yi Ch'an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 166-68. In regard to the tendency to use of indirect way of expressing truths such as using analogy, see the section, "Soteriological Effect," in Chapter 7.

<sup>11</sup> Chöng Kyöng-il, "*From Theology 'within' Korean to Theology 'of' Korea*," 285.

<sup>12</sup> Pak A-ron, *Early Morning Prayer*, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Seyoon, "Christianity and Korean Culture."

Korean cannot be a simple de-westernization or anti-westernization,” as Yi Ch’an Su argues; “the search of Korean Christianity itself is already indebted to the study from Western Christianity.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the voices of concern within KP are a good warning for the path of a distinctly Korean theology or hermeneutic, for it should be free from any attitude of indifference, animosity, or competition toward the ‘guests.’<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, a good host does not forget that he/she *is* the host. *Chugaekjōndo* or the ‘reversal of the host and guest’ is not desirable. In other words, the guest is not supposed to occupy the seat of the host and dictate Korean people’s theological thinking and unique approaches to Jesus. Further, a sensible host should be able to discern any harmful or unfitting behavior of the guest and defend his/her household.<sup>16</sup> It is out of this spirit that Ahn Byong-mu says that the path of a distinctly Korean Christianity should involve some degree of ‘de-westernization’ or ‘antithesis to Western theology.’<sup>17</sup>

How does this inform the reading of John 14:6 in this thesis? The reading will be done by respecting, as well as suspecting, the already-established, Western hermeneutical principles and accomplishments. On the one hand, the reading will make the most of the ‘gifts of guests’—various critical works, especially historical-critical information and literary critical analysis. On the other hand, this project will not surrender its spirit for fear of being called ‘non-orthodox,’ as it honestly responds to the Johannine Gospel.<sup>18</sup> In the sense of doing theology at the margin, not from the

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<sup>14</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 169-70.

<sup>15</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 167; Yi Kil-yong, “‘겨레-믿음-체험’의 신학자 탁사 최병헌” [‘Nation-Faith-Experience’ Theologian, Ch’oe Pyōng-hōn], in 이것이 한국신학이다 [*This is Korean Theology*], ed. Kim Kwang-sik (Seoul: Handŭl, 2008), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 168.

<sup>17</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *Minjung Theology*, 42-43; Ahn Byong-mu, “Seeking an Ideal Korean Christian,” 48-50. Chōng Yang-mo recalls his conversation with Ahn who is heard saying, “How powerful and proud the waves of Western theology are! Unless resisting them, we would be drowned in them.” Chōng Yang-mo, “심원의 신앙성찰” [Reflection on the Faith of Simwōn (or Ahn Byong-mu)], *Chōng Yang-mo’s Story*, 290. The problematic phenomenon of “Western colonization of academic methodologies in Korea” is pointed out by several Korean scholars. To name a few: Yi Ki-sang, *우리 말로 철학하기* [*Doing Philosophy in Our Language in This Land*] (P’aju: Sallim, 2003), 5-6; Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 156.

<sup>18</sup> Yi Ch’an-su encourages Korean theologians to guard their hearts against this possibility. Yi Ch’an-su, *Toward a Distinctly Korean Christianity*, 240-41.

centre, this approach shares common ground with other Asian theologians, and also those with liberation and feminist critical views.

### **‘Hierarchy’ among the books of the Bible**

A Jesus-centred hermeneutic involves a kind of ‘hierarchy’ among the books of the Bible. To elaborate, the Old Testament (OT) is approached as the scripture of Jesus, the book which Jesus loved to read and meditate on; the four gospels together record that Jesus quoted nearly sixty different verses from the OT, and made at least 120 allusions and more general references.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the OT is the matrix for Jesus’ religiosity; the socio-cultural tradition of the OT influences Jesus’ ‘language’—the words, idioms, phrases recorded in the gospels.<sup>20</sup> The four gospels in the NT receive more importance than the other books of the Bible because they constitute the best source of Jesus’ thoughts, passion and lifestyle. The remaining books in the NT provide a source that helps readers to see how the authors have experienced Jesus and what they want to say about him.

This kind of approach to the Bible keeps a certain distance from the literalistic reading based on the theory of ‘biblical inerrancy’ as well as the ‘Christocentric reading.’ Jesus-centred reading in this thesis does not adopt literalistic reading of the scriptures because even the Bible is treated as a resource, perhaps the best resource to help Koreans to understand Jesus. The books of the Bible, therefore, do not need to be venerated as infallible material; this idea is also present within Western scholarship.<sup>21</sup> Jesus-centred reading is not the same as the kind of ‘Christocentric reading’ that treats the OT primarily as a source for ‘fulfillment,’ i.e. the significant promises within the OT having been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus-centred reading acknowledges the independent value of the OT as scripture (for the

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<sup>19</sup> Steve Moyise, *Jesus and Scripture: Studying the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Jesus’ language’ will be further discussed in the section of ‘Literary Context’ in Chapter 9.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, John R.W. Stott says: “The God-ordained purpose of Scripture is to point and lead people to Christ. It was never intended as an end in itself, but as means to that end.” Stott goes on to say that “evangelical Christians are not bibliolaters.” John R.W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (London: Tyndale, 1970), 90, 101.

adherents to Judaism), though it attempts to read the OT as the scripture *of* Jesus, as Jesus might have read it.

Toward this end, I have been disciplining myself as a reader of the Bible by regular reading of Jesus' scripture (the OT) with the purpose of better understanding Jesus' religious background and finding the literary and cultural contexts of Jesus' language; the study of the OT is, to a Korean reader, a good hermeneutical practice for understanding the Johannine Jesus. As will be introduced in Chapter 10, Claus Westermann notes in regard to the significance of the OT for the reading of the Gospel of John: "It became clear to me that the Old Testament sheds light on many still unresolved issues pertaining to the interpretation of the Gospel of John."<sup>22</sup> The review of the biblical 'way' (Chapter 6) will introduce a few foundational themes which form Jesus' religiosity. And many of these are derived from a study of the OT.

### **Attention to the culture of Jesus and biblical texts**

This Jesus-centred hermeneutic maintains interest in the culturally-wrapped nature of the Bible as well as of Jesus. This is because to focus on the person of Jesus is to consider his humanity, and his humanity impels readers to consider him as a culturally-formed person. Jesus, being human, shares certain basic worldview elements with other contemporary fellow Jews.<sup>23</sup> Jesus' thoughts are embedded in ancient Jewish culture and developed from within the Jewish religious paradigm.<sup>24</sup> This encourages readers of Jesus' sayings in the NT to see *continuity* and also *discontinuity*, recognizing the common worldview in which Jesus partakes, and

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<sup>22</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Gospel of John in the Light of Old Testament*. Translated by Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), iv.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Kraft attempts to describe the characteristics of Jesus' worldview, which he shared with his contemporaries. To name a few, the assumption of the existence of God, and of the existence of a spirit world which is divided into two kingdoms, God's and Satan's; dependence on the Father; concern for the kingdom of God. Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 450.

<sup>24</sup> As Sandra M. Schneiders puts it, Jesus is a person who "encountered God in the tradition of Israel whose psalms were on his lips as he died." Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" Santa Clara Lecture, Santa Clara University, February 6, 2000. Source: [http://www.liturgy.co.nz/spirituality/reflections\\_assets/schneiders.pdf](http://www.liturgy.co.nz/spirituality/reflections_assets/schneiders.pdf) (accessed December 26, 2014).

discerning his *unique* theological and anthropological perspective or the kind of change that he envisioned within said worldview.<sup>25</sup>

This emphasis on the ancient Jewish, human person of Jesus entails a hermeneutical indicator: when reading Jesus' language, readers should assume a significant gap between his language and the readers. This idea has been argued by so many scholars that it is now almost a redundant statement.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the advantage of the availability of the ancient scriptures of the Bible in many vernacular languages such as English or Korean sometimes ironically deters readers from being "cautious interpreters of the Bible";<sup>27</sup> readers often forget to consider the gap and its implications. Jesus' language, like the language of the Bible, is an important element of "the framework of a culture."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, interpretive endeavour to read the words of Jesus, a first-century Jew, should make effort to examine the culturally-informed meanings and implications of the words. In light of this, the thesis reading of John 14:6 will make use of a socio-linguistic review of the word, 'way,' to examine its major concepts and soteriological suggestions in biblical tradition.

This focus on Jesus' humanity and his culture, one hopes, could help balance KP's dominant, 'high-Christological' view of Jesus. Perhaps based on the theory of 'virgin birth' Jesus is typically received as a being with no genuine earthly heritage. Holding Jesus as a universal figure, i.e. the 'saviour of the *world*,' also leaves little room to consider Jesus' own unique, cultural heritage. The most common view within KP in regard to Jesus' background is that Jesus is 'from heaven' in the literalistic sense.<sup>29</sup> This view is open to a theoretic problem of him becoming a docetic or ethereal 'saviour' who has descended to earth with a temporary human form in a

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<sup>25</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Encounters with Jesus: Uncover the Ancient Culture, Discover Hidden Meanings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> To name a few: Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Synoptic Gospels: Social-Science Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 4; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 9-10; Gary M. Burge, *Encounters with Jesus*, 7-10.

<sup>27</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Encounters with Jesus*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Jesus' being 'from heaven' is, at least in part, due to the literal and uncritical reading of passages such as: "the one who descended from heaven" (John 3:13); "I have come down from heaven" (John 6:38); "I am from above" (John 8:23).

cultural vacuum. Further, this view has created an unnecessary and unhelpful gap between Jesus and his believers, which discourages them from following his way. It would be a helpful reminder for KP members that to acknowledge the ‘humanness’ of the ‘holy’ Bible—written in human, socio-cultural expressions in certain genre—is neither disrespect to the holy book nor unfaithfulness to their lord Jesus.

### **Holistic approach**

A Jesus-centred hermeneutic seeks to understand the message of Jesus in a *holistic manner*. The holistic or integral way of thinking is biblical as well as traditionally Korean.<sup>30</sup> It is also based on the proverb, “actions speak louder than words,” as well as a biblical maxim, “A tree is known by its fruit” (Luke 6:44; Matt 7:16, 20), that Jesus’ words will be dealt with as a part of the essential message of Jesus rather than as an independent logion. This means practically that the Johannine Jesus’ saying under review (John 14:6) will be read against the background of his actions and lifestyle that are recorded in the NT. Theologically, as is Jesus’ character, so is his theology.<sup>31</sup> This principle will be extensively utilized for the discussion about the ‘exclusivist message in John 14:6’ (Chapter 10).

To introduce a few general applications of this integral approach, Jesus’ teaching about ‘persistent prayer’ until one receives an answer (Luke 18:1-8) should be considered together with his emphasis on the father’s full awareness of every one’s need even before one utters it (Matt 5:8). The Johannine Jesus’ language of ‘joy’ and ‘peace’ (John 14:27; 15:11; 17:13) should be understood alongside his agony, tears and anger (John 2:15-17; 11:33, 35; 12:27). In this thesis, the Johannine Jesus’ saying in focus (John 14:6) will be reviewed alongside six other salvific sayings within the same gospel (Chapter 11).

This integral approach overlaps with a traditional ‘canonical’ reading because the attempt to understand Jesus and his saying (John 14:6) will turn to many sources within the canon of the Bible that may witness to Jesus’ personal religious and

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<sup>30</sup> See the comparative review of the biblical ‘way’ and the Taoist/East-Asian ‘way’ (Chapter 8).

<sup>31</sup> Inspired by the work of James William McClendon, Jr: *Biography As Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).

cultural background, personhood, attitude of heart, logic, teaching, passion and mission.<sup>32</sup> The possible sources include the Gospel of John, the other gospels (the Synoptics), the rest of the NT and the OT. The distinctly Korean reading of Johannine passages in this thesis will be less interested in the differences between the Synoptic Jesus and the Johannine Jesus, but more keen to 'hear' the voice of Jesus that the Synoptic Gospels as well as other writings of the NT echo, thus supplementing the Gospel of John. Of course, this does not mean to be ignorant or unappreciative of the particular features that the Fourth Gospel exhibits. Instead, as Barton concludes, "We have to return again and again, not just to one gospel but to all four, and not just to the gospels but to the whole scriptural witness" in order to better appreciate "the Jesus of whom the gospels tell."<sup>33</sup>

### **Jesus' own hermeneutical method**

Last, a Jesus-centred hermeneutic should also mean to learn from Jesus' own hermeneutical method, by observing in Jesus' sayings and teachings the content of his quotations from the scripture available to him (the OT) as well as his interpretation of them in his teachings. For instance, we read Jesus' reminder of specific scriptural passages (Matt 12:3-7) and reinterpretation (Matt 19:4-9). In addition, Jesus' theological discussions with others, both formal and informal, are available abundantly in the NT (Matt 22:34-46; John 4:20-24; 8:33-47). Observation of such examples and learning from them should be an ongoing exercise through which we may understand Jesus' specific interest and focus, and how to read religious scriptures.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Wright defines the consideration of the canonical context as to ask questions such as: What does the rest of this book say? How does this individual book fit into the wider testament of either the NT or the OT? How does that sit within the total biblical canon? Christopher J.H. Wright, "Interpreting the Bible," 36.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Barton, "Many Gospels, One Jesus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, Markus Bockmuehl, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 182.

<sup>34</sup> There have been several studies into 'the NT use of the OT.' See, for instance, Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, eds. *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), and also a thorough research on Paul's interpretive method: Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989). Rare, however, is research on Jesus' interpretive method. One of the few examples which addresses Jesus'

Ch'a Chŏng-sik certainly has this practice in mind when he proposes that we should learn from Jesus' 'hermeneutic of difference.'<sup>35</sup> According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus indicates on several occasions that his hearers read scriptures one way, but he understands them differently (Matt 5:21-48). In my view, such hermeneutic of difference is not only allowed exclusively to Jesus; in contrast, as Jesus does, so we do.<sup>36</sup> Ch'a comments that Jesus' theological method shows a theology of *kil* or path; Jesus' thoughts are not fixed or settled in one place, but continue to emerge and develop on the road, literally and also symbolically.<sup>37</sup> Some theological thoughts that evolve from *kil* will be elaborated at the end of the thesis (Chapter 12). The 'hermeneutic of difference' seems to suit a distinctly Korean hermeneutic, not because it *wants* to be different but because it will want to be honest, continuing to follow the guidance of the spirit of truth. With this in mind, we will move on to the spirit-centred hermeneutic.

## **SPIRIT-CENTRED**

By 'spirit' in this discussion I do not necessarily refer to the 'third person' in the trinitarian God, but to the spirit of Jesus and/or 'the spirit of truth' who leads people "into all the truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The spirit-centred reading is closely related to both Jesus-centred and Korea-centred reading. A Jesus-centred hermeneutic is bound to be spirit-centred. This is because the hermeneutical goal to meet Jesus and listen to him is possible not only through reading the four gospels and

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hermeneutical method is found in Pamela D. H. Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>35</sup> Ch'a Chŏng-sik, "Finding the Way of Theology in Korea."

<sup>36</sup> To his own question, "Should we interpret Scripture with the same freedom that Paul did?" Richard B. Hays responds that "Paul's readings are materially normative for Christian theology and his interpretive methods are paradigmatic for Christian hermeneutics." Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 183. I would like to respond affirmatively to my own question: "Should we interpret scripture with the same freedom that Jesus did?"

<sup>37</sup> Ch'a Chŏng-sik, "Finding the Way of Theology in Korea."

the rest of the Bible, but also through a 'pneumatic reading' which seeks to listen to the spirit of Jesus who is *still* 'alive' and speaking.

### **Spiritually oriented**

A Korea-centred hermeneutic yields a spirit-centred reading because one of the most outstanding features of *Korean* religiosity is 'pursuit of the power of spirit.' According to the analysis of Chŏng Chin-hong, a scholar of religion, Korean traditional religiosity consists of two streams: one is to maintain the sense of *awe* toward 'transcendent heaven,' which is the source of all beings; the other is to desire to use the power of heaven for the benefit of their lives on earth, by attempting a 'connection' with such power.<sup>38</sup> Scholars often call the latter stream 'Shamanist spirituality.' When Christianity was introduced as a new religion to Korean people, this longing for 'connection with the power of the transcendent heaven' expressed itself through newly-Christian Koreans' extraordinary zeal for prayer; as Pak A-ron contends, 'early morning prayer' is something that is 'produced' by Korean people. With a similar passion for connection, a Korean reading of biblical texts seeks connection with biblical authors, anticipating the guidance of the spirit of truth. In view of this, the Johannine Gospel appeals to Korean people, at least for the reason that the gospel witnesses to the 'the spirit of truth' who guides people into all the truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

### **Prayer and meditation**

This pneumatic reading would require much prayer and meditation. Meditation is one of the Korean, traditional ways for seeking truth. When meditation becomes combined with any reading of religious scripture, it becomes 'reading and meditating' in the regular, repeated pattern until a moment, often unexpected, arrives when a certain element of truth is revealed to the reader. This phenomenon is called *tono*, a Korean Buddhist terminology. *Tono* is a moment of revelation of truth, a transforming moment wherein the power of enlightenment brings a powerful and positive change, especially in the *perspective* of the person who experiences it.

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<sup>38</sup> Chŏng Chin-hong, *Experience and Memory*, 115-20.

To be sure, pneumatic and meditative reading is not exclusive to a Korean hermeneutic. For instance, a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer, which is called *Lectio Divina* or 'Divine Reading,' finds its origin in the thoughts and practice of Origen as early as the third century CE.<sup>39</sup> It also should be noted that this reading neither discourages nor devalues any serious academic undertaking. Rather, equal emphasis is given to prayer and meditation, considering them as an essential and even preferred part of the hermeneutical process. Perhaps because the meditation route to theology is largely lacking in the academic world, Lee Jung Young, a Korean-American theologian, is heard saying that he deliberately spends "more time in meditation than in library research and more time in rereading the Bible than reinterpreting existing theological works" as he seeks biblical understanding regarding the trinity.<sup>40</sup>

### **Attention to human heart**

It should be also noted that in the culture where *tono* is sought after, especially in a religious fashion, the human heart is always in focus; *the heart that seeks the truth or the will of God* is believed to trump every other form of effort in understanding truth. In light of this, attention to one's heart is a strong recommendation for a spirit-centred reading. From within this perspective, one may argue that people with little education, but with a heart that is thirsty for truth and which deeply wants to follow the truth, are more likely to hear the message of Jesus than people with much theological training but without hearts for the truth. This finds its echo in one of the Johannine Jesus' sayings: "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will be able to discern the truth" (7:17).<sup>41</sup>

The present discussion resonates with Chŏn Ch'ang-hi's recommendation for Korean Christians in regard to how to read the Bible. As introduced in the literature

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<sup>39</sup> Vatican website, *Benedict XVI, General Audience*, May 2, 2007. Source: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20070502.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070502.html) (accessed January 12, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Trinity*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> This is my paraphrase of the saying, "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own" (John 7:17).

review, Chŏn Ch'ang-hi argues that the early Korean Christians' Bible reading method is evidence that the root of KP is not Western but distinctly Korean. Chŏn brings to our attention that they read the Bible through the framework of Korean people's narrative tradition which involves the structure of 'suffering and overcoming.'<sup>42</sup> To elaborate, it was out of their own problem of *han* or 'accumulated suppressed suffering' and their longing for 'salvation' from the suffering that early Korean Christians read biblical narratives, Jesus' stories, in particular.<sup>43</sup> They then were able to find both 'suffering and salvation' or 'problems and solutions' within the gospel narratives.<sup>44</sup> Chŏn's proposal to KP regarding Bible reading is to retrieve this 'literal reading' (*sensus literalis*) tradition with which KP began. Chŏn quickly emphasizes, however, that this 'literal reading' is "not the literalistic reading based on the theory of 'biblical inerrancy.'"<sup>45</sup> Rather, it is the reading that "acknowledges the dynamic activity and value of the gospel narrative," which works for *the hearts that long for the salvation of God*.<sup>46</sup>

As pointed out earlier (in Chapter 3), the typical Korean Christian's approach to the Bible is situated in the foundational values of hierarchical order and obedience, characteristic to Korean Confucian tradition; hence, a literalistic reading accompanied with deep reverence is the norm. Agreeing with this, Ahn Byong-mu observes another feature of Korean people's reading of the Bible: reading scripture verbally and repeatedly without making any critiques. Ahn sees in this method some influence from the Confucian teaching, *toksŏbaekp'yŏnŭijat'ong* (讀書百遍意自通), a principle which states that if you read a book one hundred times, its meaning will *automatically* come to you.<sup>47</sup> Ahn sees this method, as well as 'literalistic reading based on biblical inerrancy,' mainly negatively. However, this way of reading—

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<sup>42</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition," 227. Chŏn bases this argument on the findings of Cho Tong-il: Cho Tong-il, *구비 문학의 세계 [The World of Korean Folk Literature]* (Seoul: Saemunsa, 1980), 126-144.

<sup>43</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition," 227.

<sup>44</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition," 238.

<sup>45</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition," 237.

<sup>46</sup> Chŏn Ch'ang-hi, "The Role of Minjung's Narrative Tradition," 237.

<sup>47</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *Minjung Theology*, 47-52.

repeated reading—can be re-appropriated as a part of authentically Korean hermeneutical practice which emphasizes: *regular reading* of the Bible combined with *meditation, with a heart* that genuinely wants to understand the will of God, and *through the paradigm of ‘suffering and salvation.’*

The discussion so far observes that KP’s reading of the Bible has been primarily influenced by a traditional Confucian manner of reading scriptures. Therefore, I would like to suggest at this juncture that KP leaders and pastors may benefit from the Buddhist way of seeking truth: attending to one’s heart as one longs and waits in silence for the enlightening moment of *tono*, taking the scriptures as the ‘finger that points to the moon’ or the means that points to the truth, whilst retaining respect for the scripture. Thus, an encouragement to read not the letters but the spirit within the scripture.

The reading of the Gospel of John in this thesis—more narrowly, the effort to ‘meet with Jesus’ with the guidance of ‘the helper’ that the Gospel of John witnesses to (John 16:13)—will go together with prayer and meditation. This includes a regular checking on one’s heart and occasional reception of purification of the heart. There is additional value in this practice in being personally open to that truth, and in being transformed by it, but this cannot be guaranteed. Negligence and bias in academic work can presumably also be mirrored by negligence and bias in meditation.

## **KOREA-CENTRED**

As was noted in the literature review, those who think that KP is not yet a Korean Christianity advocate for a reversal of priority in the subject of doing theology: from Christianity to Korea. This reversal requires the following elements.

### **Self-confidence and self-knowledge**

In line with the analogy of hospitality (used in the ‘Jesus-centred’ section), Korean people should have a sense of confidence as a ‘host’ so that a theology or biblical understanding of Korean people will be distinctly Korean. This means, first of all, that Koreans should be able to think *independently, and come up with their own*

*understanding, descriptions and expressions*, as they read various books in the Bible. A quiet self-confidence may grow inside Korean hearts as their self-knowledge increases, especially the *knowledge of deep values and salvific truths within what is already given, what is theirs already*. This self-knowledge requires study of Korean history, traditional religions and cultural heritage as well as an understanding of one's own worldview. This study is, metaphorically speaking, the task of finding 'wells' that have offered good water to Korean people,<sup>48</sup> or 'ingredients' that grow in Korean soil and are made into food which Koreans have lived by. These areas of self-knowledge deserve further comment.

*Korean History*. To seek to re-read the history of Korea *with the spirit of truth* would be a helpful exercise to those who search for a Korean hermeneutic. There are people who have done it, among whom is Ham Sök-hön, a most respected person in Korea.<sup>49</sup> Ham recognized the ongoing presence of 'suffering' in the four-thousand-year long Korean history, which led him to address Korea as the "queen of suffering" in his book, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*.<sup>50</sup> Most suffering and humiliation, which Korea endured throughout her history, resulted from the invasion of neighbouring people groups and nations. In the midst of a history replete with suffering, however, Ham discerned God's *hesed* or 'relentless and enduring love' for Korean people.<sup>51</sup> God's *hesed* was seen especially in God's chastising hands upon Korean people which would not be drawn back until the people came to understand and practice the will of God.

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<sup>48</sup> Inspired by the symbolic title, "*We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*" (London: SCM Press, 1983), written by Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the leading figures in Liberation theology.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Adams, an American missionary who served Korean churches for 30 years, describes Ham in the following words: "Ham Sok-hon (1901-1989) was a Quaker who became one of Korea's most astute social and theological critics. A leading dissident he was imprisoned on numerous occasions by the Japanese, the Russian army, and the dictatorial governments in Korea led by Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-hee, and Chun Doo-hwan. Known simply as 'Teacher Ham,' he founded several journals, taught courses to thousands on an informal basis, and wrote hundreds of essays." Daniel J. Adams, "Christ, Culture, and the Story of Korean Theology," *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology* 5 (2012): 73.

<sup>50</sup> Ham Sök-hön, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 110, 456-58, and 486.

<sup>51</sup> Ham Sök-hön, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, passim.

Ham's looking at Korean history through the interpretive lens of 'suffering that leads to redemption' is perhaps not far from the apostle Paul's revisiting of his own people's history through the lens of the cross of Jesus. What Ham discerned from Korean history—"God's *hesed* or 'relentless and enduring love' for God's people"—in fact constitutes one of the major themes in the OT.<sup>52</sup> Minjung theologians similarly contend that "the history of Korea is as sacred as the history of the biblical revelation."<sup>53</sup>

*Traditional Religious Teachings.* Keel Hee-sung notes: "one of the most important requirements for doing theology with Asian resources is the theologian's in-depth knowledge of Asian religio-philosophical traditions. But unfortunately it is in this area that Korean theologians are in general ill-prepared."<sup>54</sup> Korea has a rich religious tradition, consisting of such major religions as Shamanism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Certain worldviews, values and *telos* laid within these religions have supported Korean people in their life journeys, which merits recognition and further study. As a cautionary remark, study of these religions should be done with an intention to find strengths as well as weaknesses in their teachings and practices over the history of Korea.

*Korean Cultural Heritage.* Traditional folktales, songs, proverbs, art and drama make up significant parts of Korean cultural heritage. Minjung theologians have already recognized that minjung or poor people's stories constitute an important theological source.<sup>55</sup> Son Ho-hyŏn reminds us: "minjung do not leave written history behind. Therefore, a proper understanding of history calls for the task of searching

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<sup>52</sup> *Hesed* is a divine characteristic of "the love, compassion and kindness upon which God's covenant with [ancient] Israel was founded". P. H. Towner, "*hesed*," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000): 660.

<sup>53</sup> A. Sung Park, "Minjung Theology," 9.

<sup>54</sup> Keel Hee-sung, "Korean Theology: Past and Present," 90.

<sup>55</sup> Minjung stories include not only *silhwa* (true stories of the oppressed) but also *mindam* (folk-tales), *t'alch'um* and *yŏn'gŭk* (scenario of the mask dance and play), *pansori* (Korean opera) and *hyangga* (native songs). A. Sung Park, "Minjung Theology," 9.

for ‘forgotten texts of *minjung*’ such as folk tales, proverbs, art works, or court records.”<sup>56</sup>

In fact, the true strength of Korean spirituality may be found in this form of cultural heritage which has been developed naturally and transmitted orally among common, poor people. According to Yi Ö-ryöng, the culture of Korea belongs to the ‘culture of the ear,’ which stands in contrast to the ‘culture of the eye.’ The former is oriented to be intuitive, insightful, and more sensitive to the spiritual realm, while the latter, which values visible proof, is scientific, analytical and rational.<sup>57</sup> There is potential for Korean theologians to contribute to the understanding of God’s truth through studying their traditional proverbs, folk stories, songs and dramas which have been transmitted orally. As mentioned earlier, *minjung* theologians have pioneered in this path; their work needs to be revisited and enriched by many other Korean theologians. In the reading of John 14:6, especially the reading through the lens of Korean *kil*, I will often turn to some of the well-loved Korean poems whose theme concerns *kil* or path.

Through studies of Korean history, traditional religions and cultural heritage that are primarily orally transmitted, *certain distinctly Korean values and salvific truths* may be recognized. Deep religio-philosophical concepts such as *wu*, *wu-wei* and *tao* are also found, which may complement traditional Western Christian paradigms.<sup>58</sup> Foundational ideals or *telos* of life couched in Korean idioms and maxims include: *hongikingan* (‘seeking the good of a great number of people’),<sup>59</sup> *kyöngch’önaein* (‘revering heaven and loving other human-beings’), *sap’ilgwijöng* (‘what goes around comes around’ or ‘justice will prevail’), and *in’gwaüngbo* (‘one reaps what one sows’).

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<sup>56</sup> Son Ho-hyön, *인문학으로 읽는 기독교이야기 [Reading Christianity from the Perspective of Human Science]* (Seoul: Handül, 2008), 81-82.

<sup>57</sup> Yi Ö-ryöng, *This is Korea*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> These concepts will be fully discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>59</sup> “*Hongikingan*” or ‘for the good of a great number of people’ appears in the *Tan’gun* myth in Korea. Yun Söng-börm sees that “Korean *Tan’gun* myth has a characteristic of salvation history through the concept of ‘*hongikingan*’ in it.” Yi Chong-ch’an, “해천 윤성범의 ‘말씀절로’의 신학: 성의 신학” [*Haech’ön Yun Söng-börm’s ‘Malssüm Chölllo’ Theology: Hermeneutic of Integrity*], in *This is Korean Theology*, 181.

These popular maxims and phrases further reveal certain basic tenets of belief held by Korean people even before Christianity was introduced: 'priority of communal happiness over individual,' 'belief in and reverence for the one on high, which is interconnected with loving one's neighbours,' 'belief in final justice, and reaping what one sows.' These ideas and beliefs are Korean people's precious possessions. Korean Christians would do well to let these Korean values or *telos* illumine and affirm, as well as challenge and reinterpret, established biblical principles, while letting biblical messages do the same to Korean beliefs.<sup>60</sup>

### **Honouring Korean people's life experience**

As introduced at the beginning of the methodology, a distinctly Korean theology and hermeneutic assume the involvement of the creator God in the history of Korea. Because God is the giver of life, Korean Christians are entitled to consider that whichever source *has helped Korean people to be able to live God's gift of life at their best* is part of God's redemptive work. This notion finds a parallel 'partner' in a statement of Daniel Migliore: "The essence of sin is probably grasped only when it is seen as a countermovement against the grace of God."<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Korean theologians need to recognize various sources of grace that have been experienced by Korean people. "Everything which belongs to 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' is properly to be recognized and acknowledged as the fruit of the activity of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5.22-23, cf. Rom. 14.17)."<sup>62</sup>

The sources that have helped Korean people to live full, meaningful (or truly human) lives should receive importance equal to biblical sources.<sup>63</sup> The Lausanne Covenant states: "Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty

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<sup>60</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, "Christian Faith and Culture," 446.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Migliore, who, together with others, tries to reconsider and redefine theological categories of sin and redemption. Daniel L. Migliore, "Sin and Self-loss: Karl Barth and the Feminist Critique of Traditional Doctrines of Sin," in *Many Voices, One God: Being Faithful in a Pluralistic World*, eds. Walter Brueggemann and George W. Stroup (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 146.

<sup>62</sup> The Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality.

<sup>63</sup> Living to be 'truly human' is one of the highest ideals (*telos*) for Korean people.

and goodness. Because man has fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. So culture must always be tested by Scripture and we need discernment to evaluate it.”<sup>64</sup> However, the suggestion to test cultural products “by Scripture” should not be uncritically accepted by Korean theologians. It is problematic for the specific reason that many ‘biblical principles’ have already been prepared predominantly by Western readings of the Bible. And some of these ‘biblical’ understandings may encumber a Korean reading of the Bible.<sup>65</sup>

Koreans have always sought and read God’s truths, even before the introduction of Christianity. They had their own hermeneutical tools and resources such as traditional religious scriptures and teachings, and, more significantly, *nature* to teach them about the ‘way’ or ‘tao’ in a most gentle and assuring manner (in silence).<sup>66</sup> What Koreans read from these sources has helped them to revere life and persevere even in the midst of all kinds of hardship. For a concrete example, ‘reading a tree’ has yielded an effect upon Korean people similar to the effect of Bible reading. There are countless examples among Korean people who have been deeply inspired by trees,<sup>67</sup> but for the present I will briefly relate my own experience.

During my first twenty years of life, I underwent poverty and family violence to such a degree that I felt tempted to give up on life. However, a tree, a large tree, ‘saved’ me as I began to *hear* the tree saying to me: “Look at me. I was once only a tiny seed. No one cared to see me growing. But I never stopped growing, and finally became a big tree. So, you also keep living and do the best you can each day.” The

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in John R. Davis, *Poles Apart: Contextualizing the Gospel in Asia* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1998), 264.

<sup>65</sup> A concrete, personal example, regarding Western scholar(s)’s suspicion of the validity of a Taoist reading of the biblical passages, was illustrated in Introduction of the thesis. As will be seen in due course, the Korean reading in Part IV and the subsequent theological reflections in Part V would not be possible if the thesis writer only read the Johannine Gospel within the present Western biblical paradigm.

<sup>66</sup> This point will be further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>67</sup> This idea is also shared by short essays such as: Sin Chi-sik’s “*Karosu*” [Trees on the Street], Kim Kwang-söp’s “*Namu*” [Trees], Kim Kyo-sin’s “*Platanus*” [The Tree of Platanus]. Source: <http://blog.daum.net/yoont3/11300151> (accessed September 15, 2015). In addition, the following books written by two individual pastors contain their experiences of closeness to God through nature: Cho Hwa-sun, *낮추고 사는 즐거움 [Joy of Humble Life]* (Seoul: Tosol, 2005), 29-30, 54-90; Ko Chin-ha, *나무신부님과 누에성자 [The Tree Priest and the Caterpillar Saint]* (Seoul: Segyesa, 2001), especially, 24-30, 153-160.

tree remained my mentor and friend, and whenever I felt like giving up, I looked at the tree and persevered. This was an experience I had before becoming a Christian and beginning to read the Bible. After I became a Christian, the message in the Bible also helped me to persevere and continue to seek God's way. I can now say that the tree was and is a living being, whose function is similar to that of Jesus, a good guide and companion in my walk.

Cherishing this precious 'friend'—the tree—influences my reading of the Bible. Nature becomes an interpretive lens, and I come to notice more easily, both in the OT and the NT, that nature (and the tree) is a significant literary tool with which to communicate God's truth and wisdom. For instance, the Hebrew people, 'chosen' by God, are compared to a (oak) tree that was planted by God (Isa 61:3; alluded to in Isa 11; cf. Ps 62:12-15) or a vineyard that God cared for (Isa 5:1-7; alluded to in John 15:1-10). The Johannine Jesus also turns to nature when he talks about the grace and truth of God (John 4:14; 12:24; 15:1-10).

Perhaps working on a hermeneutic of nature is an appropriate task for some Korean theologians. The insights they come upon may shed new light on existing discussions about general revelation or natural theologies. This is not to say that a special attachment to trees or nature exists exclusively among Koreans. According to Cecil Hargreaves, the 'living tree' or 'the root and the branch' is a very popular metaphor that many Asian Christian writers use.<sup>68</sup> Further, 'general revelation' has long been a part of the Western Christian faith tradition, and there are individual examples of people to whom nature is a significant presence in their faith journey.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, I argue that Korean people's relationship with nature is extraordinary, which will be elaborated further in Chapter 7, the review of the taoistic 'way.'

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<sup>68</sup> Cecil Hargreaves, *Asian Christian Thinking: Studies in a Metaphor and Its Message* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1972), 3-4.

<sup>69</sup> An apt example from the Western tradition is Brother Lawrence of the 17<sup>th</sup> century who went through a 'conversion' with the help of a winter tree: "During that winter, upon seeing a tree stripped of its leaves and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed and after that the flowers and fruit appear, Brother Lawrence received a high view of the Providence and Power of God which has never since been effaced from his soul. This view had perfectly set him loose from the world and kindled in him such a love for God that he could not tell whether it had increased in the forty years that he had lived since." Source: <http://thepracticeofthepresenceofgod.com/onlinetext/> (accessed January 15, 2016).

### Asking one's own questions

Asking one's own questions is of great importance in a Korea-centred hermeneutic. Theological questions which arise from various cultures differ much. Western missiologists inform us out of their field experiences that each culture has a unique set of questions.<sup>70</sup> Paul Tillich, who takes interest in the co-relation between the Christian message and individual culture, acknowledges that to Asians "the Christian answer is no answer because they have not asked the question to which Christianity is supposed to give the answer."<sup>71</sup>

John V. Taylor (1914-2001), an English missionary to Uganda (1945-1954), points out the crucial issue of questioning:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?<sup>72</sup>

C.S. Song takes this matter seriously in the path of a distinctly Asian theology. Song suggests to Asian theologians that they should start with questions, problems and concerns that arise from their own life situations and experiences; an irrelevant question will not do much good to the questioner or to the people he/she communicates with.<sup>73</sup> Finding a common company in Song, Ahn Byong-mu asserts that setting up questions in theology is a crucial matter because "questions dictate answers."<sup>74</sup> It is, therefore, important that Korean Christians bring their own questions to biblical texts and find answers by themselves. Chŏng Chae-hyŏn further offers pertinent advice to those who do ask questions: "Questioners should not fear

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<sup>70</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, R. D. Shaw, and Tite Tiéno, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 370. See also Rynkiewich, "Mission, Hermeneutics, and the Local Church," 53-54.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1959), 204-05 (emphasis original).

<sup>72</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>73</sup> C. S. Song, *Tracing the Footsteps of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 5-6.

<sup>74</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, "Seeking an Ideal Korean Christian," 349.

the possibility that answers may not be found easily; hence they should wait patiently because hurriedly-found 'answers' are often problematic."<sup>75</sup>

A few concrete examples of distinctly Korean questions would be helpful at this point. One of the burning questions for Koreans concerns the lives of their ancestors. As Kim Kyong-jae points out, many Korean Christians face a dilemma due to a popular teaching within KP that their ancestors, who put faith in the religious teaching (available to them at the time), actually 'worshipped idols' and are, for that reason, destined for the eternal judgment of (Christian) God.<sup>76</sup> Hence, Korean Christians wrestle inwardly with the following questions: how did our ancestors live their lives? Who or what gave them the strength to live and to love so well that they were loved by everyone who knew them and are still remembered with sweet-sadness? How did God reveal God-self to them? How does God evaluate their lives? How would the positive effect of their lives on their descendants and others be counted in the kingdom of God? How would Jesus have dealt with them?

Conversely, Koreans Christians do not need to dwell on the questions which do not interest them much nor the answers to such questions. For instance, if their thoughts are not preoccupied with the mechanism by which to obtain forgiveness of sin or righteousness, or if they are not interested in a Christological question such as "Is Jesus divine or human," then their Christian faith does not need to be based on such doctrines as 'substitutionary death of Jesus,' 'justification by faith' or the 'trinitarian God.'

Thus, Korean Christians need to be encouraged to ask their own questions, and further, to deeply think about what the creator God might be asking them. It is more common for humans to approach God with various questions (sometimes with accusations) than to wait to hear God's questions for humans. Ham Sök-hön, therefore, encourages us to think about God's questions for us (and answer the questions): "God is word, the one who speaks, and also the one who asks; human

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<sup>75</sup> Chöng Chae-hyön, 망치로 신학하기 [*Doing Theology with a Hammer*] (P'aju: Handül, 2006), 229, 251-52. A suggestion similar to Chöng's is found in C. S. Song, *Tracing the Footsteps of God*, 6-7.

<sup>76</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, 해석학과 종교신학: 복음과 한국종교와의 만남 [*Hermeneutics and Theology of Religions: Encounter of the Gospel and Korean Religions*] (Seoul: Han'guk Sinhakyön'guso, 1994), 5. His own sense of suspicion and refusal of such teaching ultimately gave birth to *Hermeneutics and Religious Theology*.

beings must be ready to answer God's questions."<sup>77</sup> The kind of questions people consider as God's questions are bound to vary depending on different cultures as well as individual persons.

I posit that an archetypal Korean theological question revolves around 'how,' rather than 'who' (such as "who is Jesus" or "who is God?") or 'what' (such as "what should I do to obtain eternal life?").<sup>78</sup> A Korean mind assumes a *given*, namely, *life*. And wisdom, which is required for living the life, invites the 'how' question. A Korean Buddhist monk Pöpnynun advises in one of his public lectures: "Approach life with the 'how' question, not with the 'why.' For example, ask how one should live, rather than why one is born. Life is a given, and every life has the right to enjoy a happy life."<sup>79</sup> Keel Hee-sung confirms that a Korean mind seeks to know *how* to live the *given* life without further, radical questions that seek the *archē* or beginning of all things (as Western Christian metaphysics does).<sup>80</sup> Admittedly, Keel acknowledges that this focus on the 'how' instead of the 'why' or the 'who' can be a weakness of Eastern naturalism, being interested primarily in 'horizontal' relationships but not in 'vertical' relational questions about the giver of life or the ultimate causation of the order and harmony of the world.<sup>81</sup>

Despite certain weaknesses, the question, "*How shall we live,*" has its own strength and legitimate place among the theological questions that should be asked.

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<sup>77</sup> Ham Sök-hön, *종교인은 죽었다: 함석헌 전집 3 [Religious People Are Dead: Complete Works of Ham Sök-hön 3]* (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1999), 277, quoted in Chöng Chae-hyön, *Doing Theology with a Hammer*, 227.

<sup>78</sup> According to Jewish scholar of sciences of religion and NT, Pinchas Lapide, Christianity is a religion which has long been interested in questions of 'who' (such as 'who Jesus is'), while the quest for 'what' has been the Jewish concern, which is observed in questions such as "*What* must we do to perform the works of God?" (John 6:28) or "*What* must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18). Quoted in Hans Waldenfels, *Jesus Christ and the Religions* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 22-23. For more about Lapide, Waldenfels offers his book, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie* (Schöningh: Paderborn, 2005), 233ff.

<sup>79</sup> Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsaTtfXmbk> (Feb 28, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 104-06.

<sup>81</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 105-07. Keel adds that Eastern naturalism contains a deep spirituality and religiosity even though it does not bring God the Creator into discussion, which is quite different from Western naturalism that characteristically begins with rejection of a supernatural God.

The reading of John 14:6 will also be approached with this Korean question, with expectation to find some answers therein.

### Expressing in Korean language

Language and culture “have grown together.”<sup>82</sup> Language is known to be the most honest and faithful witness to, and bearer of, the thoughts of a people group who use the language. In fact, “*Han’gŭl* or the Korean language is one of the most important factors that makes Korean people uniquely Korean.”<sup>83</sup> If studied carefully, many simple, originally (not borrowed from Chinese) Korean nouns and verbs reveal some deep, Korean philosophical and religious ideas and wisdom.<sup>84</sup> Ku Mi-jŏng finds such wisdom in several mono-syllabic Korean nouns such as *sal* (‘flesh’), *mul* (‘water’), and *kil* (‘path’), and develops her Christian theology accordingly.<sup>85</sup>

One may also examine Korean verbs. To illustrate an example, the verb, *p’ulda* (‘to untie’) entails undercurrents of Korean soteriological ideals.<sup>86</sup> The transitive verb *p’ulda* is often used together with the following nouns as its object: problem, knot, vault, stress, body, lock, nose. In each case, *p’ulda* means: to solve (problems), to untie (the knot), to loosen (the vault), to get rid of (strain or stress), to free (body, which means to give birth to a baby), to open (the lock), and to blow (the nose).<sup>87</sup> *P’ulda* is also the only verb that interacts with the minjung-theologically-laden noun,

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<sup>82</sup> Benjamin L. Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," in *Language, Culture, and Personality: Essays in Honor of Edward Sapir*, ed. Leslie Spier (Menasha: Sapir Memorial Publication Fund, 1941). Source: <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/library/extra4/sloan/mousesite/Secondary/Whorfframe2.html> (accessed March 3, 2011), no page.

<sup>83</sup> No Myŏng-sik, “기독교와 한국문화의 전망” [Prospect of Christianity and Korean Culture], in *Christianity and Interpretation of History*, 291.

<sup>84</sup> Yi Ki-sang, *Doing Philosophy in Our Language*, passim.

<sup>85</sup> Ku Mi-jŏng, *한글자로 신학하기 [Doing Theology in Monosyllabic Words]* (Seoul: Taehan Kidokgyosŏhoe, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Yi Ŏ-ryŏng, “한국어로 본 한국인” [*Understanding Korean People Through the Korean Language*], in *This is Korea*, 320-322.

<sup>87</sup> The italic parts in the following passage are translated in Korean Bibles with the conjugated forms of the Korean verb, *p’ulda*: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you *loose* on earth will *be loosed* in heaven” (Matt 16:19).

*han*, meaning to ‘solve or bring justice to’ *han*.<sup>88</sup> When any form of unwholesome human relationship is put right, this phenomenon is expressed as “the relationship has become ‘*p’ulida*.’”<sup>89</sup>

This brief overview of the Korean verb, *p’ulda*, reveals that Korean people see any imperfect, unresolved, less-than-desirable situation as something like an ‘entangled ball of thread.’ The verb *p’ulda*, with its implication of releasing undesirable and harmful blockage or tension (physically, mentally, emotionally and relationally) and of being restored to the most ideal state, has much potential to help Korean Christians to understand salvation in a more concrete and applicable way. There are other verbs, such as *toeda* (‘to become’), *mǒkta* (‘to eat’), and *toragada* (‘to return’), that can also be utilized to express elements of salvation in a distinctly Korean way.<sup>90</sup>

Many more Korean words and phrases are waiting to be employed as hermeneutical tools. In fact, a few Korean scholars have attempted a distinctly Korean hermeneutic by expressing their understanding about God, Jesus, the spirit, salvation and sin in a uniquely Korean way by using Korean words and phrases. Yu Yǒng-mo (1890-1981) is the pioneer and practitioner *par excellence* in this effort. Yu refers to God using an oxymoron, namely, *Ŏpsi Kyesin I*, whose literal meaning is ‘the one who *is* without existing.’ Yu calls Jesus *hyoja* (‘good son’) and *ch’amsaram* (‘true human being’).<sup>91</sup> Ryu Dong-shik finds that Christian salvation or *telos* in human life is *han mǒtjin sam* to Korean people. The downside of this terminology is that its meaning is so deeply multifaceted that it requires an essay to describe it; to translate it simply as the ‘life that is great, beautiful and enjoyable’ does not do the phrase

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Han’ has been chosen by several Korean minjung theologians as a theme which represents Korean people’s deep-seated emotion. A. Sung Park contends: “Dealing with the Minjung’s Han creatively is the task of Minjung theology. The goal of Minjung theology is to learn the Han of the Minjung, to unravel its historical complexity, and to transform it for constructing God’s kingdom.” A. Sung Park, “Minjung Theology,” 3.

<sup>89</sup> ‘*P’ulida*’ is the passive form of the verb, ‘*p’ulda*.’

<sup>90</sup> The verb, *mǒkta* or to eat, is introduced in the review of “Eating Jesus’ Flesh” in Chapter 11.

<sup>91</sup> Chǒng Yang-mo, “다석 유영모 선생의 신앙” [Yu Yǒng-mo’s Faith], in 다석 유영모의 동양사상과 신학 [Yu Yǒng-mo’s Thoughts and Theology: Asian Understanding of Christianity], eds. Kim Hǔng-ho and Yi Chǒng-bae (Seoul: Sol, 2002), 85.

justice, failing to convey the full array of its nuances.<sup>92</sup> This complexity is in fact a cause for criticism. Kim Seyoon, for instance, frowns at this phrase, calling it “artificial and arbitrary.”<sup>93</sup>

The best Korean expression that I have ever encountered which attempts to explain what it means to ‘believe in Jesus’ is: “a believer’s *p’alchasogwan* is the same as that of Jesus,” which is expressed by Chǒng Yang-mo.<sup>94</sup> *P’alchasogwan* is a traditional Korean word that denotes ‘what happens as a result of the fate or destiny that a person is born with.’ Chǒng chooses the word *p’alchasogwan*, which might sound fatalistic and deterministic to non-Koreans, in order to stress the importance of *oneness or union with Jesus* in Christian’s lives;<sup>95</sup> the lives of Christians must reflect Jesus’ lifestyle, forming a community that shares Jesus’ destiny. Chǒng also describes Jesus as “the person who has experienced God *kip’i kip’i* (literally, ‘deeply deeply’) and has embodied God *malke malke* (literally, ‘clearly clearly’).”<sup>96</sup> Chǒng’s theological expressions sound truly Korean, beautiful, easy to understand, and therefore, clearly instructive. In the thesis reading of John 14:6, I anticipate the Korean word *kil* (‘path’) will function similarly, leading us to deeper and broader theological suggestions.

Hiebert views that language is the “encoder of the worldview” of the people who use it. In my view, this statement should include the interrelationship between the general writing style of people and their culture.<sup>97</sup> I shall briefly comment here about writing style. Kim Yǒng-guk reports in his research on the interrelationship “between sentence structure (word order) and cultural structure” that English-

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<sup>92</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, *P’ungnyu Theology*, 56-57.

<sup>93</sup> Kim Seyoon, “Christianity and Korean Culture.”

<sup>94</sup> Chǒng Yang-mo, *Chǒng Yang-mo’s Story*, 40.

<sup>95</sup> The literal meaning of ‘*p’alcha*’ is the “four pillars and the eight characters” that indicate the four elements: the year, month, day and hour of one’s birth.

<sup>96</sup> Koreans often repeat an adverb with the purpose of emphasizing it. Hence, the repeat of *kip’i* means ‘as deeply as possible.’ Chǒng Yang-mo, *Chǒng Yang-mo’s Story*, 39. The descriptions of Jesus which Keel Hee-sung and Kang Wǒn-yong come up with are similar to Chǒng’s. Keel Hee-sung, “하느님은 왜 인간이 되셨나?” [Why Did God Become a Human Being?]. Source: [http://well.hani.co.kr/?mid=media&act=dispMediaListArticles&tag=길희성&document\\_srl=558831](http://well.hani.co.kr/?mid=media&act=dispMediaListArticles&tag=길희성&document_srl=558831) (accessed June 18, 2015), no page; Kang Wǒn-yong, *The Christ Whom I Believe*, 64-67.

<sup>97</sup> P. G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 141.

speaking people, in academic prose, especially, value clarity and explicit expression, often addressing their major point at the beginning of a paragraph.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, people in the East, including Koreans, tend to prioritize humility and human relationship above clarity of the message, and express their opinions indirectly; therefore the main point in Korean speech or writing often appears toward the end of a paragraph. Kim's conclusion is hardly new; rather it is already widely acknowledged.<sup>99</sup> However, Kim's research is noteworthy in that he reaches such a conclusion through examining the idiosyncrasies of Korean sentence structure or word order.

With a writing style that is clearly different from that of a Westerner, how can a Korean theologian write so as not to lose her identity while studying in the predominantly Western-based academic tradition? A Korean philosopher, who seeks to think and express in a more Korean way, is aware of this dilemma as he says:

We Koreans believe that 'The Tao that is spoken is not the real Tao.' In contrast, Westerners believe only in what is expressed in words. That we Koreans do not express enough is problematic. By now we have learned from Westerners about the value of speaking clearly, but we still hesitate to express truth verbally. This is because we are deeply aware of the limitation of human words. . . . We need to learn Westerners' games, methods and rules which they have established in the context of their lives, and to express truth as we perceive it by using more explanatory words and sentences.<sup>100</sup>

I would like to suggest a kind of 'dual writing' or 'inclusive writing' as a possibility, using indirect, poetic, metaphoric, implicit expressions as well as direct, narrative, scientific, explicit ones. I have already turned to the tree metaphor and fruit-bearing and hospitality analogies as I develop my argument in this methodology

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<sup>98</sup> Kim Yöng-guk, "문장 구조(어순)와 의식 구조 사이의 상관관계: 한국어와 영어 비교 연구" [Interrelationship between sentence structure (word order) and cultural structure : A case study in Korean and English], *영미연구 [Journal of British and American Studies]* 27 (2012): 290-92. Source: <http://builder.hufs.ac.kr/user/ibas/No27/12.pdf> (accessed September 20, 2015).

<sup>99</sup> Chinese scholars such as Fung Yu-Lan and Zhang Fa comment on the perceived 'problem' of Chinese writing style—terse, implicit and even obscure—vis-à-vis Western writing style. Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1948), 12; Zhang Fa, *中西美學與文化精神 [A Comparison of Aesthetics and Worldview between China and the West]*, translated by Yu Chung-ha (Seoul: Purönsup, 1999), 67-84.

<sup>100</sup> Yi Ki-sang, *Doing Philosophy in Our Language*, 25.

section, and I will occasionally communicate through poems, too. The more important themes I face, such as the *essence* of the reading of John 14:6, the more metaphoric and vague language I would favour and seek. Hence, the “reading through the Korean *ki*” (in Chapter 10) will conclude with a poem titled simply “John 14:6.”

## **SUMMARY**

In summary of this methodology section, major hermeneutical focus for a distinctly Korean reading of John 14:6 is divided into three interrelated areas: Jesus, the spirit of truth, and Korean people. First, a Jesus-centred reading means, as the phrase itself denotes, that the main focus of hermeneutical endeavour is (to understand) the person Jesus. This gives freedom to Korean readers, the freedom with which to understand Jesus through their own spirituality, not bound by any other existing ‘portrait’ or reading of Jesus, which includes Western theological and biblical readings of scriptures as well as historical creeds and traditional doctrines. Jesus becomes the main focus and Koreans the ‘hosts,’ not ‘guests.’ A Jesus-centred reading of the whole of scripture (the OT and the NT), understanding of implications of the culturally-formed human person of Jesus, holistic view of Jesus by interpreting his words in the light of his actions and lifestyle, and learning from Jesus’ hermeneutical method are all parts of this approach.

Second, a Korean hermeneutic is spirit-centred, for the understanding of Jesus requires the help of the spirit of Jesus. In addition, the universality of God’s love and plan for each people group, which was presented as a basic theological assumption, entails a reliance on the work of God’s spirit or the spirit of truth. An originally-Korean, scriptural reading method which focuses on meditation and ongoing cultivation of the right heart typifies this spirit-centred reading.

On the basis of God’s love and specific plan for Korean people, I submitted that Korea is a unique tree planted and cared for by the Creator, and that Korea, in turn, has borne fruit that is good (as well as bad) in her history. The third hermeneutical key of Korea-centredness means, perhaps for the first time in KP

history, to reverse the theological priority from Christianity to Korea and Korean people, thus allowing their best 'fruit' to illumine, broaden and deepen biblical texts. In addition, discerning the questions that arise from Korean minds, interpreting the life experiences of Korean people, and taking the liberty to express findings not only in distinctly Korean words and idioms but in Korean writing style will contribute to the accomplishment of a distinctly Korean hermeneutic.

## PART III

### THE BIBLICAL 'WAY' AND THE TAOIST 'WAY'

The comparative review of the biblical 'way' and the Taoist 'way' will be done with two specific purposes in mind: to examine similarities and dissimilarities between the two 'ways,' and to contribute to the main task of the thesis, namely, a *biblical* and *distinctly Korean* reading of John 14:6, where Jesus is introduced as the 'way' to the father. In this preface of Part III, I will elaborate the scope and certain complexities about this comparative review as well as the definition of a few major terms employed in the review.

First, clarification about the terms 'salvation,' 'soteriological' and 'salvific.' Within the biblical, theistic tradition, salvation is bound to be related with God. Hence, within evangelical Protestant Christianity, in particular, salvation is often understood as to entail 'reconciliation with God the Creator,' 'reception of forgiveness of sins' and eventual 'entrance to heaven and eternal life.' This salvation then requires 'faith in Jesus the saviour' whose death is substitutionary, for the sins of the world. By contrast, Taoist 'salvation' is situated in a 'non-theistic,' East-Asian tradition.<sup>1</sup> As Keel Hee-sung contends, oriental religions share a common perspective in regard to human salvation, namely, "oneness with the Absolute Reality."<sup>2</sup> This is expressed succinctly by W. Sheldon in the words: "Westerners want to *see* the reality, and Easterners want to *be* the reality."<sup>3</sup> In Taoist tradition, 'oneness with the

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this 'non-theistic' should not be taken as non-religious, which has been defended by East-Asian, as well as Western, scholars. One of those Western sympathizers Wilfred C. Smith contends: "In the West the concept of God is of course one of ultimate importance; whereas in China this kind of concept has not been particularly significant or much developed. This does not mean that the Chinese have been less religious than we; rather that they have been religious in a different way, and have conceptualized their faith in a different way." Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 74. See also Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 151.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Kim Myŏng-jin, *동과 서 [The East and the West]* (Seoul: Wisdomhouse, 2008), 5.

Absolute Reality' constitutes its ideal or *telos*, thus its salvation. Hence, to provide a fair treatment to both traditions in this comparative review, the term 'salvation' will be used as to denote the ultimate goal or *telos* pursued in each tradition—biblical and Taoist. In regard to the terms, 'soteriological' and 'salvific,' they will simply function in this review as an adjective form of the aforementioned noun 'salvation.' As will be (hopefully) made clear in due course, the discussion about 'soteriological' or 'salvific' effect or function of each 'way' will take an inclusive and holistic approach.

Second, the manner this thesis employs the term, 'Taoist tradition,' needs to be elaborated. By Taoist tradition I do not refer to a tradition where the main religion is Taoism, but a tradition where 'tao' or 'to' is a common, familiar concept to most people and influences people's worldview. Sin Yŏng-bok affirms that Taoist thought is "the very essence of oriental thoughts,"<sup>4</sup> and Ryu Dong-shik contends that 'to' is the most generic word within philosophy, religion and also people's common sense in East-Asia.<sup>5</sup> Kim Heup Young calls 'tao' "the East Asian root-metaphor" which is "as old as logos in western tradition."<sup>6</sup> Of particular pertinence to this thesis project, 'Taoist tradition,' 'East-Asian tradition,' and '(distinctly) Korean tradition' will be used interchangeably, following a traditional reception that China, Korea and Japan make up East-Asia.

There is certain complexity in relation to the review of the Taoist 'way,' which needs to be elaborated at this stage. The Taoist 'way' is '道' in Chinese, which is romanized as either 'tao' or 'dao.' This tao ('道') was imported to Korea and presently exists in Korean vocabulary in the form of '도,' pronounced as 'to.'<sup>7</sup> Though there might be a subtle difference between the Korean 'to' and the Chinese 'tao,' the

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<sup>4</sup> Sin Yŏng-bok, 강의: 나의 동양고전독법 [*Lectures: My Reading of Eastern Classic Scriptures*] (P'aju: Tolbegae, 2004), 305.

<sup>5</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, 도와 로고스: 선교와 한국신학의 과제 [*To and Logos: the Task of Mission and Korean Theology*] (Seoul: Taehan Kidokgyo Ch'ulp'ansa, 1978), 17-27.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao*, 137.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, there are countless words in Korean vocabulary whose origins are Chinese. This kind of phenomenon is not exclusive to the Korean language; numerous English words, for instance, have their origins in French, German, and Latin (to name a few).

two will be treated as the same in this comparative review. Most significantly, the review of the Taoist ‘way’ begins with the basic assumption that the Korean word *kil* (‘way’), which is used in John 14:6, shares many basic concepts with ‘to,’ having ‘grown up’ in the same socio-cultural and religious tradition where ‘to’ is highly valued. In other words, the thesis will let the findings of the review of the Taoist ‘way’ inform the Korean reading of John 14:6 (especially during the reading of the passage through the Korean word ‘*kil*’).

Linguistic complexity does not challenge only the review of the word, ‘to,’ but also the review of the ‘way’ in biblical tradition. This is perhaps more complicated. The biblical ‘way’ is the predominant translation of the Hebrew דֶרֶךְ (*derekh*) in the OT and of the Greek ὁδός (*hodos*) in the NT. Even though, according to Koch, “the English ‘way’ has misleading associations,”<sup>8</sup> the review here is more of the English ‘way’ than of *derekh* or *hodos*. As a result, the review of the biblical ‘way’ will include several other Hebrew words which are synonyms to *derekh*, for they are rendered as the English ‘way.’<sup>9</sup>

Given this complexity surrounding the Korean ‘way’ (*to*) and the biblical ‘way,’ certain delineations for the comparison of the two are necessary. First, this will not be an exhaustive etymological study of the biblical ‘way’ nor the East-Asian ‘way.’ The review, for instance, will not examine the diachronic and synchronic semantic differences in each ‘way.’ Also, this comparison is not a comparison of two religions such as Judaism and Taoism.

To introduce briefly the content and structure of the comparative review of the two ‘ways,’ I will first present major concepts and features of each ‘way’ that have long persisted within each tradition. Next, the context of each ‘way,’ which is the background where the ‘way’ concept has evolved, will be examined by examining

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<sup>8</sup> Klaus Koch, “דֶרֶךְ,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, 11 vols., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills, G. W. Bromiley and David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1978), 3:277. All dictionaries and encyclopedias will appear in abbreviated form following their first entry in the footnotes, e.g. *TDOT*.

<sup>9</sup> The noun *derekh* is attested 706 (or 710) times, and the 12 synonyms of *derekh*, which denote the concept of ‘way’ or path, appear around 130 times in the OT. G. Sauer, “דֶרֶךְ,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT)*, 3 vols., ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westerman, translated by Mark E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:270, 343; *TDOT*, 3:276. See also *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (DBI)*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), s.v. “path.”

a few foundational concepts or themes which contribute to the uniqueness of each tradition. Based on these findings, I shall discuss the soteriological effects or functions of each concept of 'way.' After the review of the biblical concept translated as 'way' (Chapter 6), and the review of the East-Asian Taoist 'to' (Chapter 7), there will be a contextual comparison of the two 'ways,' bearing the aforementioned, two specific purposes (Chapter 8).

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE REVIEW OF THE BIBLICAL 'WAY'

Victor H. Matthews considers it important that readers of the ancient texts become aware of the emic ('insider') and etic ('outsider') perspectives of said texts.<sup>1</sup> This means that readers develop cultural sensitivity, and thus, become attentive to references to daily items such as clothing, food, aspects of travel, marriage customs, and even those places described in the text as particularly significant to the lives of ancient biblical people.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the thesis review of the biblical 'way' focuses on one aspect of the biblical culture—walking—with awareness that the word 'way' carries certain connotations in an ancient society, a society where *walking was a primary mode of transportation for the majority of people*.<sup>3</sup> As Gibson aptly points out, "not even riding on a donkey but walking on foot was the usual manner of getting from one place to another" for most people in the biblical period.<sup>4</sup>

The shared experiences of walking may include the sense of safety or danger of a path, frequency of slipping on an uneven path, and getting lost on the way. Some biblical texts which relay such experiences include: "Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble" (Prov 3:23, TNIV); "My steps have held fast to your *paths*; my feet have not slipped" (Ps 17:5); "The God who girded me with strength, and made my *way* safe" (Ps 18:32). To describe the way of the evil or the guilty as *crooked* (Prov 2:15; 10:9; 21:8. Cf. Isa 59:8), while the path of the upright is a *level highway* (Prov 15:19), or to say that the way of the wicked leads their friends *astray* (Prov 12:26) is a natural by-product of familiarity with the physical realities of

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<sup>1</sup> Victor H. Matthews, *Studying the Ancient Israelites: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 126.

<sup>2</sup> Victor H. Matthews, *Studying the Ancient Israelites*, 126.

<sup>3</sup> *DBI*, 630.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1998), 151.

the road. As will be seen, it is out of these physical realities of a spatial-geographical 'way' that the word 'way' entails other associated meanings, metaphorical and figurative.

Those of us who primarily use other modes of transportation than walking are naturally excluded from a shared understanding of the 'way' with those who move around by walking on foot most of their lives. Hence, I intend to approach the biblical 'way' by first "taking off my shoes."<sup>5</sup>

## MAJOR CONCEPTS

It is almost redundant to say that the word 'way' in the OT and the NT frequently indicates a 'road' or 'path.' The 'way' denotes a physical, visible 'road' which is travelled and thus established (Gen 38:14; Num 22:23; Mark 11:8; Luke 10:31).

The biblical 'way' often denotes a *journey*: "They went a day's *journey*" (Luke 2:44). When Abraham's servant thanks God after having successfully made his *way* to Mesopotamia (Gen 24: 40, 42, 56), the 'way' means 'journey with a definite sense of a mission.'<sup>6</sup> When the 'way' signifies an invisible journey, it points to a person's life journey (Job 23:10; Prov 3:6). "The OT univocally attests to the fact that all humanity, righteous and wicked alike, are in pilgrimage along a way that leads either to life or death."<sup>7</sup> Since walking or journeying entails a direction, the ancient (biblical) 'way' often involves the idea of goal or orientation of one's life (Isa 53:6; 55:7).<sup>8</sup>

The 'way' also indicates human *life, the whole of it* at that: "Commit your *way* to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act" (Ps 37:5; see also Isa 40:27; 1 Cor 4:17); "I

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<sup>5</sup> This sentiment is inspired by Max Warren (1904-1977), a British missiologist, who said, "Our first task in approaching another place, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams." This passage appears in Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, viii.

<sup>6</sup> See Herbert Wolf, "Derek," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, 2 vols., edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1: 196-97.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "דֶּרֶךְ [Derek], *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, 5 vols., ed. William A. van Gernerren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1: 989.

<sup>8</sup> *DBI*, 631.

have seen their ways, but I will heal them” (Isa 57:17-18). When one makes an appeal to God to remember “how I have *walked* before you” (Isa 38:3), it is in fact asking God to remember one’s ‘way,’ which is one’s *whole life* (considering the inseparable relationship between the ‘way’ and ‘walking’).<sup>9</sup>

Describing human *actions* as walking along a path was common in the ancient world, and the Hebrew world was not an exception.<sup>10</sup> The ‘way’ or ‘ways’ often represent moral actions of individuals or groups, both positive and negative: “Teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the *way* they are to go and the things they are to do” (Exod 18:20; cf. Prov 1:15-16). The ‘way’ of a person or animal may refer to their *customary* or habitual behaviour: “Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its *ways*, and be wise” (Prov 6:6). When certain sets of behaviour become the norm within society, the ‘way’ is regarded as ‘custom.’ A Hebrew phrase, ‘*derekh eretz*’ (the “way of the land”), signifies “normal custom, correct conduct, good manners, courtesy or etiquette.”<sup>11</sup>

It should not be surprising that the ‘way’ in the biblical texts shares connection with the Law (of Moses), which instills in the hearts of ancient Hebrew people the sense of being ‘chosen’ people of YHWH. This treasured Law is often mentioned using the word ‘way’: “For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law” (Isa 42:24, TNIV). In this way, the biblical ‘way’ often points to the law, word, and truth of God.

Within the same Hebrew scripture, however, there is another ‘way’ that exists apart from the Law. Wisdom literature often speaks of *wisdom* as the ‘way.’<sup>12</sup> Noteworthy is that this wisdom is established through the lived experiences of collective people.<sup>13</sup> Within the biblical *creation* tradition, wisdom or the ‘way’ is

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<sup>9</sup> This connection between the ‘way’ and to ‘walk’ will be dealt with more extensively shortly. See the paragraph on ‘salvation’ below.

<sup>10</sup> *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period (DJBP)*, ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), s.v. “way of the land.”

<sup>11</sup> *DJBP*, 668.

<sup>12</sup> Wisdom literature is a generic term encompassing the books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Bible. Song of Solomon may also be included in it. We can find wisdom influence in many other books within the Bible, e.g., Psalms or parables of Jesus in the Gospels.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 681.

gleaned from observing the way of *nature*, God's creation: the way of lilies, birds, trees, or ants, for instance (Prov 6:6; Matt 6:26, 28, 30). The purpose of this observation is to put what is learned into action, just as the purpose of finding the right path is *walking* in it.<sup>14</sup>

This paves the way for a new important observation: the biblical 'way' is an important literary tool with which to convey the notion of *salvation*.<sup>15</sup> 'Deserted highways' (Isa 33:8), 'streets laid waste' (Zeph 3:6), 'ways blocked with hewn stones' (Lam 3:9) all depict temporary 'punishment' from God. In contrast, God's new or restorative work is expressed in such words as 'making a way in the desert' (Isa 40:3; 43:19; 51:10; Ps 77:19). This salvific 'way' is, more specifically, 'God's way' or the 'way of the Lord' (Ps 18:30; Isa 40:3; Mark 12:14; Acts 18:25).

A crucial point about the salvific 'way' is the necessity and requirement of *walking* in it. This notion—"This is the *way*; *walk* in it (Isa 30:21)"—is emphasized abundantly in biblical tradition (Deut 8:6; Josh 22:5; Ps 119: 3; Jer 6:16; Prov 2:20; Isa 35:8). Walking the right path is alternately phrased as 'walking with God': "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to *walk* humbly *with your God*?" (Mic 6:8; cf Gen 5:24).

This highest biblical goal—walking with God—is alternated in the NT by 'walking as Jesus walked' or 'following in Jesus' steps' (1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21). It is in the NT that we begin to read the notion of salvation in the word 'way' alone, without any supporting verbs such as 'make,' 'open,' or 'prepare' as were found in the OT. In the book of Acts, the followers of Jesus are called the people "who belong to the way" (Acts 9:2); through such use, the meaning of the 'way' encompasses 'Jesus Christ,' 'Jesus' teaching,' and 'Jesus' life' (Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). In the Gospel of John (14:6), the *person* of Jesus is uniquely identified as the 'way to the father,' which has been often received as to signify the notion of salvation or entering the kingdom of God or heaven.

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<sup>14</sup> See the importance of walking the path: "In the path of righteousness there is life, in *walking* its path there is no death" (Prov 12:28).

<sup>15</sup> *DBI*, 631.

## FEATURES

### **Mono-theistic**

At the forefront of the biblical 'way' is its *theistic*, more precisely, *mono-theistic*, feature.<sup>16</sup> Within theistic tradition, "the metaphor of the way is not controlled by a goal which humans should seek and to which they may attain. The metaphor presupposes that the command of God stands at the beginning of the way."<sup>17</sup> Hence, the biblical 'way' is often used explicitly in reference to YHWH: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the *way* you should go" (Isa 48:17). God will lead people in their walk in a similar manner to that of a good shepherd (Ps 23:3; cf. Ezek 34:10-15; Isa 40:11). People, in response, make a plea to their God YHWH: "Teach me the *way* I should go, for to you I lift up my soul" (Ps 143:8).

Closely related to this theistic tradition is the creation tradition. The biblical world simply would not exist without the *creator God*, and all creation is God's work. In this creation tradition, wisdom, which leads to life or the 'way', is *to see the interconnectedness among all of God's creation*, as did wisdom teachers: "Wisdom teachers saw how things worked and how things are inalienably related to each other."<sup>18</sup> Related to this, God's will, or the 'way' for human beings, is conveyed not only through spoken words (delivered by prophets) and deeds of God (observed in history) but also through wisdom discerned in *nature*, God's creation.

### **Dynamic**

A second feature of the biblical 'way' is its *dynamic* movement which is in contrast with a *static* settlement. The 'way' as road or street is destined to be walked on. This dynamic feature of the 'way' is found especially in its concept of 'journey' and 'life.'

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<sup>16</sup> Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 303. Craigie says that Hebrew people do not attempt to prove the existence of God but take it for granted: "from the first verse of the first book of the Bible, God's existence is affirmed and assumed."

<sup>17</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, "ὁδός," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 5:56.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament*, 685.

To picture one's life as progress along a path, for example, "captures a sense of the dynamic nature of human existence, which never stands still."<sup>19</sup>

Life, when taken as a path or journey, has further implications in relation to the dynamic movement of the 'way.' One's life, which is to be faithful to God in biblical tradition, is an ongoing journey. The Pauline reference to a person's life of faith (in Jesus) as forgetting "what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" and "pressing on toward the goal" (Phil 3:13, 14) carries this sense well. To be sure, it is important for the journey of life to envision a destination or goal. Still more important is to take each step conscientiously with an awareness of the significance of each step. In other words, the process of pilgrimage matters more than the arrival at the destination. Further, it is helpful to picture that ancient roads are not clearly signposted; there are times one enters into wrong paths. Repeated 'return' to the right path is, therefore, a fully expected and necessary action on a journey.

A similar nuance is read in certain narratives in the NT; that which happens 'on the way' provides a sense of significance. According to Mark's Gospel, it is 'on the way' that Jesus reveals himself to his disciples and teaches them about discipleship and servanthood (Mark 8:27, 9:33-34).<sup>20</sup> A blind man, after regaining his sight, follows Jesus "on the way" (Mark 10:52). In the gospels, "the life of disciples can be aptly summed up under the metaphor 'on the road with Jesus.'"<sup>21</sup> Hence, the biblical 'way' makes its sense full and alive when it is understood in light of its dynamic force.

### **Holistic**

Another interesting feature of the biblical 'way' is its organically '*holistic*' nature. This means that the 'way' one chooses to walk reveals one's destiny. The modern distinction between means and ends is not present in biblical tradition. To illustrate, the 'way' or deed of a person bears fruit for him/her: "They shall eat the fruit of *their* way" (Prov 1:31). It appears that this is the principle set by God: "I the LORD test the

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<sup>19</sup> *DBI*, 631.

<sup>20</sup> It seems like the Gospel of Mark in particular has captured this sense of the 'way.' See M. Volkel, "ὁδός," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDNT)*, 3 vols., ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 2:492.

<sup>21</sup> *DBI*, 631.

mind and search the heart, to give to all according to *their ways*, according to the *fruit of their doings*" (Jer 17:10).

The equal transaction of deed and destiny in the biblical texts is frequently described using planting-harvesting language: "You reap whatever you sow" (Gal 6:7). Another instance of the same rhetoric appears in the form of work and wage: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Whatever kind of work one does, the wage for the work is already determined, whether one receives the wage immediately or not.

Some OT scholars pay particular attention to this inseparable relation between one's 'way'/deed and one's destiny. One of the leading scholars in this argument is Klaus Koch. Koch describes the inherent connection between actions and consequences as "the action with *built-in* and *inherent* consequences."<sup>22</sup> The consequences of an action are not administered at a later time in a judicial process but are present from the very beginning.<sup>23</sup> To elaborate, a person's deeds cling to the person as it were, wrapping themselves around the person as an invisible domain, which one day is transformed into a corresponding condition or state, and then acts back upon them as consequence (an interpretation of Hos 7:2; Ps 109:17-19).<sup>24</sup>

Other scholars speak with the same outlook and force. Pederson notes that either "happiness is the destination towards which the way leads or *the very way is happiness*."<sup>25</sup> Nötscher views the connection between actual living and the course of life as a causal relationship, and contends that the two are not distinguishable entities. This kind of integral connection exists not only between deed/'way' and destiny but between one's 'way' and the salvific *shalom*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 57-87.

<sup>23</sup> Koch, "Doctrine of Retribution," 59-61.

<sup>24</sup> *TDOT*, 3:272-73.

<sup>25</sup> Johannes Pederson, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 1:361 (emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> *TDOT*, 3: 285

## CONTEXT OF THE BIBLICAL 'WAY'

This section will look at a few biblical themes which are formative in biblical tradition. Metaphorically speaking, the biblical 'way' is a tree that has grown alongside these themes; their influence on the 'way' is assumed.

### Heart

The 'heart' is a theme that receives much attention in biblical tradition. One of the proverbs clearly denotes the supreme importance of the human heart: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23). Hebrew prophets proclaim that the Lord "does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

The NT gospels witness to Jesus' interest in the human heart. Jesus teaches that "the pure in heart" will be able to see God (Matt 5:8) and that genuine forgiveness should happen "from your heart" (Matt 18:36). On the occasion of the 'final judgment,' people are not divided based on their religious activities; instead, they are divided between those with a heart (kind and merciful toward the 'least') and those without (Matt 25).

The relationship between the 'way' and the heart is like an organic flow between the tree and its root; the heart is the driving force of an action. This is effectively captured in a teaching of the Lukan Jesus:

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the *heart* that the mouth speaks (Luke 6:43-45).

Before any visible movement of a person's 'way' may be observed, there must already be movement of the invisible heart of the person. The heart, therefore, is the first movement that sets the direction of the 'way,' and the 'way' is the heart's product.

The danger of the heart is its deceitful orientation and human beings' lack of awareness of such nature: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9-10). Therefore, to work on one's heart is a requirement for those who wish to reform their 'ways,' which prophets such as Jeremiah repeatedly emphasize: "Reform your ways" (Jer 7:4-5; 26:13).

Toward the reformation of one's 'way,' the biblical tradition expects human hearts to be broken, torn, circumcised, or transplanted. Biblical texts witness that the heart is on the right path when it becomes broken and contrite (Ps 51:17) or torn (Joel 2:13), or goes through 'circumcision' (Deut 30:6. Cf. Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29). The most graphic scriptural description of renewing the human heart is a transplant: "I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek 11:19. Cf. Ezek 18:31).

### **God of the covenant**

The word 'covenant' indicates "a relationship between two persons or parties in which mutual obligations are implied or stated with respect to the covenant partners."<sup>27</sup> From within this ancient covenant tradition, a particularistic *relationship* between God and the Hebrew people was formed and cemented. Craigie recognizes the importance of this unique relationship as he posits that "religion in ancient Israel was essentially a form of relationship."<sup>28</sup>

In this covenantal relationship, the notion of being faithful is of the utmost importance. God's covenantal *faithful presence and guidance* is delivered by Hebrew prophets using 'road' or 'way' language: the Lord God will "go before you" and also be "your rear guard" (Exod 13:21; Isa 52:12; cf. John 10:4). This faithful presence and guidance is available on the way and all the way, throughout the Exodus, until people reach the destination. The shepherd model, which is an archetypal image for God in biblical tradition, aptly expresses God's faithful leading and care for the people on the

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<sup>27</sup> Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 309.

<sup>28</sup> Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 301. Ahn Byong-mu argues that the relationship is not a 'master-slave' analogy but one in which the *autonomy* of each party is acknowledged. Ahn Byong-mu, *역사와 해석 [History and Interpretation]* (Ch'onan: Han'guk Sinhakyön'guso, 1996), 87.

way (Isa 49: 13; Jer 3:15); in the NT, the metaphor, ‘good (chief) shepherd,’ is ascribed to Jesus (John 10:11; 1 Pet 5:4).<sup>29</sup>

### **Exodus and homecoming**

Wright notes: “Two mighty acts in particular, at either end of Israel Old Testament history, are recorded as occasions par excellence when Israel came to know their God—the Exodus and the return from Exile.”<sup>30</sup> We may observe certain points of interconnection between these ‘two towering events’ in ancient Hebrew history and the biblical ‘way.’ First is the significance of the concept of ‘*strangers on the road.*’<sup>31</sup> Ancient Hebrew people “were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exod 23:9). A psalmist sees himself as a “stranger on the earth” (Ps 119:19, TNIV). The followers of Christ in the NT period are urged to “live in reverent fear” as “aliens and exiles” (1 Pet 2:11; 1:17). They are reminded of the example of faith life from “a great cloud of witnesses” who “confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth” (Heb 11:13; 12:1).

Second, the significance of ‘*being on the way.*’ The history of ancient Israel witnesses that many people who begin the journey together, either the journey of the exodus from Egypt or the homecoming from the exile in Babylon, do not make it. Moses himself died on the way to the ‘promised’ land (Deut 34:1-5). All the same, Moses served both his God and God’s people to great effect (Deut 34:10-12; cf. Heb 11:13). In the NT, it was *on the way* to Emmaus that the resurrected Jesus appeared to two travellers (Luke 24:13ff).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Laniak delves into this theme of shepherding throughout the Bible and says, “YHWH reveals himself as the true Shepherd Ruler of Israel.” Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 75.

<sup>31</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *History and Interpretation*, 73; William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush, eds., *Old Testament Survey*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 43, 157, 743.

<sup>32</sup> Jhakmak Neeraj Ekka offers thoughtful insights surrounding this well-known story: “It is rather in the fact of posing questions and in accompanying the disciples as ignorant traveler that Jesus manifests the value of being on the way.” Jhakmak Neeraj Ekka, *Christ as Sacrament and Example: Luther’s Theology of the Cross and Its Relevance for South Asia* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 171.

Another point involves the theme of *'homecoming,'* the exilic community's profound anticipation for homecoming in the context of the exile.<sup>33</sup> The *'homecoming'* or *'returning home'* has a deeper meaning in biblical tradition. The OT prophets deliver the heartfelt appeals of God to Israel: "If you will return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "Then you should return to Me" (Jer 4:1, TNIV; see also Hos 12:6; 14:1; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 4:6; Zech 1:3). The theme of turning around is abundant, too—turning from evil ways and practices or deeds, toward God's way (Jer 23:22; 25:5; 26:3). YHWH is their Original Home, so to speak.

The appeal of returning to God continues in the NT. A well-known parable told by Jesus has the sentiment of returning to the father's house (Luke 15:11-32). The story portrays a son who left his father and settled in a foreign land where he ended up living the life of a slave. The son finally decided to go home, so he "set off and went to his father" (Luke 15:20). The Johannine Jesus favours *'going to the father's house'* expressions, and finally says that he is the *'way'* to the father (John 14:6). A significant transition in the NT in terms of returning to God is the emphasis to return to Jesus (1 Pet 2:25).

### **The prophets**

The existence of prophets is one of the distinct features of ancient Israel.<sup>34</sup> It is in the context of Israelite covenantal responsibility—faithfulness to YHWH—that the prophets are able to carry weighty voices in public, for their God is the God who *speaks*, through the prophets (Amos 3:7-8). What the prophets say is "what the Lord says" (Amos 1:3; Jer 26:12, 15; Isa 6.8ff). Ahn Byong-mu asserts that the Hebrew prophets and their faithful obedience to the calling of YHWH make a significant contribution to the survival of the ancient Jewish people, nation and faith, and even to the spread of their faith into the world.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament*, 77-78. Psalm 126 sings the indescribable joy of homecoming: "When the LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting" (Ps 126:1-2, NASB).

<sup>34</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *History and Interpretation*, 115-16. Craigie points to the unique character of the Hebrew prophecies in comparison to the ones in surrounding ancient NE. Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 312.

<sup>35</sup> Ahn Byong-mu, *History and Interpretation*, 115-16. Craigie says that the prophetic contribution is

The biblical 'way' is deeply indebted to the prophets. The message delivered by prophets is like 'the lamp of the Lord' that searches people's hearts and 'a light to their paths' (Prov 20:27, Ps 119:105). The people's 'way' is rebuked and judged; and an alternative 'way,' often in the name of the 'way of the Lord,' is presented. It is by exhausting every method possible that the prophets try to reveal God's 'way' or will. Certain methods go beyond the conventional modes of prophetic addresses, parables, allegories and riddles; God's will is demonstrated through bizarre, dramatic 'symbolic *actions*' that prophets embody (Ezek 4-5, Isa 20:16, Jer 13:1-10, to name a few). The prophets' messages also come in a concrete manner with an immediate focus, demanding the audience's response at the very moment by reforming or changing their ways and actions (Jer 4-5).<sup>36</sup>

#### **SOTERIOLOGICAL EFFECTS**

Several aspects of the conceptual world related to the 'way' in biblical tradition have thus far been described: *road* that people walk or travel; *journey* that often carries with it a destination and mission; *life* itself, the whole of life at that; customary *action* or behaviour; *wisdom* and *truth* taught by the Law as well as nature and shared experiences; and *salvation* or a 'new way' which is realized by walking in the 'way.' This observation helps us to understand biblical salvation when it is conveyed in the language of 'way' or 'path': salvation is primarily the matter of life, and should be manifested through actions, *walking* in the path of wisdom and truth.

Major features of the biblical 'way' include: *theistic*, *dynamic*, and *integral* or *holistic*. Each of these features of the biblical 'way' informs certain aspects of biblical salvation. First (*theistic*), salvation is the way of God, prepared by God; the way of salvation exists in the created world in which we live, and this availability itself is

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enormous both to the history of Israel and to the Old Testament. Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 315

<sup>36</sup> Regarding the focus on the immediate, concrete context of prophecies, see Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 311, Ahn Byong-mu, *History and Interpretation*, 115-16, 157, 159-63. Ahn notes that the prophets are always standing right in the middle of contemporary history with great sensitivity and participating in it with God's message.

good news. Salvation being prepared by the Creator, awareness of the interconnectedness of all creation is an important part of human salvation. Second (*dynamic*), salvation is in motion, an ongoing journey and pilgrimage, in which each step and each moment of the pilgrimage is meaningful to salvation. Third (*integral or holistic*), the path we choose now is a part and parcel of our destiny, whether it is salvation or lack of it. It goes even further that the very 'way' of a person in this world is integral to the 'way' of the person in the world to come.

Four foundational biblical themes, namely, *heart, covenant, exodus and homecoming*, and *prophets*, have been observed. Each of these themes offers certain emphasis about the biblical 'way' that leads to salvation. The biblical perspective of *heart* emphasizes that people need to vigilantly watch their hearts as they walk the 'way' or live life, and that the heart should become 'broken' regularly and even transplanted, to the effect of reorienting their lives toward God. The peculiar *covenantal relationship* of ancient Hebrew people with YHWH offers a significant element of salvation: ongoing relationship based on faithfulness. The unforgettable historic events of *exodus and homecoming* also help uncover the significance of living as strangers on the road and of returning home in people's salvific journey on earth. The tradition further adds that the journey to return home inevitably requires *prophets*, God's messengers, who rebuke people as well as comfort them, and embody the 'way' of the Lord when necessary.

Above all, the biblical 'way' presents a most natural and friendly image of salvation: *walking with the Lord God*. This salvific walk with the Lord, on the one hand, promises the privilege of YHWH's faithful companionship on the path of life, and on the other hand, demands faithfulness from people in their walks with the companion. In fact, this faithful relationship is at the centre of biblical salvation.<sup>37</sup> An obedient and faithful relationship with YHWH leads people to 'life,' and in an inseparable connection to this, a respectful and honest relationship with others leads them to

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<sup>37</sup> According to Craigie, the essence of ancient Hebrew theology is that God may be known *in relationship* with humankind. The implications of this emphasis are various. On the one hand, there is little speculative or philosophical dimension to Hebrew thought, and little attempt to define the nature and existence of God in abstract terms. On the other hand, the kinds of words used to qualify the attributes of God are primarily relational—God is merciful, kind, loving, patient, and so on. Even such conceptions as God's *holiness* are developed in relational terms: He loves goodness, hates evil, and requires justice and righteousness of God's people. Craigie, *The Old Testament*, 304.

‘peace’ or *shalom*. Life and peace are indeed the very content of the covenantal salvation offered by God (Mal 2:5). Pederson captures the importance of the relational nature of *shalom*, defining it as such: *shalom* “expresses every form of happiness and free foundation, but the kernel in it is *the community with others*, the foundation of life. Peace, strength and life belong together, because peace must be where the blessing is, the positive force of life.”<sup>38</sup>

It is in this conceptual world of the biblical ‘way,’ and the socio-religious assumptions of said world, that Jesus comes to say, “I am the *way*, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). What we have found in this review of the biblical ‘way’ may inform exegetical explorations such as: what were the associated concepts of the ‘way’ shared among the audience of the time? What kind of salvation does the ‘way’ language suggest? What kind of response from the audience does the salvific saying—Jesus is the ‘way’ to the father—expect? The findings will be of particular importance to the ‘reading through the lens of a memoir’ in Chapter 10.

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<sup>38</sup> Pederson, *Israel*, 1:313 (emphasis added). In the OT, salvation and *shalom* often appear together: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace [*shalom*], who brings good news, who announces salvation” (Isa 52:7).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE REVIEW OF THE TAOIST 'WAY'

The previous chapter explored the biblical understanding of the 'way' by observing its major concepts, features, context and soteriological effects. This new chapter will do the same exploration about *tao* or 'to' which is the 'way' in Taoist tradition. It needs to be noted once again that this research is neither an exhaustive word study of *tao*/'to' nor a discussion about Taoism as a religion or philosophy.

As we have examined the biblical 'way' through the OT and the NT scriptures, the review of the Taoist 'way' or 'to' will turn to ancient texts, primarily *Tao Te Ching* or *Todŏkgyŏng* (in Korean). *Tao Te Ching* (TTC) is generally considered the scripture of 'to,' as "the fundamental text of both philosophical and religious Taoism."<sup>1</sup> TTC, which is generally accepted as having been written around the sixth century BCE, has spawned a great number of commentaries, at least 3,000 within China alone.<sup>2</sup> We will intentionally turn to commentaries written by authors of different nationalities, including Chinese, Korean and Western scholars.

#### MAJOR CONCEPTS

Julia Ching, the author of *Chinese Religions*, comments that 'to' ('*tao*') is used by every school of Chinese thought or religion, and 'to,' for that reason, may designate

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<sup>1</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching: The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way*, translated by Victor H. Mair (Auckland: Bantam Books, 1990), xi. To emphasize that this is a translated version of the ancient Chinese classic, this text will be referenced from this point as "Mair, *Tao Te Ching*."

<sup>2</sup> Sin Yŏng-bok, *Lectures*, 259.

anything and everything.<sup>3</sup> Being aware of such vast spectrum of the usage of ‘to,’ I will present only a few major concepts of ‘to.’

The first main concept of ‘to’ is ‘*path to walk.*’ Etymologically, ‘to’ (道) is a combined character of ‘human head’ (首) and ‘in movement’ (走), depicting a human being who is in motion, walking. In the public domain, ‘to’ is simply known as ‘path,’ the path that is primarily destined to be walked.<sup>4</sup> Metaphorically, ‘to’ is the way of life, which is elaborated well by Fingarette in the following words: “*Tao* [‘to’] is a Way, a path, a road, and by common metaphorical extensions it becomes in ancient China the right Way of life, the Way of governing, the ideal Way of human existence, the Way of the cosmos, the generative-normative Way (pattern, path, course) of existence as such.”<sup>5</sup>

‘To’ as the path that should be walked denotes *the model for human life*, which a famous saying in TTC conveys succinctly: “Humans imitate earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven imitates tao, tao imitates nature” (TTC, Ch 25).<sup>6</sup> Whether ‘to’ is utilized as a basic principle of life, politics and morality (by the Confucian school), or considered as the general principle of the universe (by the Taoist group), ‘to’ includes the concept of the ultimate, most ideal model.<sup>7</sup>

‘To’ is the model for all humans because it is firstly the model of ‘heaven’ (“heaven imitates tao”: TTC, Ch 25). Out of this comes a major metaphysical concept of ‘to’: *the first principle.* ‘To’ is one of the most significant thought products of ancient Chinese cosmology; Julia Ching comments that “contemplation of the universe has led Taoists to the discovery of the nameless first principle.”<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>3</sup> Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 85, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, *To and Logos*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius—the Secular as Sacred*, quoted in Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> The translation of the passages in the *Tao Te Ching* is done by the thesis writer, unless otherwise noted with another translator’s name.

<sup>7</sup> Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 89; Yi Se-hyong, 도의 신학 [*Theology of Tao*] (Seoul: Handül, 2002), 16; Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (Chicago: Open Court, 1989), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 89.

nameless first principle underlies and governs the universe, existing before the universe comes to be.

According to Chinese cosmology, 'to' is also the *source of all beings*, thus, called the "begetter of all things,"<sup>9</sup> or the "ancestor of all things," to use a more authentic Chinese, relational term.<sup>10</sup> This is explained in TTC once more metaphorically, using *p'u* which denotes 'uncarved wood' or an 'unhewn log' (TTC, Ch. 32).<sup>11</sup> People observe the relationship between the 'unhewn log' and all the vessels: out of one huge log come to exist all kinds of tools or vessels. Vessels have their origin, the 'unhewn log.' This thought is further applied to human beings and the source of their being, and, consequently, different human beings are regarded as different 'vessels' who come from one 'Unhewn Log', that is 'To.'

As 'to' receives such metaphysical descriptions as the 'first principle' and 'source of all beings,' it is understandable why many scholars see 'to' as similar to the *logos* concept of the ancient Greek and Roman world.<sup>12</sup> Kim Heup Young, for instance, views 'to' as the root-metaphor of the East-Asian ethico-religious world in the same way that *logos* is in the Greek philosophical world.<sup>13</sup> Yi Se-hyŏng states further that, because 'to' represents the cosmic order which is involved in nature and history, 'to' to Asians is a parallel concept to the Hellenistic *logos* as well as the Christian God.<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting for the present discussion that most Chinese Bibles including Chinese Standard Version (CSV), Chinese New Version (CNV), Chinese Union Version (CUV), Chinese Contemporary Bible (CCB) render the 'word' or *logos* in the Gospel of John

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<sup>9</sup> Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 88.

<sup>11</sup> There is a background reason why *p'u* or 'unhewn log' is picked up as one of the master symbols for 'to.' Chinese civilization is generally a 'plant civilization,' valuing a gentle and yielding attitude and practice. Chen contrasts this civilization with Western civilization, which is primarily modelled on animal life, featuring struggle, conquest and the survival of the fittest. Ellen M. Chen, *The Tao Te Ching: A New Translation with Commentary* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 89, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao*, 137.

<sup>14</sup> Yi Se-hyŏng, *Theology of Tao*, 16, 115. Other scholars such as Yi Hyŏn-ju, Lee Jung Young, Ryu Dong-shik and Sin Yŏng-bok also approach Tao as analogous to Christian God.

(1:1, “In the beginning was the Word”) as ‘道’ or ‘*tao*.’ Kim Kyong-jae, in his discussion about “the Gospel of John and the Tao Te Ching,” reports that the first Korean translation of the term, *logos*, was 도 (‘*to*’), but has since become ‘말씀’ (‘*malssŭm*’ or ‘word’).<sup>15</sup>

In the matter of comparing with the Christian God, ‘*to*’ is viewed differently because of the Christian insistence on a *personal* God. Perhaps a typical, Christian example reads as follows: “The impersonal Tao is in stark contrast to the personal loving God of Christianity, who is both willing and able to meet the deepest needs we all have.”<sup>16</sup> However, ‘*to*’ is seen as both non-personal *and* personal. This argument will be discussed further when the complementary feature of ‘*to*’ is introduced.

So far we have looked at a few major concepts of ‘*to*’: the concrete ‘path to walk,’ ‘model for human life,’ ‘first principle,’ and ‘source of all beings.’ If we compare two Korean words, *kil* and ‘*to*,’ ‘*to*’ more strongly evokes the two latter concepts, while *kil* does the former two. ‘*To*’ conveys a more formal nuance (perhaps because it is a Chinese-origin word), pointing to the ethical, religio-philosophical ‘first principle.’ The originally-Korean word, *kil*, is more closely related to the concrete meaning of ‘path to walk,’ though it also conveys deep philosophical meanings.

Kŭm Chang-t’ae, a well-known Korean scholar on Confucianism, captures the major concepts of *kil* or ‘*to*’ as well as the importance of ‘walking’ or ‘acting’:

What makes the fundamental ideal of Confucianism and at the same time denotes the truth is called ‘*to*.’ ‘*To*’ not only signifies the ultimate ideal or the truth but also represents the ‘path’ as the most realistic and concrete entity. The ‘path’ is walked by ordinary people every day, which emphasizes practical actions in life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “요한복음과 도덕경 2: 말씀이 계셨다” [The Gospel of John and the Tao Te Ching 2: There Was Word]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=497&page=1&ftype=6&fval=&backdepth=1>.

<sup>16</sup> Robert E. Hume, “Taoism,” *Handbook of Today’s Religions*, ed. Josh McDowell and Don Stewart (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 347. This is not representative of all Christian voices.

<sup>17</sup> Kŭm Chang-t’ae, *Confucian Thoughts and Korean Society*, 81; See, for a similar view, Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao*, 8.

## FEATURES

### Non-definable

“All religious traditions speak of the Absolute as beyond speech and name.”<sup>18</sup> For instance, there has been a stream of opinions within Christianity that speaks about the ineffability of God. Meister Eckhart of the thirteenth century is one of the leading examples of this, emphasizing the importance of taking leave of God for the sake of God.<sup>19</sup> To quote Augustine, “If you have understood, then this is not God. If you were able to understand, then you understood something else instead of God.”<sup>20</sup> However, a couple of points will be mentioned to illustrate how the ineffable feature of ‘to,’ in particular, is emphasized as one of the most outstanding features in Taoist tradition.

The statement, “The tao that can be spoken of is not the real tao” (TTC, Ch 1), cannot be fully explicated as merely a reminder to us “of the limitations of the language,” as Graham contends.<sup>21</sup> The non-definable nature of ‘to’ stands above all other characteristics of ‘to’; it is “mystery of mysteries,” as Zhang Longxi describes.<sup>22</sup> Zhang views that the totality of ‘to’ is kept intact only through practicing silence. Sin Yǒng-bok describes this indescribable feature of ‘to’ through an analogy: “The human capacity to understand is as small as a bowl. After we take some water from the sea using a bowl, we cannot say we have the sea in our bowl.”<sup>23</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok further argues that Westerners unconsciously abide by the perspective that ‘whatever cannot be named is not the name,’ in the Heideggerian outlook wherein language is the ‘house of being’; however, Taoists would be restless with such an outlook on human language.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Chen, *Tao Te Ching*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *마이스터 에카르트 의 영성 사상 [The Spiritual Thought of Meister Eckhart]* (Waegan: Benedict Press, 2003), 9, 15-16

<sup>20</sup> Augustine *Sermo LII*, chapter VI 16 PL 38 col. 360, quoted in Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Zhang, *The Tao and the Logos*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 269.

<sup>24</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 269; Keel Hee-sung, “무언의 지혜” [Word-less Wisdom], in Keel Hee-sung

Emphasis on the indefinable nature of 'to' arises in part from the Taoist view that sees 'to' as a cyclic movement or the essence of change.<sup>25</sup> 'To' is not categorized as a static noun but as an active verb in the Taoist paradigm.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, 'to' cannot and should not be confined within a certain 'name'; it was only when forced to give it a name that the writer named it 'to,' which is explained apologetically in TTC (Ch 25).

### **Complementary, inclusive**

Another feature of 'to' is its complementary and inclusive nature. 'To' is described throughout TTC as being "transcendent yet immanent, weak yet powerful, original yet developed, subtle yet huge. It encompasses all opposites and yet is part of all."<sup>27</sup> This kind of feature is recognized in Christian perspectives of God. In Christian theology, too, God is both transcendent and immanent, judging and forgiving, revealed and hidden, and even both male and female (even though God still remains mostly portrayed as 'He').

However, that God *is* 'personal,' not impersonal, has been a crucial, almost non-negotiable, stance in Christian faith tradition.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, that 'To' or/and God can be both personal and non-personal is an intuitive knowledge for those who have grown up within Taoist tradition. Lee Jung Young observes that most Chinese people have conceived of *t'ien* ('heaven') as the impersonal sky as well as the personalized

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and others, *오늘에 풀어보는 동양사상 [Eastern Thoughts for Today]* (Seoul: Ch'ölhakgwa Hyönsilsa, 1999), 63.

<sup>25</sup> It was based on the cyclical view of East-Asian cosmology that Lee Jung Young expands a 'theology of change.' In the theology, Lee affirms that tao is the essence of change, or, in one word, change itself. Lee views that the Western concept of reality captured in process theology is most similar to his own theology of change. Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 13, 19, 30. See also Ryu Dong-shik, *To and Logos*, 26; Sin Yöng-bok, *Lectures*, 270.

<sup>26</sup> See, for the comparison between Tao, the Change and 'YHWH,' which is derived from the verb *hayah*, Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 30-43.

<sup>27</sup> Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 165.

<sup>28</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 49-52. Lee suggests the possible reason behind this personal God in Western Christianity might be based on the human-centred cosmic view: "It may well be that westerners think of the divine nature as personal because of their view of the human condition and the human place in the cosmos." Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 52.

*Shang Ti* ('King of Kings' or 'God'), and "their concept of *tao* has encompassed both the personal and the utterly impersonal."<sup>29</sup>

Derived from the 'both-and' thought paradigm, another distinct 'to' perspective is its inclusive nature. This is emphasized especially by the Taoist school within the Chinese religio-philosophical world, by encouraging non-discrimination, whether it is between 'beautiful and ugly,' 'good and evil,' 'difficult and easy,' or 'high and low' (TTC, Ch 2). This avoidance is based on deep insight that most value systems are typically socially-constructed and power-based.<sup>30</sup>

Taoists go even further than mere avoidance, by bringing marginalized entities into the centre.<sup>31</sup> Within this paradigm of reversal, the marginalized group—which includes 'ignorance,' silence, nothing, inaction, female, empty, dark/black, below, behind, still, small, weak, soft, and bent—receives priority over the opposite central group—'knowledge,' verbalisation, something, (over)action, male, full, light/white, above, before, moving, big, strong, hard, and straight.<sup>32</sup> Derridean deconstructionism is, in this sense, considered as a modern revival of the ancient Taoist notion of non-discrimination.<sup>33</sup>

On a more practical level, this inclusive nature of 'to' underlies the phenomenon wherein rival schools such as Confucian and Taoist "do not compete with each other but stay in healthy tension, offering a good companion to each other."<sup>34</sup> 'To' is also pursued by Buddhists; they seek the "Eight Right Paths" in order

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<sup>29</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 53. Lee introduces Betty Heimann's view on this: "The West think in *aut-aut*, the disjunctive 'either-or'" but Indian people visualize a "continuous stream of interrelated moments of *sive-sive*, the 'this as well as that' in an endless series of changes and transformations." Betty Heimann, *Facets of Indian Thought*, quoted in Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Lectures*, 272-77.

<sup>31</sup> Graham posits that one of the most interesting and meaningful features in Taoist perspective is "the reversal of priorities in chains of oppositions." Graham, *Disputers*, 223-31.

<sup>32</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, 223. Chen says that the TTC alone draws its inspiration from the female principle among all the ancient classics still extant. Chen, *Tao Te Ching*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Scholars who comment on a parallel between this Taoist reversal and Derridean deconstructionism: Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 89; Graham, *Disputers*, 227. We find this 'reversal' echoing in the vision of restoration proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah in the Bible (Isa 40:4).

<sup>34</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Discussions*, 122.

to reach their *telos*, that is, *nirvana*. Graham notes: “Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. there had been a general shift from ‘You are wrong, I’m right’ to ‘You have a narrow view, I have a wide view.’ We may see this as one more example of the Chinese tendency to rank A above B rather than eliminate B.”<sup>35</sup> Even with the weakness that may arise from this tendency of compromise, inclusiveness is an original virtue in Taoist tradition.

### **Practical, life-centred**

One of the features of ‘*to*’ is its familiarity with common, ordinary people. “‘*To*’ is not far from human beings,” informs *the Doctrine of the Mean*, another foundational Chinese classic (of the fifth century BCE).<sup>36</sup> In his commentary on *the Doctrine of the Mean*, Kim Yong-ok argues that it would be a mistake to consider ‘*to*’ as something distant from ordinary people’s lives.<sup>37</sup> ‘*To*’ has been utilized in every field of human life, not only in academic quarters but in everyday expressions of ordinary people in China and beyond. As mentioned earlier, ‘*to*’ is the most generic word within philosophy, religion and also people’s common sense in East-Asia; by contrast, many East-Asians would not understand *logos* without some lengthy explanation about it.<sup>38</sup>

This familiarity of ‘*to*’ with common people highlights its practicality. Sin Yǒng-bok comments that whatever offers no practical help to real life is valueless within the Asian realistic paradigm; the values that would be beneficial only in the ‘other world’ are not highly regarded.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, Asians are “non-religious realists,” remarks Sin.<sup>40</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok compares this life-centred practicality with Western philosophy: “The West has had philo-sophy, that is, the ‘love for knowledge.’ In

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<sup>35</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, 378.

<sup>36</sup> 中庸 [*The Doctrine of the Mean*], Ch 13. See Kim Yong-ok, 中庸 [A Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean] (Seoul: T’ongnamu, 2011), 35-41.

<sup>37</sup> Kim Yong-ok, *Doctrine of the Mean*, 192, 195.

<sup>38</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, *To and Logos*, 17-27.

<sup>39</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 34-35.

<sup>40</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 35.

contrast, the Eastern philosophy has simply been ‘to,’ literally the ‘path to walk.’”<sup>41</sup> ‘To’ as the Eastern wisdom and truth is not something that can be obtained by intense, solitary thinking but found in the very midst of everyday life, especially communal life.<sup>42</sup> This is affirmed by Nisbet, who comments that Chinese philosophy, such as Taoism and Confucianism, is “less concerned with finding the truth than with finding the Tao—the Way—to live in the world.”<sup>43</sup>

## CONTEXT OF THE TAOIST ‘WAY’

### **Wu (無)**

‘Wu,’ which is generally rendered in English as ‘non-being’ or ‘emptiness,’ is an important concept in Taoist or East-Asian religio-philosophical tradition. It is out of wu or non-being that all beings derive their usefulness or find their genuine identity. Metaphors illustrating the preeminence of non-being or emptiness include the hub of a wheel (of an ancient cart), a vessel, and a room (TTC, Ch 11). Thirty spokes share one hub to make a wheel of a cart, and it is through the non-being (wu) of the hub that a use for the carriage exists. Similarly, both vessel and room are made useful through the *emptiness* that exists in them.<sup>44</sup> Sin Yöng-bok affirms that “mu [wu] is not just emptiness but the basis for all beings.”<sup>45</sup>

Wu’s English translation, ‘non-being’ or ‘emptiness,’ can be misleading in the Western world where the matter of ‘being’ is prioritized. Scholars observe that one of the major differences between Western and Chinese cosmologies lies in their dealings of ‘being’ (‘yu’) and ‘non-being’ (‘wu’). According to Chinese philosopher Zhang Fa, Chinese philosophy views that all things come from ‘being’ but this ‘being’

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<sup>41</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Lectures*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Lectures*, 36-37.

<sup>43</sup> Richard E. Nisbet, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>44</sup> The oxymoron, “emptiness that exists,” is a precious reality to the people of Taoist tradition.

<sup>45</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Discussions*, 123. ‘Mu’ is the Korean equivalent of the Chinese ‘wu’; the same word with different pronunciation.

comes from ‘non-being’; this superlative quality of *wu* makes Chinese worldview distinct from that of the West.<sup>46</sup> Moltmann confirms Zhang Fa’s view as he states: “Western philosophy (ever since Parmenides and Plato) started not from the non-being of Being but from the Being of beings. The philosophy which takes Being as absolute presence does exclude all non-being. Christian theology has always followed this Greek metaphysics, taking as starting point the absolute being of God.”<sup>47</sup>

*Wu* has its twin concept, ‘dark’ (玄).<sup>48</sup> In the Taoist thought paradigm, as *wu* or ‘non-being’ precedes ‘being,’ so ‘dark’ does ‘light.’ As non-being is far from something lacking, so ‘dark’ is not a chaos to be overcome. ‘Dark,’ instead, encompasses that which is *deep, hidden, silent, mysterious*.<sup>49</sup> Kim Hyŏn-sŭng, a well-loved poet in Korea, writes a poem called “*Kŏmŭn Pit*” (The Dark Light), which captures this preeminence of ‘dark’:

*The Dark Light*

Light, not singing,  
but thinking  
of what to sing.

Light, not opening,  
but closing eyes  
quietly.

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<sup>46</sup> Zhang Fa, *Comparison of Aesthetics and Worldview between China and the West*, 37-40.

<sup>47</sup> Moltmann, “TAO – The Chinese Mystery of the World: Lao Tsu’s *Tao Te Ching* Read with Western Eyes,” in *Science and Wisdom*, 177.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Dark’ (玄) is translated as ‘dark and mysterious’ (Ellen M. Chen) or simply as ‘mysterious’ in most Korean translations introduced here.

<sup>49</sup> This kind of ‘dark’ concept promises to be difficult to understand for those who are accustomed to light-centred thinking; to them darkness is often ‘evil’ and something to be overcome, opposite to light. For instance, most Westerners receive the ‘empty’ and ‘dark’ language in Genesis (1:2) as negative—something to be corrected and overcome by ‘filling in,’ ‘ordering,’ and ‘shining light.’ However, an East-Asian perspective sees differently; ‘darkness’ or ‘emptiness’ is deep and mysterious, thus best describing the ‘Way’ or Tao; after all, this ‘emptiness’ and ‘darkness’ existed with God before the ‘entrance of human sin’ in Genesis (1:2). Hence, Chen argues that it is by “the divinization of the Receptacle (Chaos or Nothing)” —which has been repudiated by other religions and philosophies—that the Taoist paradigm proves to be a reversal of the whole religious process of humankind. Chen, *Tao Te Ching*, 42. Similarly, Graham, *Disputers*, 225. Perhaps Taoists’ valuing of ‘*wu*’ or ‘dark’ above ‘*yu*’ or ‘light’ finds its echo in a biblical passage such as St. Paul’s emphasis of ‘the invisible’ over ‘the visible’ (2 Cor 4:18).

Light, seeing flowers,  
not asking their names  
but embracing them all.

Light, cherishing,  
instead of loving;  
Not revealing faults,  
but casting shadows upon them.

Light, offering shelter  
for all shining lights,  
tired and faltering.

The one and only light,  
The most beautiful  
The most painful,  
beyond all other lights,  
has reached the final light.<sup>50</sup>

This concept of *wu* paves the way to the understanding of another crucial Taoist concept, *wu-wei*, to which we will now turn.

### ***Wu-wei* (無爲)**

*Wu-wei* is a compound noun which consists of *wu* (無) and *wei* (爲). *Wu* means ‘non-being’ or ‘emptiness,’ as discussed above, and *wei* means ‘doing’ or ‘acting.’ Out of this comes a problematic, English rendering of ‘non-action.’ The term ‘non-action’ can lead people into negative concepts such as laziness and passivity. The *wu-wei* concept, however, is grounded on the superlative quality of *wu*.

*Wu-wei* does not signify “inactivity” that belittles human effort,<sup>51</sup> “the absence of action”<sup>52</sup> or “passive escapism which avoids one’s own responsibility.”<sup>53</sup> Griffiths defines *wu-wei* as “actionless activity,” and further elaborates that “it is a state of passivity, of ‘non-action,’ but a passivity that is totally active, in the sense of

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<sup>50</sup> Kim Hyŏn-sŭng, 가을에는 기도하게 하소서 [*Let Me Pray in Autumn*] (Seoul: Yejŏnsa, 1984), 255.

<sup>51</sup> Comprehended by Robert E. Hume. Robert E. Hume, “Taoism,” 346-47.

<sup>52</sup> As corrected by Ching. Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 89.

<sup>53</sup> As corrected by Yi Se-hyŏng. Yi Se-hyŏng, *Theology of Tao*, 97.

receptivity” which is dynamic and creative.<sup>54</sup> *Wu-wei* avoids artificiality, aggressiveness, overaction, and attachment whether to the self or to the action itself;<sup>55</sup> instead, it seeks spontaneity, non-interference, humble faithfulness in one’s own place.<sup>56</sup> A Chinese word, ‘falsity’(偽), which takes the form of ‘human’(人) and ‘action’(爲) combined together, gives a warning to any human (over)action, while affirming the notion of *wu-wei*.

Actions of *wu-wei* are characteristically peaceful and beneficial, which may be best captured through the metaphor of water (TTC, Ch 8). As shown in the manner that water runs, *wu-wei* never quarrels; facing a mountain, it finds a detour, and encountering a rock, it divides itself. Thus, it turns and yields at times but does not stop flowing.<sup>57</sup> On a different note, *wu-wei* will not go forward until it fills up the lowest part around, ultimately benefitting all things.<sup>58</sup> Because of this kind of action, the way of water or *wu-wei* is designated as the “highest form of goodness” (TTC, Ch 8).

As water is part of nature, *wu-wei* or the ‘right doing’ is best manifested in nature, which is free of any artificiality or manipulation. All ‘doings’ of nature are *wu-wei*, which instructs humans about the importance of emptying one’s personal ambitions, desire, obstinacy and willfulness.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective arises the deep respect for nature within the Taoist tradition.

## Nature

It is perhaps in the concept of nature that the East and the West differ from each other the most. Smith phrases this difference in a much generalized manner: “a

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<sup>54</sup> Bede Griffith (1907-93) was a Benedictine mystic who lived many years in Indian ashrams. Griffith is quoted in Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao*, 165-66.

<sup>55</sup> Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 89; Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 273; Mair, *Tao Te Ching*, 138.

<sup>56</sup> Mair, *Tao Te Ching*, 138; Chen, *Tao Te Ching*, 144; Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 273, Yi Se-hyǒng, *Theology of Tao*, 98; Moltmann, “Tao,” 185.

<sup>57</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Discussions*, 133.

<sup>58</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Discussions*, 133.

<sup>59</sup> Jesus’ discipleship code—denying yourself—is recalled here (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; implicitly in John 12:24-25). This superlative aspect of emptiness in ‘*to*’ also seems to echo the kenotic Christ as described in the NT (Phil 2:5-8).

union of man with nature” in China but “man against nature” in the West.<sup>60</sup> Kim Heup Young affirms that East-Asians have long maintained intimate relationship and close partnership with nature.<sup>61</sup> Nature to East-Asians is something that has life in the way that human beings have life. Both nature and human beings are on *communicable terms* in the true sense of the meaning.<sup>62</sup> In his reflective essay, “*Mokdök*” (Virtues of the Tree), Kim Kyong-jae illustrates excellent virtues of the tree: peaceful equity, balance between visible and invisible, ability to abide by the order (of the Creator), and self-emptiness. Kim finishes the writing with a reflective question: “According to Genesis, a tree is a creature and so is a human being. Whose life reflects God’s truth more truthfully and faithfully, and thus glorifies God—me, as a human, or a tree?”<sup>63</sup> Kim Heup Young goes so far as to say that East-Asian affinity with nature is incomparable with any other.<sup>64</sup>

Nature is superior to human beings in its obedience to the truth. For this reason, humans should reorient the axis of life onto nature and imitate the ‘*to*’ of nature. In TTC, nature is placed even before ‘*to*’ (*tao*) when it comes to the matter of practical imitation: “Humans imitate earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven imitates tao, tao imitates nature” (TTC, Ch 25).<sup>65</sup> Korean (children’s) songwriter Ö Hyo-sön (1925-2004) wrote in a much-loved song called “In the Flower Garden”: “Dad told me, ‘live *with* flowers, live *like* flowers.’”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 74. See also Kim Heup Young, *도의 신학 [Toward a Theo-tao]* (Seoul: Tasan Külbang, 2000), 293; Sin Yöng-bok, *Lectures*, 297-98.

<sup>61</sup> Kim Heup Young, *Toward a Theo-tao*, 293-94.

<sup>62</sup> This point was presented as a part of the distinctly-Korean hermeneutic. See the section, “Korea-centred,” in Chapter 5.

<sup>63</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “*목덕*” [Virtues of the Tree]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=415&page=1&ftype=6&fval=&backdepth=1> (accessed November 17, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Kim Heup Young, *Toward a Theo-tao*, 293.

<sup>65</sup> Chen, *Tao Te Ching*, 125-26, 144; Yi Hyön-ju, *장일순의 노자이야기 [Dialogue with Chang Il-sun about Lao-Tzu]* (Seoul: Samin, 2003), 297-99.

<sup>66</sup> Ö Hyo-sön wrote this song as he recalled his pastor father who was kidnapped in the northern part of Korea (North Korea) during the Korean War (1950-1953).

Nature to East-Asians is not only alive and friendly, but educational and, even further, revelatory of the truth or way, which is elaborated by Chen:

According to the *Tao Te Ching* nature is the most direct and faithful revelation of Tao. Its theology of nature is grounded in natural theology, i.e., our knowledge of Tao comes through the observation of nature. Nature is the realm of grace. Everything spiritual we learn from the natural world; its beauty and perpetual youth require only that we open our eyes and look.<sup>67</sup>

Keel Hee-sung affirms that ‘Eastern naturalism’ contains a deep spirituality and religiosity even without mentioning ‘God,’ and, therefore, it should not be mistaken for the Western-born, atheistic naturalism.<sup>68</sup> In fact, East-Asians see the immanent God in nature. Yi Hyŏn-ju focuses on the original meaning of the Chinese word, ‘自然’ (nature)—‘who/what is’ or ‘self-so’—and finds it analogous to God’s original ‘name’—“I Am Who I Am” (Exod 3:14)—which is understood to denote the self-revealing nature of God.<sup>69</sup> Those with East-Asian spirituality would strongly disagree with such notion that “Nature’s Creator forms and sustains, but does not embed into nature a message to be interpreted in knowing who God ‘is’ or what God ‘wants.’”<sup>70</sup>

The Taoist ‘way’ has grown within the environment of these foundational themes and superlative values of *wu*, *wu-wei* and nature.

## **SOTERIOLOGICAL EFFECTS**

As introduced above, the conceptual world related to the Taoist ‘way’ or ‘to’ contains: the concrete ‘path to walk,’ ‘model for human life,’ ‘first principle,’ and

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<sup>67</sup> Chen, *Tao Te Ching*, 42.

<sup>68</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 106.

<sup>69</sup> Yi Hyŏn-ju, *Lao-Tzu*, 259-61.

<sup>70</sup> Marty Folsom, “The Two Books Metaphor: A Critique and a Caution,” *CRUX* 47/1 (2011): 32. To be fair, Folsom makes this comment in an effort to defend Christianity against the dominance of Science in present days where Christianity continues to lose its cultural sway.

‘source of all beings.’ Major features of the Taoist ‘way’ have also been identified: ‘non-definable,’ ‘complementary and inclusive,’ and ‘practical, life-centred.’ These findings shed light on Taoist salvation or *telos*—“oneness with the Absolute Reality,” highlighting *movement or walk, returning to the source, and word-less embodiment*.

First, connected with the basic concept of ‘*to*’ as the ‘path to walk’ and its inherent indicator of ‘walking,’ reaching the Taoist *telos* involves ‘movement’ or ‘walk.’ Action in the feet bears more significance in the salvation of ‘*to*’ than realization in the head. In light of this, salvation is that which one can enjoy to the degree that one walks the right path. This means that there is no separation between (true) knowledge and life, or between faith and deed. Whether it is a right perspective, noble thought, good will, strong faith, or deep understanding, it truly becomes one’s own only when the feet carry it forward and act it out in real life situations, especially in the context of living with one’s neighbours or other people.

In addition, one’s own effort, through walking or living, is inherently suggested. The Korean word, ‘*to*,’ is often accompanied by the verb *takta* (‘to work on’), whose literal meaning is ‘to mop or clean.’ The emphasis of movement orientation and human effort in ‘*to*’ salvation offers certain significance in soteriological discussion: salvation is not an object that one receives and safely stores but that which is revealed as one continues to walk in and work on it.

The second aspect, ‘returning to the source,’ directly concerns the *telos* in Taoist tradition: “oneness with the Absolute Reality.”<sup>71</sup> This Taoist *telos* entails essential elements such as *relationality* and *returning*, acknowledging one’s relation with the ‘Unhewn Log,’ the origin and source, and all other ‘vessels’ (as discussed in major concepts of ‘*to*’). Taoist salvation is based on the perspective that all humans are inherently interrelated beings, having come from the same source. Taoist salvation requires both the right perspective and sustained efforts toward right relationships of all kinds; ignorance about such truths is a state from which humans should be saved.<sup>72</sup> Those who seek to live harmoniously with all other beings, both

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<sup>71</sup> Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 151.

<sup>72</sup> In this sense only, ignorance is a similar concept to ‘sin’ in Christian tradition.

human and non-human, would be able to enjoy wellbeing and peace, which is echoed in the concept of *shalom* in biblical tradition.<sup>73</sup>

Salvation is ultimately returning to the One, eternal source and origin. Yi Hyön-ju finds in this notion of 'returning,' resonance between the biblical tradition and the Taoist one. For instance, Yi hears the echo of the returning appeal to 'To' in the biblical 'story of a prodigal son,' in which reuniting with the loving father is highlighted.<sup>74</sup> In the Korean language, someone's death is expressed as '*toragasyötta*' ('has returned'), which is an implicit expression signifying the return to the eternal home or source.

Third, the emphasis of word-less embodiment of the 'to' or truth yields certain Taoist tendencies, alternative and complementary to the strength of Western theologies and pedagogies. With the outstanding feature of ineffability of 'to,' Taoist tradition in general does not regard highly any attempt to *define* the deep and mysterious, e.g. 'To' or God or salvation. This tradition overlaps with the Eastern Orthodox apophatic or mystic tradition insofar as the mystery of 'God' is highly emphasized.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, well-defined and categorized, systematic *tao*-logy has not been developed and is unlikely to be so. Verbal or written, clear explanation or argumentation would neither be a passion nor strength of *tao*-logians.

Moreover, in accordance with the Taoist maxim, "The person who knows does not speak; the person who speaks does not know" (TTC, Ch 56), there is general agreement about the inefficacy of human speech in conveying truth in Taoist tradition. When seeking to express truth, it is preferable to do so indirectly and even 'vaguely,' turning to metaphors, symbols, analogies and parables.<sup>76</sup> The best form of

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<sup>73</sup> Yi Se-hyöng, *Theology of Tao*, 255. See, for the biblical *shalom*, the section, "Soteriological Effects," in Chapter 6.

<sup>74</sup> Yi Hyön-ju, *Lao-Tzu*, 36. Yi calls this returning a 'salvation.'

<sup>75</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin shares his experience as a teacher at a seminary in Russia: Russian students' response to C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Evil* was: "Lewis is too logical and rational." Clendenin points out that this kind of remark presents a major difference of perspective in the theological posture of Orthodox theologians of the east and their counterparts in the west. Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 1994), 48, 150. For similar arguments, see: Zhang, *The Tao and the Logos*, 45-51; Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 92.

<sup>76</sup> There is a certain similarity between this and the preferred language of ancient scriptures such as the OT and the NT. Robert E. Webber contends that the development of metaphor originated from an 'ancient mind-set' such as a Hebrew worldview. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship* (Grand

*tao*-logical pedagogy is silence, which means that the best form of teaching or ‘evangelism’ is through being a companion and an example. Learning about the way of salvation requires observation: observation of nature and of good, all-benefitting deeds.

Interconnected with this de-emphasis of human speech is the importance of *embodiment* in the matter of Taoist salvation. The ineffable ‘*to*’ is not theory-based or argumentation-oriented; instead, it is best to be embodied. ‘*To*’ is made known by potency of actions and virtues, whose designated term is *tök* (in Korean) or ‘*te*’ (in Chinese).<sup>77</sup> This comprises the summary of *Tao Te Ching*: the *Ching* (Scripture) which conveys its foundational message that the indescribable *tao* must be manifested by ‘ten-thousand’ forms of *te* or practical, specific, concrete actions.

All this information about the soteriological implications of the Taoist ‘way’ or ‘*to*’ will shed light on the Korean reading of John 14:6, especially in the ‘reading through the lens of Korean *kil* or path’ (Chapter 10).

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Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 129. It is also widely acknowledged that “throughout the Old and New Testaments metaphorical language is used in order to teach a truth that is otherwise difficult to comprehend.” Sharon Baker, “The Repetition of Reconciliation: Satisfying Justice, Mercy, and Forgiveness,” in *Striken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, eds., Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 224.

<sup>77</sup> Scholars have translated ‘*te*’ in various words: potency, power, virtue; integrity, self, character, personality or charisma. Graham, *Disputers*, 13; Mair, *Tao Te Ching*, xiii.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE BIBLICAL 'WAY' AND THE TAOIST 'WAY': A CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON**

The previous two chapters described the major concepts, particular features, respective contexts of the biblical 'way' and the Taoist or East-Asian 'way,' and soteriological effects of each 'way.' The aim of the present chapter is to compare these two 'ways.' Comparison of the two 'ways,' as with any other comparative task, is a complex one. This comparison will aim to make an analytical and synthetical summary of the previous two chapters: the reviews of the biblical 'way' and the Taoist 'way.' In addition, this comparison would like to respond to the two specific questions (as spelled out in the introduction of the thesis): what are the aspects in which both 'ways' contribute together to matters of 'salvation'? And, as a hermeneutical tool for reading John 14:6, how similar and how different are the biblical 'way' and the Taoist or Korean 'way' from each other?

#### **DIFFERENCES**

This comparative review will begin with the apparent differences between the two 'ways.' First of all, the geographical location of each 'way' is different from that of the other. The location of the biblical 'way' is ancient Near East, featuring an environment of desert and a more nomadic life style, while that of the Taoist 'way' is ancient China or East-Asia, characterized as a relatively stable and predictable natural environment, which allowed people to settle in one place and continuously cultivate

land over generations. In view of this, each ‘way’ is considered as a ‘tree’ that was planted in a certain ‘soil.’<sup>1</sup>

Ham Sök-hön, recalling Ellsworth Huntington’s theory, states that a race or a people group might be compared to a kind of fruit, with its geography being likened to the weather and soil for the fruit.<sup>2</sup> Both ‘way’ traditions have witnessed to good as well as bad, faithful as well as faithless, fruit among their own people. For instance, multitudes of people in East-Asia have been able to enjoy the good fruit of ‘*to*’ (by exercising *wu-wei*).<sup>3</sup> We may call this kind of ‘good fruit’ the ‘work of salvation’ for a people group.

Avoiding a comprehensive review of the subject, we will narrowly observe the best fruits—salvation for people—in each ‘way’ tradition; this requires some discussion about the religio-philosophical background of each ‘way.’ As presented in the section that described the context of each ‘way,’ the biblical ‘way’ has grown in a theistic, creation and revelation tradition. This tradition has the creator God who initiates a covenantal relationship with the ‘chosen’ people, speaks through prophets, and is actively involved in history through concrete historical events. In contrast, the religio-philosophical background of the Taoist ‘way’ is a mystical one where the Ultimate Reality, ‘non-being,’ is ‘hidden’ on the one hand, and is manifested in every being on the other, in silence through nature, in particular.

From within a biblical salvational perspective, the creator God is acknowledged, as well as verbally praised, as the one who saves, the giver of salvation. In contrast, ‘salvation’ is available in Taoist tradition but the ‘giver’ is not elaborated in any depth. The biblical ‘way’ of salvation emphasizes faithful allegiance to the highest personal being, while Taoist salvation stresses harmonious union with the ultimate ‘*to*,’ *wu* or non-being. A faithful covenantal relationship that culminates

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<sup>1</sup> This is aligned with the main hermeneutical assumption which was presented in Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ham Sök-hön, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 84. Ellsworth Huntington (1876-1947) was a leading American geologist, whose works pioneered the theory that climate influences geography, human migration history and, most meaningfully, *character* of races.

<sup>3</sup> “Millions of people in Asia lived worthwhile, humane lives with the help of the religions which were *available for them.*” See Kim Kyong-jae, “숨발 김경재 교수와 박재순 교수의 대담” [Dialogue of Kim Kyong-jae and Pak Chae-sun], in *The Voice*, 32; also, Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 13-15, 24.

in biblical salvation requires initial agreement and commitment, while a harmonious union for Taoist salvation does not make such demands at the entry point.

The personhood of the Ultimate Reality deserves further discussion. According to common understanding, the biblical God reveals God's name and is personal while 'To' is nameless and non-personal. However, on closer inspection, the biblical God shares more in common with the unnameable 'To' than is immediately apparent. The self-introduction of the creator God with the name YHWH underlines God's 'self-so' (meaning, 'non-created') and self-sufficiency. God is incomparable, irreproachable, unfathomable and unexplainable, to which biblical texts frequently attest. Hebrew writers address God through a wide range of "comparative forms of figurative language"<sup>4</sup>: "This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel . . . I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King" (Isa 43:14-15). From this observation, one may see that the *name* of God in biblical tradition is to be understood from the vantage point that God is not created, hence not a human being or man-made idol; God's being named should not be read with an intention to defend a 'personal' God against any 'non-personal' Ultimate Reality described in other religious faiths. This, of course, is not to say that the biblical God is not personal. Kim Kyong-jae proposes that the biblical God should be understood as supra-personal, i.e. not less-than but more-than personal.<sup>5</sup> This kind of notion, 'more-than-personal,' is analogous to 'To.'

It is also observed that the biblical 'way' has been generally explained in a more explicit, clear and direct manner, and the Taoist 'way' in a more implicit, ambiguous and indirect manner. In this sense, it is as if the biblical 'way' of salvation is yang and the Taoist one is yin in their character; there is no hierarchy between yin and yang, especially in their functional quality. As yin and yang are complementary,

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<sup>4</sup> DBI, 332.

<sup>5</sup> Kim sets off a journey that seeks to understand the real meaning of YHWH, the *name* of God, and offers along the way a thorough critique of such monotheism that defends a 'personal' God who has a similar character and feature as a human being. Kim Kyong-jae, 이름없는 하나님 [*The Nameless God*] (Seoul: Samin, 2002), 32, 37, 51, 54-62, 88. Waldenfels uses similar terms for the Holy Spirit: "In Christian understanding in which God is personal, Holy Spirit, too, is a 'person.' . . . He [the Holy Spirit] cannot be less or below human personality and thus impersonal, in case of doubt he can only be super- or trans-personal." Waldenfels, *Jesus Christ and the Religions*, 35.

so the Taoist salvation and the biblical one may be seen as complementary to each other.

In my view, these apparent differences between the two 'ways'—theistic tradition versus mystic, and the consequent emphasis of the verbal communication with the personal God versus non-verbal union with the non-personal Non-being—are natural and even unavoidable, due to the difference of physical context or 'soil' in which the two 'trees' have grown.

## COMMONALITIES

### **Availability, relationality, returning and walking**

Despite these differences, the two 'ways' converge at a few crucial points in regard to salvation matters. First of all, the availability of salvation in both 'ways.' This is easily overlooked because of its basic, foundational nature. Nevertheless, that people are shown the right 'way' or 'to,' that people can enjoy 'salvation' by walking in the 'way' is not an insignificant fact; it is good news that exists in each tradition. In this sense, the biblical worldview and the Taoist worldview are not pessimistic but optimistic and hopeful.

That the salvation of both 'ways' emphasizes *relationality* is another, important commonality between them. The 'way' people should walk in the biblical tradition is relationship-based: faithful, covenantal relationship with the Lord God. Closely related to this is the salvific *shalom*, which is a communal, relational term, entailing the necessity of appropriate or God-honouring relationship with one another. The Taoist 'way' also points to the supremacy of relationality. All things that have life are destined to live together with others, both human and non-human. Becoming enlightened about this fundamental responsibility of interrelationality among the world of living beings and living accordingly, constitutes Taoist *telos*.

It is important to note that this relationality carries the notion of *returning* in both traditions. The repeated message of God, 'return to me,' conveys this emphasis, asking for the return of people's hearts to their God. The Taoist notion of salvation

also emphasizes this returning. Each being is from the eternal 'Wu' or 'Non-being'; a return to the Non-being is the natural, necessary and most beneficial thing to do.

Another important commonality is that salvation of both 'ways' is firmly grounded in *walking*. Since both 'ways' have developed from ancient worlds, the practical, everyday action of human walking seems to have contributed to the phenomenological knowledge of the 'way.' The importance of walking further indicates that the 'way' of salvation is an inherently 'embodied' entity. Whether the transformation of the human heart or the right perspective of the human mind, it has to be carried into actions in concrete life situations. Neither the biblical 'way' nor the Taoist 'way' knows any salvation that is disconnected from its physical manifestation.

The integral and holistic nature of both 'ways' affirms that faith and deed, or theory of salvation and appearance of salvation, are one whole, indivisible and non-compartmentalized. Recognition of such affords valuable insights about the matter of destiny in both traditions: each step of a person is engaged in her destiny. Each movement of a person's body encapsulates his heart, mind and faith, and every action one takes contributes to the formation of one's destiny. This embodied nature of both 'ways' has a potential to be useful in further development of Christian theology of the body or embodied theology.<sup>6</sup>

Commonality between the two 'ways' so far has included the *availability of salvation* and important elements of salvation such as *relationality*, *returning*, and *walking* (embodiment). In addition to these, further mutual agreement exists between the two 'ways' in regard to *resources for salvation* and *frame of thought*. These two areas may shed light on each 'way' in terms of its use as a hermeneutical tool with which to accomplish an authentic Korean reading of biblical texts.

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<sup>6</sup> The late Ahn Byong-mu understood the importance of the embodiment of the 'Way'; Ahn, who made effort to honour his own cultural heritage, left behind a legacy of "*ch'ehyŏn sinhak*" (theology of embodiment) or "*mome sinhak*" (theology of body) to Korean Christianity. See Kim Kyong-jae, "안병무의 '체현(體現)의 신학'" [Ahn Byong-mu's Theology of Embodiment], speech at the commemoration of Ahn Byong-mu, Hyangnin Church, Seoul, October 20, 2002. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=72&page=1&ftype=6&fval=&backdepth=1> (accessed July 12, 2012).

## Resources for salvation

Review of each 'way' offers some commonality in resources for salvation. Resources for each salvific 'way' are found *both* within and outside human beings. As a common source outside of human beings, nature offers itself as an important resource which people can turn to in order to know the 'way' of salvation. The primary source of salvation in the biblical tradition is of course God: the spoken words of God, deeds of God through history, *and* God's wisdom gleaned from things in nature. In the Taoist tradition, the very best resource from which one can learn the 'way' of salvation is nature; the principles and virtues discerned in nature are to be imitated by human beings.

Both traditions also point to the preeminence of the human heart as a resource through which to discern the 'way' of salvation. Biblical texts remain in tension in their appraisal of the human heart; though possible to be the most corrupt above all, the heart is a dwelling place for God and God's words and truth. The Taoist tradition emphasizes the right heart or mind, emptied of one's self-centred will and desire; it is the 'pure heart of a little child' mentioned in TTC (Ch 28).<sup>7</sup>

Acknowledging the existence of common resources in both 'ways' for salvation, one may ask how this informs salvation matters and biblical hermeneutics. That these specific resources—human heart and nature—are available to every individual human being and each unique religio-cultural group on earth creates a fair ground for human salvation, and also serves as an effective point of reference in intercultural or interreligious discussion about salvation matters.<sup>8</sup>

A Taoist-biblical hermeneutic that turns to nature in relation to salvation creates a different tangent in reading biblical passages. For instance, on reading the passage, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4), "every word that comes from the mouth of God" is not

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<sup>7</sup> Sin Yŏng-bok, *Lectures*, 58; Kim Kyong-jae, "요한복음과 도덕경 5: 간사함 없는 것이 참 신앙의 표징" [The Gospel of John and *Tao Te Ching* 5: No Deceit in Heart is the True Sign of Faith]. Source: <http://veritas.kr/articles/12515/20120405/성서학당-요한복음과-도덕경-5-간사함-없는-것이-참-신앙인-표징.htm> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> There exist different views even among the individuals within the same cultural group; each individual has a unique 'culture.' Thus, 'inter-cultural' in this sentence indicates not only different people groups but also different individuals within the same culture.

limited only to the words of God (or the Bible) or the deeds of God but is extended to *wisdom in nature*. Ham Sök-hön, for instance, expresses the following: “If God had a mouth, it would be the mountains, sea, grass, flowers, insects, sunlight and wind. Is nature not the Word of God?”<sup>9</sup> This kind of reading is a legitimate one, and further, may potentially enrich the traditional, “*logos*/word-centred Western,” reading.<sup>10</sup>

### **Frame of thought**

Similarity is found also in the frame of thought within which each ‘way’ is contained and developed. The comparison of frame of thought is a comparison of logic and paradigm. According to the review of each ‘way,’ both ‘way’ concepts are carried in a thought paradigm which is characteristically non-dualistic, holistic and inclusive. Within a non-dualistic, i.e. ‘both-and,’ thought frame which holds opposites as complementary, there is no room for enmity between the one and the other, such as is often observed in the logic of ‘either-or.’ In this sense, both biblical and Taoist logic stand in contrast to Greek and Western ways of thinking in which exclusive, ‘either-or’ thinking predominates.

It is widely agreed that traditional Christian theology is couched in the Greek and Western thought paradigm. Scholars such as Jürgen Moltmann and Lee Jung Young, however, express reservations about “the inadequacy of grounding Christian doctrine and biblical interpretation on the presuppositions of Greek philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Analyzing the theologies of Moltmann and Lee Jung Young, Dejong reports that these two scholars “go to considerable length in their writings to question the degree to which reading the Bible through a Hellenistic hermeneutical lens has distorted true Christian doctrine and contributed to the inability of Christian theology to solve some of its most persistent problems.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ham Sök-hön, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Word-less Wisdom,” 61, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Dejong, “The Dao, the Truth, and the Life.” A similar, alternative theological movement is advocated in Kim Heup Young, *Christ and the Tao* and *Toward a Theo-tao* as well as in Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee, eds., *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Dejong, “The Dao, the Truth, and the Life.”

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

As presented in the introduction of the thesis, there exist voices of concern about the possibility that a Taoist approach to the biblical texts might hamper understanding of the biblical 'way.' The outcome of our comparison encourages us otherwise: if a Taoist perspective or East-Asian frame of thought is employed as a hermeneutical tool, it would likely enhance and deepen the understanding of biblical texts. I see that many biblical texts are 'waiting' to be affirmed and expanded by important Taoist concepts and illustrations such as 'nature,' 'wu-wei,' and 'emptiness.'

A concrete example may be found in certain Westerners who read biblical scriptures through a Taoist lens:

What this experience [of reading TTC] did, far from exporting me even further from my Christian roots, was reignite the seemingly tired and dead voice of the divine in the Holy Bible. Suddenly it began to make sense to me as this ancient Chinese text began to breathe new life into Christian theology. Every paradox-laden verse sent flashes through my mind of similar verses in the Bible that spoke to the same theme of reversals—so much so that it felt, for me, as though Christ himself was speaking to me through these ancient Chinese verses and beckoning me back to faith in his Way.<sup>13</sup>

Half a century ago, Del Byron Schneider affirmed that "the Judaic-Christian tradition came out of the same mold which has shaped so much of the Eastern way of thinking and doing"; hence, the richness of Indian thought would aid Western Christians with "a discovery of a dimension which was lost when the Greek—rather than the Hebrew—attitude of life had stamped European thinking."<sup>14</sup> Nida and Reyburn observe that the similarity between biblical culture and the cultures of many non-Western groups is much stronger than the similarity between biblical culture and the culture of the Western Christian world.<sup>15</sup> These examples of positive views about

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<sup>13</sup> Dejong, "The Dao, the Truth, and the Life." Joseph Petulla expresses a similar experience. See also the introductory section of Joseph Petulla's *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Del Byron Schneider, *No God but God: a Look at Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 28.

the Eastern paradigm, however, have been shrouded by the anxious suspicion of syncretism.<sup>16</sup>

The result of this comparative review, which aimed at a contextual comparison between the biblical 'way' and the Taoist 'way,' serves as a *concrete illustration* that supports such idea—the affinity of biblical culture with a non-Western (traditional Korean) culture. Also affirmed is a basic contention of the thesis: it is misleading to qualify the Western thought paradigm only as 'biblically-based,' or to label an Asian thought frame as 'non-biblical.'<sup>17</sup> The term 'biblical' cannot be the monopoly of any one group. Similarly, the essence of biblical or Jesus' messages, as argued in the literature review, should continue to be sought by *all* cultural groups in the world from within their cultural reference point.<sup>18</sup>

In conclusion, the outcome of this comparative review, on the one hand, encourages the employment of an important (non-Western) East-Asian concept such as 'to' and its originally-Korean equivalent, 'kil,' as a hermeneutical tool. At the same time, some of the findings of each review will inform and support the reading of John 14:6 (Chapter 10).

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'syncretism' itself exposes such anxiety. Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese-American scholar, observes that syncretism is "abhorred by many Christians often for too simple a grasp of the issue involved," and affirms that "bringing our religious customs and orientations to his [Jesus] presence is not syncretic." Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 64, 68.

<sup>17</sup> This was presented in the introduction of the thesis.

<sup>18</sup> See, for Yi Man-yŏl's argument, in Chapter 4 (Page 78).

## PART IV

### A NEW KOREAN READING OF JOHN 14:6

Though the scope and delimitation of the main task of the thesis was previously elaborated (in the introduction), I see it fitting to reiterate the specific nature of the thesis and its consequent scope and focuses at this juncture. The project that seeks a new Korean reading of John 14:6 entails two kinds of complexity.

The first complexity is that the major thrust of the project may be perceived differently depending on the receiving group. The new reading claims to be a hermeneutical enterprise within the theological world of KP. This is because “distinctly Korean theologies that have been achieved thus far within KP remain mostly systematic-theological rather than biblical-hermeneutical.”<sup>1</sup> And I hope to deepen KP theologies “by engaging more in reading biblical texts (the Gospel of John).”<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of the wider theological, Western academic setting, however, this new reading is less hermeneutical and more theological; “this thesis reading is more Korean theological than biblical exegetical with respect to the global setting.”<sup>3</sup> After all, the thesis was birthed out of a vision for a *distinctly Korean* understanding of biblical passages. Hypothesizing a historical scenario wherein no teachings about the Bible to Koreans (by Western Christians) ever occurred provides stimulus for this project; what theological insights might have been gleaned from indigenous Korean reading of the Bible, uninfluenced by the teachings of Western missionaries?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction (Page 13).

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction (Page 9).

<sup>3</sup> See Introduction (Page 13).

<sup>4</sup> A Vietnamese theologian, Peter C. Phan also let himself imagine a “historical improbability” such “that the first disciples of Jesus had turned to the East rather than the Greco-Roman world to carry out the Lord’s ‘great commission,’” as he was seeking Jesus Christ with an Asian face. Peter C. Phan, “Jesus Christ with an Asian Face,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), 399.

The second complexity arises from the first. The thesis writer finds herself both a guest and a host. As was laid out in the introduction, the thesis is indebted to countless theologians from all across the world, having received from them encouragement and help, direct and indirect, during this theological journey. In particular, “the vision for a distinctly Korean theology itself would not have been formed if not for the established, Western (and other global) theologies.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Western theologies and academia have extended their hospitality such that the thesis writer, a guest, could develop and even express her own theological thoughts and biblical understandings. In fact, many points of argument toward a distinctly Korean theology and hermeneutic expressed in this thesis are supported and validated by Western scholarship.

Conversely, as argued in the methodology section, a way to seek a Korean hermeneutic is to realize that one is a host in this path; “a good host does not forget that he/she *is* the host.”<sup>6</sup> How to exercise responsible hosting as a Korean theologian *and* to properly appreciate and respond to the ‘hospitality’ of Western scholarship remains a tension throughout the thesis. The thesis writer has both to respect and suspect the established, predominantly Western, theological paradigm. Put differently, she needs to value the contributions of the paradigm while also pursuing her own thoughts.

In light of these complexities, certain clear delimitations are necessary for the present section, so that a new, distinctly Korean reading might be achieved. The first chapter (Chapter 9), which discusses certain hermeneutical issues in relation to the reading of John 14:6, will be selective and Korean perspectival. To be sure, I will make some use of the established historical-critical information from the existing scholarly works on the Gospel of John. This will not be, however, a ‘normal,’ ‘historical-critical’ discussion that interacts with an extensive range of biblical scholarship preceding the actual reading. Instead, I will present some reservations about the primarily Western, biblical scholarship with its protracted discussion of issues relating to the authorship and historicity of the gospel. I will also offer some comments on the issues such as

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<sup>5</sup> See Introduction (Page 5).

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 5 (Page 89).

the setting and language of the Gospel of John, the Johannine Jesus and 'the historical Jesus,' and parallelism. The main purpose of this survey and these comments is to ignite an interest in developing possible, future Korean hermeneutical guidelines, with the awareness that such attempts have been few so far. In addition, they will influence and assist the reading of the central biblical passage (John 14:6).

The ensuing chapter (10) will be a reading of John 14:6, which will be accomplished through four individual tasks: (a) the basic, literary-critical exegesis of John 14:6 in its immediate context (John 13:33-14:11); (b) through the lens of a 'memoir,' revisiting the contemporary, associated concepts around the biblical 'way' during the period; (c) employing the Korean word, *kil*, as a hermeneutical tool; (d) with a discussion of the supposed exclusivist message within the passage.

After this, I will turn to the whole Gospel of John with a view to understand the same, Johannine Jesus in regard to his perspective and teaching about salvation matter (Chapter 11). Six phrases that carry a soteriological image within the Johannine Gospel will be reviewed individually, which will be followed by an attempt to find common elements shared by all the phrases. A summary and some conclusions will then be drawn from these findings, bringing Part IV to an end.

## CHAPTER NINE

### DISCUSSION OF SELECTED HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES

#### TEXTUAL VARIANTS

It is a basic exegetical discipline to examine textual variants and determine the types of manuscript variants, which is at times an essential discipline, shedding light on the exegetical task. However, the passages that are taken as an immediate literary context for John 14:6, namely, John 13:33-14:11, do not have any major issues in regard to textual variants.<sup>1</sup> We refer to the Greek NT (*The Greek New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. United Bible Societies, 2014) whenever necessary, although we mainly rely on an English Bible (NRSV) as well as various Korean versions of the Bible.

#### AUTHORSHIP

Asian exegetes in general, and Korean biblical scholars in particular, are very familiar with the range and contested nature of academic discussions about authorship and date; Western scholarship is easily and widely accessible to them. I shall not engage in such discussions, as they are peripheral to the central concerns of this thesis. Instead, I will offer a Korean scholar's view of hermeneutical issues, which I hope can be developed into one of the Korean hermeneutical guidelines.

Sin Yŏng-bok views that any emphasis on the 'individual author' is a switch of the appropriate priority. As he reads the 'hundred schools of thoughts' in ancient China such as Confucius, Lao-tzu and Mo-tzu, Sin observes the close relationship between 'individually-owned' thought and the historical period in which the

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<sup>1</sup> Some manuscripts render 14:7 ("If you know me, you will know my Father also") as "If you really knew me, you would know." We deem this to be a minor variation.

individual lives.<sup>2</sup> An issue or problem must already be present before any individual thinker or school of thought arises. Hence, our attention should be directed toward *what* thought rather than *whose* thought it is. And as a historical period yields a school of thought, not vice versa, identifying commonality among all the schools—common issues and interests—is more important than seeking the ‘unique’ thought of each school. Sin further notes that the differences among various schools of thought are none other than the difference of perspective about the *same* primal issues of the time; each school has its own point of departure and emphasis in approaching similar contemporary issues.<sup>3</sup> In this way, Sin lays out the priority of the historical context wherein any individual thought/book is birthed. And the recognition of this priority, in my view, makes the pursuit of individual authorship less imperative.

In addition, Sin touches on a few important hermeneutical themes, by pointing out the necessary task to observe pressing issues faced by the writers, major points the writers intend to convey, and popular contemporary literary devices the writers employ. These areas occupy Korean hermeneutical concerns. As a reader of the Gospel of John, I will pay attention to the possible, critical issues faced by the Johannine community (in the section, “the Johannine Community and Its Language,” below), the major message the author aspires to deliver on behalf of Jesus (Chapter 10), and the literary devices the author uses in delivering such a message (i.e. parallelism).

To summarize the view about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel presented by this thesis, the thesis writer receives John as the ‘author’ of the gospel, and uses his name accordingly.<sup>4</sup> However, the ‘author John’ does not have to be an *individual* person John; John’s ‘disciples,’ ‘community,’ ‘circle’ or ‘school,’ and even another

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<sup>2</sup> Sin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 362-63.

<sup>3</sup> Shin Yǒng-bok, *Lectures*, 363.

<sup>4</sup> I will also assume that this same ‘John’ is the ‘author’ of the Johannine Epistles (John 1, 2, 3), and quote passages from the Epistles accordingly. Francis J. Moloney argues that the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles share the same author, based on considerable similarity in the language and ideas between the two. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 4.

anonymous disciple of Jesus are all included in the authorship.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this thesis will assume the shared authorship of the Fourth Gospel by the Johannine community.

## THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Another point to comment on concerns the historical value of the Fourth Gospel. Burge observes that biblical study “for centuries has understood truth to be a value that is central to the historical facts given in the text. That is why heated debates have always raged around the historicity and Jewishness of the narratives.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Western scholars’ keen interest in the *historicity* of the gospel is not unrelated to the Western pursuit of scientific accuracy and provable evidence.

There is a recent shift, however, in the understanding of the relation of truth to historical narrative even in the West. Wider scholarship begins to recognize that truth comes in other ways (such as completely fictional novels), and concedes that “truth does not have to be necessarily tied to historicity.”<sup>7</sup> It is also through dreams, insights, arts and feelings that moral and spiritual changes occur. From the perspective of a ‘reader-response’ hermeneutic, such as a Korean hermeneutic, historical accuracy is certainly of less priority than positive effect of the gospel on the reader’s mind.<sup>8</sup>

As an extension to the present discussion, one may moderate the traditional scholarly passion that seeks the ‘original’ version of the biblical materials with a new emphasis upon the oral tradition of the gospel and the role of Christian communities in its formation. To consider the oral tradition seriously would engender recognition of the effect of biblical narratives on the hearers. If one heeds the position of James D.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for a recommended approach for authorship of ancient texts such as the Gospel of John, Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, edited by Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 189-99.

<sup>6</sup> Burge, *Gospel of John*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Burge, *Gospel of John*, 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> According to a ‘reader-response’ critical observation, a text evokes different kinds of responses in different communities of readers at different times. The meaning of a text, therefore, is not bound to its first readers, or to the existing interpretations, but open to new responses in new communities.

G. Dunn, performance variation is integral to and even definitive of oral tradition.<sup>9</sup> This 'performing' nature of the Gospel then subverts the idea of an 'original,' for the reason that each 'performance' is, properly speaking, an 'original.'<sup>10</sup> Thus, major focus shifts *from accuracy to effect*.

The notion of "from accuracy to effect" is a valuable point to consider in any biblical interpretative work. Rynkiewicz critically observes that "some of the hermeneutical presuppositions of literate peoples are that the primary purpose of Scripture is to transmit truth: truth isolated from relationships (universal), truth encapsulated in propositions (verbal), and truth independent of community (private/personal)."<sup>11</sup> In oral tradition, however, "the relationship with the teacher is as important as the features of the story," and, therefore, "the point worth discovering is how what is said affects our relationships, not primarily whether it is true or not."<sup>12</sup> Following this oral traditional emphasis, the hermeneutical work on John 14:6 in this thesis will prepare a section to examine the effect of the saying on the disciples and other followers of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

The role of Christian communities in the formation of the Fourth Gospel is one of the focuses of Johannine scholarship (J. Louis Martyn, Georg Richter, Wolfgang Langbrandtner, and Raymond Brown).<sup>14</sup> Moloney observes that after the previous dethroning of the Fourth Gospel as a historical document through the growth of historical criticism, there is now a new, greater appreciation of the gospel as a Christian document which "reflected events from the life of Jesus, and the subsequent experience of a Christian community that derived its Christianity from a telling and retelling of that life."<sup>15</sup> Moloney goes on to comment that the story of Jesus recorded in this gospel "reflects *the history of an early Christian community*,"

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<sup>9</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 98.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus*, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Rynkiewicz, "Mission, Hermeneutics, and the Local Church," 51.

<sup>12</sup> Rynkiewicz, "Mission, Hermeneutics, and the Local Church," 51.

<sup>13</sup> See the section, "Reading through the Lens of a Memoir," in Chapter 10.

<sup>14</sup> Moloney, "Excursus: Theories of Johannine Community History," in Brown, *An Introduction*, 69-85.

<sup>15</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 11-12.

rather than an *accurate* record of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The Fourth Gospel is currently received by scholars as a record of a ‘communal faith journey,’ the community of Johannine Christians; this community will be further examined below.

## THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY AND ITS LANGUAGE

How will we be able to look into the life context of the Johannine community? No one would assume such task to be an easy one; there is a great distance of time and space between the general worldview of first century Mediterranean culture and that of readers of the Fourth Gospel, many of whom live in postmodern, digitalized societies. Despite the difficulty of the task, scholars have come up with certain hypotheses in regard to the ‘setting’ of the gospel. In this section, I would like to discuss a specific feature of the Johannine community, namely, “antisociety” or “radical liberalist,” primarily based on particular socio-scientific and Minjung theological insights. Though contested, their insights may shed light on the understanding of the ‘language’ of the Johannine community, the major purpose of the writing of the gospel, and even how to read the gospel.

History witnesses that early Christians were persecuted under then Roman imperial rule. It is also through the writings of the NT that we hear about various kinds of hardship suffered by the early believers of Jesus. All Christians, Jew and Gentile, before the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, underwent persecution and marginalization. The life challenge of *Jewish* Christians of the first and second centuries, however, had an added dimension; the challenge also came from their fellow Jews.

We know that Christians and Jews were gradually separating from each other in the first and second centuries of the Common Era.<sup>17</sup> The separation between the

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<sup>16</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 12 (emphasis original).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Kysar, *John the Maverick Gospel*, third edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 27; Mark W. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1994), 62; Kim Chin-ho, 요한복음: 급진적 자유주의자들 [*The Gospel of John: Radical Liberalists*] (Seoul: Tongyŏn, 2009), 231-35.

two parties may have resulted from Christians, those who believed in Jesus, voluntarily distancing themselves from other Jews who did not.<sup>18</sup> It also happened through excommunication of Christians by local Jewish synagogues. Some scholars hold a view that conflict between the Johannine Christians and the members of the Jewish synagogue may have escalated from an edict issued from Jamnia in around 85 CE.<sup>19</sup> The Fourth Gospel records in some detail the excommunication of a believer of Jesus from the synagogue (9:1-41). Also in the same gospel, believers of Jesus are warned that they are going to be put out of the synagogues (16:2), and that they will be hated by the world (15:18-25; 17:4).

The incident of excommunication of a believer of Jesus which the Fourth Gospel exclusively records appears significant; perhaps it is a way of presenting the Johannine community itself as an ‘excommunicated’ group from other fellow Jews. According to Moloney, the experience of excommunication of the man born blind is “widely regarded as a reflection of the experience of the Johannine Christians.”<sup>20</sup> However, a question arises: was not the fate of other Christians more or less the same as that of the Johannine Christians? Why was the Johannine community more keenly aware of such isolation? As a possible response to such question, we find a suggestion that the Johannine community might have taken a different path from the paths that other Christian communities such as ‘apostolic’ churches took.<sup>21</sup>

Kim Chin-ho, one of the leading, second-generation Minjung theologians in Korea, finds “radical liberalists” in the Fourth Gospel. Kim, developing from the original insight of his teacher Ahn Byong-mu, reads the well-known, ‘incarnation passage’ —“the Word became flesh” (1:14)—as the Johannine proclamation of a radical reversal of the contemporary socio-religious paradigm.<sup>22</sup> Kim and Ahn observe

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<sup>18</sup> Kysar, *John*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 231-35; Stibbe, *John’s Gospel*, 62; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), lxxiv-lxxv. This is a contested hypothesis; Kysar dismisses such theory, saying that it “can no longer be sustained, thanks to historical research that shows no evidence of such a decree.” Robert Kysar, *John*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 231-35; Brown, *An Introduction*, 177-79.

<sup>22</sup> This is the main argument in Kim Chin-ho’s book, *The Gospel of John: Radical Liberalists*. Kim Kyong-

that the author of the gospel deliberately employed the word, flesh (*sarx*), instead of 'body' (*soma*).<sup>23</sup> For Kim and Ahn, *sarx* symbolizes the despised, lowly people such as 'oppressed minjung,' while *soma* entails the notion of a dignified body.<sup>24</sup> From *soma* is developed a 'body' of a systematic, structured church or institution which (even unintentionally) imitates the fashion of the world.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the community of *sarx*, like the wind (John 3:8), cannot be confined within any system or institution; it is led not by any other human leader except the true shepherd, Jesus (10:1-3, 7-8), and after his death, by the 'paraclete,' the spirit (14:1-3, 7-8).<sup>26</sup> As Jesus took a different path than that of his own brothers (John 7:10), the Johannine community was now taking a path different from other Christian groups.<sup>27</sup>

In understanding said feature of the Johannine community, some Western scholars reach a similar conclusion to that of a Korean Minjung theological reading, *albeit* taking alternate routes. Kysar, for instance, contends that "among all New Testament literature, this Gospel [of John] most radically concentrates authority outside of societal structures," going its own way without regard for the social customs of the time;<sup>28</sup> the story of the belief of the Samaritans and the extraordinary portrayal of women in the gospel lend credence to this view.<sup>29</sup>

Socio-scientific commentators of the gospel, employing sociolinguistic findings and vernacular, typify the Johannine community as "antisociety."<sup>30</sup> Antisociety, according to sociolinguistics, is "a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the

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jae also argues for a "revolutionary spirit" contained in the Gospel of John. Kim Kyong-jae, "The Gospel of John and the Tao Te Ching 2."

<sup>23</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 31-32, 220-23.

<sup>24</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 222-23.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 29-32, 220-23.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 29-79.

<sup>27</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Kysar, *John*, 185.

<sup>29</sup> Kysar, *John*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 7-10.

form either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction.”<sup>31</sup> It follows that such society often deals with “opposing collectives”; these groups are mentioned repeatedly in the gospel as “the/this world” or “the Jews.”<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the Johannine Christians had more than one group of ‘rivals,’ as Malina and Rohrbaugh suggest, endorsing a theory proposed by Raymond Brown that identifies four other competing groups in the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

Antisociety goes hand in hand with “antilanguage,” the language defined as “a language deriving from and generated by an antisocietal group.”<sup>34</sup> This antilanguage manifests itself through consistent relexicalization<sup>35</sup> and overlexicalization,<sup>36</sup> along with focus on the interpersonal and textual aspects of language employed in the gospel.<sup>37</sup> What is noteworthy is that through these interpersonal (with whom one speaks) and textual (how one speaks) modes of the linguistic system, ‘inside group’

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<sup>31</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 7. Modern day examples of antisocieties would be prison inmates, street gangs, new religious cults, and underground political groups.

<sup>32</sup> The term, “the/this world” may be found seventy-nine times in the Fourth Gospel in comparison to its fifteen appearances in the Synoptics, and the term, “the Jews,” seventy-one times in the same gospel but seventeen times altogether in the Synoptics. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 10. These groups refer to the adherents of John the Baptist who do not as yet believe in Jesus, and three groups that claim to believe in Jesus—“crypto-Christians,” “apostolic Christians who looked on Peter as the most representative apostolic figure,” and “Christians of inadequate faith.” Brown, however, emphasizes that the Gospel of John takes a priority of “Jesus’ hope for unity with those other Christians and Jesus’ prayer for that unity,” over any competition with other Christian communities. Brown, *An Introduction*, 153-80 (the quote appears on the page 179).

<sup>34</sup> Bruce J. Malina, “John’s: The Maverick Christian Group: The Evidence of Sociolinguistics.” Source: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/info/john-maverick.html> (accessed June 21, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Relexicalization refers to the practice of using new words for some reality that is not ordinarily referred to with those words; the Johannine selection of words to refer to the realm of God—spirit, life, light, above, not of this world, freedom, truth, love—bespeaks language partially relexicalized. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Overlexicalization means to have many words for the central area of concern; to express the reality of “believing *into* Jesus,” the author of the gospel has recourse to terms such as: following him, abiding in him, loving him, keeping his word, receiving him, having him or seeing him. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Among the three linguistic modes of meaning—the ideational (what one says), the interpersonal (with whom one speaks), and the textual (how one speaks)—the Fourth Gospel typically de-emphasizes the ideational, and focuses rather heavily on the interpersonal and textual. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 5, 7.

values are introduced, highlighted, and solidified.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the antilanguage serves to maintain inner solidarity (in the face of pressure from the wider society), and the alternative reality and values the community comes to acquire, which seems to be the case of the frequently lengthy and even ambiguous modes of dialogue within the gospel.<sup>39</sup> This supports a view that the primary purpose of the writing of the Fourth Gospel is to deepen the faith of *believers* (including ‘sympathetic’ believers), rather than to evangelize the ‘world’ or ‘the unbelieving.’<sup>40</sup>

Where does this lengthy theoretic expansion about the life context and language of the Johannine community lead us? First, a comment on the Johannine ‘high Christology.’ In my opinion, the Johannine community was in need of a high Christology. The community now held a *new, alternative reality*, wherein they came to identify with and in Jesus of Nazareth, and there was necessity as well as desire to express various aspects of such reality in passionate and creative words and phrases. It is from this life context of the Johannine ‘antisociety’ that several high-Christological concepts and phrases, such as the pre-existent ‘word’ or *logos*, ‘one and only Son’ (1:1-2, 14, 18), and ‘I am’ sayings, were created. This is a legitimate perspective about the ‘high Christology’ that the gospel presents.

Second, in line with the first point, Johannine ‘high-Christological sayings’ are to be received not so much as universal, propositional truths but as creative, passionate in-group confessions. The sayings are borne out of their own experiences, and therefore more true and real than any other objective facts to them. What they experienced could not be denied, minimized or taken away from them; it was their living, cherished memory, the memory that they did not want to forget. Their experience concerned the ‘life’ of and in Jesus, which they saw, heard, and their own hands touched (1 John 1:1); the life lived among them (John 1:14). In view of this, Johannine expressions such as “the Word became flesh and *lived among us*, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (1:14),

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<sup>38</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 180-83.

or “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:16-17), are understood as Johannine Christians’ deep experience of God’s grace and truth through the person of Jesus who lived among them and died. And the person surely had *flesh*, which was later wounded and torn.

Third, the Johannine Christian group seems to encourage us to find our own language by which to express our experiences of Jesus. Johannine Christians’ survival depended on who Jesus was *to them*, and they produced a fine Christology in a gospel form. This harkens back to a crucial point in a Korean hermeneutic: *to meet Jesus and hear his voice* (as expressed in the methodology). For a Korean hermeneutic and theology, to meet Jesus is more important than to appreciate the features of Johannine faith language. Distinguishing the language of Jesus from that of the Johannine Gospel presents obvious challenges. Nonetheless, as much as we are able, we need to let Jesus walk out of the life context of Johannine Christians and their unique vernacular, and speak to us in the language familiar to us. This undertaking will be pursued in the reading of John 14:6 in the ensuing chapter, especially read through the lens of the Korean word ‘*kil*.’

Last, the nature of Johannine Christian community as a persecuted minority or radical liberals creates a quandary for many of us, readers of the gospel, whose life circumstances are very different from that of said community. Would it be possible for those of us, who enjoy freedom and most benefits offered by society, to enter into the Gospel of John, and find the same Jesus whom they found? If the context of the Johannine language, which sometimes appears exclusivistic toward others, is their life circumstance as a *persecuted minority*, where is the present, Christian exclusivism situated? Perhaps the Fourth Gospel is waiting for the readings of present day people belonging to the ‘persecuted minority’ because of their faith in Jesus and/or their alternative reception of Jesus.

## THE JOHANNINE JESUS AND 'THE HISTORICAL JESUS'

The unique life setting of Johannine Christians results in a gospel that is quite different from the other three gospels. In fact, it would be about this distinctiveness of the Fourth Gospel, not only in what is recounted but also in theological tone and language, that most Johannine scholars are likely to agree with each other.<sup>41</sup>

Thompson notes that the “distinctiveness of John’s gospel has never gone unnoticed in the church.”<sup>42</sup> Moloney also informs us that “it is widely accepted that the Fourth Gospel comes later than the Synoptics and does not depend directly upon them.”<sup>43</sup>

Acknowledging the unique features of the Fourth Gospel, however, does not mean to deny the possibility of the gospel’s familiarity with aspects of the other three gospels.<sup>44</sup> Many scholars have come to recognise that the ‘independent’ tradition *about Jesus* which the gospel draws on is “similar to traditions that underlie the Synoptics.”<sup>45</sup>

Scholars unanimously report that Johannine Christology constitutes one of the major differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptics. As submitted in the previous section, this thesis holds that from within the Johannine community’s ‘unique’ life setting and experiences, a Christology, often qualified as ‘high,’ was birthed. This implies in part that the Jesus whom we read of in the gospel is ‘clothed’ in the language of the Johannine Christians, and thus is addressed by scholars as ‘the Johannine Jesus.’ Recognizing and appreciating this characteristic contributes to a

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<sup>41</sup> Kysar, *John*, 3-15; Brown, *An Introduction*, 65-69, 91-93; Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 3. For a summary of the similarities and differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptics, refer to Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Gospel according to John,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 182-85.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, “The Gospel according to John,” 198.

<sup>43</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> See, for the scholarly disputes over the relationship between the Johannine Gospel and the Synoptics during the last century, Brown, *An Introduction*, 91-110; Kysar, *John*, 17-18.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 104. Jörg Frey contends that the previous assumption of the independence of John from the Synoptics should be rejected and the incorporation of the first three Gospels at least to a certain degree must be reckoned. S. Michal Ahn, review of *Die Herrlichkeit des Gekreuzigten: Studien zu den Johanneischen Schriften I*, Jörg Frey, *Review of Biblical Literature* 3 (2016). Source: [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/9329\\_10298.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/9329_10298.pdf) (accessed April 20, 2016).

better understanding of this gospel's message. At the same time, it presents a particular challenge to a Korean reading of the gospel. As a distinctly Korean hermeneutic is Jesus-centred, ultimately seeking to 'meet' with Jesus and listen to him, a question emerges: does the Johannine Jesus sufficiently represent the 'real' Jesus? Is there any discrepancy between the two? Perhaps there is. For instance, the language of Jesus might differ from that of the Johannine Christians. As Brown aptly points out, we cannot be certain that Jesus himself spoke in the typically Johannine, abstract language, since the 'author' "familiar with such language could have reinterpreted Jesus in its terminology."<sup>46</sup>

How, then, can a Korean reader of the Johannine Gospel discern the language of Jesus in the midst of the peculiar language of Johannine Christians? Of course, this desire to meet with the real Jesus is not uniquely Korean; searches for 'the historical Jesus' have been undertaken for the last two centuries or longer. The said Korean pursuit may be considered as another attempt at this longstanding historical endeavour. That being said, I recognize that the Korean search for the historical Jesus is somewhat different from the historical search that has been undertaken so far, in terms of the motive for the search and major methods employed. Hence, in the remainder of this section I will elaborate certain aspects of a Korean approach to the historical Jesus, which will influence the general reading of the Johannine passages in this thesis.<sup>47</sup>

In regard to its primary motivation, if Fowl's observation is right, Western scholarly search for the historical Jesus was partly fueled by the "long-recognized textual irregularities and puzzles" identified in the gospels.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, a Korean search begins with the desire to follow distinctively Korean hermeneutical sensitivity and bias. ("Textual irregularities and puzzles" would not overly concern Korean

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> This will have many overlaps with the discussion that was already presented in "Jesus-centred" and "Spirit-centred" sections in the methodology (Chapter 5).

<sup>48</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, "The Gospels and 'the Historical Jesus,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 92. To be fair, however, it should be acknowledged that Western search for the historical Jesus was also done with the desire to find the 'real' Jesus, the historical figure behind the thousands of years of historical accretions and interpretations.

readers.) In this sense, the Korean pursuit of the 'real' Jesus is coupled with exercise of independence and responsibility, actively participating in the global Christian pursuit of the 'essential' messages of biblical or Jesus' teaching. As will be seen, what follows in the remainder of this section reaffirms and expands what was already presented in the methodology for a distinctly Korean reading (Chapter 5), namely, holistic reading (in 'Jesus-centred') and the importance of heart (in 'Spirit-centred').

One of the methods employed in the Korean search finds common company in the traditional canonical reading of the gospels. A Korean reading takes a 'holistic' approach, seeking to hear the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels as well as other writings of the NT, a Jesus who echoes and supplements the Johannine Jesus. Similarly, Barton concludes in his article, "Many Gospels, One Jesus": "We have to return again and again, not just to one gospel but to all four, and not just to the gospels but to the whole scriptural witness" in order to better appreciate "the Jesus of whom the gospels tell."<sup>49</sup> This holistic reading does not neglect to recognize or appreciate each gospel tradition's distinctive voice, but makes effort not to lose sight of the primary concern to listen to the same person of Jesus.

Methodological difference may be found in the degree to which Korean reading values and depends on the matter of human heart and the spirit (of truth), respectively. In order to be able to listen to Jesus' voice, a reader needs to cultivate a heart that thirsts for the truth of God and a habit that meditates on Jesus' sayings, and to turn to Jesus' spirit or the spirit of truth to understand the message behind the visible words. It is the Johannine Gospel that emphasizes the work of the spirit (sent by Jesus and the father) as a guide to all the truth (14:16-17; 16:7, 13).<sup>50</sup> This method, which emphasizes the heart and the spirit, is of equal importance to, or even takes precedence over, historical investigations in seeking the real Jesus or 'historical criticism' in biblical interpretation.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen Barton, "Many Gospels, One Jesus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, Markus Bockmuehl, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 182.

<sup>50</sup> Thompson notes that the Johannine Gospel "presents a somewhat fuller picture of the Holy Spirit than do the synoptics." Thompson, "The Gospel according to John," 197-98.

<sup>51</sup> For major methods employed by Western scholars in their search for the historical Jesus, refer to Fowl, "The Gospels and 'the Historical Jesus,'" 76-96. The term, 'historical criticism,' is used as an umbrella term, which encompasses all the other critical methods. Paula Gooder, *Searching for*

The effort to hear Jesus' 'voice' or message maintains certain distance from efforts to separate the 'authentic sayings of Jesus' from the later ones, allegedly 'constructed' by communities of Jesus' believers after the death of Jesus, which is one of the paths traditionally taken by some of the historical searches for the real Jesus. A Korean biblical reading, therefore, would neither insist that every saying recorded in the gospels belongs to Jesus, nor decide that certain sayings are definitely not from Jesus' own lips.<sup>52</sup>

After all, it would be now impossible to retrieve the original, Aramaic words that Jesus uttered; we cannot hear these words any more except in a few excerpts in the NT, such as "*Talitha koum*" (Mark 5:41) and "*Ephphatha*" (Mark 7:34). Jesus' 'sayings' that most of us now read are translated ones, into Greek, English, Korean, Bangla, and many other vernaculars. And we know that effective translation requires enough change of the original form to convey the 'intended' meaning. It is not only the specific language Jesus used but also his exact wordings and paralinguistic that are largely absent from the gospel records. It would be a pertinent, sociolinguistic reminder that in communication, paralinguistic is as effective as the verbal form of language,<sup>53</sup> which is largely overlooked by readers of the gospel narratives. Those who seek Jesus' voice in the gospels should remember that Jesus' language we read in the NT was originally delivered in oral form.<sup>54</sup> And as Wilder points out, "Jesus' use

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*Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 12.

<sup>52</sup> Moyise introduces three different views among scholars in regard to 'authentic' sayings of Jesus in the gospels: the 'maximalist' view which holds that Jesus must have said all of the sayings in the gospels; the 'moderate' view believes that a 'moderate' amount of material found in the canonical gospels can plausibly be traced back to the historical Jesus. This position accepts that real events lie behind the gospel stories but believes that they have been embellished as each gospel writer adapts the tradition to meet his readers' needs; the 'minimalist' view argues that only a small proportion of the gospel sayings are from Jesus, and that most other sayings are the creation of the gospel writers for their own claims and purposes. Moyise, *Jesus and Scripture*, 8-11, 79-117.

<sup>53</sup> Human communication happens through language and paralinguistic. Language talks about verbal and written language, while paralinguistic consists of kinesics or body language, tone and character of voice, proxemics, clothing and makeup, etc. It has been suggested that as much as 70% of what we communicate when talking directly with others is through paralinguistic. Dennis O'Neil, "Hidden Aspects of Communication," tutorial for the course of Language and Culture, Palomar College, California. Source: [http://anthro.palomar.edu/language/language\\_6.htm#military\\_body\\_language\\_return](http://anthro.palomar.edu/language/language_6.htm#military_body_language_return) (accessed July 8, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> As far as we know, Jesus never wrote a word, except on one occasion when, in the presence of a

of the spoken word alone has its own theological significance.”<sup>55</sup> One such significant aspect is that in oral speech, *how* one speaks is as important as *what* one speaks, and that the expectation of certain *response* by speaking is stronger than that of writing.<sup>56</sup>

All of these reminders affirm the hermeneutical importance of attention to a reader’s heart, exercise of imagination (about Jesus’ paralinguage), careful observation of the effect of Jesus’ sayings upon the hearers/receivers, and dependence on the spirit of truth. In addition, open-hearted humility will be a universally essential element in understanding Jesus’ message. A concrete example might support this last statement. Moloney introduces us to some passages in the Fourth Gospel which have become so central “for Christians that they have developed a life of their own”: 1:14; 3:16-17; 8:32; 10:30, 38; 11:26-27.<sup>57</sup> To another person such as the thesis writer, the powerful, central sayings of Johannine Jesus include: 4:14; 5:44; 8:11; 9:41; 12:24; 14:6; 15:5; 17:3-4.<sup>58</sup> I will not engage in discussion about why our sets differ but emphasize that any attempt to hear/read the ‘real’ Jesus in the Johannine Gospel includes listening, with humility, to the readings done by others.

To hear the historical Jesus through the reading of the four gospels—the Gospel of John, in particular—promises to be a demanding task. Any ‘understanding’ of Jesus that an individual or group presents is likely to be heavily contextual and subject to partiality. Even with his evaluation of the two-hundred years of critical scholarship to present a widely agreed-upon account of the historical Jesus as “manifest failure,” however, Fowl is still optimistic about the ongoing search: “In and of itself this failure is not a reason to abandon work on the historical Jesus. Under

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woman who was caught in adultery and brought up to him, he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground (John 8:3-6).

<sup>55</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 14.

<sup>56</sup> Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 3, 13. ‘Speech-act theory’ makes a related point to this, which will be addressed in the subsequent reading “through the lens of memoir” (Chapter 10).

<sup>57</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Many of these passages will be discussed in Chapter 11.

certain conditions it might even be a reason for scholars to redouble their efforts.”<sup>59</sup> This continued pursuit will be likely to bear in the long run “a more authentic, robust, and mature faith.”<sup>60</sup>

All these factors, individually and cumulatively, motivate this thesis’ Korean search for Jesus’ voice in the Johannine Gospel. Another hermeneutically involved issue in the new Korean reading concerns ‘popular contemporary literary devices the writers employ,’ as introduced in the discussion about authorship above. As will be seen, parallelism is a literary device among many others which is vital in reading John 14:6. Hence, a brief review of parallelism is necessary.

## PARALLELISM

“Parallelism is universally recognized as *the* characteristic feature of biblical Hebrew poetry.”<sup>61</sup> It permeates the words of biblical poets, and further, “most of the sayings, proverbs, laws, laments, blessings, curses, prayers, and speeches found in the Bible.”<sup>62</sup> Parallelism, however, is not an exclusive peculiarity to Hebrew literature; it is found in ancient Assyrian and Egyptian literature as well. This being said, parallelism “is best adapted to the genius of the Hebrew language with its wealth of synonymous expressions which enables the poet or the prophet to dwell upon a theme with an almost inexhaustible variety of expression and coloring.”<sup>63</sup>

There is a range of different forms of parallelism. Certain scholars classify parallelism according to three basic types: synonymous parallelism, antithetical

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<sup>59</sup> Fowl, “The Gospels and ‘the Historical Jesus,’” 91.

<sup>60</sup> David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying about the Historical Jesus?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 143.

<sup>61</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Parallelism,” in *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 114.

<sup>62</sup> James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>63</sup> I. M. Casanowicz, “Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry,” the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Source: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=67&letter=P&search=parallelism> (accessed April 4, 2011).

parallelism, and synthetical parallelism.<sup>64</sup> Scholars observe that parallelism occurs in the utterances of Jesus in the NT frequently.<sup>65</sup> Gillingham views Jesus' "poetic sayings, expressed in concise and pithy form" "as examples of poetic parallelism recited and remembered within the Christian community" of the later period.<sup>66</sup>

An interesting point about parallelism is that it is often extended further than just one couplet. For example, the first part of the prayer in which Jesus taught his disciples, "hallowed be thy name," "thy kingdom come," and "thy will be done" (Matt 6:9-13), in fact constitutes a three-part synonymous parallelism where each of these three reinforces the idea of the other two, or explains more fully the implications of the other two. Another such example is the beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10), which are even further extended, an 8-part synonymous parallelism; each beatitude is equal to and has the same sense as the other seven. Jesus says the same thing in eight different ways; the beatitudes all refer to kingdom people, members of Jesus' movement. In order to participate in Jesus' movement, his disciples have to be the kind of people who continually seek God with all their hearts, hungering and thirsting for God's kingdom and salvation.

To summarize, a foundational truth about parallelism is that it reinforces the main idea or expands an idea more fully.<sup>67</sup> Recognition of such parallelism in biblical passages is a necessary exegetical 'tool' because it aids interpreters not to analyse certain passages in individual parts with different meanings but to synthesize all parts into one main idea. As will be seen in the ensuing chapter, a Korean re-reading of John 14:6 (and other sayings in the Gospel of John) is aided by appreciation of this linguistic device.

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<sup>64</sup> S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 73. Alternatively, other scholars see more types of parallelism than just three; Kugel, for instance, contends that "Biblical parallelism is of one sort, 'A, and what's more, B,' or a hundred sorts; but it is not three." Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 58.

<sup>65</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, vol 1 (London: SCM Press, 1971), 14-15; Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms*, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms*, 83.

<sup>67</sup> Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms*, 69.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE NEW READING OF JOHN 14:6

This Korean reading of John 14:6 is a *re-reading* of the present, popular reading among Korean Protestant Christians, an endeavour motivated by some doubt about the ‘exclusivistic’ content of the popular reading. It is also a reading that allows a ‘*distinctly Korean*’ spiritual sensitivity. Because of this context, the reading that follows will take an unusual course; thus, we shall assign four individual tasks for the reading. Each task is an approach to the passage with a specific interest and focus.

To introduce each, the first task is a basic, literary-critical reading of John 14:6 in its immediate context (John 13:33-14:11). This task is elementary in that it does not engage in critical discussion about redaction or source or form of the Fourth Gospel. Insofar as the reading accepts “hermeneutical value in the Bible’s final literary form,” it employs a canonical approach to the gospel.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to this rudimentary treatment of the gospel where the main passage is situated, careful attention will be paid to literary aspects of the established pericope and also wider context within the same gospel. Also, as submitted in the previous chapter, certain hermeneutical attention will be paid to “a reader’s heart, exercise of imagination (about Jesus’ paralanguage)” as well as “dependence on the spirit of truth.”<sup>2</sup>

The second task is an attempt to look at the passage through the lens of a ‘memoir’ which recalls how the disciples later remembered Jesus after his ‘glorification.’ This approach will examine the disciples’ (and other believers’) ongoing reception of Jesus’ “I am the way to the father” saying, after their master’s death and successive resurrection.

The third assignment will be to read John 14:6 by employing a Korean hermeneutical tool, namely, the Korean word, *kil*. Certain Korean reading components

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Wall, “Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, second edition, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 373.

<sup>2</sup> See the section, “The Johannine Jesus and ‘the Historical Jesus,’” in Chapter 9.

will already be present at this stage through the previous exegetical tasks, due to the thesis writer's Korean sensibilities. This task, however, will adopt a more intentional Korean hermeneutical method, which I expect will provide a major contribution to a distinctly Korean reading of John 14:6.

The final task will be an examination of John 14:6 with a question whether the passage carries any exclusivist message or not. The first exegetical task will already have responded to this question. However, this fourth assignment will try to respond to the question once more, this time based on a fuller 'understanding' of the person Jesus, using the witnesses given by the NT writers about the 'way' of Jesus.

## **AN EXEGESIS OF JOHN 14:6 WITHIN THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT**

### THE PERICOPE: JOHN 13:33-14:11

<sup>33</sup> "Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." <sup>36</sup>Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards." <sup>37</sup>Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." <sup>38</sup>Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times. <sup>14</sup> <sup>1</sup>Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going." <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." <sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup>Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves" (John 13:33-14:11, NRSV).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See the appendix for the Greek text of the pericope.

### **The atmosphere: (up to John 14:1)**

Endeavouring to understand the general atmosphere of Jesus' disciples during this time is an appropriate pre-task before approaching John 14:6. For this purpose, we will look to the previous chapters in the gospel. Jesus' disciples begin to notice that their master, for some reason, seems to draw anger and hatred from the contemporary religious leaders (5:16; 7:1, 44; 8:59; 10:39; 11:57). On one occasion, for instance, certain individuals, who are often referred to as 'the Jews' or 'the Pharisees' in the gospel, try to arrest Jesus, but he escapes from their hands, to the relief of his disciples (10:39). Jesus himself has spoken of his coming death, a horrific manner of death at that (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33). The inevitably painful but willing death of Jesus (and of his followers) is implied in the following passages, where Jesus' troubled heart is also recorded:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . . *Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”?* No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour (12:24, 27).

The disciples are far from pleased to hear this. The Gospel of Matthew adds the following: Peter rebukes Jesus for using this kind of language—the least wanted manner of death—and it is very possible that Peter speaks on behalf of all the disciples (Matt 16:22; cf. Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). The disciples' anxiety grows with the creeping fear of death. Hence, when Jesus says, “Let us go to Judea again,” the disciples say to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” (11:7-8). Seeing that Jesus is indeed determined to re-enter Judean territory, Thomas says to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may *die with him*” (11:16). By this time, their fear of death is realistic because the Jewish Council in Judea has made a definite decision—to capture and kill Jesus; he is now officially 'wanted' (11:53-57). Jesus himself takes precautions and no longer walks about openly among the Jews; instead he goes away to a region near the wilderness (11:54). The disciples feel in the air an animosity toward their master and consequently toward themselves as well.

The notion of Jesus' death is expressed in the word 'going' which is mentioned alternately in the longer expression of 'going to the father' (13:3; 33, 36). The time for

Jesus' 'going' or death is finally come: "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father" (13:1). One of the troubling factors to the disciples, in relation to Jesus' going, is that he is going alone and they would not be able to accompany him (13:33). When Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answers, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward" (13:36).

Peter is not willing to give up yet, so he continues, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (13:37). Jesus responds to Peter: "Will you lay down your life for me? *Very truly*, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times" (13:38). We can imagine the shame that Peter must feel. The dominant emotion experienced by the disciples during this time is anxiety or fear, coupled with sadness and exhaustion; the Gospel of Luke records that the disciples are exhausted from sorrow and grief (22:45, TNIV). *In this mood and atmosphere* comes the simple instruction of Jesus: "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (14:1a).

Jesus' saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," reflects the troubled hearts of the disciples on the one hand, and reveals Jesus' pastoral care and concern for his disciples on the other. Jesus wants to impart comfort and assurance, out of his sustained love for them: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them *to the end*" (13:1). The subsequent instruction, "Believe in God, believe also in me" (14:1b), is given to the disciples as both the why and the how not to worry; it is through focusing on God that they can remain hopeful and not be discouraged. Believing in God, at least to the disciples, is supposed to be closely connected with believing in Jesus; the notion of unity between Jesus and his father (God) is one of Jesus' favourite themes in the Gospel of John.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the instruction is given that they should believe in God *and* also believe in Jesus (14:1b).

### **My father's house (τῆ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου): (14:2-6)**

Jesus emphasizes the spaciousness of the father's house as he instructs the disciples to trust the father: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places" (14:2a). This saying is followed by "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (14:2b), which is rendered in other versions of the Bible as such: "if it

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<sup>4</sup> This notion of unity will be expounded in Chapter 11.

were not so, I would have told you” (NKJV); “if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” (TNIV). The main force of the message among them is not different, though; through reminding them of his father God’s generosity, Jesus intends to comfort the troubled disciples.<sup>5</sup>

The phrase, ‘going to the father’ or ‘going to the father’s house,’ may be seen as a parallel to ‘entering the kingdom of God/heaven.’ In comparison to the Synoptic Gospels, where the kingdom language is abundant, the Fourth Gospel shows that Jesus prefers the expression ‘going to the father’s house’ to that of ‘entering the kingdom of heaven.’<sup>6</sup> Scholars observe Jesus’ favoured use of ‘father’ in addressing God, and comment that calling God *abba* father is unconventional among ordinary Jews.<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that the idea of seeing God as father is something strange or wrong to the people; by contrast, such an idea already existed in ancient Israel (Deut 1:31; Ps 103:13; Prov 3:12; Isa 63:16; Jer 3:4, 19; Hos 11:1, 3; Mal 1:6; 2:10). Even Jesus’ opponents had such concept, as seen in their retort to Jesus, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself” (John 8:41). What is extraordinary with Jesus in this matter is, according to the Fourth Gospel, that he favours the term ‘father’ most and uses it frequently,<sup>8</sup> which seems to inform readers/hearers about Jesus’ favourite identity: the son of the father.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the gospel, Jesus is the son who maintains an intimate ‘father-son’ relationship with God, experiencing the love of the father deeply (3:35; 5:20; 14:31; 15:9). For a deeply beloved son, then, going (back) to the father’s house would be a joyous occasion. In one of the parables Jesus tells, we read that a ‘prodigal son’ finally returns to his father’s house with trust and anticipation (Luke 15:17-19). The “best son,”

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<sup>5</sup> A Kenyan biblical scholar, Samuel M. Ngewa, reads that “Jesus’ promise here [John 14:2] is most comforting to troubled hearts.” Samuel M. Ngewa, “John,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WorldAlive, 2006), 1283.

<sup>6</sup> The language of ‘kingdom’ is quite scarce in Johannine Gospel: The “kingdom of God” appears when Jesus has a dialogue with Nicodemus (3:3, 5), and on another occasion when Jesus says before Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world” (18:36).

<sup>7</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 70-71; Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 17-21; James Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 26.

<sup>8</sup> The term ‘father’ is found in the Fourth Gospel almost twice as frequently (120 times) as in all the three Synoptic Gospels combined (64 times). Kysar, *John*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, “The Gospel according to John,” 188.

then, will surely return to his father's house with the same sense of anticipation and joy.<sup>10</sup> According to the analysis of the biblical 'way' (Chapter 6), the theme of 'homecoming' holds an important meaning for ancient Hebrew people, who came to know of God through their two unforgettable historical events—the Exodus and the *return* from Exile.<sup>11</sup> This 'homecoming' or 'returning home' possessed a deeper meaning in the OT; "YHWH is their Original Home, so to speak."<sup>12</sup> And there are repeated, heart-felt appeals from YHWH to biblical people to *return* to YHWH self (Jer 4:1; Hos 12:6; 14:1; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 4:6; Zech 1:3). It seems that Jesus was able to grasp the essence of the ancient Jewish religious teachings and live out the Jewish faith in the best way—the faith in, and returning to, the *father* God. That he came "not to abolish but to fulfill" the law or the prophets is recalled here (Matt 5:17).

Jesus' disciples must be familiar with the expression of 'going to the father' because Jesus used it on many other occasions. This familiarity, however, does not guarantee an accurate understanding of it; they do not seem to understand what exactly Jesus means by 'going to the father,' for Simon Peter asks Jesus where he is going (13:36), and Thomas conveys explicitly that he and others do not know where Jesus is going (14:5). Overall in the Gospel of John, there is a confessional tone, made in retrospect: it is not until Jesus rises from the dead that the disciples come to understand truly what Jesus has said or done (2:22).

Despite the disciples' lack of understanding, Jesus assures them that he will come back to take them to the father's house (14:3a), and the result will be that they will have a reunion: "where I am, there you may be also" (14:3b). It is not difficult to see that this promise of Jesus is to give comfort and anticipation to the disciples. A Korean scholar senses in this portion of the 'farewell discourse,' the compassionate heart of a mother for her children when she is just about to take off for a long journey; she assures her children that she will surely come back to them.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A Korean scholar, Yu Yǒng-mo (1890-1981), views Jesus as the "best son" who had a perfect relationship with the father God. O Chǒng-suk, "유영모의 한국적 기독교" [Yu Yong-mo's Distinctly Korean Christianity], in 다석 유영모의 동양사상과 신학 [Yu Yǒng-mo's Thoughts and Theology: Asian Understanding of Christianity], eds. Kim Hǔng-ho and Yi Chǒng-bae (Seoul: Sol, 2002), 242.

<sup>11</sup> See the section, "Exodus and Homecoming," in Chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup> See the section, "Exodus and Homecoming," in Chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Yong-ok, 요한복음 강해 [A Commentary on the Gospel of John] (Seoul: T'ongnamu, 2007), 388.

Jesus also reminds the disciples that they actually should be able to find the place where he is going because they (already) know the way (14:4). As will be explained by Jesus shortly, the reason that the disciples should know the way is because they are, by now, supposed to *know* Jesus himself, who is the ‘way’ to the father (14:7-11). However, they do not seem to agree with Jesus; Thomas represents the shared sentiment of the group when he asks: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (14:5). To Thomas’ seemingly frustrated question, Jesus responds in one of the most well-known sayings of his: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6).

### **I am the way (Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδός): (14:6a)**

Jesus’ saying, “Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδός καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή” (14:6a), has three predicates of “I am”: the ‘way,’ the ‘truth’ and the ‘life.’ If we consider *the flow of the conversation* between Jesus and his disciples up to this point, the word, ‘way,’ is a more meaningful predicate than the other two: the ‘truth’ and the ‘life.’ Westermann is one of the few scholars who focuses on the word ‘way,’ contending that engrossing oneself with other words such as “and the truth, and the life” and “no one. . . but” (14:6b) only impedes the understanding of the key saying, “I am the way.”<sup>14</sup> It is plausible to consider that the successive words, “and the truth, and the life,” might reflect a skillful ‘editorial’ work of the gospel ‘author(s).’ It is because of this consideration of the immediate literary context, and also because of the Korean reading’s specific attention to the word ‘*ki*’ (‘way’), that I am going to primarily focus on the predicate ‘way’ in this saying. This should not be mistaken, however, as belittling the themes of the ‘truth’ and the ‘life’ in the Gospel of John. As Potterie says, “the idea of truth is truly at the heart of John’s theology.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Beasley-

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<sup>14</sup> Westermann views that Jesus’ response (14:6) to Thomas’ question (14:5) consists of *one* sentence, i.e. “I am the way.” Claus Westermann, *Gospel of John*, 38. The majority of other scholars, however, see the significance of the successive two words. Brown contends that Jesus’ being the ‘way’ is made unique and incomparable because he is the truth—“the only revelation of the Father”—and the life which “the Son alone can give to men who believe in him.” Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, XIII-XXI. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 630-31. A similar view is found in D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 491; Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 395; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 812.

<sup>15</sup> Ignace de la Potterie, “The Truth in Saint John,” in *The Interpretation of John*, second edition, ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 78. As reading the passage of John 14:6, however, Potterie asserts that “the main idea is that of the *way*”; “the two other nouns (‘the truth and the life’) are to be

Murray argues that the very word which corresponds to the concept of 'salvation' in the Fourth Gospel is 'life.'<sup>16</sup>

Considering the fact that Jesus' saying is in response to Thomas' question, "How can we know the way," perhaps the better form of rendering "I am the way" might be "the way is me." On the occasion of oral recitation or performance, the orator must place emphasis on "Ἐγώ" or "I."<sup>17</sup> There is some convenience in the Korean language in relation to this argument. The Korean language has two kinds of subjective suffix: '-nŭn' and '-ka.' If this saying is rendered as "Na-nŭn kil-iyō," it is the equivalent of the English "I am the way." If rendered as "Nae-ka kil-iyō," it is either "I am the way," or "the way is me." Between the two, "Nae-ka kil-iyō" would be a more faithful rendering contextually, conveying the sense of both assurance of and invitation to the 'way.' By contrast, "Na-nŭn kil-iyō" sounds more like an individualistic, formal, doctrinal proclamation. In light of this, it is encouraging to see that the New Korean Revised Version (NKRIV), one of the most recent versions of the Bible in Korea (2008), renders "I am the way," as "Nae-ka kot kil-iyō," thus placing emphasis on the word 'I.' In addition to this, NKRIV uses an emphasizing adverb, 'kot' or 'very,' right after 'nae-ka,' thus doubly emphasizing the fact that the 'way' (which Thomas enquires about) is *the very person Jesus*.

Most Western scholars take note of the Greek article 'ἡ' or 'the' in this passage and argue that its usage is to denote the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Some Korean biblical scholars follow this kind of argumentation and also stress use of the definite

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regarded simply as an explanation of the declaration of Jesus, 'I am the way.'" Potterie, "The Truth in Saint John," 72.

<sup>16</sup> Beasley-Murray points out that the term 'salvation' is hardly used by Johannine Jesus, except once, "salvation is of the Jews" (4:22), which "is not exactly an epitome of the gospel," either. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 1-2. Furthermore, the significance of the theme of 'life' will be expounded in the section, "Having Life to the Full," in Chapter 11.

<sup>17</sup> See the brief discussion about the oral tradition of the Bible in the section, "The Historical Value of the Fourth Gospel," in Chapter 9.

<sup>18</sup> Geivett and Phillips argue: "there seems to be no reason for the definite article that accompanies each of the three terms—the way, the truth, and the life—except that all others who may claim to be the truth and the life are thereby exposed as untrue and without life." R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 236-37.

article.<sup>19</sup> However, the Korean definite article, *kŭ* or ‘the,’ is rarely used, and all Korean Bibles render this part without the definite article in front of ‘*ki*’ (‘way’). The same applies to the other two predicates: truth and life. This encapsulates many Korean scholars’ almost-habitual imitation of Western scholars’ emphases, without careful consideration as to their relevance to Korean readers or not.

Scholars also highlight the significance of the “ἐγὼ εἰμι” or “I am” statement in this saying, which without failure ends up denoting the presence of a high Christology in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>20</sup> However, it is hard to imagine that, at this special moment when the disciples desperately need some assurance, comfort and hope, Jesus is making a grand doctrinal statement about who he is. Much more plausible is that Jesus is giving the assurance of the way to the father: there *is* a way, an assured one at that, because the way is the very person of Jesus whom they have known and who has loved them. As Kim Chin-ho reads, the surrounding atmosphere of the three consecutive ‘speeches’ recorded in the gospel (13:31-14:31; 15:1-16:4a; 16:4b-33) is “anxiety and fear,” and that in this context, Jesus’ speeches are “focused on imparting comfort.”<sup>21</sup>

It seems that Jesus’ disciples are not able to comprehend that the *person* Jesus is the way to God the father. Their difficulty in grasping the connection between a *person* and the ‘way’ of the Lord is understandable; Hebrew prophets showed and proclaimed the ‘way’ of the Lord, but none of them presumed to be or ascribed someone to be the ‘way’ of the Lord.<sup>22</sup> Jesus’ saying, “I am the way,” then, yields a new paradigm; Johannine Jesus is a new and *living* way. This new paradigmatic Jesus may be found in other sayings in the same gospel, such as “I am the bread of life” (6:35) and “living water” (7:38; cf. 4:14). When Jesus discusses manna or the ‘bread from heaven,’ he designates himself as the “*living* bread” (6:51); the previous manna has now become a person in flesh and blood (6:51, 55). Those who put trust in Jesus will have

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<sup>19</sup> Pak Yun-sŏn, *요한복음 II: 12-21* [*The Gospel of John II: Chapters 12-21*] (Seoul: Yŏngŭm, 1992), 434.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Bauckham, “The ‘I Am’ Sayings,” *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 243-50.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Chin-ho, *Radical Liberalists*, 185-86.

<sup>22</sup> Identifying a person as the ‘way’ would surely have been an unfamiliar concept in ancient Israel. Ordinary people’s common understanding of the ‘way’ would be in terms such as ‘path,’ ‘action,’ ‘journey,’ and ‘wisdom.’ See the discussion about the typical association of the ‘way’: “Major Concepts” in Chapter 4.

within themselves the “*living water*” (7:38; cf. 4:14). With this new, challenging paradigm opened to them, Thomas and the other disciples are still looking somewhere else or for something else to determine the way to God. Toward such a state of mind, Jesus speaks emphatically: do not look elsewhere but here, because *I*, standing here in front of you and in the midst of you, am the way!

**Except through me (εἰ μὴ δι' ἐμοῦ): (14:6b)**

We now face the contentious content of the main passage which is the second half of the verse: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” The customary reception of this passage as to defend exclusive salvation within Christianity was spelled out in the thesis’ introduction. Here I shall examine scholars’ readings of this passage within the gospel context. Drawing from John 14:6 (and a few other key Christological passages), Anderson states that “John’s soteriology (theology of salvation) is the most particular and exclusive anywhere in the Bible.”<sup>23</sup> Ridderbos comments, “In all these core sayings [including John 14:6] Jesus posits himself in his exclusivity as the one sent by the Father and hence as the only way.”<sup>24</sup> Bruner even coins the term, “Christoexclusivity,” from this verse.<sup>25</sup> Kanagaraj and Kemp unashamedly acknowledge the “narrow or arrogant” appearance of the claim, insisting that this verse should serve as the Christian answer to Jesus’ question, who do you say I am?<sup>26</sup>

There are scholars who read this second half of the verse (14:6b) specifically in relation to other religions. Barrett, for instance, comments: “If John, here and elsewhere, used some of the notions and terminology of the religions of his day, and there are many indications that he was not unfamiliar with them, he was quite sure that those religions were ineffective and that there was no religious or mystical

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<sup>23</sup> Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 183. Even though Anderson quotes this specific verse for an ‘exclusive’ claim of Jesus, he also stresses that “John is the most universalistic and inclusive of biblical texts: ‘The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world’ (1:9).”

<sup>24</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, translated by John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 493.

<sup>25</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 812.

<sup>26</sup> Jey K. Kanagaraj and Ian S. Kemp, *The Gospel According to John* (Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 2002), 319.

approach to God which could achieve its goal.”<sup>27</sup> Some others read this portion in a more lenient manner toward other religious groups. Newbigin, for instance, asserts that “to follow this way is, in fact, the only way to the Father,” while acknowledging that “this is not to say that God has left no witness to himself in the rest of the life of the world.”<sup>28</sup> Schwarz, in a similar vein, notes that “the emphasis on the exclusiveness of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ is not directed against other religions.”<sup>29</sup> Anderson is probably one of the few scholars to critique the historical reception of this verse; he contends that this text is “misconstrued as the privileging of one religion over another”: “only ‘Christians’ [as the reader defines them, of course] will be saved; the rest will be lost.”<sup>30</sup>

Most Korean Protestant commentaries also point to the ‘exclusive claim of Jesus’ in this passage, referring to and agreeing with the comments of many Western scholars.<sup>31</sup> To introduce some of the comments: “Jesus announces a messianic self-claim when he says that he is one and only, *the way*, and *the life* and *the truth*.”<sup>32</sup> “The way, the life and the truth all equally point to Jesus’ uniqueness. Except through Jesus, no human beings can have fellowship with God who is the foundation of all things.”<sup>33</sup> “Jesus is God’s one and only, true manifestation.”<sup>34</sup> “Some dared to say that all religions lead to one God, but Jesus said that it is only through him people can come to God.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, second edition (London: SPCK, 1978), 458.

<sup>28</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 181. For a similar view, see William H. Willimon, “Preaching on the Way of John 14:6.” Source: <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/article/entry/407/preaching-on-the-way-of-john-146> (accessed September 10, 2013). Willimon is bishop of the Birmingham Area, the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Schwarz, *The God Who Is: The Christian God in a Pluralistic World* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 236.

<sup>30</sup> Anderson, *The Riddles*, 184 (the square brackets are Anderson’s).

<sup>31</sup> All the Korean scholars introduced here exclusively refer to Western sources for their comments on John 14:6; there is no quote from any Korean traditional, philosophical, literary source.

<sup>32</sup> Pak Yun-sŏn, *The Gospel of John II*, 434.

<sup>33</sup> Kim Ch’un-gi, *요한복음 연구 [A Study of the Gospel of John]* (Seoul: Handŭl, 1998), 210.

<sup>34</sup> Ch’oe Hong-jin, *말씀이 육신이 되어 [Word Becoming Flesh]* (Seoul: Korean Biblical Studies, 2007), 292-93.

<sup>35</sup> Ch’oe Sŏn-gŭn, *요한복음 주해 II: 11-21장 [A Commentary of the Gospel of John II: Chapters 11-21]* (Seoul: Hanyang University Press, 2006), 192-93.

“There is no one but Jesus on earth who could say this.”<sup>36</sup>

Most of these Korean readings seem to be doctrinal in nature, reading into this passage a traditional, Christian doctrine on the person of Jesus, namely, Jesus’ divinity as the ‘second person’ in the trinity. (As long as the essence of Christian faith is explained only from and dependent on the framework of trinity, it seems that John 14:6 will continue to be used as a proof-text for ‘Jesus’ exclusive access to God.’)

I read the portion (14:6b) as *a rephrasing of the first half* (14:6a), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” which is arranged in a typical Hebraic parallelistic pattern. As was discussed in Chapter 9, Hebrew parallelism serves to reinforce the main idea or expand an idea more fully. Jesus has just said that he is the way to the father (14:6a). The immediately following saying—“No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6b)—is then the confirmation of what has just been said—“I am the way”—rephrased in different words. It is not that Jesus wants to say something profoundly new or dissimilar to what he has just uttered. Still beating here is Jesus’ pastoral heart: he wants the disciples not to be troubled but to trust and hope, by focusing on him, the person who they have known.

We in fact see a similar pattern of speech in other ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus, such as “I am the bread of life” (6:48) or “I am the true vine” (15:1). Both of these ‘I am’ sayings constitute speeches (as parts of lengthy discourses) that share a similar narrative structure.<sup>37</sup> To elaborate, the ‘I am’ statement, implicitly and explicitly, gives a simple command or exhortation, such as ‘eat this bread’ or ‘abide in me.’ This is qualified by the consequent, highly desirable destiny for those who follow the command: “Whoever eats of this bread *will live for ever*” (6:51); “those who abide in me and I in them *bear much fruit*” (15:5). This positive clause/sentence is then *made complete* by another that denotes the contrasting consequences: “*Unless* you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you *have no life* in you” (6:53); “*apart from* me you *can do nothing*” (15:5). As seen in these examples, the contrasting clauses often begin with negative conjunctions such as “unless” or “apart from.” In this pattern of speech, the latter part reiterates and consolidates the previous one, which

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<sup>36</sup> Pak Su-am, *요한복음 [The Gospel of John]* (Seoul: Korean Christian Books, 2002), 316.

<sup>37</sup> Scholars observe that (often lengthy and allusive) discourses of Jesus constitute a unique feature of the Fourth Gospel, which stands in contrast to Jesus’ pithy sayings and parables which appear frequently in the Synoptics.

constitutes antithetic parallelism. The appeal for the hearers is to grasp the exhortation for a certain symbolic action, such as *eating* Jesus' flesh or *abiding* in the vine of Jesus. Another 'I am'-based speech—"I am the good shepherd"—similarly involves a positive action followed by a negative one: "He goes ahead of them, and the sheep *follow* him because they *know* his voice. They will *not follow* a stranger, but they will *run from* him because they *do not know* the voice of strangers" (10:4-5). Those who truly know the shepherd are supposed to demonstrate this knowledge through *following him*.

The "I am the way" saying (14:6), however, does not explicitly include an imperative for a specific action. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why scholars do not associate this saying with Hebraic parallelism.<sup>38</sup> However, it is plausible to view that the action of walking is omitted in this saying because the biblical 'way' inherently entails walking;<sup>39</sup> to attempt to read what is omitted in the text is an important but challenging part of the reading of ancient, 'foreign' material.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the Johannine Jesus' speech—"I am the way; no one comes to the Father except through me"—may be received as a condensed form of an antithetic parallelistic saying which bases itself on the statement of "I am the way." To expand this parallelistic phrase: walk through me, and you will come to the father's house; if you don't walk as I do, you will not see the father. It should be emphasized here, once more, that the major force is encouragement, encouraging the hearers to trust in Jesus and continue to live in an intimate relationship with him; the saying's purpose is not primarily to caution the disciples against the possibility that they may not enter the father's house.

The phrase, "except through me," deserves some further examination and comment. There is no persuasive explanation why this phrase should denote

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<sup>38</sup> As Jeremias reports, parallelism is more easily found in the words of the Synoptic Jesus. Jeremias, however, does not consider the parallelism within the Fourth Gospel significant, for he views that the (more than thirty instances of) antithetic parallelism found in the Fourth Gospel does not "lend itself to a comparison, as it is affected by Johannine dualism." By contrast, Brown presents fifteen working examples of parallelism in the Gospel of John, though he does not include the present passage, John 14:6. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, vol 1 (London: SCM Press, 1971), 14; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), cxxxii.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 6 (Pages 119, 122, 131-132).

<sup>40</sup> Socio-scientific analysis of the NT informs us that the NT writings are 'high-context' or 'collectivist society' documents. Based on this observation, Malina contends that much of what is needed for adequate interpretation is simply left unsaid and presumed known from the cultural experience shared by the implied readers. Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (London: Routledge, 1996), 28.

exclusiveness that contributes to a reading such as “*unless* you confess that I am the only saviour in the world.” One can read, instead, that the phrase, ‘through me,’ emphasizes *Jesus’ life in a holistic sense*; every step he takes, every path he decides to walk, everything he says (or does not), each way he acts and behaves, each new and deeper theological and anthropological understanding constitutes his whole life.<sup>41</sup> The review of the biblical ‘way’ also affirms that the ‘way’ is human life itself and *the whole of it* at that.<sup>42</sup>

With the portion of John 14:6b being received in this manner, the general force of the saying (14:6) cannot be exclusive or conditional as in the popular reading of John 14:6, wherein it is often interpreted to mean that “unless a person receives Jesus as the only Saviour, the person cannot come to the father or salvation.” It is, instead, positive as well as encouraging and comforting; positive in the sense that it affirms human possibility. Anderson views that John 14:6 primarily speaks to the human predicament: humans *cannot* come to God by themselves. Hence, what should be read in the passage is God’s initiative, which is self-revelation through Jesus.<sup>43</sup> However, I do not read in this passage “human limitation and lack of potentiality—no one *can* come except being drawn by the Father.”<sup>44</sup> By contrast, I see here a *human possibility*: the disciples *can* and will walk the way of Jesus. Perhaps I see this possibility through a Korean traditional religious matrix in which a human being is viewed as originally good.<sup>45</sup> This ‘positive’ reading adopts a different focus by Beasley-Murray, which is the

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<sup>41</sup> The following reflection of Jung Young Lee upon his own life illustrates this *holistic notion* of one’s life very well: “Perhaps the greatest gifts in my life are the sacred memories of my past. Every step I have taken, every direction in which I have moved, and every event in which I have participated is part of the memories which are the source of my theological reflection.” Jung Young Lee, “A Life In-Between: A Korean-American Journey,” in *Journeys at the Margin*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 38.

<sup>42</sup> See the section, “Major Concepts,” in Chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, *The Riddles*, 184.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *The Riddles*, 184.

<sup>45</sup> There is a strong ‘affirmation of humanity’ in Confucian philosophy. Divinity is ascertained or promised in ‘full humanity,’ which is manifested in a well-known Confucian axiom: “What Heaven imparts to human beings is called human nature.” *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Chapter 1. Kim Yong-ok, *A Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean*, 65. It seems that there is also biblical support for the possibility of human original goodness, when we consider all the sayings of Jesus which take the sentence structure of ‘(just) as I do, so you do.’ All these commands or instructions would lose their impetus, if we denied this *possibility*. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus even talks about the possibility of his disciples’ doing ‘greater works than those he has done’ (14:12).

notion of inclusivity. Beasley-Murray sees that the negative form of John 14:6b—“no one”—implies human possibility to resist the ‘way,’ but the reality which it points to is uplifting for humanity.<sup>46</sup> He goes on to comment, quoting Bruce, that “Jesus’ claim, understood in the light of the prologue to the gospel [1:4, 9 for instance], is inclusive, not exclusive. All truth is God’s truth, as all life is God’s life.”<sup>47</sup>

**If you know me, you will know my father (εἰ ἐγνώκατέ με, καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου γνώσεσθε): (14:7-11)**

The notion of knowing Jesus immediately follows the main passage (14:6) and makes further appearances in the designated pericope. To receive Jesus as the way to the father depends on whether the disciples *have known* their master Jesus or not. As will be discussed further in due course, the matter of ‘knowing’ in biblical contexts entails an intimate relationship and union.<sup>48</sup> Jesus’ oneness or union with the father, which is one of Jesus’ favourite phrases, is implied when he talks about the significance of knowing him: “If you know me, you will know my Father also” (14:7).<sup>49</sup> However, the disciples are also persistent; they are still looking for some other ‘way’ to see the father than by knowing Jesus, the ‘way.’ This time, Philip represents the group when he enquires of Jesus: “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied” (14:8). We sense Jesus’ emotions of sadness and frustration as he responds to Philip: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (14:9).

By the words of Jesus’ response to Philip, it is made clear that Jesus has wanted his disciples to come to know the father God through their relationship with himself. The vision or mission of Jesus’ life is to lead people to one single, ultimate figure, God, not Jesus himself. After asking, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (14:10), Jesus reminds the disciples of the words and works they have

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<sup>46</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 252.

<sup>47</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 252; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 298-99. This view is met with opposition by Carson who states, “the prologue is as exclusive as 14:6, and offers scant support for Karl Rahner’s theory of the ‘anonymous Christian.’” Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 492.

<sup>48</sup> See the section, “Knowing Jesus,” in Chapter 11.

<sup>49</sup> Regarding the oneness with the father, see the section, “Becoming One with Jesus,” in Chapter 11.

heard and seen from him: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves” (14:10-11). In this manner of reasoning, Jesus wants to draw his disciples and others to the father God. Jesus’ desire to help people to see God is not separating himself from God; by contrast, it is out of his humility (self-emptying) and of his assurance of him being in the father.

### READING THROUGH THE LENS OF A MEMOIR

The Gospel of John offers us much content that would have been realistic at the time, such as the disciples’ lack of understanding of Jesus and his words and deeds. The gospel also presents, explicitly and implicitly, that the disciples came to certain realizations after Jesus’ death and successive glorification. A poignant expression from the prophet Ezekiel, “There *was* a prophet among us” (Ezek 2:5; 33:33, in the context of 33:30-33), is echoed in the Gospel of John: ‘There was God’s son among us’; alas, “his own people did not accept him” (1:11). The expressions in Ezekiel and John denote that the prophet and Jesus were not recognized, acknowledged or believed in while they were living among their own people.<sup>50</sup> It was *only* later, *after* they were gone, that people came to realize the true identity of the prophet and Jesus. The notion of ‘belated realization’ is included in the Johannine Gospel (2:22; 12:28-29).

Jesus anticipated that this would be the case: “But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them” (16:4; cf. 14:26). “Remember the word that I said to you,” said Johannine Jesus (15:20). This work of remembering is to be aided by the ‘*paraclete*,’ a term used consistently for the spirit (of the truth) in the farewell discourse (14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 12-15).<sup>51</sup> This *paraclete* or ‘helper,’ who will be sent by Jesus (and the father) after his

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<sup>50</sup> Brian Neil Peterson also notices this parallel between Ezekiel in the OT and the Fourth Gospel in the NT. See Brian Neil Peterson, *John’s Use of Ezekiel: Understanding the Unique Perspective of the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 16.

<sup>51</sup> Catrin H. Williams, “The Gospel of John,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2011), 114.

death (14:16; 16:7), will remind them of all that Jesus said (14:26), and, further, guide them into all the truth (16:13).

In this section, I will approach the passage of John 14:6 particularly through the lens of a memoir. A memoir indicates remembrance of Jesus at a later time, or post-Easter perspective of Jesus, by Jesus' disciples, especially the Johannine "remembering community."<sup>52</sup> This particular approach to John 14:6 is an attempt to observe the disciples' ongoing reception of the 'I am the way to the father' saying. To borrow a term from speech-act theory, this approach is to look into the 'perlocutionary effect' of such a statement.<sup>53</sup> Toward this end, we shall briefly revisit the specific life context of the Johannine Christians after Jesus' death and resurrection.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Johannine community is characterized as an 'antisociety' which has undergone excommunication and marginalization in the society they once belonged to.<sup>54</sup> Certain scholars take the context of a persecuted minority into consideration for their reading of John 14:6. Commenting on the meaning of 'Jesus being the way,' Kim Yung-suk establishes the life context of the disciples as a minority group who are misunderstood and persecuted, and reads the main purpose of the saying (John 14:6) as to comfort the disciples and help them to persevere with their life of faith in Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

William H. Willimon does acknowledge the 'exclusive tone' in John 14:6 but quickly points to the necessity to consider the *context* wherein the gospel was written.<sup>56</sup> The context which Willimon pays attention to is two-fold. One is "a

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<sup>52</sup> Williams, "The Gospel of John," 115.

<sup>53</sup> 'Perlocutionary' is a term used in 'speech-act' theory or analysis. Speech-act theory, introduced first by J. L. Austin, contends that verbal utterances not only say things but also *do* things. According to the theory, there are three actions associated with communication: the *speaker's saying* (the locution), the *speaker's verbal action* (the illocution), and the *hearer's response* to the verbal action (the perlocution). Perlocutionary act, in particular, indicates the *effect* of the text on those who encounter it. Speech-act analysis of biblical texts, therefore, emphasises the *performative* and *interpersonal* nature of the text. See Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 32-35. J. L. Austin's speech-act theory appears in his book: J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>54</sup> See the section, "The Johannine Community and Its Language," in Chapter 9.

<sup>55</sup> Kim goes on to say that it is an irony that this saying has now turned around so that the 'powerful majority' of Christians impose their faiths on to other 'weak' religious groups. Yung Suk Kim, *The Bible, Culture and Interpretation: A Critical Examination of the Bible and Culture*, Korean edition (Lexington: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009), 60.

<sup>56</sup> Willimon, "Preaching on the Way of John 14:6."

persecuted, hanging-on-by-their-fingers minority” who “are reacting to their rejection by proclaiming that their newfound minority way is the way.” The other is “a group of people who are swept up in loving infatuation of Jesus,” a group whose language is “passionate and personal, centered not on a set of doctrines or beliefs, but rather on a person, a Savior who is the Beloved.”<sup>57</sup> Willimon’s description of the language of the Johannine group aptly fits the characteristics of ‘antilanguage,’ a product of an antisociety.<sup>58</sup>

As we have observed, the Johannine Christians now hold a new, alternative reality and set of values. This equates to change in their perspectives about important issues such as death and suffering. In relation to the ongoing effects of the “I am the way” saying, we shall briefly look at the Johannine Christians’ new perspective on death. Their memoir of Jesus includes his perspective and attitude toward death. His own impending death meant to Jesus the *returning* to (the house of) his father where he came from. When physical death is described as ‘going to the father,’ with whom one has shared a mutual, deep love and understanding, the ‘event’ should not incite dread or great sadness. The disciples may have recalled how saddened they were by Jesus’ talk of his imminent death or ‘departure,’ but also how Jesus subsequently heartened them, reminding them of the greatness of God: “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). They may have remembered the quiet confidence (and perhaps a hint of smile) Jesus manifested as he was speaking these words. Jesus’ disciples had learned to associate death with anticipation, joy and hope. Jesus’ use of ‘going to the father’s house’ even creates the sense of glorification of death.

The second profound effect of Jesus’ saying (John 14:6), which is closely related to the first, concerns the perspective of *suffering* that exists in life. It appears that one’s interpretation for the existence of suffering in human life leads people to different religious convictions.<sup>59</sup> I have no intention here to discuss the theme of

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<sup>57</sup> Willimon, similar to Kim Yung-suk, contends that “[f]or those of us who live in a majority Christian environment to simply apply it to ourselves (‘We have the one and only way and you don’t.’) is to do scripture an injustice.”

<sup>58</sup> See the section, “The Johannine Community and Its Language,” in Chapter 9.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Buddhism has taken the lead in this matter of suffering, for its foundational premise is that ‘life is the sea of suffering.’ Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that “for forty-five years, the Buddha said, over and over again, ‘I teach only suffering and the transformation of suffering.’” Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart*

suffering in depth, but will examine how Jesus' disciples, who received Jesus as the 'way' to the father, viewed the matter of suffering in their own lives.

It seems that the disciples' view was influenced not as much by Jesus' teaching on this matter as by all kinds of suffering which they witnessed in Jesus' life on earth. Jesus was 'not received' but 'rejected' and 'hated' (in the language of the Gospel of John), and underwent great suffering, the climax of which was the excruciating pain and utter shame—'crucifixion on the cross'—which was in fact the last appearance of Jesus that the disciples were left with before they were to see the risen and glorified Jesus. Why such a righteous person, through whom God was revealed, received so wide and deep a suffering must have been a burning theological question for the Johannine Christians.

Their newly-acquired understanding about the nature of *true* life may have provided a possible 'explanation.' To use a more modern perspective, they experienced a paradigm shift in relation to true/eternal life and suffering. Indeed, they remembered Jesus saying that he was willing to give up his life in order to receive (eternal) 'life' (John 10:11; 12:25). They also witnessed that joy and peace, which no one can take away, go together with sorrow and suffering (John 14:27; 16:22). The paradoxical phenomenon in Jesus' life spoke to the disciples about the *truth of life*. Hence, Jesus' being the 'way' is remembered together with Jesus' being the 'truth' and the 'life' (John 14:6). 'Walking in the way of Jesus' is alternated with 'walking in the truth' in John's Epistles (2 John 4; 3 John 3-4).

The third and perhaps the most significant effect of the 'I am the way to the Father' saying upon the disciples is the thought and practice of 'walking with Jesus,' who rose again and was still present amongst them. As concluded in the review of the biblical 'way' (Chapter 6), the 'way' "presents a most natural and friendly image of salvation: *walking with the Lord God.*"<sup>60</sup> The (eternal) life guaranteed by walking with God is now pursued by the disciples through walking with the risen Jesus.<sup>61</sup> The review of the biblical 'way' also showed that the word 'way' carries with it the meaning of "life

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*of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy and Liberation* (London: Rider, 1998), 3, 9.

<sup>60</sup> See the section, "Soteriological Effects," in Chapter 6.

<sup>61</sup> 'Salvific walk with the Lord that leads to life' is elaborated in the section, "Soteriological Effects," in Chapter 6.

itself, the whole of life at that.”<sup>62</sup> Remembering Jesus as the ‘way’ to the father possibly encouraged his believers to think of his whole life, and to maintain “obedient and faithful relationship” with Jesus.<sup>63</sup>

We see that this theme, ‘obedient and faithful relationship’ or ‘union with Jesus,’ is dealt with as an essential, Christian element by all the NT writers. Peter, for instance, encourages his ‘flock(s),’ who undergo various kinds of suffering, by interpreting for them the meaning of the suffering as to mean ‘following in Jesus’ steps’ (1 Pet 2:21); they are *partakers* of Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet 4:12-13) *and* of the glory that will be revealed (1 Pet 5:1). James, known as Jesus’ brother, reminds the believers that they should *share the faith of Jesus* (Jas 2:1). The apostle Paul gives special emphasis to believers’ *participation in Christ*, which is expressed in varying phrases such as: ‘walk in Him’ (Col 2:6), ‘in Christ’ (Eph 1:1, 4), ‘belonging to Jesus’ (Rom 1:6, 1 Cor 15:23), ‘being united with Jesus’ (Rom 6:5).<sup>64</sup> The author of the Letter to the Hebrews joins with others in urging suffering believers to participate in the faithfulness of Jesus (Heb 12:3-4).<sup>65</sup>

We have seen in this section Jesus’ believers’ later reception of the “I am the way to the Father” saying. Within the concrete socio-historical context where the believers formed a persecuted minority, they continued to remember the life and death of Jesus their lord. Their faith in Jesus, as the ‘way to the Father’ or ‘way’ of salvation, helped them to maintain the newly acquired, experiential, *truth of life*, which gave meaning to their own suffering and helped them not to fear the imminent death. And their daily life consisted of conscientious effort to be united with the life of

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<sup>62</sup> See the section, “Major Concepts,” in Chapter 6.

<sup>63</sup> “An obedient and faithful relationship with YHWH leads people to ‘life.’” See the section, “Soteriological Effects,” in Chapter 6.

<sup>64</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker emphasizes that Paul’s language of ‘faith’ is “fundamentally a language of ‘participation,’ a language that presupposes Paul’s theology of union with Christ whereby Christians are incorporated into Christ.” Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 106.

<sup>65</sup> It is very likely that the sense of identification with one’s lord or master came in a more natural way in the ancient world than it would in modern days. A master’s accomplishment, honour and glory as well as dishonour, sorrow and suffering were shared by the master’s servants in realistic fashion. A modern day sentiment which might be closest to this kind of solidarity is perhaps what people feel when they watch various sporting events in which their national teams are playing. People ‘participate’ in their team’s success and failure, and share elation and disappointment with the players. Something similar happens also in a family setting; a member’s joy and sorrow are automatically shared by the rest of the members.

Jesus, both in suffering and in joy and peace. This daily effort of ‘walking with Jesus’ and ‘participating in Jesus’ life’ is reflected in the phrase they were likely to often recite: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the father *except through me*” (John 14:6).<sup>66</sup>

With these observations in hand, I would like to invite Korean Protestant communities to examine their present life context and their readings of John 14:6. The life context of the *present day* KP believers is quite different from that of the Johannine Christians of two millennia ago. KP members now form a powerful majority in Korean society, and behaviours of many of them toward the religious others appear to be un-neighbourly, exhibiting often-aggressive evangelism and occasional, violent actions such as destroying Buddha statues. John 14:6 is frequently read in an exclusivistic manner in relation to other religions, rather than confessionally within their own Christian faith. In the midst of this, the essential element of participation, or walking in Jesus’ steps, within the passage seems overlooked by his ‘followers.’ The Johannine Christian community has left a legacy: ongoing remembrance of Jesus as the ‘way’ to the father urges his believers to participate in Jesus’ way holistically. This legacy should perhaps be reinstated among the present Korean Christian communities.

### **READING THROUGH THE KOREAN WORD ‘KIL’**

The word, ‘ὁδὸς’ (way), in John 14:6, deserves special attention because we are informed by the records of Acts in the NT that believers of Jesus were called “the followers of the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Perhaps the disciples began to call themselves such for the sake of self-protection (instead of using the name of Jesus), or they taught people about Jesus’ being the ‘way’ so regularly that others called them such. Perhaps there was another reason. No one knows for sure. We cannot say, either, which word precisely the disciples remembered, the Greek *hodos*, the Hebrew *derekh*, or the Aramaic equivalent. It is, however, a viable hypothesis that

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<sup>66</sup> Scholars such as Barrett and Lindars also identify a participatory theme in this passage. However, they primarily connect the theme with Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, while I maintain that the whole life of Jesus should be considered in relation to the disciples’ solidarity with Jesus. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 458; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 472.

through the Johannine community, Jesus became remembered as the 'way' among the early Christians as well as contemporary, non-Christian people.

That the word 'way' is a significant word to the early Christians is an encouragement to a Korean hermeneutical enterprise because as we will see, the Korean word *kil* ('path') conveys deep philosophical, religious, and aesthetic connotations, similar to the Taoist 'to' as well as the biblical 'way.' Kim Heup Young is obviously attracted to the word, *kil*, as he emphasizes that "Jesus did not identify himself in formal doctrinal terms such as simultaneously *verus Deus* and *verus homo* or as the incarnate *logos*; he simply said that he is the 'kil' that leads to God (John 14:6b)."<sup>67</sup> Perhaps it would accord with biblical tradition to call Korean Christians "the followers of *Kil*." In this section we shall explore the hermeneutical significance and implications of Jesus being received as the 'kil' to the father.

### **Holistic life**

As a metaphorical predicate for Jesus the subject (John 14:6), the Korean *kil* points to *life*, *the life* of Jesus, as the biblical 'way' does.<sup>68</sup> In reading John 14:6, Kim Hŭng-ho, a theologian and pastor, contends that the 'way' is Jesus' life. Kim goes on to say: "The gospel talks about the good news that we have found the path to come to God. This path is Jesus' heart and mind, which is revealed in his life."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Kwŏn Chŏng-saeng, a well-known children's storywriter, comments on Jesus' saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," emphasizing that Christianity is not about faith in the content-less Jesus but about living out in one's body the *life* which the human Jesus lived out so painstakingly.<sup>70</sup> As the biblical 'way' indicates "the whole of life," so the Korean *kil* leads us to see Jesus the *kil* holistically.<sup>71</sup> This means that we ought not to separate Jesus' death and resurrection from all other steps he has taken in his life on

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<sup>67</sup> Kim Heup Young, *Toward a Theo-tao*, 342

<sup>68</sup> See the section, "Major Concepts," in Chapter 6.

<sup>69</sup> Kim Hŭng-ho, *영원을 사는 사람들 [Those who Live Eternity]* (Seoul: Sasaek, 2009), 237.

<sup>70</sup> Kwŏn Chŏng-saeng, *우리들의 하느님 [Our God]* (Seoul: Greenview, 2008), 59.

<sup>71</sup> See the section, "Major Concepts," in Chapter 6.

earth. As the Taoist 'to' is "found in the very midst of everyday life," the *kil* of Jesus is recognized in every aspect of his life.<sup>72</sup>

### **Nature of life and salvation**

*Kil* being used to indicate a person's life further speaks about the nature of life and also salvation, if we are to consider the nature of *kil* or path. As pointed out in the review of the biblical 'way,' the original hearers of Jesus' saying, "I am the *kil*," were likely to have pictured an ancient path with its ups and downs, and many curves and bends which do not show the path behind it; they would not have imagined modern, straight highways and motorways.<sup>73</sup> This specific feature of the ancient *kil* encourages people to see various challenges in the journey of life as something natural, not as surprising or questionable. It also seems to say to us that the questions in our lives may not have clear answers.<sup>74</sup> Certain questions may never be answered; certain problems may never be resolved in one's lifetime. If Jesus is the *kil* to the father's house or 'salvation,' the salvation is not something that one reaches instantaneously or through one way (such as 'through the verbal confession of faith in Jesus'), a way whose image bears some resemblance to a customary experience of many of us: arriving at a far destination via modern transport such as a car or an airplane. The *kil* salvation, by contrast, consists of steady, faithful, daily walks that include occasions of confusion, doubt, and even going astray. The *kil* is not straightforward or easy to walk. Nonetheless, the *kil* is there to remind us that such is life, and such is salvation, and to encourage us to keep walking, trusting in God's goodness and the final justice.

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<sup>72</sup> "'To' as the Eastern wisdom and truth is not something that can be obtained by intense, solitary thinking but found in the very midst of everyday life, especially communal life." See the section, "Features," in Chapter 7 (Page 141).

<sup>73</sup> "The shared experiences of walking may include the sense of safety or danger of a path, frequency of slipping on an uneven path, and getting lost on the way. . . . As will be seen, it is out of these physical realities of a spatial-geographical 'way' that the word 'way' entails other associated meanings, metaphorical and figurative." See the 'preface' of Chapter 6 (Page 119-120).

<sup>74</sup> When a Taiwanese theologian, C. S. Song offers some suggestions about how to deal with the many questions that arise from our lives, his words sound like as if they came from within a '*kil* paradigm': "Keep in mind as you set out on this journey that the purpose of our exercise is not to come up with correct answers to the issues posed and the questions raised. As a matter of fact, we may not find neat and elegant answers to many of them. It is our hope that as we wrestle with them honestly, we may be led to a deeper understanding of who we are and to a personal encounter with that loving power we call God—from whose eternity we came and to whose eternity we return." C. S. Song, *Tracing the Footsteps of God*, 7.

This idea is reflected in a Korean poem, “*kubŭrŏjin Kil*” (A Curved *Kil*), written by Yi Chun-gwan. The poet prefers a curved *kil* to a straight one because walking on a curved *kil* offers more opportunities to see the real lives of common people. The straight *kil* is a symbol for a person whose life has seen few challenges, while the curved *kil* symbolizes the life of a person who “has walked through many uneven paths.” The appearance of the latter person has little attraction, like a “dirt-covered potato,” but the person does not fail to “embrace one’s family and neighbours.” Poet Pan Ch’il-hwan reads from this poem a deep message of ‘the path to which we humans need to return,’ as he comments: “people who used to prefer ‘straight paths’ now seek ‘a curved path.’ This new search is interconnected with our longing for home, where we find mountain [nature], village [community] and mother [the source].”<sup>75</sup>

### **Becoming a *kil***

Jesus being the *kil* means to Koreans that the person of Jesus *has become a new kil* for human ‘salvation.’ Unlike the disciple of Jesus who initially struggled with the concept that Jesus the person *is* the ‘way,’ ‘Korean disciples’ would have easily made the connection between the person Jesus and the (new) ‘way.’ This is because Koreans are familiar with the idea that a human person becomes a *kil*. At certain ‘kairotic’ moments, a need arises for making a new *kil*. In a religious and ethical sense, a person makes a new *kil* by *becoming the kil*; the person’s whole lifestyle and character becomes a new *kil*, so that other people can imitate him/her and walk in the way he/she has walked. Jesus who has become the *kil* is now an example for many others to follow. Put differently, Jesus has become the ‘to,’ the “model for human life.”<sup>76</sup> A Korean pastor, theologian and poet, Ch’ae Hi-dong writes a poem, “He is the Way,” in memory of the late Ahn Byong-mu, (regarded as a leading minjung theologian), which illustrates this point well. I shall introduce a few stanzas of the poem:

Laying the ground, opening the way,  
became the *kil* for a Korean theology.

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<sup>75</sup> Pan Ch’il-hwan, “이 아침에 만나는 시: 이준관, 구부러진 길” [The Poem We Read This Morning: A Curved *Kil* by Yi Chun-gwan]. Source: <http://news.donga.com/3/all/20070921/8492519/1> (accessed May 25, 2016).

<sup>76</sup> See the section, “Major Concepts,” in Chapter 7.

Ahn Byong-mu, he  
was the *kil*.

In the daybreak we  
now walk the new *kil*,  
the *kil* he has walked.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, self-sacrifice or *self-death* is an inherent element in the life of a person who becomes a *kil*. In An To-hyön's poem, *Chomun* ('Condolences'), the poet reminisces about an elderly person who, during his life, cared for those in the village. Two lines of the poem read: "he was the *kil* of the community/ so hard-trodden, sorrowful *kil*." As implied in An's poem, the person who has become a *kil* is walked on by many, which was identified earlier as an inherent image of 'to'.<sup>78</sup> It is also introduced that *wu-wei*, the action of 'to' is grounded on "the importance of emptying one's personal ambitions, desire, obstinacy and willfulness," which harkens back to Jesus' discipleship code—denying yourself (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; implicitly in John 12:24 -25) as well as the kenotic Christ as described in the NT (Phil 2:5-8).<sup>79</sup> The Johannine Jesus the *kil* emphasizes the notion of self-death (12:24, 27), and chooses death of his own accord (10:18).<sup>80</sup> Han Wan-sang understands from Jesus' being the *kil* that Jesus is willing to offer himself as a *kil* for people to walk on, which entails much suffering.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ch'ae Hi-dong, "민중신학자의 생애와 사상 2: 안병무" [Life and Thoughts of Minjung Theologians 2: Ahn Byong-mu]. Source: [http://minjungtheology.org/magazine/magazine\\_read.asp?fdMonthSeq=21&fdSeq=5](http://minjungtheology.org/magazine/magazine_read.asp?fdMonthSeq=21&fdSeq=5) (accessed April 20, 2011). Ch'ae Hi-tong has witnessed to all manners of suffering, such as torture and imprisonment, which Ahn endured. The idea of a person's becoming a *kil* is also described by Chŏng Ho-sŭng in his poem, "*Pomkil*" (A Spring Path). The first stanza of *Pomkil* reads: "Where a *kil* ends/ there is a *kil*/ Even where a *kil* ends/ there is a person who becomes a *kil*."

<sup>78</sup> As introduced in the review of the Taoist 'way' (Chapter 7), the 'to' or 'path' "is walked by ordinary people every day." See Page 136 for the quote of Kŭm Chang-t'ae.

<sup>79</sup> See the section, "*Wu-wei*," in Chapter 7 (Page 144).

<sup>80</sup> This point will be further elaborated in the reading below: "Examination of the Exclusivist Message."

<sup>81</sup> Han Wan-sang, "스스로를 지우시는 하나님: 마태 16:23-25, 요한 14:1-6" [God Who Erases One's Self: Matt 16:23-25, John 14:1-6], sermon, *Saegil* Church, Seoul, December 4, 2005. Source: <http://www.saegilchurch.or.kr/sermon/10062>.

## Returning to the destination

The *kil* has a *destination*. The destination is the Source of all beings in the Taoist ‘way’ tradition, and Creator of all creation in the biblical ‘way’ tradition. The theme of *returning* to such destination was presented as a soteriological implication in both ‘way’ traditions. As read in the exegesis, the *kil* of Jesus leads to his father’s house, and this return is a joyous occasion to Jesus because he is a son who deeply loves the father. He also anticipates glory because of the completion of his mission for which he was sent. This joy and glory of returning to one’s father’s house reminds Koreans of a Korean traditional story— *Kūmūihwanyang* (‘Returning home in golden clothes’). Following the recommendation of Sŏ Nam-dong, I will attempt to converge two stories here— one biblical and one Korean.<sup>82</sup>

*Kūmūihwanyang* is a folk story of a young male who comes from a very poor family. He sets himself a goal to pass the highest government exam, a dream hard to fulfil. For the sake of the goal set up before him, the young man endures various hardships. Through his diligence, hard work and perseverance, he eventually passes the exam, earning the highest mark among his peers. The story does not end here. The climax of the story is his glorious return to his father’s house, this time with changed clothes or status, in the finest (‘golden’) garments bestowed by the king. And the entire village of people gather together in eager anticipation and joy, waiting for the arrival of the young man who fulfilled his dream. (The story is situated in a culture where the entire village shares the young person’s glory as if it was its own.) And in the centre of the multitudes of people who are waiting for him is his father! Jesus’ own story-telling wherein he calls his death ‘going back to the father’ aptly fits the Korean *kūmūihwanyang* tale, reminding Koreans that Jesus’ death is a return to his father’s house; it is the *completion and fulfilment* of his life, by which he becomes glorified.

Goodness of returning is deeply embedded in Korean people’s hearts. A Korean poet Ch’ŏn Sang-byŏng (1930-1993) wrote a poem called *Kwich’ŏn* (‘Back to heaven’) which is much beloved by many Korean people, and was eventually made into a couple of different songs:

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<sup>82</sup> ‘Converging of two stories’ is to be done in a creative and mutually-enriching encounter of the two texts or stories in ‘cross-textual hermeneutics,’ a method which is advocated by Sŏ Nam-dong, one of the leading, first-generation Minjung theologians. Sŏ Nam-dong, *민중신학의 추구* [*Seeking Minjung Theology*] (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 1983), 275-312.

I shall go back to heaven.  
Hand in hand, together with the dew  
fading at the soft touch of dawn

I shall go back to heaven.  
At sunset, together, just we two  
playing at the shore when the clouds beckon

I shall go back to heaven.  
And on the day this beautiful outing ends  
I will go,  
and I shall say it was beautiful... .<sup>83</sup>

The notion of ‘going back to heaven’ touches Korean hearts, both Christians and non-Christians. It is hardly surprising that Korean-American theologian Andrew Sung Park uses the following expression as he describes his own theological journey: “We are going to return to where we come from; God is the ‘final home of our destiny.’”<sup>84</sup>

This ‘returning’ image associated with *kil* incorporates a view that human life on earth is a pilgrimage, on the path to ‘home.’ One of the most respected Christian leaders in Korean church history, Han Kyöng-jik (1902-2000), spoke this kind of *kil* language at the time he gave his ‘last words’ for his own children:

Life on earth is like a stranger walking on *kil*. As you walk on the *kil*, if you sow many good seeds, there will grow many flowers on the *kil* that you have walked. From flowers will come some fruit. However, if you sow bad seeds on the *kil*, only weeds will grow in the *kil* you have passed.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Translated by Alex Rose. Source:

<http://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=elguapo81&logNo=20170625158> (accessed August 17, 2015). The poet’s life is known to be full of suffering and sorrow. In 1966, he was falsely accused of being a political spy and was subjected to severe torture, whose aftereffects left some permanent physical disability. Despite such experience and poverty, he was able to say in 1979 that the life on earth, a temporary ‘outing,’ is beautiful, with the ‘permanent home’ to return to. Sin Kyöng-nim, 시인들을 찾아서 [*Revisiting the Poets*] (Seoul: Urigyoyuk, 1998), 341-44.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Sung Park, “Church and Theology: My Theological Journey,” in *Journeys at the Margin*, eds. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 167.

<sup>85</sup> Han Kyöng-jik is respected for his life of honesty, integrity and simplicity. Apparently, Han’s theology never deviated from the conservative doctrinal frame of Jesus’ divinity and his substitutionary death. However, Han used this *kil* language as a final contribution to his legacy. For this reason, I see that this ‘*kil* theology’ is Han’s deep, ‘home theology.’ Pastor Han’s ‘last words’ are recorded and available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NKlcsA1lc> (accessed September 6, 2015).

Han's understanding of human life as 'a stranger walking on *kil*' is biblically-grounded; one of the major concepts of the biblical 'way' is a journey,<sup>86</sup> and the biblical salvation is "in motion, an ongoing journey and pilgrimage, in which each step and each moment of the pilgrimage is meaningful to salvation."<sup>87</sup> The concept of pilgrim journey also harmonizes with the Taoist 'way' in that 'to' is viewed "as a cyclic movement or the essence of change"; "'To' is not categorized as a static noun but as an active verb in the Taoist paradigm."<sup>88</sup>

When *kil* is received as a pilgrim journey, a 'road companion' emerges as an important consideration. In the tradition of the biblical 'way,' prophets acted on behalf of God as the 'guide' for people's life journey.<sup>89</sup> The Johannine Jesus not only serves as a *kil* to walk but as the best guide, because he *came from* the destination and *knows* the way to return. What sojourners need to do is to seek to hear Jesus' voice and walk with him, which is characterised as a journey *led by Jesus' spirit or the spirit of truth*. Travellers should be conscious of not only the faithful companionship of Jesus but also other travellers. The destination of the *kil* being the father's house, they need to be considerate of their siblings, the children of the same father (John 20:17). Koreans should know what is required to please their father/parent, and what grieves the father's heart. Caring for other brothers and sisters will please the father's heart, and despising and avoiding them would grieve it. Arriving Home alone, without any news regarding the siblings' whereabouts, for example, would sadden the father's heart. The more who come to the father's house, the better, for the father's house has 'many rooms' (John 14:2). Hence, the *kil* of Jesus—returning to the father's house—is most inclusive, just as the Taoist's 'to' is.<sup>90</sup>

To conclude this section, all these implications about the Johannine Jesus as the *kil* affirm that the Korean word '*kil*' sits comfortably within the conceptual world of the biblical 'way' as well as the Taoist 'to,' sharing in common certain essential

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<sup>86</sup> See the section, "Major Concepts," in Chapter 6 (Pages 120).

<sup>87</sup> See the section, "Soteriological Effects," in Chapter 6 (Page 131).

<sup>88</sup> See the section, "Features," in Chapter 7 (Page 138).

<sup>89</sup> As reported in the review of the biblical 'way,' "the journey to return home inevitably requires *prophets*, God's messengers, who rebuke people as well as comfort them, and embody the 'way' of the Lord when necessary." See the section, "Soteriological Effects," in Chapter 6 (Page 131).

<sup>90</sup> See the section, "Features," in Chapter 7 (Pages 139-140).

implications: indicator of (holistic) life as well as the 'curved' (instead of 'straight'), pilgrim nature of life and salvation, inherent element of self-sacrifice, joyous and glorious returning to the Source ('*To*' or father God), and maintenance of faithful relationship with the Source and other 'road companions.' Affirmed here is that the Korean word '*kil*,' as in the case of the Taoist '*to*,' is a hermeneutical tool, legitimate and effective.<sup>91</sup> The Korean reading of Jesus' being the *kil* to the father (John 14:6) has helped us to understand in a more Korean way who Jesus is, what salvation is like, and what it means to be the followers of the *kil* Jesus. These new theological insights will be incorporated into "a new Korean theological development" that will be presented in the last chapter of the thesis (Chapter 12).

## **EXAMINATION OF THE EXCLUSIVIST MESSAGE**

We have already argued in our exegesis of the phrase, "except through me," that KP's (and other similar Christian groups') popular reception of 'Jesus' exclusivist claim' from the passage is a reading which does not consider its literary context. In this last section of the exegetical chapter, we will more narrowly focus on this issue, 'Jesus' exclusivist claim.' Based on the Jesus-centred methodology, developed for a Korean hermeneutic in this thesis, the person Jesus continues to be 'read' *holistically*. This means, in part, to maintain in the reading of Jesus the principle, "as Jesus' lifestyle is, so his words are." Furthermore, a person may be better identified through the observation of the person's fruit or lifestyle, which is in fact one of Jesus' teachings (Matt 7:16, 20; Luke 7:35). Based on this principle, I will examine the trait of 'exclusivity' in the person Jesus by revisiting his major teachings, mission, and lifestyle. Toward this I shall get some information from the Synoptic Gospels as well as the Johannine Gospel.

### **Looking through Jesus' major teachings**

We know that all four Gospels primarily witness to Jesus; each gospel concerns the good news about Jesus. The gospel Jesus preaches, however, is not focused on himself

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<sup>91</sup> This was already mentioned as a conclusion in Part III: "If a Taoist perspective or East-Asian frame of thought is employed as a hermeneutical tool, it would likely enhance and deepen the understanding of biblical texts."

but on God whom he calls his father; Jesus preached the “good news of God” (Mark 1:14). As will be seen in the ensuing chapter, Jesus’ ‘appeal’ to people to believe in him is because he wants them to receive his words as truth, coming from God, and heed them; it is not to draw attention to his own person.<sup>92</sup>

Jesus’ major teaching concerns God. Each gospel witnesses that Jesus passionately talks to people about the love and mercy of God as the loving father, the features of which include openness and inclusiveness. The Matthean Jesus stresses that the heavenly father is so merciful that *both* the righteous and unrighteous receive the same, basic benefits such as the sun and rain (Matt 5:43-48). The Markan Jesus fleshes out the loving care of God through *all* the wondrous works he performs for those who are sick, physically and mentally (as evidenced by the many healing stories recorded in Mark). The Lukan Jesus tells people that God’s father heart is always ready to welcome ‘sinners,’ through the story of “a prodigal son” (Luke 15:11-31). The Johannine Jesus says that the father’s house is large enough to hold as many as are willing to come (John 14:2), and embodies such generosity of God by welcoming all, including adulterous women (John 4:7-24; 8:2-11).

Whereas the kingdom of God is a primary concern of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ major teaching in the Fourth Gospel concerns eternal life. Whether Jesus’ major teaching is about the kingdom of God or about eternal life, one of the surprising elements in this teaching is inclusivity. Using an eschatological symbol of the ‘great banquet,’ the Lukan Jesus tells the crowd that the Lord’s invitation is given to *everyone*; no one is excluded from the invitation (Luke 14:15-24).<sup>93</sup> Both the mercy of God and Jesus’ invitation to this mercy are offered and taught in an inclusive way; they are to *all* people, *whoever* has a heart to receive the teaching (Matt 11:15; Mark 4:9; 7:16; 9:41; Luke 9:23). The Johannine (eternal) life is also available to everyone (John 3:15; 6:35; 7:37; 8:51). This ‘whoever’ contains no exclusivity, which means that there is no condition based on human-born and human-created appearances, such as gender, sexual orientation, family background, physical condition, social or economic status,

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<sup>92</sup> See the section, ‘Believing in Jesus,’ in Chapter 11.

<sup>93</sup> Bob Robinson views this particular Lukan parable, along with its Matthean version (in Matt 22:1-14), as the parable which “presents a broad salvation history of God’s dealings with Israel and the wider Gentile world.” Bob Robinson, *Jesus and the Religions: Retrieving a Neglected Example for a Multi-cultural World* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 141.

religious familiarity or knowledge of the Law. The inclusiveness or openness of God's grace is certainly one of the unique teachings of Jesus.<sup>94</sup>

How does the Johannine Jesus' saying, "I am the way; no one comes to the Father except through me," harmonize with these primary concerns and major teachings of Jesus? In what way does this saying reflect the heart matter of Jesus? It is possible to see that this saying reflects very much the Johannine community in its particular life context; the community decides to remain faithful *exclusively* to Jesus, the way to the father. If the saying appears to polemically exclude other attempts to reach God, "it is primarily directed, not against the attempts of others, but against other attempts by the disciples."<sup>95</sup>

We may consider another focus of Jesus' teaching. In the midst of his major teaching about the mercy and love of the father God, Jesus emphasizes self-denial as the key to true life (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; John 12:24-25). The life of Jesus himself is that of *kenosis* or emptying oneself.<sup>96</sup> Self-denial and self-death is the discipleship code for Christ-followers.<sup>97</sup> It would be contradictory to this core teaching of Jesus if Christians were to choose to empty or nullify the faith of *others*. Rowan Williams aptly elaborates this point:

It is part of the theology of the cross that is evolving throughout the later chapters of John, the mapping out of a revelation of glory through self-forgetting and self-offering. The text in question [John 14:6] indeed states that there is no way to the Father except in virtue of what Jesus does and suffers; but precisely because that defines the way we must then follow, it is (to say the least) paradoxical if it is used as a simple self-affirmation for the exclusive claim of the Christian institution or the Christian system.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Dunn brings up this point as one of the commonalities between Jesus' and Paul's teachings. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 98-99.

<sup>95</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, "ὁδός," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 5: 80. A similar view is found in Rowan Williams, "The Bible Today."

<sup>96</sup> Korean scholars such as Kim Kyong-jae and Keel Hee-sung argue that kenotic Christology should guide the future of Korean Christianity and theology. Kim Kyong-jae, "신학을 어떻게 할 것인가?" [How Shall We Do Theology?], in *The Voice*, 44-46; Keel Hee-sung, *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 28-31.

<sup>97</sup> Readers need discernment so as not to confuse this notion of *kenosis* with Ham's wording of 'self-forgetfulness' which Ham Sök-hön points out as Korean people's primary sin against the Creator. See Chapter 4 (Page 72).

<sup>98</sup> Rowan Williams, "The Bible Today."

## Looking through Jesus' actions and mission

One of the things that all four Gospels witness to is that Jesus embodies the inclusiveness of God's grace by actively befriending the 'sinners' of the day. The 'sinners' of the day can be listed as "the poor, the blind, the lepers, the hungry, those who weep, the sinners, the tax-collectors, those who are possessed by demons, the persecuted, the captives, those who are weary and heavy laden, the rabble who know nothing of the law, the little ones, the least, the last, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, even the prostitutes," and also Gentiles and Samaritans.<sup>99</sup> Jesus chooses to be with those excluded, excluded from the 'righteous.' Among the 'righteous' who call many others 'sinners' are a Pharisee who sees himself as a "faithful observer of the Law' (Luke 18:11-12), religious leaders who condemn a person born blind as a 'sinner' and excommunicate him (John 9:34), and those who think they are offering a service to God by persecuting Jesus and his followers (John 16:2). Through befriending the excluded 'sinners,' Jesus comes to bear the name, a "friend of tax-collectors and sinners," by those claiming to be righteous (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34; cf. Mark 2:14-17).

Looking at Jesus' mission, his primary concern is about Jewish society and community. Jesus identifies his mission as such: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24). Furthermore, he instructs his disciples to "go rather to the lost people of the house of Israel!" (Matt 10:6). Because of this, Jesus' disciples initially think that their ministry is limited to their own people. However, "the provocative, boundary-breaking nature of Jesus' own ministry" gradually helps them to realize that their mission is to approach *all* people—all Israelites, and all Gentiles.<sup>100</sup> One may interpret this missional focus on the house of Israel as to suggest that Jesus senses the urgency of repentance and altered religious behaviour among his contemporary Jewish people, the 'people of God.'

Within this missional focus, Jesus' approach is radically inclusive. This inclusiveness stands out when we consider the background of the religious phenomenon of the day, which can be typified as 'self-righteous and exclusivistic'; each of the self-assuming 'righteous' groups, such as the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes, carries a conviction that their understanding of what it means to be Israel,

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<sup>99</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, twenty-fifth anniversary edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 21-29.

<sup>100</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 30.

God's covenant community, is the only correct understanding.<sup>101</sup> David Bosch elaborates the religious environment into which Jesus is born:

For several centuries prior to the birth of Jesus the conviction was gaining ground that not all Israel but *only a faithful remnant* would be saved. Several religious groups within Judaism regarded themselves as this remnant and all others, even fellow Jews, as being unacceptable. This was particularly true of the Essene communities along the Dead Sea. In most of these circles there was little concern for recruiting others even of their own kind, let alone Gentiles.<sup>102</sup>

Bosch, then, describes the uniqueness of Jesus' mission: "What amazes one again and again is the *inclusiveness* of Jesus' mission. It embraces both the poor and the rich, both the oppressed and the oppressor, both the sinners and the devout."<sup>103</sup> Jesus' mission dissolves alienation, crossing boundaries between individuals and groups.<sup>104</sup> With this inclusive manner, Jesus consistently challenges such attitudes, practices and structures that tended arbitrarily to exclude potential members of the Israelite community.<sup>105</sup>

The focus of Jesus' mission on Jewish people, however, should not be taken to mean that Jesus does not care for Gentiles. In fact, Jesus finds (at least) some Gentiles (including Samaritans) to be 'people of faith.'<sup>106</sup> In a study of Jesus and his attitude toward Gentiles, Bob Robinson reports that "the later Second Temple Era generally consolidates and expands the principle of *amixia* (separation from non-Jews), including the refusal to eat with Gentiles," and 'later rabbinic' thinking maintains that "nothing of value could be drawn from Gentile religions whose ubiquitous idolatry separates Gentiles from Jews."<sup>107</sup> Isolationism and separatism existed both within and outside Jewish communities. However, Jesus' attitude and actions in relation to Gentiles, to

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<sup>101</sup> Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels*, 99.

<sup>102</sup> Bosch emphasizes the importance of knowledge about the religious climate that Jesus was born into; without such knowledge, it would be difficult to understand Jesus. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 28 (emphasis original).

<sup>104</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 28.

<sup>105</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 27.

<sup>106</sup> We use the term 'Gentiles' not only to denote 'foreigners' but also 'Samaritans,' for Samaritans were equally 'alien' to most Jews during the Second Temple era. Robinson, *Jesus and the Religions*, 48-49.

<sup>107</sup> Robinson, *Jesus and the Religions*, 48-49.

which all the four Gospels witness, again show a radical difference to the common attitude and practice (Matt 8:5-13; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 4:25-27; John 4:4-42). Jesus is moved by certain Gentiles' faith in God and praises them for it, which often results in extreme anger from the Jews, and endangerment of himself (Matt 8:10; Luke 4:28-29); the religious leaders of the day even call him a "Samaritan" (John 8:48), whose modern day parallel might be a 'heretic' or 'non-Christian.' The NT stories of Jesus' encounters with Gentiles lead us to see Jesus' respect for the Gentiles and even his eagerness to learn from them.

One may see that this 'outrageous' attitude of Jesus toward Gentiles manifests his keen interest to see to completion the works of his father (c.f. John 5:17, 20; 9:3) and to seek, as his father does, those who worship the father not in appearance but in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Jesus does foresee that those who are outside Israel will come into God's kingdom: "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29; Matt 8:11). Other 'flocks' in Jesus' sayings recorded in the Gospel of John (10:16; 12:20-24; 17:20) might denote 'seekers' among his contemporary Jews; however, Gentiles is also a strong possibility. In conclusion, concerning Gentiles, no words of criticism or exclusion or denial from the kingdom of God are heard from the lips of Jesus.

Fredrick D. Bruner would agree with what has been argued for so far in this section, for he sees that "the exclusive Jesus of the New Testament is, of course, remarkably inclusive in his public ministry of love and outreach (as we see in his treatment of his culture's outcasts—women, Samaritans, lepers, gentiles, tax collectors, sinners, etc)." <sup>108</sup> However, at this point we diverge; such a remark is immediately followed with "Christ is the *exclusive* way to God vertically." <sup>109</sup> Bruner explains his view in an interesting metaphor of the two beams of the cross Jesus bore: "Onto this firm vertical beam of the exclusivity of Christ must be nailed the horizontal beam of the inclusivity of Christ." <sup>110</sup>

The binary opposites—exclusivity and inclusivity—may exist together, which is in fact an important element of the Taoist paradigm. Nevertheless, according to the

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<sup>108</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 826.

<sup>109</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 826 (emphasis original).

<sup>110</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 829.

reading of this thesis, 'vertical exclusivity' claimed by certain group(s) was the very idea Jesus perpetually fought to deconstruct. Having examined the content and manner of Jesus' major teachings, radical inclusivity of his mission, together with his high integrity, this thesis concludes that the Christian exclusivist claim about the destiny of people of other religious faiths *based on John 14:6* is at best *a misplaced argument and, moreover, an act of injustice to the speaker of the saying.*

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### SAYINGS WITH SOTERIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS WITHIN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

In the previous chapter, the passage of John 14:6 was approached with four specific focuses. The present chapter continues on with the same purpose, a better understanding of John 14:6. The hermeneutical effort to understand John 14:6 is, to a Korean interpreter, ultimately the attempt to ‘meet’ the person Jesus and hear his heart message. As elaborated in the methodology section, a Korean hermeneutic is Jesus-centred through a holistic approach to him. To this end, we will now turn to the whole Gospel of John by selecting six phrases in it that carry images of salvation, and review each of the phrases. These phrases are selected because they appear frequently within the gospel, and pertain to the matter of ‘eternal life.’

The gospels in general show that Jesus does not define important matters such as the kingdom of God in a few unchangeable doctrinal statements or dominant symbols, but in as many stories and metaphoric phrases as possible. When it comes to the Johannine Gospel, we see a communication method that uses various symbols and metaphors. The Johannine Jesus, for example, presents himself by employing several images such as “bread of life (6:48)” and “gate for the sheep (10:7).”<sup>1</sup>

The same principle is applied to the presentation of salvation matters. In the Gospel of John, salvation matters are spoken of by Jesus (and also by ‘John’) in diverse verbal phrases such as ‘eating my flesh,’ ‘believing in me,’ ‘having life to the full,’ ‘abiding in me,’ ‘becoming one with me,’ and ‘knowing me.’ As we look at each of these phrases, we may be able to find one or two major elements shared by all, in regard to Johannine Jesus’ perspective about ‘salvation’ or eternal life. These common

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<sup>1</sup> There are several images Jesus uses in the Gospel of John in the form of ‘I am’ sayings: ‘bread of life’ (6:48), ‘light of the world’ (8:12), ‘gate for the sheep’ (10:7), ‘good shepherd’ (10:11), ‘resurrection and life’ (11:25), ‘way, truth and life’ (14:6), and ‘true vine’ (15:1).

elements, if they are recognized, may contribute to the establishment of the soteriological message conveyed in John 14:6 as proposed in this thesis.

### **EATING JESUS' FLESH**

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life” (6:54).

One of Jesus' sayings that points to eternal life is, peculiarly, 'eating his flesh and drinking his blood.' The fact that even some of Jesus' disciples find the saying hard to digest suggests either that the saying is detestable or offensive (6:61), or simply difficult to understand (6:60). However, because we can 'hear' this from a distance with the benefit of wider biblical resources, it is possible to identify a few essential points couched in this saying.

This expression is closely connected with *sustenance of life*. One needs food and drink to live. As such, this phrase is an invitation to life. In this saying, as in most other sayings of Jesus, we see both continuity and discontinuity from the tradition to which Jesus belongs. The invitation to (true) life is expressed using such terms as 'eating' and 'drinking' in the OT, too (Isa 55:1-2). When the word of God came down on the prophet Ezekiel, he was instructed to eat the word or the scroll (Ezek 2:8; see also 2:9-3:3). God is remembered as the provider of food for life; God even set “a table in the wilderness,” and “rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven” (Ps 78:19-20, 24; cf. Exod 16:4). Looking at the context of the saying above (6:54), Jesus' speech begins with the topic of “food that endures for eternal life” (6:27), reminding the audience of the previous, gracious gift of God: “bread from heaven” (Exod 16:4). In this context, Jesus is introduced as the 'bread of life.'

As always, Jesus points to God, the Source: Jesus as the bread of life is the “bread of God” (6:33). A change to the paradigm is that the previous bread and water, which the God of Israel provided to save the ancient Jewish people, has now appeared in the 'flesh and blood,' the *body* of Jesus (6:51). Jesus stands before people as a new saving food from God, because Jesus carries in him the life of God (5:26). The life of God, which exists from the beginning, is *within his body*; Jesus' body is a carrier of God.

We read in the earlier part of the gospel that Jesus considers his own body as the temple of God (2:19-22).<sup>2</sup>

The notion, 'Jesus is a carrier of God,' is echoed in the foundational beliefs of a Korean indigenous, socio-political theology, *Tonghak*.<sup>3</sup> The key concepts such as *innaech'on* ('the human being is heaven') and *sich'önju* ('receiving/serving heaven in one's body') reveal *Tonghak's* perspective that takes the human body as the carrier of God. *Tonghak* viewed a human body as a 'cosmotheandric reality'; any human being has the potential to receive heaven/God in his/her own body.<sup>4</sup> Through such radical perspective and statements, *Tonghak* leaders demanded the contemporary, corrupted, (neo-) Confucian government officials to 'serve heaven' *by means of serving common/poor people*.<sup>5</sup> *Tonghak* theology has the potential to help flesh out the message of Johannine Jesus' salvific expression, 'eat my flesh.'

Giving away his own flesh and blood for others should indicate Jesus' *willingness to suffer and die*, which Jesus acknowledges clearly: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (10:17-18; cf. 6:61-62).<sup>6</sup> Reading this passage, Yi Yong-do (1901-1933) commented that Jesus saw no other way but his own death—through torn flesh and bleeding—to help people (with hardened hearts) to enter the path of salvation; they would not learn the way of salvation by means of his

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<sup>2</sup> This perspective of body which Jesus holds onto appears to be carried through the apostle Paul, who says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19; cf. Rom 8:23; 12:1). The apostle Peter also considers body as 'tabernacle' where God dwells; Peter uses the expression, 'taking off the tabernacle,' when he mentions death (2 Pet 1:13-14).

<sup>3</sup> *Tonghak*, whose literal meaning is 'Eastern learning,' was an indigenous religious, philosophical and political movement developed in Korea/*Choson* during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as a counter movement to the introduction and spread of *Sōhak* (Western Learning). Because of its proactive stance toward political reformation, *Tonghak* was forcefully closed down by *Choson* government (by killing all the leaders) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Its philosophical and socio-political thoughts, however, did not die but were carried through in various resistance movements in the later history of Korea.

<sup>4</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, "수운의 시천주체험과 동학의 신관" [*Su-un's Sich'önju* Experience and *Tonghak's* Theology]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=26&page=1&ftype=6&val=&backdepth=1> (accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> All the officials of the time were immersed in neo-Confucianism and spoke about right principles of heaven without acting on them.

<sup>6</sup> Considering this willing 'self-death' nature of the Eucharist, it is quite disturbing to remember all the divisions, hatreds, martyrdoms, persecutions and fracturing of the church, which have occurred over minute differences in the interpretation of the Eucharist in Western tradition.

words, teachings, or even wondrous works and signs.<sup>7</sup>

One element that should not go unnoticed in this saying is the necessity for a believer's *union with Jesus*. As any food is consumed by the eater, enters the body, and is transformed into energy for actions, so Jesus' flesh and blood is taken into the body of a believer, and the same qualities of Jesus' life should be displayed in the believer's actions. As the food and the eater become one, so Jesus and the believers become one. This oneness, in fact, is expressed by means of the addition of the verb 'abide' in the immediate literary context: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood *abide in me, and I in them*" (6:56).<sup>8</sup>

The Korean word, *mǒkta* or to eat, conveys this crucial aspect, 'union,' effectively. *Mǒkta* is used not only with food but also heat, shame, words, or goal. The Korean expression of 'having eaten the heat' means 'overheated,' not an uncommon occurrence during summer in Korea; the heat stays in one's body, and it is hard for the person to find relief from the heat felt. After winning a world title, Korean professional boxer Hong Su-hwan declared in public: "I've *eaten* the championship!"<sup>9</sup> The Korean verb, *mǒkta*, is an excellent source to convey the message of complete union with Jesus: Jesus becomes mine, and I become his.

## **BELIEVING IN JESUS**

The matter of believing in Jesus creates a question as well as a mission for the Johannine community. The 'main author' of the gospel wonders, after Jesus' death and resurrection, why only certain people come to believe in Jesus and many others do not. The author now has one ultimate project in life: to be a faithful witness to Jesus and invite people to *believe in Jesus*. This mission is expressed near the end of the gospel:

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<sup>7</sup> Chǒng Chae-hǒn, ed., *이용도 목사 평전 [Revisiting Pastor Yi Yong-do]* (Seoul: Haengbokmidia, 2014), 228-29.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Brower Latz views this phrase, 'eating the flesh of Jesus,' as a *cognate* of 'abiding' which he considers as a major theme of John's Gospels. Andrew Brower Latz, "A Short Note toward a Theology of Abiding in John's Gospel," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* (4.2), 167.

<sup>9</sup> Hong Su-hwan, right after he won the world boxing championship at the junior featherweight level in 1977, said, "Mum, I have eaten the champion!" This is vividly and fondly remembered by many Korean people. The moment that Hong uttered these words can be viewed in various places online.

“These are written so that *you may come to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that *through believing* you may have life in his name” (20:21).

Painter points out that ‘believing’ is one of the ‘mega-themes’ in the Gospel of John.<sup>10</sup> The phrase, ‘to believe in Jesus,’ has been, in church history, the essential requirement for salvation especially since the Reformation, forming the salvific phrase of ‘justification by faith alone.’ As contended in Part I, a large portion of KP members have misunderstood and misused this salvific phrase in recent decades. This gives more impetus to a careful examination of what the Johannine Jesus might have meant by the phrase and how people at the time received the saying.

First of all, the matter of believing in Jesus, in the Gospel of John, is an indicator for a genuine *faith in God*: “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (6:45); “believe in God, believe also in me” (14:1). A deep desire to do the will of God would lead people to recognize that Jesus is sent by God (7:17; cf. 10:37). In other words, believing in Jesus is receiving Jesus specifically as *the one whom God sent* (5:24).<sup>11</sup> The very work that God requires of people is to “believe in him whom he has sent” (6:28-29, 40).

Believing in Jesus is also equalized to believing in Jesus’ *words*. The Johannine Jesus is identified with his words (cf. 15:4, 7). More important is that his words are identified with those of God, a notion abundant in the gospel (3:34; 7:16; 12:49; 17:8). That is why the words Jesus spoke to people “are full of the Spirit and life” (6:63). It was a common understanding among Jesus’ contemporaries that listening to and keeping God’s words would lead them to life and *shalom*.<sup>12</sup> Jesus’ heartfelt appeal—‘believe in me’—is understood, therefore, not as his desire to be somebody worthy of respect but to bless people. In fact, he would not have been troubled even if people did not believe in him as an individual person, as long as they recognized the truth of God in what he was saying and came to believe in the words: “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, *even though you do not*

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<sup>10</sup> The verb, ‘to believe,’ appears 98 times in the Gospel. R. Jackson Painter, *The Gospel of John: A Thematic Approach* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 3.

<sup>11</sup> This will be further expanded below when we focus on Jesus as the ‘sent one’ in the discussion of “Becoming One with Jesus.”

<sup>12</sup> This message is repeatedly emphasized in the OT: “If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that *it might go well with them* and with their children for ever!” (Deut 5:29; see also Deut 6:24; 10:12-13).

*believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father*" (10:37-38; c.f. 14:11).

Receiving Jesus' words as those of God, then, rightly demands *obeying* them, as the word of God should be obeyed. Believing and not believing is, in fact, conveyed as the matter of obeying and not obeying, respectively, in typical Hebraic parallelistic fashion: "whoever *believes* in the Son has eternal life; whoever *disobeys* the Son will not see life" (3:36). It is perhaps pertinent at this stage to note that the verb, to 'believe,' is the dominant form in John's Gospel, not the noun, 'faith.'<sup>13</sup> The matter of believing, therefore, is expressed in the gospel in certain *actions* such as obeying, following, loving, eating (the flesh of), knowing Jesus, and doing as Jesus does.

It is also important to note, in the matter of believing in Jesus, *Jesus' own example* of believing in his father and obeying him. Through this, Jesus sets up a path toward a tripartite union—"the father, Jesus, and Jesus' believers." This specific union is repeatedly expressed by the Johannine Jesus: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (15:10); "they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me" (17:22). This should inform us that 'faith in Jesus' is made possible particularly through learning from the faith *of* Jesus, Jesus' own faith in his father.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Johannine record about Jesus' attitude and actions in relation to people's belief or unbelief in him sheds light on missiological understanding. Even though Jesus does want people to believe in him, "Jesus coerces no one into belief in himself."<sup>15</sup> Jesus, recognizing God's will in all that is happening, says that "no one can come to me *unless it is granted by the Father*" (6:65; cf. 6:44). Johannine Christians also have come to terms with one of their major questions, namely, the phenomenon of people's unbelief; it "was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'"

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<sup>13</sup> Willis H. Salier, pointing to the fact that John's Gospel has no noun of 'faith' but all verbs, emphasizes the verbal reality of faith, primarily in loving and obeying. Willis H. Salier, "The Obedient Son: The 'Faithfulness' of Christ in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 235.

<sup>14</sup> The Letter to the Hebrews, in particular, speaks of Jesus' exemplary faith, which is used by God as the way of salvation for all who *believe in* Jesus: "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:8-9).

<sup>15</sup> Latz, "Abiding in John's Gospel," 163.

(12:37-38). That Jesus says to Judas, who has decided to betray him, “Do quickly what you are going to do” (13:27), can also be seen as Jesus’ habit of not interfering with either God’s will or human self-will.<sup>16</sup> This attitude of Jesus—doing his best, within his fullest capacity, to invite people to believe in him, but not coercing or manipulating them—should be the model for his followers.<sup>17</sup>

## HAVING LIFE TO THE FULL

Salvation matters discussed in this chapter and throughout the thesis concern (eternal) ‘life.’ The author of the Johannine Gospel mentions it both at the beginning and end of the gospel: “In him was *life* and the *life* was the light of all people” (1:4); “[t]hese are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have *life* in his name” (20:31). The purpose of Jesus’ life concerns ‘life’: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *life*, and have it abundantly” (10:10). It is observed that the word, ‘life,’ in the Gospel of John receives equal importance to that of the ‘kingdom of heaven’ language in the Synoptics.<sup>18</sup>

God is the source of life and the giver of life in biblical tradition. Life, together with peace, constitutes the very content of the *covenantal salvation* offered by God: “a covenant of life and peace” (Mal 2:5). Therefore, life is given to humans not only as a blessing but as a responsibility, a commandment from the giver of life.<sup>19</sup> This idea—responsibility in every living being—is captured by Ham Sök-hön as he revisits the origin of the Korean/Chinese word for ‘life,’ *saengmyöng*, which itself consists of two

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<sup>16</sup> Jesus must have said these words, not in an angry or resentful voice, but in such a normal voice that “no one at the table knew why he said this to him” (13:28).

<sup>17</sup> This will be fully expanded as we discuss the missiological development from the reading in Chapter 12.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, “The Gospel according to John,” 191.

<sup>19</sup> Life, a *long* life at that, is a gift of God to human beings in biblical tradition: “With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation” (Ps 91:16). See also Ps 34: 12-14; implied also in Ps 128:6; “I know that his [God’s] commandment is eternal life” (John 12:50).

root words: *saeng* (life or living) and *myōng* (command or calling); life is the commandment of God.<sup>20</sup>

'Life' and 'eternal life' are used interchangeably, as if they are one, in the Gospel of John (3:36; 20:31).<sup>21</sup> 'John' records that life was there *in the beginning*, for it was in God (1:1, 4), and it is because life belongs to God that this life has eternity and fullness (10:10). The life is not something newly created or introduced by Jesus, but that which is from 'ancient of age,' so to speak, having existed since the beginning. This suggests that to receive this life requires a close relationship with God by being in God, united with God. The Johannine Jesus emphasizes that one needs to be born again (3:3), born of God the Spirit (3:6, 8). This life, eternal life, is not received through any medium of human-originated entity such as being born "of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man" (1:13; TNIV); what is born of the flesh includes whatever a person is born with/into or inherits: bodily form, wealth, health, cultural heritage such as language, custom and religion.<sup>22</sup>

John then witnesses that this life is *now in Jesus*: "For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26).<sup>23</sup> For this reason, people need to come to Jesus (5:40), receive Jesus (1:12), and believe in Jesus' name (1:12). Most important, the gospel emphasizes, is the matter of an intimate relationship between Jesus (as well as God) and those who seek true life; people "can participate in this life by entering into a relationship of intimate communion with the Father and the Son."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ham Sök-hön, *A Korean History from a Spiritual Perspective*, 470. It should be noted that Ham's *hananim*, God, is an inclusive term which can be replaced by will, history, the One, or Tao.

<sup>21</sup> See the similarity between the concluding remarks in the Gospel of John and in the First Epistle of John: "These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have *life* in his name" (John 20:31): "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have *eternal life*" (1 John 5:13).

<sup>22</sup> According to the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist, whom Jesus respects, conveys such a notion when he states: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt 3:9).

<sup>23</sup> Jesus is portrayed as the carrier of this life in the First Epistle of John: "This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us" (1 John 1:2); "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11-12).

<sup>24</sup> Williams, "The Gospel of John," 110-11.

This (eternal) life, according to John, is closely connected with 'light': "The life [which was in the beginning] was the light of all people" (1:4). Jesus, who carries the life of God, is the "light of the world" (8:12).<sup>25</sup> The human response to come to Jesus is described as to "come to the light" (3:21) and to "have the light of life" (8:12). Because Jesus is "the true light, which enlightens everyone" (1:9), those who receive Jesus and, as a result, come to enjoy life, have recognized their blindness (9:39-41) and subsequently been enlightened.

The Johannine Jesus' saying, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), deserves special attention within the present discussion. Our attention concerns the *immediacy* of the effect of the (eternal) life in Jesus. The concept of and hope for everlasting life and resurrection already existed among the Jews of Jesus' time.<sup>26</sup> Eternal life, according to the Johannine Jesus, is available *now* in its effect; the life which is in Jesus, when received with faith, is accessible to the believers immediately. In addition, the life being eternal, death will not overcome the life (11:25-26). Death, then, is phrased as going back to the father's house (as we observed in the previous chapter).

## ABIDING IN JESUS

'Abiding' or 'remaining' (μένω) is a major theme of John's Gospel and therefore deserves attention, "more attention than commentators usually afford it."<sup>27</sup> From the 'preface' of John's Gospel onward, the theme of dwelling retains its importance. We hear in the prologue that Jesus the *logos* comes to live among his people (1:14). A modern equivalent to the Greek word, σκηνώω or *skēnōō*, literally meaning to 'pitch

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<sup>25</sup> John also says, "God is light" (1 John 1:5). It is not only life but light which Jesus receives from God and carries in him.

<sup>26</sup> The prophetic book of Daniel in the OT is considered to be one of the main contributors to the development of the concept of eternal life in ancient Israel, especially during Second Temple Judaism (see Dan 12:2-3). According to the Gospel of John, when Jesus visits the family of Lazarus, who has been dead for days, Lazarus' sister Martha expresses such contemporary hope: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection *on the last day*" (11:24); eternal life, to Martha (and to many others of the time), is something that will happen "on the last day." Jesus, in response, however, uses the present tense: "I *am* the resurrection and the life."

<sup>27</sup> Latz, "Abiding in John's Gospel," 161.

or live in a tent,' could be: Jesus "moved into the neighborhood."<sup>28</sup> Once again, this theme of dwelling is inherited from traditional Hebrew religiosity: dwelling in (the house of) God is a cherished yearning in the hearts of ancient Hebrew people (Ps 84:1-4, 10). However, the traditional Hebraic concept of 'dwelling in the house of God' receives modification in the Fourth Gospel. As will be seen, the gospel presents, as life's ultimate goal, a *tripartite, mutual dwelling*: God in Jesus, Jesus in God; Jesus in the disciples, the disciples in Jesus; God in the disciples, the disciples in God. Because there is a lingering trace of locality in John's use of 'abiding' or 'dwelling,' this salvific expression, 'abiding in Jesus,' will be dealt with separately from another similar expression, 'becoming one with Jesus,' which transcends any locality.

The instruction to 'abide in Jesus' appears frequently in the gospel, John 15, in particular. Reading the chapter, we see that the instruction to abide in Jesus incorporates three important themes: *keeping an intimate relationship, bearing fruit (of love), and keeping his commandments*. First, regarding the intimacy which Jesus invites the disciples into, this intimacy is a relationship which he shares with the father, a "personal, committed, continuous, and reciprocal relationship."<sup>29</sup> Second, as abiding in Jesus is illustrated in the relationship between the vine (Jesus) and its branches (the disciples), 'bearing fruit' is a natural development stemming from the abiding (15:4, 5, 8). Third, the fruit-bearing is the bearing of love which is the outcome of keeping Jesus' (new) commandment: "love one another as I have loved you" (15:10, 16, 17).

Jesus' instruction to abide in him is demonstrated through his own life example of abiding in the father. Jesus, by abiding in his father, lets his father's will and spirit remain in him. The co-dwelling of Jesus and his father is depicted as a loving relationship: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (15:10). It is out of this already-established, intimate relationship between Jesus and his father that a concrete image of ideal contentment appears: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and *make our home with them*" (14:23).

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<sup>28</sup> The Message version (MSG) of the Bible renders the verse as such.

<sup>29</sup> Latz, "Abiding in John's Gospel," 161.

Dwelling together and eating together with someone in a high position is considered an honour, privilege and joy in a hierarchical and closely-knit society; ancient Israel was indeed one such society. Dwelling or living daily life together with God and God's son was likely one of the most concrete, beautiful and comforting salvific images for the people at the time of Jesus; perhaps it still is so, especially to those in cultures that value highly family bonds and life together.<sup>30</sup>

It is also worth noting that this theme, abiding, is connected with other important Johannine themes such as immediacy, permanency (eternity) and safety. A way to abide in Jesus is by letting his words abide in one's heart (15:7). On a different occasion, the life-giving 'words' are expressed in the term, "living water" (4:14). The effect of receiving the words of Jesus and drinking water offered by Jesus is *immediate*, for the words and water now dwell "*en auto*" (*in* the person). Hence, no one or nothing can "snatch" them away from the person, unless the person willingly relinquishes them (10:28-29); hence, there is a sense of *safety*. Moreover, the water offered by Jesus will become "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" inside the person who drinks it (4:14); thus, there is permanency; whenever one needs 'water,' one always can go to the 'well' of salvation and draw life-giving water.<sup>31</sup> This sense of immediacy, safety, permanency, couched in the notion, 'abiding in Jesus,' provided strength and hope for the Johannine believers, a persecuted minority, who could not find any support, strength or hope from the world, *outside* of themselves.

## **BECOMING ONE WITH JESUS**

The Gospel of John presents an ideal state in terms of the relationship between believers and Jesus, and also among believers themselves: 'becoming *one*.' Those who become one with Jesus would share eternal life in Jesus, which is in and of God from the beginning. In this sense, the Johannine believers' salvation or eternal life hinges on

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<sup>30</sup> This is a particularly helpful image for those whose own homes have not been a safe place. For example, domestic violence victims, and various refugees, civil war or political, would benefit from this picture of a dwelling place where they do not have to live in constant fear but live with the sense of welcome, peace and love.

<sup>31</sup> See Isaiah 12:3, which says, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

the fact that Jesus is one with God. For this reason this section shall further explore the meaning and manner of Jesus' oneness with God.

'Jesus' oneness with God' has long been the foundation of major Christian doctrinal and creedal formation and also been the subject of centuries of theological debate. As we observe the history of reception around this 'claim,' the dominant, traditional view in Christianity has been that of 'hypostatic union.' In other words, Jesus' oneness with the father has been understood as the *ontological union* of the divine and the human in one person, or the relation between two persons within the trinity.<sup>32</sup> The Johannine Gospel is allegedly the strongest witness to this view among the four gospels in the NT.<sup>33</sup> However, it is also possible to read that Jesus' own expression of oneness with God primarily indicates a *functional and relational identity with his father*, rather than the (historically dominant) ontological identity. As will be made clear in Part V below, I will argue for this functional and relational identity theory, firstly by looking at one of Jesus' sayings wherein he 'claims' to be equal to God (John 10:30), and then examining several thematic points within the gospel against the background of the contemporaneous agency custom.<sup>34</sup>

We read in the Gospel of John that Jesus says, "the Father and I are one" (10:30). John adds that this saying of Jesus arouses so much anger among the audience that they prepare to stone Jesus (10:31). This hostile reaction suggests that such a statement is a very unusual, unorthodox saying among the Jews of the time; it sounds like a direct challenge to Jewish monotheism, 'promoting oneself to the status of God' (10:33; cf. 5:18). However, Jesus' intention is far from self-elevation, but to let people

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<sup>32</sup> The Council of Chalcedon (in 451) affirmed the union of the two natures of deity and humanity in the one *hypostasis* or person of Jesus.

<sup>33</sup> Keener, *John* 1.310; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 314. Both Keener and Guthrie, however, equally emphasize the subordination of the son in the Fourth Gospel. Richard Bauckham, seeing that a 'high Christology' or "Christology of divine identity" (the term which he prefers) is present in most other parts of the NT, disagrees with those scholars who view the Johannine Christology as the 'highest.' Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 239.

<sup>34</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the Johannine Jesus' 'oneness' with his father is approached only through the frame of ancient agency; *kil* and filial relationship are also vital tools that assist the reading of the Johannine Jesus in this thesis. To introduce a cautionary remark about the 'agency' approach, Williams notes that "Jewish notions of agency, even when combined with the Father-Son language, do not fully encompass the presentation of Jesus as the emissary of God"; "other strands within Jewish tradition may also have contributed to the shaping of Johannine christology, including traditions about God's principal angel, his chief agent, who bears God's name." Williams, "The Gospel of John," 123.

know that he *is* sent by God (10:35-36). The claim of oneness with the father is “not incompatible with belief in the one God” to Jesus, who identified himself as God’s emissary and obedient son.<sup>35</sup> As we observed earlier, Jesus’ appeal to people to believe in him primarily aims to instill in people recognition that he is sent from God.<sup>36</sup>

It would be appropriate at this juncture to provide some information about the system of agency in the ancient world. The practice of agency is well observed not only in the ancient Greco-Roman world, but in Jewish literature at the time.<sup>37</sup> One of the most foundational aspects in the ancient agency system is a sense of identification of the agent (or the sent one) with the sender. Peder Borgen informs us that “the basic principle of the Jewish institution of agency is that ‘an agent is like the one who sent him.’”<sup>38</sup> The ‘agent’ in ancient society, whether in political, educational, business, or cultic realms, is given both the *authority* to function on behalf of the sender and *responsibility* to carry out the sender’s wishes.<sup>39</sup> The essential virtues required of the agent are *trustworthiness*, *submission* and *fidelity*.<sup>40</sup> In this ancient agency system, “the son sent by his father is regarded as the most authentic agent.”<sup>41</sup>

Against the backdrop of this agency custom, the Johannine Jesus is the one who takes his status—a delegate sent by his father God—seriously, and carries out his mission in obedience and faithfulness.<sup>42</sup> Many of his statements, such as “whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me” (12:44), “whoever receives me receives him who sent me” (13:20), “the Father is greater than I” (14:28), are to be

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<sup>35</sup> Williams, “The Gospel of John,” 112.

<sup>36</sup> See the earlier section, “Believing in Jesus.”

<sup>37</sup> Keener, *John*, 1:310, 313, 317.

<sup>38</sup> Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Interpretation of John*, second edition, ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 84.

<sup>39</sup> Socio-scientific analysis employs the term, ‘broker,’ instead of ‘agency’; seen from the contemporary ‘patronage’ system, the role of the Johannine Jesus is viewed as “God’s honoured broker.” Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 115-19.

<sup>40</sup> Keener, *John*, 1:314.

<sup>41</sup> Satoko Yamaguchi, “‘I AM’ Sayings and Women in Context,” in *A Feminist Companion to John*, vol II, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 43.

<sup>42</sup> Cowan observes Jesus’ subordination to God through the father-son relationship, which he argues is a major theme in the Fourth Gospel. Christopher Cowan, “The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49/1 (2006): 115-135.

understood in the light of this socio-political, religio-cultural agency system.<sup>43</sup> Looking closely at Jesus as a faithful delegate, many of his words such as honour, glory/praise, authority, witness, completion, take on somewhat new meanings. In regard to honour, giving honour to the sent one is functionally honouring the sender. Hence, the honour that Jesus receives is directed to God: “so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him” (5:23). As a faithful delegate only seeks praise and acknowledgement from the sender, Jesus seeks “the glory that comes from the one who alone is God” (6:44; cf. 7:18). Jesus has the most powerful witness: the father who sent him testifies on his behalf (8:18). Also, Jesus speaks clearly about the source of authority he exercises: “The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands” (3:35); “I have come in my father’s name” (5:43); “I have received this command from my Father” (10:18). Jesus’ sense of completion of his mission is reflected in sayings such as: “It is finished” (19:30; cf. 19:28) and “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do”(17:4).

Jesus’ *faithfulness* as God’s sent one, in particular, merits further examination not only for the present argument but within the greater biblical context. This thesis has identified faithfulness as one of the foundational biblical themes,<sup>44</sup> which is embodied in Jesus’ life through his faith(fulness) in God.<sup>45</sup> Jesus’ faithfulness as a trusted and loved agent is best seen in his willingness to undergo suffering in order to carry out the sender’s will (12:27, in the background of 12:23-26). The “sending Christology” in the Gospel of John, as Keener frames it, brings Jesus down to a position “subordinate to the Father.”<sup>46</sup> Jesus’ subordination to God, however, is a willing one, done out of his love for and trust in his father (10:17-18).

Jesus’ functional and relational oneness with his father provides *the way* for his followers. The repeatedly-occurring ‘just as, so’ sentences throughout the Fourth

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<sup>43</sup> Satoko Yamaguchi, “‘I AM’ Sayings and Women in Context,” 43.

<sup>44</sup> In the review of the biblical ‘way,’ this significance was discussed on the basis of ancient Israel’s peculiar relationship to their God, YHWH, i.e. the covenantal relationship. I reported: “In this covenantal relationship, the notion of being *faithful* is of the utmost priority.” See the sections, “the Context of the Biblical ‘Way’” and “Soteriological Functions,” in Chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> See the earlier section, “Believing in Jesus.”

<sup>46</sup> Keener, *John*, 1:317. See also Cowan, “Johannine Subordination Revisited,” 115-135.

Gospel point to this fact (13:15, 34; 17:14, 16). Jesus' identification with his father or his mission as God's chosen agent, thus, starts from a vision, the vision for the union of three parties: God, Jesus, and believers. He expresses this vision in the following words: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20; cf. 10:14-15; 13:20; 17:18; 20:21; 17:21).

## KNOWING JESUS

'Knowing' the Lord God is much emphasized in the OT. The prophet Hosea, for instance, appeals to the Israelites to return to the Lord (Hos 6:1), saying, "Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord" (Hos 6:3); the Lord desires "steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings" (Hos 6: 6; cf. Hos 11:3; 14:9). It is connected with salvation matter (Ps 91:14-16). To know the Lord God, then, should be manifested through concrete actions: "'He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?' declares the LORD" (Jer 22: 16, TNIV). Eschatological vision is also described in the language of knowledge: "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9b). Consequently, following this logic, the lack of knowledge of God has potential for destruction: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6).

This kind of biblical 'knowledge' stands distinct from scientific knowledge which values objectivity and seeks mastery, or such knowledge which often indicates an abstract recognition or a perception of details. According to John Pederson, an eminent OT scholar, "the knowledge of a thing, a man or whatever else, is identical with intimacy, friendship, fellow-feeling" in the ancient Hebrew world.<sup>47</sup> The sense of intimacy in the Hebrew word, *yadha* or to know, is clearly manifested when it is used to refer to sexual intercourse: "Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain" (Gen 4: 1, NKJV).

Informed by this distinct concept of biblical 'knowledge,' we will now focus on the salvific importance of the phrase, 'knowing God and Jesus,' in the Gospel of John. First, knowing is interrelated with *obedience*: "Though you do not know him, I *know*

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<sup>47</sup> Pederson, *Israel*, 1:109.

him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and *obey his word*" (8:55). There is also a relationship between knowing and loving, and lack of knowledge and hatred (16:2-3). This is described in the OT in a typically Hebraic, parallelistic expression: "Those who *love* me, I will deliver; I will protect those who *know* my name" (Ps 91:14). This interconnectedness among knowledge, obedience and love is clearly expressed in one of the Johannine letters: "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Those who say, 'I know him,' but do not do what he commands are liars, and the truth is not in them. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them" (1 John 2:3-5). In a cyclical fashion, the Johannine Gospel emphasizes the interconnectedness of loving and obeying (14:15; 15:10), both of which constitute the matter of 'knowing.'

The Johannine Jesus tells us that true knowledge occurs in a *mutual* manner, as is the case of a genuine relationship: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father" (10:14-15). This element of reciprocity in knowing is implicitly suggested in Jesus' teaching recorded in the Synoptics as well. "I never knew you," a saying which conveys eschatological judgment of the Lord, indicates that the hearers did not in fact know the Lord, however hard they claimed acquaintance with the Lord, having done many 'good' works *in his name* (Matt 7: 21-23; Luke 13:26-27).

A strong theme of '*relational union*' runs in Johannine Jesus' 'knowing' language. The expression, "I and the Father are one" (10:30), in fact, is *another way* of saying, "the Father knows me and I know the Father" (10:15). True knowledge about a person is built on faithful fellowship or sharing life with the person.<sup>48</sup> This 'sharing life' is depicted in the familiar image of 'living together' in the gospel: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (14:23). The intimacy of living together should mean to enter into each other's joy and sorrow, glory and suffering. Another NT writer, Paul, reasons that the way to know Jesus is through participating in Jesus' suffering and glory (Phil 3:10). What follows is that the fellowship should happen in an *ongoing* way. The key theme of 'abiding in Jesus' in the Johannine Gospel undergirds this importance. This is

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<sup>48</sup> This kind of intimate fellowship is noted in the First Epistle of John (1:1-3).

reflected by Peter's exhortation to Jesus' believers: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

Thus, the salvific knowledge mentioned by Johannine Jesus includes *love and obedience in life, mutual intimacy, nurtured by ongoing life-sharing*. This kind of knowing Jesus is closely related to one's salvation or eternal life, as Johannine Jesus says: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (17:3).

## SUMMARY

Having reviewed each of these soteriologically-related phrases in the Gospel of John, I now will summarize this chapter by presenting a few important findings in this review.

First, each of the reviewed Johannine sayings is echoed in certain thematic passages of the OT. This finding reaffirms the hermeneutical focus which takes the human person Jesus seriously as a 'culturally formed being.' It also leads us to see that the uniqueness of Jesus lies not so much in any 'original' saying or idea of Jesus as in the areas of his focus and his faithful and truthful *embodiment* of (traditional Hebraic) faith in YHWH.

Second, the reviewed phrases are all interconnected with one another.<sup>49</sup> As each review proceeds, we begin to hear each phrase 'playing' in harmony with the rest of the phrases in the gospel. These phrases play in such a way that the main theme or motif of a 'symphony' is developed into its variants and, thus, appears repeatedly throughout the whole piece of music. A socio-scientific reading calls this phenomenon "overlexicalization."<sup>50</sup> Korean scholar Ryu Dong-shik seems to latch on to the same phenomenon in his study of the Gospel of John. Ryu writes in the postscript of his

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<sup>49</sup> A similar conclusion is drawn by Latz. When Latz sets up 'abiding' as the central motif in the Gospel of John, he finds several other phrases in the same Gospel—such as 'eating Jesus' flesh' and 'following Jesus'—which are qualified as the cognates of abiding. Latz concludes that "abiding is connected with some of the other central themes of John's Gospel, to the extent that they become almost synonymous, or at least all evoke one another." Latz, "Abiding in John's Gospel," 167.

<sup>50</sup> As was introduced in Chapter 9, socio-scientific reading points out that the phenomenon of 'overlexicalization' is one of the features of 'antilanguage' in Johannine 'antisociety.' See the section, "The Johannine Community and Its Language," in Chapter 9.

book, *P'unngnyudo and The Gospel of John*, that the Fourth Gospel seems to be “filled with variants of a few major themes,” repeated throughout the gospel.<sup>51</sup>

Third, ‘intimate union’ is the main theme, played in all six phrases. This theme is self-revelatory in such phrases as ‘abiding in Jesus’ and ‘becoming one with Jesus,’ while it is more implicitly, culturally embedded in other phrases such as ‘eating Jesus’ flesh’ and ‘knowing Jesus.’ ‘Having life abundantly,’ to the Johannine community, is to be united with the life of and in Jesus, which is expressed holistically as ‘believing in Jesus.’ The theme of *intimate relationship with Jesus or bodily participation in Jesus’ life* undergirds all these phrases. This theme is also couched in other phrases in the gospel, such as ‘drinking the water Jesus offers’ (4:14) or ‘entering through the gate of Jesus’ (10:9).

In the midst of the synonymous nature of all six phrases, however, the phrase, ‘believing in Jesus,’ seems to function as a representative of them all. This is because the gospel presents ‘believing’ in its concluding remark,<sup>52</sup> and also because ‘believing’ is more frequently used than any other synonymous word or phrase in the gospel. Based on this observation, this thesis suggests that the phrase ‘believing in Jesus’ in the Gospel of John should be recognized as a concept which carries multi-faceted meanings, in conjunction with all other phrases which are employed to convey the notion of eternal life.

This suggestion bears a particular importance to Korean Protestantism (KP) because KP’s understanding and teaching about salvation primarily consists of the word, ‘faith’: ‘salvation through faith in Jesus.’ The ‘faith in Jesus’ terminology used by many KP members might remain an abstract phrase that typically refers to ‘mental or verbal acknowledgement of Jesus being the Saviour,’ unless it is accompanied by and alternated with various other, more practical and concrete verbal phrases. This chapter has introduced some of them (the selected six), but many other phrases, within the gospel *and* outside of it, are still waiting to be used.

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<sup>51</sup> Ryu Dong-shik, *풍류도와 요한복음 [P'unngnyudo and the Gospel of John]* (Seoul: Handŭl, 2007), 156.

<sup>52</sup> “These are written so that you may come to *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through *believing* you may have life in his name” (20:21)

## SUMMARY AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

Part IV began with an expanded reiteration of the specific nature of the thesis reading of the Johannine passage (14:6). A distinctly Korean reading entails a dual tension: the thesis writer's status as both 'guest' and 'host,' and the reading as both 'contextual theological' and 'biblical hermeneutical.' In Chapter 9, I presented alternative, supplementary perspectives in relation to hermeneutical issues such as authorship and historicity of the Fourth Gospel. Following this, I discussed the Johannine community and its language, the thesis' attempt to hear 'the historical Jesus' in the Jesus portrayed by the Johannine Christians, and the literary device of parallelism. Presentation of these alternative perspectives and discussion focuses might serve as an impetus for further development of Korean hermeneutical guidelines.

The ensuing chapter sought a new Korean reading of John 14:6 (Chapter 10). I first examined the immediate literary context of John 14:6—John 13:33-14:11—from which the message of John 14:6 was to emerge. The immediate life context of Jesus includes his imminent death, and, for this reason, the necessity to give comfort and assurance to his disciples, troubled by anxiety and fear. Against this background, the main points of John 14:6 include: Jesus' addressing himself to the disciples as the 'way' to the father, and encouraging them to trust in him (as they trust in God) and maintain union with him. The necessity of walking the 'way' of Jesus or participating in Jesus' holistic life is rephrased in the words, "no one can come to the father except through me" (14:6b). I have thus read the second half of John 14:6 as *a parallelistic phrase which reinforces the previous saying, "I am the way"*; this is meant to expand the 'I am' phrase more fully by emphasizing the need of actual walking '*through*' Jesus, and thus bringing the saying to completion.

The second step of approaching the passage was through the lens of a memoir, observing some lasting effects of the saying—"I am the way to the Father"—upon the lives of the disciples (and, consequently, those of early Christians). In biblical tradition, where the 'way' offers an excellent salvific image of 'walking with God,' the Johannine Jesus' being the 'way' presents a new paradigm for salvation, namely, 'walking with Jesus.' Especially from within the life context of a *persecuted minority*, the disciples acquired a new perspective on death, suffering, and true life, by conscientious

remembrance of the life and death of Jesus their lord. The word, 'way,' coupled with the new reading of the second half of the passage ("no one comes to the Father except *through me*"), was reaffirmed by the thesis as a fitting reminder to the disciples; the 'way' encouraged them in their daily, *participatory* walk with Jesus, wherein eternal life is already a reality, even in the midst of suffering and threats of social estrangement and physical death.

Another approach to the passage was to explore the hermeneutical significance and practical implications of Jesus being received as the '*kil*' to the father. Read through the Korean *kil* or 'path,' not only Jesus' unique death and resurrection but his ordinary and holistic human life take on a new significance. Through his wisdom and lifestyle characterized as self-death, Jesus has become a new *kil* that many other human beings should walk in, to enjoy salvation or eternal life or 'true humanization.'<sup>1</sup> The archetypal Korean longing for 'return' readily empathizes with Jesus' salvific notion of returning to his father God. Moreover, the ancient *kil* leads us to recognize the 'curved,' pilgrim nature of life and salvation, to find in Jesus a trustworthy, compassionate and supportive walking companion, and to see the importance of caring for other travellers. Noteworthy is that the findings of the reviews of both the biblical 'way' and the Taoist '*to*' support and affirm this Korean reading of Jesus' being the '*kil*' to the father. Through this, an important Korean framework—'*kil*'—has been established as a legitimate and effective hermeneutical tool, as was the Taoist '*to*.' In addition, the Korean reading of Jesus' being the *kil* to the father (John 14:6) has helped us to understand in a more Korean way who Jesus is, what salvation is like, and what it means to be the followers of the *kil* Jesus, which will be elaborated in the final chapter of the thesis.

As one of the main focuses of the hermeneutical work, I revisited the passage from within its wider context: Jesus' major teachings, mission and lifestyle. The thesis made an assumption that interpretation of any isolated saying of Jesus should be guided by this wider context, which would better present who Jesus is. After analysing the content and manner of Jesus' major teachings—a mission of radical inclusivity, embodying that of the father God, the following conclusion was reached: the Christian

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<sup>1</sup> We will more fully expand this notion, 'true humanization,' when we discuss the 'uniqueness of Jesus' and the 'new Korean soteriological development' in Chapter 12.

exclusivist claim about the destiny of people of other religious faiths *based on John 14:6* is at least *a misplaced argument and, moreover, an act of injustice to the speaker.*

The last chapter (Chapter 11), which reviewed six other phrases within the same gospel, submitted that a particular soteriological theme—the ‘intimate union with Jesus’—runs through all the phrases. This affirms, and is affirmed by, one of the major findings of the previous hermeneutical tasks: walking the ‘way’ of Jesus or participating in Jesus’ holistic life is an essential component in life eternal.

A distinctly Korean, “Jesus-centred” hermeneutic has encouraged the thesis writer to view Jesus as a culturally-formed person.<sup>2</sup> According to the new Korean reading, the Johannine Jesus, the ‘way,’ carries a certain theological ‘continuity’ with the OT tradition. To elaborate, from within the prophetic tradition of the OT, Jesus the ‘way’ is received as the chosen servant and prophet who functions as a ‘guide’ and *walking companion* on the way to the ultimate destination. Within the framework of the Covenant, allegiance or *faithful and loving relationship* is a central component in walking, both in the ‘way’ of YHWH and the ‘way’ of Jesus. The ‘way’ of Jesus encapsulates both images of (suffering) *strangers on earth* and *journey back home*, concepts not unfamiliar to the ancient Jewish people whose history is marked by exodus and return from captivity.

Conversely, certain modifications to the ‘old way’ are also apparent in the ‘way’ of the Johannine Jesus. First of all, this ‘new way’ places greater emphasis on a *human person*, that is, Jesus, than the Law or religious rituals and customs. The author of the Fourth Gospel expresses this in a creative, passionate and confessional fashion: the eternal *logos* or word has become *sarx* or flesh (John 1:14). In light of this, the passage (John 14:6) seems to be a new version of the ‘old’ *word* of God given to ancient Jewish people, which stated, “You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you” (Deut 5:33). Second, this new ‘way’ offers a significant *eschatological* implication. The Johannine Jesus as the ‘way’ is not simply different from the old ‘way of the Lord’ but, being identified as the Messiah (John 4:26; 9:37), carries an imminent eschatological force (John 4:23; 5:25; 11:25-26); with a heart of repentance or return to God, salvation, eternal life and resurrection became a present reality to the Johannine Christians. The

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<sup>2</sup> See the section, “Jesus-centred,” in Chapter 5.

third modification in this new 'way' is that it embraces the *suffering son* of God in the historical-religious context wherein people expected blessings from God for 'the faithful' in a triumphant manner. The faithful son Jesus was, however, the bread that was chewed and broken (John 6:48-56), the grain of wheat that fell into the ground (John 12:24), and the life laid down for his friends (John 15:13).

Upon finishing the section of a new Korean reading of John 14:6, perhaps it would be meaningful to present a new poem, entitled "John 14:6," in the Korean language, which will subsequently be translated in English. The simple, unrefined quality of the poem, I console myself, rather suits Jesus who offers a warm friendship to the ordinary of this world.

#### 요한복음 14:6

나는 보았네, 내가 갈 한 길;  
좁은 그 길은 만인을 위한  
넓은 길 내기 위한 길.

태고적 부터 자리잡은 위협적인 가시덤불  
치우며 가다 흘린 피,  
곤하고 슬퍼 흘린 눈물인데

성령안에서 보고 들었네:  
슬픔에 잠긴 자의 웃음, 병든 자의 일어섬,  
말못하던 자의 아름다운 소리,  
절망에 잠긴 자의 장래소망... .

우리 걸어야 할 이 길의  
끝에 계시는 하느님, 우리 아버지,  
가는 노중에도 동행하시니,  
같이 걸지 않으려나, 나의 벗이여.

#### JOHN 14:6

I saw a *kil*, the *kil* for me to walk;  
this narrow *kil* is to make  
a broad *kil* for many.

Thorn bushes, ancient threats,  
clearing away, I bled,  
exhausted and sorrowful, I wept.

Still, I saw; in the spirit I heard:

Laughters of the sorrowful, movements of the sick,  
beautiful voices of the mute, dreams of the hopeless.

Let's walk, dear friends;  
waiting at the end of the *kil*  
is God, *our* father, who  
surely accompanies us on this *kil*.

## **PART V**

### **A NEW, KOREAN THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The presentation of a new Korean reading of John 14:6 was done in the previous part (Part IV). After finishing the major task of the thesis, what else remains? As was elaborated in the introductory section, the concern of this thesis includes the theological and missiological stances of the mainstream of KP. The interest of the thesis, therefore, does not remain hermeneutical only but extends to theological and missiological applications of the work. The present, dominant theological content held by KP may be summarized as follows: Christological, that Jesus is the divine son of God, one and only saviour, and sinless God-Man; soteriological, that salvation—reception of forgiveness of sin and eternal life—happens through confession of one's sin and declaration of Jesus being the saviour who died for one's own sin; missiological, that 'the greatest commission' is to preach the gospel of such Jesus and such salvation. This last chapter will present some alternative theological thoughts—Christological, soteriological, and missiological—that emerge from the new, Korean reading of John 14:6.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### A NEW, KOREAN THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT FROM JOHN 14:6

#### CHRISTOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Scholars attest that the Fourth Gospel, among the four gospels, contributed the most to the Christological controversy and subsequent formation of the creed and doctrines of Christianity. Dunn, for instance, affirms in his book, *Christology in the Making*, that “the history of Christological controversy is the history of the church’s attempt to come to terms with John’s Christology.”<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it is worthwhile to present a Korean Christological perspective which emerges from the new reading of John 14:6, one of the most popular Johannine passages.

The passage of interest within the Gospel of John (14:6) specifically mentions that Jesus is the path or *kil* that leads to the father’s place. KP’s popular reception of Jesus the *kil* is connected with the two-fold Christological notion: first, the ‘*only-ness*,’ which appears to derive from the phrase, “except through me”; second, the ‘*channel to heaven*,’ based on the phrase, “come to the Father.” These two components collectively render the *kil* in John 14:6 to mean ‘the only soteriological medium’ for the world or for all humanity; Jesus the *kil* is an ‘exclusivist and restrictivist path to salvation.’

In the reading of John 14:6, I approached the passage through the lens of the Korean *kil*, and submitted that Jesus, the *kil* to the father, would come to Korean believers as the *trustworthy guide* and supportive *companion* on the journey to the ultimate destination. The *kil* Christological model of Jesus, as the ‘road companion,’ is close to the friend model.<sup>2</sup> This friend model belongs to exemplary Christology; faithful friend Jesus is a human being, an ideal one, whom Christians should imitate.

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<sup>1</sup> Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 180-82. It is worth noting

Exemplary Christological discussions exist within the wider academic sphere, though they are not popular, among non-academics, in particular. Kenneth Schenk observes that “Christians today often do not think of Christ as a model of faith. For some, even to suggest such a thing takes away from his divinity. Nevertheless, the early Christians had no problem ‘looking to Jesus’ as an example for them to emulate and follow.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a Korean theological contribution to this existing exemplary Christology is a view that holds Jesus as the person who was *fully humanized*; to become a ‘full human being’ is an essential part of a Korean ideal or *telos*. This Jesus, then, is not only ‘the saviour of the world’ but the most ideal human being with whom KP members can walk together on the path toward their own full humanization.

This exemplary Christological view raises a few questions in relation to the longstanding practice of ‘worship’ of Jesus: what is the meaning of worshiping Jesus? Is the manner and goal of the worship consistent with Jesus’ way, life and passion? Would Jesus himself be pleased to receive church-centred, formalized worship from people who he would call his friends (John 15:14)? After all, was he not called even a “friend of tax-collectors and sinners” (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34)? Would he not prefer worship in the form of lives and actions that seek the father’s kingdom and justice (Matt 6:33; John 4:23-24)?

Of course, these questions would not have arisen within a ‘high Christological’ paradigm, wherein Jesus is primarily the God-Man, not only unequalled to but also inimitable by any other human being. According to the new, Korean *kil* Christological view, however, Jesus’ ‘oneness with God,’ is more relational and functional than ontological.<sup>4</sup> Korean theologian Keel Hee-sung expresses that he prefers Jesus’ “relational union with God” over the Chalcedonian decision on the Christ as being “consubstantial with the Father.”<sup>5</sup> The importance of father-son relationship in the

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that only the Johannine Jesus uses the term ‘friend’ for his disciples (John 15:15). Another use of ‘friend’ in the Gospel of John is found in Jesus’ comment on Lazarus: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him” (John 11:11).

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Schenk, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 68.

<sup>4</sup> This was argued for in the section, “Becoming One with Jesus” in Chapter 9.

<sup>5</sup> Keel Hee-sung, “Why Did God Become a Human Being?”

Gospel of John is also addressed by Western scholars. Moloney, for instance, reads that “the Fourth Gospel presents the God of Israel as Father, and Jesus as Son, in an all-determining *relationship*.”<sup>6</sup> Moloney goes on to contend that the Christian doctrine of one God in three persons is “an attempt to explain in philosophical, often *metaphysical* terms what was described as a series of *relationships* in the Fourth Gospel.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus’ ‘relational unity’ with his father is an important theme to Korean theologians, in particular. The ‘father-son’ bond is the most foundational human relationship within traditional Korean, Confucian-based ways of thought.<sup>8</sup> This is reflected in the fact that the Christian concept of God as the loving father contributed most powerfully to the transformation of early Korean Christians’ character and life;<sup>9</sup> they were able to put their trust in the *father* God, who is not only transcendent and all-powerful but also personal and relational. One may even argue that this reception of the love of the heavenly father was a factor behind the noticeable growth of KP membership within its first few decades.<sup>10</sup> Hence, I will offer the following Korean theological reflections by employing some working concepts of this father-son relationality.

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<sup>6</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 21 (emphasis original).

<sup>7</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 21-22 (emphasis original).

<sup>8</sup> The relationship between ‘father and son’ was designated as one of the Three Bonds or Social Orders in Confucian tradition, which Korean socio-cultural tradition is deeply influenced by. According to the Confucian view, there are five major human relationships in society, namely, those between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friend and friend. It was during the *Han* dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) that three relationships out of the five were selected as superlative order and called the ‘Three Bonds.’ The original Chinese word for the ‘bond’ means a major cord in a net, to which all the other strings are attached. Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1948), 191-97.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “한국 기독교인 인간품성의 기질과 행태에 대한 신학적 성찰” [A Theological Reflection upon Sensibilities and Behavioural Attitudes of Korean Christians’ Characters]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=478> (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Kim and Kim report that “by 1910 Protestant numbers stood at about one per cent of the Korean population, a figure that was much larger than that in China or Japan in the same period and about the same as in India, which had a much longer Christian history.” Kim and Kim present manifold explanations about the reason behind such growth. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 105-06.

The 'best son' is a Christological model which naturally emerges from the background of the 'father-son' relationship between Jesus and his father God. Yu Yŏng-mo refers to Jesus as "the best son" who enjoys the utmost intimacy and joy *in union with* the Father God.<sup>11</sup> The major verbs that describe the son's relationship with his father in the Gospel of John include: to know, trust, love, obey, be sent (by), honour, abide (in), be one (with), come (from) and return (to). One of the most foundational qualities of the best son is his deep understanding of the father. The Johannine Gospel emphasizes that the son Jesus knows the heart of his father. As human parents experience, there is hardly anything that pleases parents' heart more than seeing their children love one another. In view of this, Johannine Jesus' command to "love one another" (John 13:34) appears to be based on his understanding of the father's longing for love shared among his children.

Read from the broader biblical stories, the son who understands the merciful heart of the father stands in stark contrast to such a son as Cain, who responds, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper" when asked about his brother Abel (Gen 4:9), or to the elder son in the Lukan Jesus' parable, 'the prodigal son and his brother' (Luke 15:11-32), who could not empathize with his father's yearning for the lost son, his younger brother. The good son Jesus understands his father's heart for the lost children; hence, he himself seeks to save the lost (Luke 19:17; cf 15:1-32). The good son would not dream of eliminating or excluding the brother or sister who dislikes him. Even concerning the brother who has done harm to another sibling, the good son would hear the father saying, 'I *know* this brother has done wrong, and I am sorrowful and angry about what he has done. However, please do not hate your brother, for he is my child, too.' This deeply merciful paternal heart is echoed by the good son Jesus as he says on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

In addition to the 'best son,' another Christological model arising from Jesus' sonship to God is the 'eldest brother.' This model appears in the NT: God's son is "*the*

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<sup>11</sup> O Chŏng-suk, "Yu Yong-mo's Distinctly Korean Christianity," 242. This notion was introduced as an example of distinctly Korean, theological expression; see the section, "Expressing in Korean Language," in Chapter 5.

*eldest of a family of many brothers*” (Rom 8:29, the Phillips Bible).<sup>12</sup> The eldest brother or son in Korean tradition has a few distinctive features regarding his status and role. First, the eldest brother, similar to the ‘best son,’ knows the father best because he has closely observed the father working, and so understood the will and manner of the father. Second, the eldest brother, by birth and also for the reason just described, represents his father, bearing the father’s ‘name’ wherever he goes. Third, the eldest brother is expected to inherit and continue his father’s business, in tune with the father’s will. Fourth, the eldest brother is a mediator between his siblings and the father; while he helps his siblings to understand the father’s best intentions for them all, he also regularly informs the father about the life situation of each of his siblings. Hence, the eldest brother offers approachability and friendliness to the other siblings on the one hand, and exercises the father’s authority on the other.

All these features are reflected in the Johannine Jesus. Jesus the best son/eldest brother “can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing” (John 5:19-20). The Johannine Jesus’ ‘oneness with his father’ makes much sense in this context of ‘father-son’ relationship. Jesus’ command, “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34; 15:12-13), indicates to a Korean reader both his knowledge of the father’s will as the eldest son, and his active care for the father’s children.

A Vietnamese-American theologian, Peter C. Phan is discontented with the fact that theology in general, and, in particular, “Christological treatises have been nothing more than a translation of Chalcedonian Christology into local tongues.”<sup>13</sup> Phan’s search for a unique Vietnamese Christological model results in “Jesus as the eldest son” as well as “the ancestor par excellence.”<sup>14</sup> While Phan’s description of the role of the eldest son primarily focuses on the filial piety toward the father, the Korean model of the eldest son/brother includes his affinity with his siblings as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Almost all other English Bible versions render this phrase as “the *firstborn* within a large family.”

<sup>13</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 125.

<sup>14</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 135-43.

The Johannine Jesus, especially as presented in John 14:6, offers some new Christological models such as the *kil* to the father, trustworthy guide, supportive companion, best son and eldest brother. As Sallie McFague points out, each model for Jesus or God has certain limitations, and even all models together cannot fully express human understanding of God and Jesus; each model needs to be balanced by other models.<sup>15</sup> *Kil* Christological models are not exceptions. The best son and the eldest brother models, for instance, could be employed with a purpose to emphasize and perpetuate a hierarchical and androcentric theological paradigm, which would be likely to meet the disapproval of most feminist theologians. The Johannine Jesus' unique contribution in introducing God as the loving 'father' should not be misunderstood as to emphasize and safeguard the male image of God, as Kyser warns.<sup>16</sup> Also, the 'best son' model based on 'father-son' relationship could be misunderstood as an encouragement for a childlike dependency, inadvertently discouraging development of 'adult' responsibility.<sup>17</sup> Both interpretations, however, would be at direct odds with the Jesus we have read of so far. In addition, these models would not satisfy those who seek the divine power of Jesus to forgive all their sins.

Nonetheless, these familial models are effective across a broad range of human experience, not only for Koreans but other nationalities, as long as family relationships exist in the human world. It also seems that the 'good son' and the 'eldest brother' models could serve a corrective function to those believers who disregard 'horizontal' relationships, focusing primarily on the 'vertical' relationship either with God or Jesus the incarnate God (based on our appraisal in Chapter 2);

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<sup>15</sup> Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 190.

<sup>16</sup> Kyser, *John*, 184-85. Perhaps it is pertinent to mention at this point that the thesis author believes in both the masculinity and femininity of God. Furthermore, she recognizes that the 'language' employed to refer to God is a matter of considerable significance. Hence, the thesis has avoided masculine pronouns—He, His, Himself, etc—in reference to God. Accordingly, the Johannine Jesus is the *kil* not only to the father's house but also to the mother's house. Even though the 'father's house' has received a special attention throughout this thesis, the eternal 'home' to which humans return, and to which the *kil* of Jesus leads, is mother's house as well as father's. Despite this, the thesis author contends that this project, whose main purpose is to uncover a distinctly Korean reading of John 14:6, is not the appropriate venue to strongly advocate for the femininity of God.

<sup>17</sup> Implied in McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 186.

they could learn from ‘the eldest brother’ in that his love for the father inevitably leads him to care for his sisters and brothers to the degree that he lays down his life for them.

## UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

Traditionally, the Johannine Jesus’ “ἐγὼ εἰμι” or “I am” statements have been employed for the defence of the uniqueness of Jesus. In fact, this saying, “I am,” is regularly quoted for the purpose of establishing the superiority of Jesus over any other religious ‘founders’ such as Gautama Siddhartha, Muhammad, and Confucius. The defending logic asserts that every religious leader humbly acknowledges his own weaknesses and limitations; it is only Jesus, ontologically equal to God, who has uttered a claim that purports himself to be the only way for human ‘salvation.’<sup>18</sup> This kind of view is met by criticism; “some Johannine scholars say that the Gospel of John was ‘hijacked’ or ‘used’ as the ‘tool’” with which to establish “the dominant christology of the church.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the Johannine Jesus’ ‘I am’ sayings may be read differently, which is demonstrated in this thesis, through an alternative reading of one of the ‘I am’ sayings—“I am the way” (John 14:6).

Based on this *kil* reading of John 14:6, a new Christological understanding has been presented with several alternative Christological models. Perhaps there is a need to comment about the ‘uniqueness of Jesus,’ in response to possible questions such as: how does the ‘uniqueness of Jesus’ fit in this new, *kil* Christology? What is the meaning and role of the suffering and death of Jesus? I will first make some observations about the ‘uniqueness’ matter before moving on to the particularity of the *kil* Jesus. A brief comment about the ‘substitutionary death of Jesus’ will be added at the end.

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<sup>18</sup> Kim Chun-gon, “아무도 이렇게 말한 일이 없다” [No One Has Ever Said These Words], in *Jesus Column*, 22; Pak Su-am, *The Gospel of John*, 316.

<sup>19</sup> Yamaguchi, “‘I AM’ Sayings and Women in Context,” 34-35.

It is often the 'divine nature' of Jesus that has been used to qualify the uniqueness of Jesus. However, this begets a question: does not every human being have a divine nature? Within the biblical witness, we read that human beings are created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27), and that believers of Jesus are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4, NKJV). A Hebrew poet wrote: "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you" (Ps 82:6); this passage was interpreted by the Johannine Jesus as to mean that "those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'" (John 10:34-36).

I also have a lingering suspicion that the term 'uniqueness' itself might pertain to a Hellenistic-Western Christian interest. Richard E. Nisbett, in his book which examines how and why Asians and Westerners think differently, submits that "the Greeks, more than any other ancient peoples, and in fact more than most people on the planet today, had a remarkable sense of personal *agency*—the sense that they were in charge of their own lives and free to act as they chose."<sup>20</sup> Nisbett further states that a strong sense of *individual identity* accompanied the Greek sense of personal agency; "there is no doubt that the Greeks viewed themselves as unique individuals, with distinctive attributes and goals."<sup>21</sup> The traditional theological 'obsession' around the matter of 'uniqueness of Jesus' might not be unrelated to the Greek mind's keen interest in the uniqueness of individual personhood, and also contemporary Western individualism.

The Chinese/Asian counterpart to the Greek interest in 'individual identity' would be 'harmony' among members of a family or community.<sup>22</sup> The matter of uniqueness of an individual member would be far less important in 'collectivist' society than in 'individualist' society. As Malina and Rorhbaugh contend, those living in collectivist societies assume that "identity is possible only in relation to the others" who form the group.<sup>23</sup> And we know that Jesus himself belonged to a 'collectivist'

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<sup>20</sup> Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 2 (emphasis original).

<sup>21</sup> Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Malina and Rorhbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 163.

society;<sup>24</sup> he is not simply an individual person named 'Jesus' but is identified as "a Nazarene" (Matt 2:23), "the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (Matt 21:11), the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23) whose ancestors include Abraham, Seth, and Adam, "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). According to *my reading*, the Jesus to whom the Johannine Christians witness seems to be content to be a son of God who is the loving father to many others.

Hence, a Korean theologian might ask: why should Jesus be unique, so unique that he is completely different from any other human being? Would such 'uniqueness' be considered positive? Should non-Western followers of Jesus agree with existing theories of the uniqueness of Jesus? Instead of attempting a fully developed scholarly discussion about the matter of Jesus' uniqueness, I present a Korean view about the particularity or uniqueness of Jesus, examining, in particular, the way in which he fills gaps within the various traditional religious teachings in Korea.

First, the Johannine Jesus affirms the *fatherhood* of God. This is certainly different from non-theistic beliefs such as Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism; Buddhist *Kong* (Ultimate Non-being), Confucian Heaven, and Taoist *To* are never addressed as 'Father.'<sup>25</sup> This is also different from Islam, where, though a theistic religion, such attributions as 'father' or 'son' in relation to Allah are avoided. Jesus introduced the creator God, the highest, the incomprehensible (cf. Rom 11:33), as our father (John 20:17). Koreans always revered 'heaven,' who is highest, mysterious, and somewhat distant. Through the teaching of the Johannine Jesus, this 'heaven' figure has now become 'our father,' who is concrete, tangible and close. This is good news especially to Koreans (and many other ethnic groups) for whom the family relationship is one of the highest values.<sup>26</sup> Through Jesus, the familial bond of love is expanded into a foundational, cosmic relationship.

Second, Jesus strongly emphasized 'horizontal relationship' among people, which challenges the vertical, hierarchical relationship and order which dominates

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<sup>24</sup> Malina and Rorhbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 163-65.

<sup>25</sup> To render the Buddhist term '*Kong*' as 'Ultimate Non-being' does not do it justice. It is a parallel to the Christian God insofar as both are the most foundational concept in each religion. Keel Hee-sung, "공과 하나님" [*Kong* and God], in *Bodhisattva Jesus*, 155-63.

<sup>26</sup> As was commented earlier, "Christian concept of God as the loving father contributed most powerfully to the transformation of early Korean Christians' character and life" (see Page 240).

Korean society through the Confucian influence. This was made possible through Jesus' radical embodiment of the inclusive mercifulness of God the father, and solidarity with the suffering of the day. The study of six phrases which have salvific images within the Gospel of John has concluded that "the uniqueness of Jesus lies not so much in any 'original' saying or idea of Jesus as in the areas of his focus and his faithful and truthful *embodiment* of (traditional Hebraic) faith in YHWH."<sup>27</sup> I shall elaborate how I see the particularity of Jesus in this inclusivity and solidarity.

Jesus' uniqueness is recognized especially by his lifestyle, which manifests radical inclusivity. The *ki* of Jesus, in whom the Johannine community intended to exclusively abide, embodied maximum inclusivity. Jesus being called a "friend of tax-collectors and sinners" (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34) testifies to this. The Gospel of Luke helps us to see that from the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus identifies the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed as the main group for whom he will ensure the favour of God the father (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus' touch of the 'untouchable' such as the sick and the dead (Mark 5:41), Jesus' sincere 'God-talk' with women such as a Samaritan woman (John 4:9-27) and Martha (John 11:21-27), Jesus' recognition and praise of great faith manifested in the Gentiles he encounters (Matt 8:5-10; Mark 7:24-30), Jesus' table-fellowship with 'sinners' (Luke 14:1, 15:1-2), and not excluding even those who put him to crucifixion from his father's house (Luke 23:34),<sup>28</sup> all speak to the extraordinary inclusivity embodied in Jesus' life.

The person who sees greatness in the least among people and encourages others to treat them accordingly (Luke 9:48) must be a true son of God; it is the task of the son that affirms the love of the father towards those for whom no one in society cares. Indeed, Jesus' active search for those who are forcefully excluded from God's grace by socio-religious systems and practices of the day, and his exhibition of respect and honour towards such people, invites us to see divinity in Jesus; it is only through the fullness of the spirit of God, the Creator of all beings, that one could act toward the miserable, the outcast, and the 'untouchable' in the way Jesus did. In this way, Jesus reveals the father's heart toward human beings. Chŏng Yang-mo's

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<sup>27</sup> See "Summary" in Chapter 11 (Page 230).

<sup>28</sup> "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

description of Jesus as “the person who embodied God in the most concrete way” expresses this kind of understanding of Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

Kim Kyong-jae finds Jesus’ mode of existence different and unique in comparison with Gautama Siddhartha, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and other historical personages in Asian religious history.<sup>30</sup> The difference does not concern Jesus’ ‘greater understanding’ of the truth of God. In contrast, “the eyes of Gautama Siddhartha, Confucius, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu staring into wisdom may be sharper and deeper than that of the young Jesus of thirty-three years old,” argues Kim.<sup>31</sup> Yet Jesus’ life was “unique” in that “he lived as one with the poor and the weak to the end of his life in completing justice, peace, and love among the people.”<sup>32</sup>

As Kim stresses, Jesus’ radical inclusiveness did not remain theoretical but was truthfully embodied through his participation in the deepest suffering of the day. According to the repeated witnesses within the NT, Jesus was misunderstood, rejected, betrayed, tortured and crucified. Jesus’ crucifixion, in particular, represents best his willing participation in the deepest shame and physical suffering of the time. A Korean, who was one of the ‘bearers of the cross’ on behalf of multitudes of people in Korea during the regime of dictatorship, wrote: “A person’s life should be read according to how close the person has been to the ‘suffering of the time’ during his/her lifetime, rather than what achievements or fame the person has earned.”<sup>33</sup> Looking at Jesus in light of this, he was right in the middle of the suffering of the age;

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<sup>29</sup> We have introduced this description in “Korea-centred” methodology in Chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, *Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions: Method of Correlations, Fusion of Horizons, and Paradigm Shifts in the Korean Grafting Process* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 1994), 154.

<sup>31</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, *Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions*, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, *Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Sin Yŏng-bok, 나무야 나무야: 국토와 역사의 뒤안에서 띄우는 엽서 [*Dear Trees: Letters Sent from the Back Yard of the Land and History*] (P’aju: Tolbegae, 1996), 33. Sin Yŏng-bok was imprisoned with a life sentence in 1968, falsely accused of ‘an attempt to overthrow the South Korean government in collaboration with North Korea.’ Sin Yŏng-bok was released, after twenty years in jail, with a ‘special pardon’ on the occasion of the hosting of the first Olympic Games in Korea (The Seoul Olympics in 1988). Since being freed, Sin Yŏng-bok taught in Sungkonghoe University, wrote several books, did various public speaking, the fruit and gems of his suffering, wide reading and meditation during his long imprisonment, until his recent death (on January 15, 2016). The thesis is deeply indebted to Sin Yŏng-bok for his writings and also longsuffering, not only his own but also his co-sufferers: parents, brothers, sisters, and close friends.

in the midst of religious arrogance and exclusion, endless suffering of the poor and the sick, Jesus was rejected by the majority and willingly suffered the worst form of death at the time.

Being drawn to Jesus' radical inclusivity, and his empathetic participation in the suffering of the day, various Asian theologians have seen in Jesus "the most marginal person" (Lee Jung Young), "the crucified people" (C. S. Song), and "the poor monk" (Aloysius Pieris).<sup>34</sup> By his active participation in the greatest suffering of his 'siblings' or other human beings, Jesus showed the maximum potential of humanity to Korean people; Jesus became the most beautiful, 'fully humanized person,' a state which represents the ideal telos of life to Korean people.<sup>35</sup> Jesus' 'resurrection from the dead' was a sign of the approval and justification of the father God to the earliest followers of Jesus; Koreans may read in Jesus' resurrection God's acknowledgement of the fullest humanization of the person Jesus, hope in humanity, and possibility of their own full humanization. Keel Hee-sung succinctly puts this kind of uniqueness of Jesus in the following words: "Jesus is the one who has shown the true God to human beings, and a true human being to God."<sup>36</sup>

I will offer a brief comment about the 'substitutionary death of Jesus,' a death he has died on behalf of the sins of the whole world. To most KP members, the substitutionary death of Jesus is what defines Christianity, and, therefore, should remain sacrosanct. Kang Yöng-an argues that criticising Christian exclusivism (which is grounded by this substitutionary death) would be an injustice to those Christians for whom denying this exclusive uniqueness of Jesus would mean the loss of their Christian faith.<sup>37</sup> Those Christians whose faith is constructed on such a foundation

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<sup>34</sup> For Christological review of Lee, Song, Pieris, see Peter C. Phan, "Jesus Christ with an Asian Face," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 406-21.

<sup>35</sup> The Korean expression, '사람되다' (*saramdoeda* or 'to become a human') is typically Korean, and heard in everyday conversation; it is familiar to all Koreans, regardless of their individual religious, educational, social-status backgrounds. 'To become a human being,' being one of the highest goals in life among Koreans, has deep religious, philosophical and ethical implications. Hence, 'what makes a (full) human being' continues to be an important theme to Korean people.

<sup>36</sup> Keel Hee-sung, "Why Did God Become a Human Being?"

<sup>37</sup> Kang Yöng-an, "종교다원적 상황에서 그리스도인은 무엇을 해야 할 것인가?" [How Should Christians Behave in the Context of Religious Pluralism], speech at the twelfth public discussion of *Hanmokhyöp* (The Korean National Association of Christian Pastors), *Yonsei University*, Seoul, October

would ask, in defense of it, “why would Jesus have to die on the cross if he was not the exclusively unique saviour of the world?”<sup>38</sup>

There are, however, other KP members, albeit a small minority, whose faith in Jesus is not founded on the doctrine of Jesus’ substitutionary death. Rather, Jesus’ death or ‘blood’ is more participatory than substitutionary. For me, *this participatory death, together with the subsequent justification by God, provides the kil of full humanization, humanity that reflects the image of God*. There is assurance and hope for humanity and for the future in this *kil* Jesus. Viewed in this way, the blood of Jesus has no intrinsic supernatural power, operating independently of faithfulness to God. The manner of Jesus’ death is, however, deeply significant and meaningful, not so much as a fixed archetype but as an open-ended prototype of self-death, a form of ‘first fruit’ which would be, and should be, reproduced in diverse ways in history.<sup>39</sup> The Johannine Jesus expected that his followers would also do the works that he did, even greater works (John 14:12). The shedding of innocent blood has indeed continued throughout human history, some of which is public knowledge but most of which remains largely unknown. Using the expression of Yi Yong-do, “we have eaten the flesh of the righteous, and drunk their blood.”<sup>40</sup> As a concrete example, many Korean people are able to live better lives thanks to the blood of those who were tortured and killed in their protests against the regime of dictatorship (1963-1992) in Korean history.

In summary, this Korean theologian is not captivated by the notion of ‘uniqueness’ (of Jesus), and not persuaded that such uniqueness is something that needs be argued for. At the same time, she sees that Jesus is a truly extraordinary human being in his ‘childlike’ trust in the father God and love for God’s way/truth, and the radical embodiment of God’s mercy and love for *all* human beings. Jesus is a

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16, 2008. Source: <http://www.kpastor.org/news/articleView.html?idxno=165> (accessed January 22, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Kang Yǒng-an, “How Should Christians Behave in the Context of Religious Pluralism”

<sup>39</sup> The expression, ‘open-ended prototype,’ is inspired by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who suggests a new feminist critical hermeneutic in which the Bible is understood as an open-ended, self-transformational prototype, not as a binding timeless archetype. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, tenth anniversary edition (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 33-34.

<sup>40</sup> Chǒng Chae-hǒn, ed., *Revisiting Pastor Yi Yong-do*, 229.

human being, *perfectly humanized* and undeniably united with God; he opened a *kil* for other human beings to walk, leading them to true life that is eternal. This makes Jesus sufficiently 'unique' that the thesis writer, without hesitation, commits herself to him and his *kil*.

## **SOTERIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The dominant soteriological paradigm within KP includes the 'reception of forgiveness of sin and eternal life' as the content of salvation and 'faith in Jesus' as the means. The new Korean reading of the Gospel of John and, in particular, the passage of John 14:6, however, offers a broader understanding about salvation based on some new, *kil*-related concepts and Jesus' apostleship and sonship.

### **In relation to Jesus being the *kil***

First, Jesus being the *kil* to the father's house offers various soteriological implications, already discussed in Chapter 10. To briefly reiterate, the outstanding image of salvation within the *kil* soteriological paradigm is that of a journey. To be sure, the idea of salvation as a journey, not an event, or the notion that following Jesus is a journey or process, not just a momentary decision, is not a novel concept in Christian theology.<sup>41</sup> *Kil* soteriology affirms such a notion but further emphasizes the aspect of return; salvation is a *return* journey 'home,' to the house of the eternal loving father or parent.

If we roughly compare the basic cultural *a priori* between Korean and Western, Korean anthropology is *not* based on the traditional, mainstream Western Christian 'conflict between humans and the creator God,' from which the doctrine of human 'sin' evolved.<sup>42</sup> This Augustinian paradigm of 'human-God conflict' required a

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<sup>41</sup> A traditional hymn, "Close to Thee," written by Fanny Jane Crosby (1820-1915), conveys the notion of life journey for salvation, using a few, major *kil*-related images such as walk (with), toil, and gate (destination): "Thou my everlasting Portion, more than friend or life to me. All along my pilgrim journey, Saviour, let me walk with Thee"; "Not for ease or worldly pleasure, nor for fame, my prayer shalt be. Gladly will I toil and suffer," until I enter "the gate of life eternal."

<sup>42</sup> Kim Kwang-sik, *Theology of Word-Deed Accord*, 148, 152-54.

medium of reconciliation such as the death of Jesus. By contrast, Koreans never had such a 'conflict' paradigm. What Koreans need for 'salvation' is a recognition (through enlightenment) of the God who existed from the beginning, and a *return* to such God. This 'return' is, of course, a return of *one's heart*; it is repentance, self-change to move *forward*, following Jesus. Lee Jung Young's understanding of 'sin' concerns the resistance to such change: "Sin is nothing but humanity's desire to *be* rather than to *become*; it is our unwillingness to change."<sup>43</sup>

In this soteriological paradigm of return journey, there are certain, somewhat reversed priorities. As the image of 'walking in the *ancient*, (not modern), path or *kil*' implies, faithfulness, adaptability, perseverance and awareness of community are more important values and virtues than individual accomplishment, success and clarity. Moreover, the usually overlooked human feet take precedence over the head or even heart. Salvation may begin in one's head, and should reach one's heart, but ultimately is realized through one's feet;<sup>44</sup> the feet are the symbol for actions and lifestyle. Salvation is best manifested where believers' feet are. Echoed here is the Johannine Jesus' saying: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also" (John 12:26). Perhaps most significantly, the journey of walking the *kil* of Jesus appreciates eternal life as a present reality, rather than exclusively future reality. This is in line with the (Johannine) realized eschatology that is fundamental to a *kil* Christology; as concluded in Part IV, the Johannine Jesus as the 'way' carries an imminent eschatological force.<sup>45</sup> A much-loved Korean hymn, wherein each of the four stanzas has a chorus that says, "*tasting* eternal life, I am living in Jesus; today and also tomorrow, I live with Jesus" seems to echo this view;

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<sup>43</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Theology of Change*, 93 (emphasis original). The major thesis of Lee's book is based on his view of God as Change itself, challenging the view of God as the unmovable, eternal source.

<sup>44</sup> This is inspired by Sin Yöng-bok's "the longest journey": "The longest journey for anyone of us is from head to heart. Another longest one is from heart to feet." Yi Süng-hyök and Chang Chi-suk, eds., *처음처럼: 신영복의 서화 에세이 [As In the Beginning: Sin Yöng-bok's Short Essays with Pictures]* (Seoul: Random House, 2007), 50. This book is, similar to wisdom literature, a collection of poetic and proverbial short phrases, written by Sin Yöng-bok.

<sup>45</sup> See the section, "Summary and Some Conclusions," in Part IV.

followers of *kil* Jesus are able to enjoy eternal life right *here and now* regardless of their present circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

‘Walking with Jesus,’ as well as ‘returning journey to God,’ forms an effective soteriological image. This ‘walking with Jesus’ offers a satisfying response to a deeply-Korean question, “how shall we live?” The Johannine Jesus offers his companionship; in addition to his faithful companionship, assurance and hope are given because Jesus finished his walk, and his ‘walk’ has been proved as truth through his resurrection. Perhaps more challenging than walking with Jesus would be walking with other fellow walkers. However challenging it might be, those who walk with Jesus should learn to walk with other fellow walkers, regardless of differences in religion, race or social status, because their guide exercises radical inclusivity.

### **In relation to the apostleship and sonship of Jesus**

In addition to the above *kil* soteriological discussion is an exploration of how the apostleship and sonship of Jesus inform the matter of salvation. First, a brief discussion about the apostleship of Jesus. The title of ‘apostle’ is ascribed to Jesus once in the NT: “Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle” (Heb 3:1). The ‘apostle,’ the original Greek word being ‘ἀπόστολος’ (*apóstolos*), means ‘one sent as a messenger.’ This notion of ‘the sent one,’ as we have seen, is one of the major undercurrents used to portray Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>47</sup> The disciples of Jesus become ‘apostles’ because Jesus was the ‘apostle’ or the ‘sent one’ before them: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). As will be made clearer, discussion about Jesus’ apostleship is a part of an exemplary Christological discussion.

Of key importance to apostleship is ‘faithfulness.’ According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is subordinate and faithful to the sender. Soteriologically significant is that God’s salvific plan for humanity is accomplished through Jesus’ faithfulness to the sender.<sup>48</sup> Hence, the ‘faithfulness of Jesus’ becomes a crucial theme in

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<sup>46</sup> “나 이제 주님의 새생명 얻은 몸” (I Am A New Creation with Jesus’ Life), written by Yi Ho-ŭn in 1967. It is worth noting here that Kim Kyong-jae presents the ‘focus on here and now’ as one of the features of South-East Asian theology. Kim Kyong-jae, *Hermeneutics and Theology of Religions*, 253.

<sup>47</sup> See the section, “Becoming One with Jesus,” in Chapter 11.

<sup>48</sup> For further discussion about the ‘faithfulness of Jesus,’ the following books are helpful: Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Nashville:

soteriological discussion. Commenting on this significance of the ‘faith(fulness) of Jesus’ in Christian theology, Bird and Sprinkle go so far as to say: “At stake is nothing less than the very architecture of the Christ-event and the nature of the summons to faith and the life of discipleship that flows from it.”<sup>49</sup> The fact that it was necessary for Jesus to exercise his own faith in God should speak to his believers about the necessity to express their own faith in God. “Jesus’ faithfulness,” Kim Young Suk states, is “an example through which the Christians can live to embody such a life of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Faithfulness of Jesus strongly encourages ‘participation in Jesus’ faith’; believers’ active trust in the father of Jesus is required in the path of salvation. This discussion is a much needed one for KP because KP’s popular soteriological paradigm of ‘faith in Jesus’ has yielded ‘sour fruit’ such that the believer’s role remains passive, accepting a “ready-made individual righteousness from God through faith in Christ.”<sup>51</sup>

The *ki/* Jesus holds the status and role of a son as well as an apostle. We will examine, therefore, what soteriological insights we might receive from Jesus’ sonship witnessed in the Johannine Gospel. Scholars have presented ‘sonship’ as an essential phenomenon of biblical salvation. Motyer views that “sonship and salvation are indissolubly linked.”<sup>52</sup> Burke argues that ‘sonship,’ which constitutes a central biblical theme, sheds light on salvation, signifying a call to an intimate relationship with God.<sup>53</sup> The Fourth Gospel, in particular, appeals to this sonship through its frequent use of the terms, ‘father’ and/or ‘son’; Jesus’ addressing God as ‘father’ is recorded

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Abingdon, 1998), 95-115; Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 317-324; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 3. Bird and Sprinkle introduce Sigve Tonstad’s article, “πιστις Χριστου □ Reading Paul in a New Paradigm,” as that which lays the groundwork for an entirely different paradigm in the theology of the NT. See Sigve Tonstad, “πιστις Χριστου □ Reading Paul in a New Paradigm,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 40/1 (2002): 56-57.

<sup>50</sup> Kim Young Suk, *A Theological Introduction to Paul’s Letters: Exploring a Threefold Theology of Paul* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 71.

<sup>51</sup> Kim Young Suk, *A Theological Introduction to Paul’s Letters*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 91.

<sup>53</sup> Trevor J. Burke, *The Message of Sonship* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press; 2011), 18-26.

one hundred times in the Fourth Gospel, while it appears forty-six times altogether throughout the Synoptics.<sup>54</sup>

### **Jesus' own salvation model**

Based on Jesus' sonship and his relational unity with God, which we have observed in the Johannine Gospel, it would not be an injudicious statement to say that the *ki/* Jesus walked and demonstrated is not only for the salvation of others but for his own as well. Jesus needed salvation, and the salvation he experienced should speak to the salvation of his followers. As the Gospel of John witnesses, 'eternal life,' the Johannine Jesus' salvation, is not something that Jesus created but that he received: "Just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26). The Letter to the Hebrews, wherein we find "one of the most vivid portrayals of the real humanness of Jesus" in the NT,<sup>55</sup> details the salvation that Jesus himself received: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Heb 5:7).<sup>56</sup> Jesus, as a son, needed discipline, and he received suffering and underwent the process of moving from imperfection to *perfection*. After "having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb 5:9).

Most commentators contend that the term 'perfection' in the Letter to the Hebrews (5:8-9) concerns vocational completion rather than morality or infinite

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<sup>54</sup> Cowan, "The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel," 115. Cowan further reports that besides the designations "Son of God" and "Son of Man," 'the Son' occurs thirteen times in John, compared to nine in the Synoptics.

<sup>55</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, "With Loud Cries and Tears: The Humanity of the Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham and others (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 64.

<sup>56</sup> This way of reading clearly takes a different route from the reading of most scholars who view that the "prayers" mentioned here (Heb 5:7) are indicative particularly of Jesus' passion, as opposed to any suggestion of Jesus' need of salvation. The humanity of the son Jesus is usually approached from within the frame of the dual nature of Jesus: full divinity and humanity. McCormack, "With Loud Cries and Tears," 65; Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 148.

quality.<sup>57</sup> However, I read in the same letter a message that Jesus became a perfect human being, who, in turn, became the source or *kil* for others to become *true* human beings. 'To become a true human being' comprises the *telos* or salvation to many Koreans, which is often attested to by Koreans from all walks of life. Andrew Sung Park, for instance, says, "we were not born to be Christians but to be the true human beings whom God intended to create," and "Christ came to enable us to be what we ought to be."<sup>58</sup> Jesus is the one who demonstrates what it looks like to become as truly human as the Creator's original design. As was introduced before, Keel Hee-sung views Jesus as the one who has shown "the true human being to God."<sup>59</sup>

How might Jesus have experienced his own salvation or life eternal? We will turn to the Johannine Gospel to identify some essential elements of the eternal life Jesus himself received and enjoyed. First of all, it seems that Jesus' salvific experience consists of *joy*, the joy of being loved by his *abba* and abiding in him. Jesus' self-awareness and his actions in life are closely connected with his 'unique *abba* experience.'<sup>60</sup> The Johannine Jesus says that the father has loved him, and he remains in the love of the father (John 15:10); even when all else leave him for their own sake, the father is still with him (John 16:32). The experience of the love of the father is the source of the son's joy which Jesus wants to share with his disciples (John 15:9, 11; 17:13, 26), reminding them that his father is their father, too (John 20:17).

Certain Korean theologians explain this joy of the son Jesus through the Korean Confucian concept of *ch'in* or filial intimacy; "the *ch'in* or filial intimacy between the father God and the son Jesus constitutes the essence of Christian truth,"

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<sup>57</sup> Schenk, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews*, 69; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 67; Merland Ray Miller, "Seven Theological Themes In Hebrews," *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (1987): 134-35; McCormack, "With Loud Cries and Tears," 67.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Sung Park, "Church and Theology: My Theological Journey," 171.

<sup>59</sup> Keel Hee-sung, "Why Did God Become a Human Being?"

<sup>60</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, translated by Hubert Hoskins (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 637ff; Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 70-71.

says Yun Söng-bȫm.<sup>61</sup> This concept of *ch'in* is particularly helpful because it contains other important Johannine themes such as trust, obedience and peace, associated with the intimate *abba* experience of Jesus.<sup>62</sup> Jesus' filial intimacy with his father is expressed in the Johannine Gospel as joy which cannot be taken away (John 16:22) and peace which is distinctive from that which the world gives (John 14:27).

It is worth noting that Jesus' experience of joy has an important connection with obedience: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:10; 14:21, 23-24). In view of this, I would argue that Jesus did not begin with a (pre-existent) sense of joy before acting upon the will of his father. Rather, as Jesus *chooses* to do the will of his father and actually does so, he *comes to experience* joy and union with his father. This kind of reading elevates human will and decision as a significant part of salvation.

### **Back to following Jesus' *ki***

I am aware that the notion of 'Jesus' own salvation' may be bewildering, offensive and unthinkable to many KP members; to them, Jesus is *sinless* and, for that reason, does not require salvation.<sup>63</sup> Jesus' connection with salvation is solely as the medium of it. However, in recent years, several KP scholars have criticized KP's dominant soteriological understanding and practice. Kim Seyoon contends that a distorted reception of the justification-by-faith-alone theory is the major cause for the phenomenon of frequent moral corruption among KP members; misunderstanding about Paul's and/or Luther's emphasis on faith has resulted in the unfortunate

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<sup>61</sup> Yun Söng-bȫm is a leading theologian who develops a theology on the theme of the Korean Confucian *ch'in*. Yi Chong-ch'an, "해천 윤성범의 '말씀절로'의 신학: 성의 신학" [Haech'on Yun Söng-bȫm's '*Malssüm Chȫllo*' Theology: Hermeneutic of Integrity], in *This is Korean Theology*, 183.

<sup>62</sup> Schillebeeckx views that Jesus' real and deep experience with his *abba* is based on his unfailing trust in the *abba*, which should be exemplary to all those who believe in him. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 637-38.

<sup>63</sup> Since the decision about Christology at the Council of Chalcedon, the 'sinlessness' of Jesus remains the orthodoxy in Christianity. I observe that 'Jesus, who is like us in all things *except sin*' has been a starting point for most Christian scholars who seek to better understand the 'humanity of Jesus.' I cannot enter into a proper discussion about this matter here except to suggest that Christian soteriology needs a wider range of 'sin' concepts (together with 'sinlessness'), especially from non-Western cultures.

phenomenon of “faith without content” or fruitless lives of believers.<sup>64</sup> In a similar vein, Kwŏn Yŏn-gyŏng seeks communication with Korean Christians by offering a careful re-reading of Pauline ‘faith language,’ presenting the embodied-nature of faith that expresses itself through actions.<sup>65</sup>

A recent, extensive critique of KP’s predominant soteriological paradigm appears in Sin Kwang-ŭn’s book, *Undefeatable Arvinism: the Indulgence That Korean Churches Sell*.<sup>66</sup> The new coinage, ‘Arvinism,’ represents an extremely pragmatic mixture of both Arminian and Calvinist theologies to fit KP members’ own interests and preferences: through the Arminian emphasis on individual decision about believing in Jesus, and Calvin’s theory on the ‘perseverance of the saints,’ KP members are assured of their salvation the moment they confess their sin and receive Jesus as their personal saviour.<sup>67</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn argues that faith and deed are two separate entities within such salvation paradigm, and ‘saved’ people are quick to become unconcerned about the fruit of their lives, which is “the main cause of the present KP’s ethical failure.”<sup>68</sup>

As a basis for his critique, Sin Kwang-ŭn explains Christian soteriology using the metaphor of a ‘well,’ and points to the potential harmfulness as well as the benefit of any salvation theory:

This ‘well’ [Christian salvation theory] has two sides to it. That the well is a source of life-giving water speaks about only one side; the other side should be recognized, i.e., if anyone falls into the well, the well becomes a grave for the one who has fallen in. The well is necessary and we cannot do without it. If we fall into it, however, the harm would be potentially fatal.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kim Seyoon, “Correction for the Korean Church.”

<sup>65</sup> Kwŏn Yŏn-gyŏng, *행위없는 구원? 새롭게 읽는 바울의 복음 [Salvation without Deed? Paul’s Gospel Reread]* (Seoul: SFC, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *천하무적 아르뱅주의: 한국교회가 발행하는 면죄부 [Undefeatable Arvinism: The Indulgence That Korean Churches Sell]* (Seoul: P’oiema, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *Undefeatable Arvinism*, 229-45, 287-88.

<sup>68</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *Undefeatable Arvinism*, 292.

<sup>69</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *Undefeatable Arvinism*, 395.

According to Sin Kwang-ŭn, KP's present, popular soteriology has fallen into three wells: Greek philosophy (dichotomic, argument-based truths), Augustine's theology (the original sin and complete inability of human beings to work out their salvation), and Luther's doctrine ('justification by faith alone').<sup>70</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn encourages KP members to appreciate the context from which each soteriological theory was birthed, and not to be bound by their precise theological words and logic.<sup>71</sup>

As a (Baptist) pastor, Sin Kwang-ŭn proposes a way out of the theological 'well,' that is, "walking the *kil* of life, the life of Jesus."<sup>72</sup> He elsewhere suggests that "the only thing that we must hold on to is Jesus. Jesus' body, life and word should be the source which continues to renew his church and theology."<sup>73</sup> A 'Jesus-centred' Korean reading of the Johannine Gospel finds its importance in appreciating and entering into the faithfulness, joy and peace of Jesus, which is the *kil* of eternal life and salvation.

## MISSIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

From my personal observation of overseas evangelism, exclusivist Christology and restrictivist soteriology appear to serve as the main motivation for evangelistic zeal.<sup>74</sup> In other words, many missionary endeavours are propelled by the conviction that Jesus is the only saviour and the Christian God is the only true god. KP's fervent evangelism includes the eschatological conviction that "without Christ, people are lost eternally in hell and therefore, whatever they or others might think, presenting

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<sup>70</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *Undefeatable Arvinism*, 299-395.

<sup>71</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *Undefeatable Arvinism*, 297, 395.

<sup>72</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, *Undefeatable Arvinism*, 480.

<sup>73</sup> Sin Kwang-ŭn, "구원론 비판 2: 세계의 우물에 빠진 기독교의 구원론" [A Critique on Soteriology 2: Soteriology of Protestantism Which Has Fallen into Three Wells]. Source: <http://blog.daum.net/penthos> (accessed November 12, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> This is an observation from the first-hand experience of living and working in Bangladesh as a missionary for 11 years between 1997 and 2015.

them with the gospel message is the best way to help them.”<sup>75</sup> However, according to the new Korean, *kil* theological reading of Jesus’ “I am the way” saying, Christian mission—sharing the good news of God, as preached by Jesus—is possible without holding such theological positions. In this section I will present alternative missiological reflections that are based on the *kil* Christology and soteriology.

*Kil* missiology, as a part of distinctly Korean theology, is characteristically Jesus-centred. This means to take *the major teaching of Jesus as missiological content and the attitude and life of Jesus himself as a foundational missiological model*. As endorsed by WCC, “the example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission.”<sup>76</sup> The new, Korean reading of the Johannine Jesus as the ‘best son,’ ‘eldest brother’ and ‘companion’ on the *kil*, suggests that an evangelist should assume such roles. Hence, *kil* missiology entails some revision to the traditional mission paradigm regarding the major role of an evangelist, as well as other areas such as the perspective and ultimate goal of mission, and important questions pertinent to evangelism. We shall address these revised areas, one by one.

As the best son Jesus’ own life exhibited, this mission is founded on the recognition that God is the loving father and that *all* human beings are beloved children of the same father. As Jesus’ own mission demonstrated, an evangelist’s mission should begin with deep appreciation of the love of the father God. Viewed from this more relational—familial—missional paradigm, mission is not so much a specific undertaking of ‘going out to preach the gospel’ as a believer’s whole lifestyle based on Jesus’ theological and anthropological perspectives. Consequently, the major biblical passage which supports Christian mission is not the ‘great commission’ to ‘go and make disciples’ which the Matthean Jesus commands (Matt 28:18-20). It is

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<sup>75</sup> Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 312.

<sup>76</sup> Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and World Evangelical Alliance (WCC, 2011). Bob Robinson is one of a small number of scholars who advocate imitating the example of Jesus in the present endeavour of ‘interfaith dialogue.’ See Bob Robinson, *Jesus and the Religions* (especially pp 34-37: “Implications of an Exemplary Christology for a Religiously Plural World”). See also Bob Robinson, “Evangelical Christians at the Inter-faith Dialogue Table? How?” *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* 10 (2012): 41-42.

instead the 'greatest commandment' recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels: loving God wholeheartedly and loving one's neighbours as oneself (Matt 22:37-40; also Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28). The Johannine Jesus, as we have seen, helps us to understand this commandment through a family paradigm; hence, mission basically concerns loving one's *father* God and loving one's siblings. This is the 'mission' for all followers of Jesus to undertake wherever they are situated.

Inspired by Jesus the 'eldest brother,' the evangelist will assume the role of an eldest brother or sister who better understands the father's heart and, for that reason, reminds other siblings about the father's good will and love for them and encourages them to trust the father. At the same time the evangelist will bring other siblings' life concerns to the father, which is equivalent to 'intercessory prayer,' to use current Christian terminology. In particular, the evangelist works toward caring for brothers and sisters who are in much suffering, for whom the father's heart aches. A Korean gospel songwriter, Yu Ŭn-sŏng writes a song, "*Abŏjji Maŭm*" or "Father's Heart," which well expresses the heart of our evangelist:

Father, I want my heart to be where yours is;  
Father, I want my tears to fall where your tears have fallen;  
Father, I want my eyes to look at the souls you see;  
Father, I want my feet to walk into the dark land  
where you are weeping.  
May my heart know the father's heart  
that all my will become the father's will;  
May my whole body know the father's heart  
that all my life become the father's life.

As Yu's song emphasizes, an evangelist's work closely resembles the work of the father. Such resemblance is exemplified in the Johannine Jesus, who does the work that he sees his father doing (John 5:17, 19). Also, this aligns with an already-available missiological focus, the *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei*, 'the mission of God,' means "putting the accent on what God is doing: humans are to look for what God is doing and to join in, rather than to drive 'mission' using their own ideas and wisdom."<sup>77</sup> Our evangelist will sense wonder and admiration at the tender care of the father who has

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<sup>77</sup> Steve Walton, "A Spirituality of Acts," Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University (2015): 12. Source: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/239234.pdf> (accessed July 8, 2015).

already been present in the ‘unreached’ people’s lives.

The model of an evangelist as an ‘eldest brother or sister’ might sound condescending or patronizing; however, this is not the intent. Another *kil* missiological, ‘friend’ model, may balance the ‘eldest brother or sister’ evangelism model. An evangelist on the *kil* missional walk is like a compassionate ‘companion’ and ‘friend,’ following the example of the Johannine Jesus. This perspective of an evangelist as a friend is of particular importance to the current ‘interfaith dialogue’ movement within Christianity, for the reason that dialogue is an essential component in friendship; genuine friendship is developed through honest, respectful and mutually-edifying dialogue between two parties. We shall discuss how the *kil* evangelist—an empathetic and supportive friend on the *kil*—informs Christian missional discussion.

First, our evangelist encourages, not discourages, sharing of Christian thoughts and experiences with others. Dialogue, in the truest sense of the word, assumes the freedom and right of both parties to express their own thoughts and feelings. An evangelist is not to talk *about the other*, informing what the other is, lacks or needs; however, the evangelist has the freedom and right to explain his/her position “freely and without fear.”<sup>78</sup> This goes together with the notion that the language of evangelists is to be deeply experiential and confessional rather than propositional and doctrinal; the language of the Johannine Christians is such an example. It is within this confessional language that Christians can share freely the ‘bread’ and ‘water,’ the strength, hope and reason for life, which they have found with and in Jesus of Nazareth, with their dialogue partners.

Second, the *kil* evangelist encourages Christians to revisit their approach to evangelistic questions. In genuine dialogue, the questions or agendas are not dominated by one party. Waldenfels affirms this: “A dialogue in our days calls, first of all, for an equal right and position for all. No one is allowed to enforce his view upon others, no one is to determine the agenda by himself and obliges everyone else to follow.”<sup>79</sup> This means that the evangelist endeavours to listen to the major questions

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<sup>78</sup> Waldenfels, *Jesus Christ and the Religions*, 56, 60.

<sup>79</sup> Waldenfels, *Jesus Christ and the Religions*, 55-56.

that rise from the lives of the other. In addition, even within Christian evangelism, major questions could be replaced by another. Traditionally, Christian evangelists preferred the use of such questions as ‘who do you say Jesus is?’ A new, *kil* missiological question a Christian may hold is ‘how much commonality an individual person or culture has with the *kil* or life of Jesus.’

This new question, though it is still based on the evangelist’s own understanding of Jesus and Reality, is more other-centred, being non-Christian-friendly and -respectful. The question begins with the search for the ‘footstep of God’ in the other person’s life, placing more emphasis on the *missio Dei*, the steadfast and eternal love and grace of God for all people. At the same time, the question demands that evangelists continue to be reflective of their own lives, engendering in them respect for others and humility for themselves. The question is also more life-centred than theory-centred, examining closely the fruit of life rather than verbal confession. As the commonality in life between a person and Jesus becomes prioritized, it becomes possible for KP members to honour their ‘non-Christian’ ancestors whose lives bear some similarity to the character of Jesus the *kil*. Kim Kyong-jae appears to follow this logic as he proposes a rhetorical question: “Women and mothers in our history, who had not heard about Christ or read the Bible, but spent their lives in quiet endurance, wholehearted love and devotion to people around them—are they not the genuine yet anonymous Christians?”<sup>80</sup>

Third, the *kil* evangelist’s goal involves *mutual transformation*. It is in fact a natural deduction from the above dialogue considerations that our evangelist would not be interested in one-sided change, proselytizing or converting other people into Christians. Instead, *kil* paradigmatic, friend-based evangelism places equal emphasis on the transformation of the evangelist him/herself through the encounter with the other. Moreover, the transformation of the evangelist is considered even more crucial, which is expressed by a Korean missionary, Yi Yong-gyu: “One of the things I have learned in the mission field is that God’s primary concern is the transformation of the missionary, not of the local people. To repent before God and continue to

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<sup>80</sup> Kim Kyong-jae, “탄허록을 읽고” [Reading *T’anhŏ*, the Buddhist Monk]. Source: <http://soombat.org/wwwb/CrazyWWWBoard.cgi?db=article&mode=read&num=524&page=1&ftype=6&fval=&backdepth=1> (accessed August 30, 2013).

grow into the character of Jesus is the most important work of a missionary, and the kingdom of God expands in the local community as the missionary undergoes such change.”<sup>81</sup> These changes, however, will not happen unless evangelists and their sending churches become aware of their own, *partial* understanding of God and the truth (1 Cor 13:9, 12) and elements of blindness within themselves (John 9:39-41). This indicates the need of “the movement from thinking and talking about ‘them’ to thinking and talking in some way about ‘us.’”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, friendship-based *kil* mission entails a good measure of self-reflection and self-transformation.

It needs to be noted that the *kil* missional goal, mutual transformation, goes deeper than religious or theological ‘*tolerance*.’ To be sure, *kil* missiology includes religious *tolerance* insofar as it rejects all forms of violence. However, it goes beyond mere *tolerance*; if it pursued only *tolerance*, there would not be any need of mission. Moreover, there is a danger in the talk and practice of religious *tolerance*: by just letting others have their way while rigidly maintaining one’s own positions, covert pride and indifference toward others may be perpetuated; also, latent may be the desire to see others change and eventually become like oneself.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, *kil* missiology moves from religious *tolerance* to religious ‘nomadism.’ A nomadic walk expects to meet with new people and learn from them as well as humbly imparting something precious to them. Mutual transformation or “deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other,” to use the words of the Baar Statement of WCC, is the ideal goal for religious nomads.<sup>84</sup>

It is in fact for the sake of this mutual transformation that mission should continue. Sin Yöng-bok writes a two-sentence poem: “Covenant flows like river; encounters will bloom like flowers.”<sup>85</sup> I read in this saying a hope, founded on the

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<sup>81</sup> Yi Yong-gyu, 내려 놓음 [*Laying It Down*] (Seoul: Kyujang, 2006), 191.

<sup>82</sup> Robinson views that interfaith dialogue should include such movement. Bob Robinson, “Inter-faith Dialogue Table,” 42.

<sup>83</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Discussions*, 232. Sin calls *tolerance* a ‘logic of hidden power’ and ‘generosity of the powerful’; it is not ‘deconstruction of self’ or ‘nomadism.’

<sup>84</sup> The Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality.

<sup>85</sup> Yi Süng-hyök and Chang Chi-suk, eds., *Sin Yöng-bok’s Short Essays*, 127.

good will of God which has run through all human history, and all the beautiful encounters that occur as people walk along the 'river' of God's covenant. The short poem seems to contain the essence of *kil* missiology which bases itself on the divine providence of salvation and emphasizes dialogue, dialogue that listens and learns from differences, toward mutual edification and ultimately, mutual transformation.

Another focus of the friendship-based, *kil* mission is *fellowship*; friendship develops through life sharing as well as genuine dialogue. The Johannine Christians' witness to the interconnection between intimacy, mutual knowledge and love is helpful to the present discussion; intimacy occurs through mutual knowledge, and mutual knowledge is a fruit of ongoing, faithful and loving *fellowship* with each other.<sup>86</sup> If we apply this to evangelism, an evangelist who works among people of other religious faiths, should make effort to know the people, through listening to their stories, observing their values, and simply living in their midst. Of equal importance, the evangelist should allow people to know him/her, by opening his/her heart and not hiding his/her weaknesses, struggles or failures. Sin Yöng-bok evaluates that "it is an illusion to claim knowledge of the other with whom we have no loving relationship."<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the end-product of a 'friend' mission—mutual transformation—will be more likely achieved when evangelists open their hearts and enter into the lives of the other.

Last, but not the least, the spirit of Jesus or truth is of high importance to *kil* mission. The missional path to walk with Jesus, and to love the father and other brothers and sisters as Jesus did, surely requires the presence of the resurrected Jesus, the spirit of truth. In this regard, evangelists' dependence on the holy spirit will be deepened, as they decide not to use any form of violence in their mission, "even psychological or social, including the abuse of power in their witness."<sup>88</sup> As the

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<sup>86</sup> See the section, "Knowing Jesus," in Chapter 11.

<sup>87</sup> Sin Yöng-bok, *Lectures*, 174-75.

<sup>88</sup> "Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World" (WCC, 2011). Source: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world> (accessed January 22, 2016); Kirsteen Kim, "God of Life: Evangelism Today," *International Review of Mission* (2014): 91.

mission of Jesus the *kil* is based on trust in the father, and the activity of the holy spirit is “beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations, as ‘the wind blows where it wills’ (John 3:8),” evangelists should regularly pray that the father’s will be done.<sup>89</sup> As they work and pray *with and in the spirit of Jesus*, they await the ‘fruit’ of their work “in patience, hope and expectancy.”<sup>90</sup> Above all, *kil* evangelists will continue to deepen their desire to love and trust the father, even if they do not see the fruits of their labour in their lifetime, which is a life lesson from the Johannine Jesus.

Han Chong-ho, pastor and ex-editor-in-chief of *Kidokgyo Sasang (Christian Thought)*, contends that “a theology which cannot give hope to the most despaired is ultimately meaningless.”<sup>91</sup> Recalling that Jesus raised people out of deep despair, Han wonders whether the present Korean church is a place open only to those who already can stand by themselves.<sup>92</sup> I will let the new, Korean *kil* theological reflections submitted here stand trial to Han’s words; they will be tried and tested by the marginalized and hopeless in society.

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<sup>89</sup> The Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality.

<sup>90</sup> The Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality.

<sup>91</sup> Han Chong-ho, *밀실에 갇힌 예수 [Jesus Who Is Trapped in a Secret Room]* (Seoul: Kkotjari, 2012), 225.

<sup>92</sup> Han Chong-ho, *Jesus Who Is Trapped in a Secret Room*, 225.

## CONCLUSION

### Restatement of Aims

The present study was born in the context of two concerns in relation to the predominant exclusivism within Korean Protestantism (KP): the first pertains to often aggressive and occasionally violent, exclusivist behaviours that emerged within KP in recent decades, resulting in equally aggressive, anti-KP reactions among Korean citizens; second, the lack of both awareness and growth of distinctly Korean theological expressions and biblical understanding within KP.

This thesis seeks a Korean re-reading of John 14:6 where Jesus is reported as saying, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This biblical passage was selected because of its frequency in use as an isolated text to argue for exclusive, Christian salvation—“Jesus is *the only* way to the salvation of God”—over against Korean traditional religions. In addition, the Korean word ‘*kil*,’ which is the translation of the word ‘way’ in the passage, is a common and friendly term with deeply philosophical, religious and literary undertones, which promised to be an effective linguistic tool for a Korean hermeneutic. As the thesis has unfolded, it has also emerged that a family-related word, ‘the father,’ in the passage probably speaks deeply to the Confucian-based Korean mindset of the thesis writer.

The author believes that KP’s present, popular reading of the passage is not through a distinctly Korean ‘lens,’ suspecting that a more Korean, biblical reading of the passage is possible, and also that the new reading will challenge the prevalent reading that substantiates the dominant theological exclusivism within KP. The thesis envisions making a positive contribution to Johannine scholarship, through its distinctive Korean interpretation, as well as to global theological understanding, through the Korean theological—Christological, soteriological and missiological—understandings and expressions that emerge from the new reading. The scope and delimitation of the thesis evolved from its pursuit of this new Korean reading; the thesis has a particular focus on the exclusivity theme in the passage, eschewing an

exhaustive exegetical work of the Johannine text. Hence, the aim of the thesis: “A Distinctly Korean Re-Reading of John 14:6: Jesus Christ Is the *Kil* (‘Way’) to the Father.”

### **Methodology**

The thesis goal being “a *distinctly Korean* re-reading of John 14:6,” it was crucial to establish the meaning of ‘distinctly Korean,’ as it was used in this thesis. To this end, the literature review critically engages in scholarly disputes about whether present KP is distinctly Korean or not. The affirmation of the present form of KP as a distinctly Korean Christianity is often based on the recognition of dynamic relationship between KP and Korean culture and history. Hence, the presence of Korean church teachings and practices which are (unconsciously) derived from Korea’s traditional religions, indigenous evangelism in the earliest period of KP history, Korea-originated Christian culture such as ‘early morning prayer,’ KP’s nationalism, as well as the ‘success’ of Christianity within Korea, support the contention that KP is a Koreanized religion.

However, the thesis argues that, for Christianity to be distinctly Korean, it requires Korea and Korean people to be the *subject* or host of theology; Koreans should find and experience the *essential and unique biblical message of Jesus Christ* by themselves and express their understanding in distinctly Korean expressions, and ultimately embody the message in such a way that they *form Korean people’s general character*. These are more significant factors in making Christianity in Korea truly Korean than the successful appearance of a large Korean church. Since each of these elements show much deficit in present Korean Protestant churches, the thesis argues for the need of a *distinctly Korean*, re-reading of familiar biblical texts, such as John 14:6.

I present a methodology for a distinctly Korean hermeneutic with three-fold, interrelated methodological focuses, namely, Jesus-centred, spirit-centred and Korea-centred. To be Jesus-centred means to have priorities such as: ‘meeting’ with Jesus, Jesus-centred reading of the Bible, understanding of implications of the culturally-formed human person of Jesus Christ, holistic view of Jesus by interpreting his words in the light of his actions and lifestyle, and learning from Jesus’ own

apparent hermeneutical method. Relying on the work of God's spirit or the spirit of truth, an originally-Korean, scriptural reading method which focuses on meditation and ongoing cultivation of heart—the heart seeking God's will and salvation—typifies spirit-centred reading. Finally, growing in confidence in and knowledge about whatever is Korean (such as history, religions, folk tales), discerning the questions that arise from Korean minds, interpreting the life experiences of Korean people, and taking the liberty to express findings not only in distinctly Korean words and idioms but in Korean writing style, will all contribute to the making of a Korea-centred hermeneutic. From this methodology, a new Korean reading emerges, wherein the Korean reader assumes the status and role of a host, exercising the freedom to read Jesus, not bound by any other existing 'portraits' or readings of Jesus. The reading also takes appropriately critical distance from aspects of Western hermeneutical method on the one hand, and, on the other, re-formulates the Western-born, dogmatic and exclusivist reading of John 14:6 to which much of KP adheres.

The actual Korean hermeneutical endeavour of John 14:6 consists of five individual readings: (a) literary-critical, in its immediate context (John 13:33-14:11); (b) through the lens of a memoir; (c) employing the Korean word, *kil* or path; (d) looking at Jesus' major teachings and mission, with a specific question about exclusivist message within the passage; (e) seeking essential soteriological components in the whole Gospel of John.

It is perhaps worth noting that I have come to better understand Koreanness through the writing process itself. As I have pointed out on several occasions in the thesis, the task of explaining logically and systematically is not a natural forte of Korean people;<sup>1</sup> they typically find it easier to see intertextuality among diverse texts, and their writings are more descriptive than analytical or syncretical. Nonetheless, the thesis writer's understanding had to be explained in a logic and system that is

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<sup>1</sup> Ninian Smart considers that doctrine is "an attempt to give system, clarity, and intellectual power" to expound the reality that each religious tradition has perceived. Smart further notes that "the world religions owe some of their living power to their success in presenting a total picture of reality, through a coherent system of doctrines." Ninian Smart, *Religious Experience Of Mankind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 19. However, as I have argued in this thesis (Chapter 7), *tao*-logy does not have the same degree of *system and clarity* that Western theology has; those in Taoist tradition are less interested in giving "system, clarity, and intellectual power" to their beliefs than their Western cohorts.

accessible to Western academia. As a Korean thesis writer, I not only found it burdensome but also disconcerting and uncomfortable, as if putting on clothing that does not fit. I report, in addition, that various phenomena in this thesis writing style—repeated use of passive sentences, frequency of metaphoric and even ‘vague’ expressions along with personification, and conditional phrases placed at the beginning of the sentence—all reflect the Korean mother-tongue influence.

### **Summary of the Findings**

What then is the new Korean reading of John 14:6? What content does this new reading have? The literary-critical reading, which considers the literary context in which the saying is situated—Jesus’ impending departure/death and his disciples’ growing anxiety and fear—reads that the passage was a *pastoral* message for the then-disciples to focus on the *person* Jesus who manifested a union with his father God, and to maintain the *intimate relationship* with the father *through* Jesus. The second half of John 14:6—“no one comes to the father except through me”—is read as a parallelistic phrase which expands, reinforces and completes the previous saying, “I am the way,” with an emphasis on union with Jesus, walking as Jesus walked. The thesis rephrases the Johannine passage as: *if you walk my way, you will come to the father; if you do not abide in me, you cannot have eternal life*. Evaluation of other religions or an intention to exclude the adherents of other religious faiths from the path of salvation is beyond the scope of the saying.

A further reading through the lens of memoir finds that the word, ‘way,’ in the passage, functioned as a highly effective, ongoing reminder of Jesus’ holistic life to the Johannine Christians, a persecuted minority. In retrospect, the disciples came to see that the truth and meaning about matters of suffering and death of the righteous were embedded in the (eternal) life of Jesus, and that Jesus was sufficiently “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Followers of Jesus—the ‘way’—are beneficiaries and keepers of an alternative reality—eternal life—which they found in Jesus. The ‘way’ in the biblical tradition, which is inherently associated with ‘walking,’ also created a necessity for believers to continue to walk/live as Jesus walked/lived.

Read through the Korean *kil* or path, Jesus’ ordinary and holistic human life, which in general has received less attention compared to his ‘unique’ death and

resurrection, takes on a new significance. Jesus emerges as a person who became a new *kil* that would lead its walkers to salvation or eternal life, because he was faithful and obedient to the way and truth of God his father until he ‘bled.’ Evoking images associated with ancient *kil* or path, *kil* Jesus reminds Korean Christians that (eternal) life is a pilgrimage, steady journey, and offers himself as a trustworthy, encouraging and compassionate walking companion. The archetypal Korean longing for ‘return’ readily empathizes with Jesus’ salvific notion of returning to the *father* God. This longing should encourage walkers of the *kil* (of Jesus) to practice a more radical inclusivity, endeavouring to maintain a faithful and loving relationship with other travellers, that is, all other children of the same father.

Revisiting the passage from within a wider context—Jesus’ major teachings, mission and lifestyle—Jesus passionately taught people about the generosity and inclusivity of the love and mercy of the father God, and even embodied this character of God in his life and mission in a radical manner. Hence, a conclusion: the Christian exclusivist claim in relation to the destiny of people of other religious faiths *based on John 14:6* is at least *a misplaced argument and, moreover, an act of injustice to the speaker.*

The review of six other soteriological phrases within the same gospel—eating Jesus’ flesh, believing in Jesus, having life to the full, abiding in Jesus, becoming one with Jesus, and knowing Jesus—supports the thesis’ previously-explored, four perspectives of John 14:6 by affirming ‘union with Jesus’ as the essential theme of abundant and eternal life. In a typical Johannine, ‘overlexicalizing’ and circular linguistic fashion, these six phrases, along with others, unanimously encourage believers of Jesus to seek unity with Jesus.

Having approached John 14:6 five times, each time through a different lens, a central message of the passage emerges: *life in a close union with the living Jesus is eternal life, life united with the father God who is eternal.* The perlocutionary effect of this particular speech (John 14:6), which anticipates the hearer’s *response*, requires a certain action from receivers of the saying: walking as Jesus walked, for the then-disciples two millennia ago and also for the modern-day followers of *kil* Jesus. To this end, both the Johannine Gospel itself and a Korean reading of the same gospel witness to the critical importance of the spirit of truth and of Jesus.

One of the additional findings that emerges in the Korean re-reading of John 14:6 (Part IV) is that this reading is congruent with a perceived reception of the passage by Jesus' contemporaries. In other words, *a more indigenously-Korean theological reading of John 14:6 is more grounded in the biblical tradition* than KP's present, popular reading of the same is. This result is primarily the fruit of an anthropological approach to the passage, examining some major sociolinguistic concepts associated with both the 'way' in biblical tradition and the 'to' (way) in Taoist/East-Asian tradition (Part III). Both the biblical 'way' and the Taoist 'to' support and affirm the thesis (Korean) reading of John 14:6 ("Jesus is the *kil* to the father"). This is because they all share several essential aspects of salvation which are related to the mode of walking: walking (embodiment), sojourning, faithful relationship with companion(s), and repeated returning (of one's heart) to the eternal home, father, One, or God, for instance. The biblical 'way,' the Taoist 'to' and the Korean '*kil*' all offer images of salvation that are perhaps familiar to many: 'walking with God/Jesus' and 'returning journey to eternal home.' Through this, an important, distinctly Korean framework—*kil*—is established as a legitimate and effective hermeneutical tool, as in the case of the Taoist '*to*.'

Out of this multi-faceted, new Korean reading of Jesus' being the *kil* to the father emerge some new focuses and elements in Christology, soteriology and missiology. Christologically, Jesus is a human person who became a new *kil* to the father and eternal life. Jesus who knows the *kil* to the father becomes a trustworthy guide, and empathetic and supportive companion on the *kil*. Based on the Johannine Jesus' intimate relationship and functional unity with his father God, Jesus is depicted in familial terms: the best son and eldest brother. Jesus, through his manifestation of a radical inclusivity toward 'the least' in the society and participation in the deepest suffering of the time, emulated his father truthfully; the father's response to this faithful son is the reward of resurrection, a form of eternal life. Jesus' perfect embodiment of (the mercy and truth of) God is none other than the perfect humanity of Jesus, which constitutes his uniqueness. At least to Koreans, Jesus is a person who is fully humanized. The death of Jesus, in this view, is not 'substitutionary' but 'participatory'; this death is a prototype of sacrificial life for whole humanity, a paradigm for a maximum humanization.

The new, *kil* soteriological perspective broadens KP's popular and fairly limited salvation paradigm—forgiveness of sins and entering heaven. The new perspective sees eternal life primarily as an intimate, familial relationship with God, in the symbolic image of filial intimacy with the father God as well as a return journey to the father. Eternal life, whose nature/setting is intimate relationship, is a present reality to believers who participate in Jesus' life. In addition, this salvific paradigm places emphasis upon human feet (actual life), a trustworthy guide (the spirit of Jesus or truth), and awareness of and care for other fellow sojourners. Through the means of filial relational elements such as trust, knowledge, obedience, faithfulness and love, Jesus, the son and apostle ('sent one'), experienced joy and peace, which constitutes a paradigmatic salvation and life eternal. This relational unity with Jesus and God are compatible with the Taoist and Buddhist union with the Ultimate Reality; the traditional Korean religious teaching complements and enriches the Johannine Jesus' notion of eternal life. To *walk* this *kil* that Jesus walked is an answer to an archetypal Korean question, "how shall we live," and to the Korean search to become a fully humanized person.

*Kil* missiology, informed by new *kil* Christological and soteriological insights, holds Jesus' major teachings as the content of mission, and the attitude and lifestyle of Jesus as a foundational model for mission. Influenced by the Johannine Jesus—the 'best son' and 'eldest brother'—the focus of mission in *kil* missiology is revised from 'preaching the gospel' to 'loving the father God and other siblings,' and the role of the evangelist shifts from 'preacher of the word of God to non-Christians' to the 'eldest brother/sister' and the empathetic and supportive 'friend.' This friendship-based mission, in particular, considers genuine dialogue and life sharing as essential for its ultimate goal—*mutual transformation*. Within this missional paradigm, evangelists passionately share their understanding and experience about the strength, hope and reason for life, which they have found in Jesus. It is mandatory that the dialogue partners have equal freedom and right to express their own faith confessions; evangelists will not control main agendas and questions in the dialogue with the other. The major evangelistic question may shift from 'who do you think Jesus is' to 'how much commonality does one's life have with that of Jesus.' Toward mutual transformation, evangelists will rely on the spirit of truth and Jesus.

## Implications of the Findings

These findings immediately yield two, co-related implications. First, a distinctly Korean hermeneutic of a biblical text is achievable. This study, which began over against suspicions about the existence and necessity for an authentically Korean interpretation of biblical texts, concludes by establishing its possibility. Second, KP's present, exclusivist reading of John 14:6 is more informed by a Western Christian theological reading than by a uniquely Korean spiritual resource, considering the significant theological distance between KP's dominant reading and this new reading. This was in fact an assumption of the thesis, and now is confirmed.

These implications offer a few words of suggestion, primarily to many KP members, without excluding other Christian groups. Many within KP would benefit by making an effort to read biblical texts with their own, instinctive understanding about God, human beings and nature. This hermeneutical attitude and work will be, analogically speaking, returning to one's own old parents who gave birth to them but have been neglected, with a renewed heart to appreciate and care for one's parents. When read this way, the unique spiritual 'magnet' inside Korean hearts—their core values and beliefs—may be attracted to certain passages in the Bible, such as was done with *kil* (in John 14:6). Correspondingly, it almost appears as if the entire biblical texts, the four gospels in particular, are 'waiting' to be read by Korean minds.

Also, I suggest that there should be more acknowledgement among Western theologians and biblical scholars of the distance between the popular Western reading of John 14:6 and biblical implications of the 'way,' and also closeness of non-Western/Korean traditional framework of the 'way'/*kil* to the same (as submitted through our work in Part III). If this is appreciated, there would be more Western theologians eager to encourage non-Western Christians to seek earnestly their own, local readings of biblical texts; they may exercise more active 'hospitality' toward non-Western people, being patient with the 'discomfort' caused by the existence of the other or unfamiliar theological 'languages' and, in particular, methodologies preferred by non-Westerners.

### **Significance of the Findings (Research Contribution)**

I will suggest three areas where this research has made a contribution to the wider theological sphere: hermeneutics, contextual theology, and missiological framework. First, as a hermeneutical contribution, this thesis offers an authentic Korean reading of John 14:6 (and, to some degree, of several other passages with soteriological images within the Gospel of John). Of course, the distinctly Korean reading presented in this thesis is not a perfect Korean reading or *the* Korean reading; this reading can certainly be supplemented with different insights and also likely be corrected. Even in its imperfect form, however, it still *is* a distinctly Korean reading. Biblical scholars and theologians, Korean as well as non-Korean, will be able to interact with this new reading, using it as a resource, both for affirmation and critique.

Second, this work contributes to global knowledge about contextual theologies by providing a concrete example of a local reading, an anthropological contextual model at that. In this model, which is categorized as the most radical model, a theologian/exegete approaches biblical texts through a respectful engagement with her own traditional ('non-Christian') human resources. The present study shows that an authentic contextual hermeneutic is not easily formulated without taking such risk. The fruit of the new reading, which this author submits is more biblically-grounded than KP's present, popular reading, proves the worth of such risk. The various methodological focuses used for this Korean contextual reading (Chapter 5), in particular, may be examined by, compared with and applied to other efforts of contextual readings.

The third contribution of this research concerns missiological framework. The *kil* missiological principles, which are biblically-based and also Korean-theologically oriented, will potentially encourage and even guide the efforts of interfaith dialogue. The *kil* missional path, within which the role of an evangelist is that of a road companion or friend, seeks first self-transformation as well as praying for the blessing of the other's transformation. This suggests a potential to mitigate unnecessary conflicts and even dangers in the 'global village' that often arise due to various forms of aggressive evangelistic assertions and practices.

### **Limitations of the Research**

There are various limitations within the present study. A couple of outstanding caveats need to be noted here. First, there is a problem of dealing with Korean Protestantism (KP) and also Western Christianity in an over-generalized manner. The undoubtedly broad spectrum of each tradition has not been fully addressed in this research. I readily acknowledge the diversity within Western theology, in particular, with its multiple voices and paradigms concerning Christological, soteriological and missiological themes. Even within KP, which is a more homogenous group than most other, wider Christian groups, there are individual diversities both in theological understanding and outward expressions of such understanding.

Second, the end product of this study, which was done with a dual intention to listen to Korean spiritual resources as well as Western hermeneutical and theological accomplishment in reading John 14:6, is unlikely to fully represent the depth and width in both traditions. The diversity of Western theological thoughts and hermeneutical achievements could have been discussed in more detail. Perhaps one may see this limitation as something unavoidable, considering the characteristic of the present dissertation—a project of a *distinctly Korean (non-Western) reading of a biblical text in a Western Protestant academic context*. Still, a deeper concern remains, as Ahn Byong-mu mused, “our own thoughts remained underdeveloped” because of so much time spent to understand Western theological thoughts.<sup>2</sup> Ahn’s theological anxiety has often haunted the author of the thesis. However, while acknowledging the still-developing Korean understanding of biblical texts such as John 14:6, some of the essence of distinctly Korean biblical understanding has been presented here.

### **Recommendations for Further Work**

This thesis offered a distinctly Korean reading of John 14:6. This should mean that many other major portions within the Johannine Gospel—Jesus’ offering *water* of eternal life to a Samaritan woman (4:1-42), for instance—are waiting to be read through a distinctly Korean lens. Also, several themes were recognized during the

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<sup>2</sup> See Introduction (Page 12).

research as meriting further investigation (and some even deserving of a separate project). The recommendations for further study include: a comparative study of “eating Jesus’ flesh” (which is one of Johannine Jesus’ salvific expressions embedded in the pericope of John 6:22-59) and Korean, *Tonghak* theological phrases such as *sich’onju* (receiving heaven in one’s body);<sup>3</sup> a comparative study of returning to the father in the Fourth Gospel and becoming one with the Ultimate Reality or *kong*;<sup>4</sup> a hermeneutical theoretical approach to the language of the Johannine persecuted minority, examining the dynamic relationship between the psychological dimension of the Johannine ‘antisociety’ and the features of its apparent ‘antilanguage.’<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Johannine Christians’ dialogical truth-seeking may be compared with Korean *Sŏn/Zen* Buddhist *hwadu* truth-seeking.

Certain areas outside the Johannine Gospel also arose as potential, distinctly Korean theological projects: first, there is potential for Korean theologians to contribute to the truth of God through studying their traditional proverbs, folk stories and songs which have been transmitted orally.<sup>6</sup> Second, working on a hermeneutic of nature is perhaps a proper task for some Korean theologians; the insights they come upon may shed new light on existing discussions about general revelation or theologies of nature.<sup>7</sup> Third, Korean words (both nouns and verbs), other than *kil*, which are packed with theological implications and, at the same time, used commonly among ordinary people, are waiting to be employed as hermeneutical tools.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In addition to various limitations, this study faces a great test: will KP members consider the insights of this study worthy of attention; will they consider this new

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<sup>3</sup> Suggested in the section, “Eating Jesus’ Flesh,” in Chapter 11.

<sup>4</sup> Suggested in the section, “Becoming One with Jesus,” in Chapter 11.

<sup>5</sup> See the section, “The Johannine Community and Its Language,” in Chapter 9.

<sup>6</sup> Suggested in the section, “Self-confidence and self-knowledge,” in Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> See the section, “Honouring Korean people’s life experience,” in Chapter 5.

reading of John 14:6 sufficiently 'biblical'?<sup>8</sup> In reflection, as the thesis seeks a distinctly Korean reading, the author dares to ask questions that implicitly and explicitly challenge some of the essential doctrines held by the 'great tradition' (of the Church)—such as 'Jesus' own salvation'—and offers responses to such questions. Some of the resulting hermeneutical and theological works clearly stand over against the present, popular theological stances held by KP's majority, which understandably might cause considerable suspicion and offence to them. Moreover, many theological developments introduced in this research are still in the stage of tender 'shoots'; these shoots need firstly to survive within KP before they can hopefully enjoy healthy growth.

Hence, the thesis writer is mindful of the *how*—*how* to communicate the new insights gleaned from this project to KP members. It is important to offer some practical recommendations for any Korean Christians, both leaders and lay people, particularly those who might agree with the main points presented in this study and thus desire to communicate these new perspectives to other Koreans. Considering the characteristics of KP—conservative-biblicist and active-evangelistic—I recommend that this communication follow several key principles, namely, pastoral, Bible-based, Jesus-centred, educational, respectful and prayerful. For the present purpose, however, perhaps it may suffice to sum up these recommendations in a single sentence: consider Jesus deeply and follow his *ki*.

80,892 words

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<sup>8</sup> I reported in the introductory part of the thesis that all the theological works which sought an authentic Koreanness were attempted at the margins and not favourably received by mainstream Christianity in Korea.

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A few specific rules observed in this bibliography:

Books and journals written in Korean are cited according to the following rules.

- A. Korean names will appear in the way Koreans use them: the family name before the first name. However, when Korean authors' books are written in English and published overseas, their names will follow the exact way they appear on the books.
- B. Korean books will appear in their original Korean titles which will be followed by their equivalent *English translation*: e.g., 강의 [*Lectures*].
- C. The publishers of Korean books will appear only in English, which is transliterated from Korean.

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## APPENDIX

### THE GREEK TEXT OF JOHN 13:33-14:11

<sup>33</sup>τεκνία, ἔτι μικρὸν μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι: ζητήσετέ με, καὶ καθὼς εἶπον τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὅτι Ὁπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν, καὶ ὑμῖν λέγω ἄρτι. <sup>34</sup>ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους: καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους. <sup>35</sup>ἐν τούτῳ γνώσονται πάντες ὅτι ἐμοὶ μαθηταὶ ἐστε, ἐὰν ἀγάπην ἔχητε ἐν ἀλλήλοις. <sup>36</sup>Λέγει αὐτῷ Σίμων Πέτρος, Κύριε, ποῦ ὑπάγεις; ἀπεκρίθη [αὐτῷ] Ἰησοῦς, Ὁπου ὑπάγω οὐ δύνασαι μοι νῦν ἀκολουθῆσαι, ἀκολουθήσεις δὲ ὕστερον. <sup>37</sup>λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος, Κύριε, διὰ τί οὐ δύναμαί σοι ἀκολουθῆσαι ἄρτι; τὴν ψυχὴν μου ὑπὲρ σοῦ θήσω. <sup>38</sup>ἀποκρίνεται Ἰησοῦς, Τὴν ψυχὴν σου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ θήσεις; ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἀλέκτωρ φωνήσῃ ἕως οὗ ἀρνήσῃ με τρίς. <sup>1</sup>Μὴ παρασέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδιά: πιστεύετε εἰς τὸν θεόν, καὶ εἰς ἐμὲ πιστεύετε. <sup>2</sup>ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου μοναὶ πολλαὶ εἰσιν: εἰ δὲ μή, εἶπον ἂν ὑμῖν ὅτι πορεύομαι ἐτοιμάσαι τόπον ὑμῖν; <sup>3</sup>καὶ ἐὰν πορευθῶ καὶ ἐτοιμάσω τόπον ὑμῖν, πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλήμψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἐμαυτόν, ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε. <sup>4</sup>καὶ ὅπου [ἐγὼ] ὑπάγω οἴδατε τὴν ὁδόν. <sup>5</sup>Λέγει αὐτῷ Θωμᾶς, Κύριε, οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ὑπάγεις: πῶς δύναμεθα τὴν ὁδὸν εἰδέναι; <sup>6</sup>λέγει αὐτῷ [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ: οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι' ἐμοῦ. <sup>7</sup>εἰ ἐγνώκατέ με, καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου γνώσεσθε: καὶ ἀπ' ἄρτι γινώσκετε αὐτὸν καὶ ἐωράκατε αὐτόν. <sup>8</sup>λέγει αὐτῷ Φίλιππος, Κύριε, δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν πατέρα, καὶ ἀρκεῖ ἡμῖν. <sup>9</sup>λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Τοσούτῳ χρόνῳ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωκάς με, Φίλιππε; ὁ ἐωρακὼς ἐμὲ ἐώρακεν τὸν πατέρα: πῶς σὺ λέγεις, Δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν πατέρα; <sup>10</sup>οὐ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐστίν; τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ οὐ λαλῶ: ὁ δὲ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων ποιεῖ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ. <sup>11</sup>πιστεύετε μοι ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοὶ: εἰ δὲ μή, διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε. (John 13:33-14:11, *The Greek New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. United Bible Societies, 2014).