

"The Missionary Spirit of the Korean Church" (Revised, 2019.12.28.)

Originally presented at the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation & Celebration,

Nakano Sun Plaza, Tokyo, May 11-14, 2010,

Rev. Prof. Kyo Seong AHN

Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary;

Presbyterian Church of Korea

I. Introduction

In the beginning of the last century, the Korean Church was frequently said to be a miracle of mission. Indeed, it was mainly through missionary reports that Korea began to be known world-widely.¹ Over the last century, the exponential growth of the Korean Church extended to it another credit, a miracle of the church. Furthermore, since the last quarter of the last century, the Korean Church emerged as one of the main force of the world missionary movement, obtaining still another credit, a miracle of mission; obviously, in this case, the Korean Church was the subject, not the object, of mission. In short, the Korean Church continued to transform itself from a fast-growing mission church to a massively expanding national church and then to a startlingly developing missionary (missional) church.² To be frank, the Korean Church was, has been and is a missionary church. This article aims to elucidate the missionary spirit of the Korean Church, on the one hand, and to share its historical legacies with other churches, on the other.

¹ It was the 1900 New York Ecumenical Missionary Conference that the Korean Church began to be a topic of discussion, especially in relation to self-support. See Ecumenical Missionary Conference New York, 1900, *Report of the Ecumenical Missionary Conference on Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches, April 21 to May 1, Vol. I.* (London; New York: Religious Tract Society; American Tract Society, 1900), 534-37; *Vol. II.*, 289-324, esp., 301-9.

² It is necessary to note that nowadays the word of 'missional' tends to be preferably used to that of 'missionary', which is a loaded word.

II. The history of the missionary movement of the Korean Church

1. Before the opening of Korea to the world³

At the end of the nineteenth century when Christian (Protestant) mission to Korea began, it was the policy of isolation of the Korean Yi Dynasty government that predisposed the future of the Korean Church as well as its missionary movement. Due to this policy, mission to Korea could not be implemented in a normal way in which the commencement of the church came with the arrival of missionaries. Circumstances dictated that missionaries who planned to reach out to Korea, mostly working in China and Japan at the time, were to find more imaginative methods: some attempted to land on the Korean Peninsula, even at their own risk, distributing copies of the Chinese Bible to the Koreans; and others tried to mobilize the Koreans for mission who occasionally came out of the Korean Peninsula for various reasons such as international trade. In Manchuria, John Ross, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary originally sent for China, together with the Koreans, succeeded in translating the Bible into the Korean language, and a number of Korean Christians devoted themselves to distributing the Bible and building up Christian communities within and without the Korean border. Thus, the first Korean church started as an overseas Korean community church and also established the tradition of being a self-evangelizing church. In other words, the Korean Christians were accustomed to evangelizing their own compatriots, wherever they were.

Meanwhile, in Japan, a Korean aristocrat called Yi Su-Jeong (or Soo Jung Lee)⁴ who was baptized by an American Presbyterian missionary took the lead in the Christian movement.⁵

³ For the more detailed information regarding sections 1 and 2, see Kyo Seong Ahn, "Korea as an Early Missionary Center: Korean Missionaries Around 1910 in Northeast Asia and Beyond", Klaus Koschorke & Adrian Hermann, eds., *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 99-110.

⁴ His name is 'Rijutei' in Japanese, by which he was more widely known.

⁵ Kyo Seong Ahn, "Mission in Unity: An Investigation into the Question of Unity As It Has Arisen in the Presbyterian Church of Korea and Its World Mission" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2008), 11.

Besides taking leadership in translation of the Bible, evangelism and church planting, he appealed to American churches for the evangelization of Korea, which was known as the 'Korean Macedonian Call.'⁶ Although his precarious small Christian community mainly comprised of the higher echelons of society and short-lived, it revived in the beginning of the twentieth century, which finally grew into the Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ), the first and only interdenominational Korean church.

2. From the opening of Korea to the Liberation

With the opening of Korea to the world, especially to the West, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, missionaries flocked to Korea. They could utilize the legacy of Christian mission done before the opening of Korea such as the Bible and self-evangelized Korean Christians.⁷ Only after a decade of eventful but unprofitable years, they could make a real breakthrough in their ministry.⁸ However, it was the Korean Christians who attained the substantial growth of the Korean Church, while missionaries attempted to devise the ecclesiastical structure.⁹ Martha Huntley, a former missionary to Korea, even argues that the inexperience of the first generation of missionaries could partially save them from paternalism and promote the participation of national Christians in ministry.¹⁰ She maintains that:

I cannot speak for later generations of missionaries, but the pioneers worked in tandem

⁶ Rijutei, "Rijutei to the Christians of America, Greeting", *The Missionary Review* (Mar. 1884), 145-46.

⁷ We may add one more thing, that is, pre-understanding of Christianity through the Korean Catholic Church. See Kyo Seong Ahn, "The Genesis of World Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Korea" (Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004), 15.

⁸ Arthur J. Brown, "A Memoir dated October 23, 1916" in Insoo Kim, ed. & tr., *Rev. Underwood's Missionary Letters, 1885-1916* (Seoul: Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, 2002), 1189.

⁹ Kyo Seong Ahn, "The Genesis of World Mission", 19.

¹⁰ Ibid.

with Koreans from the beginning. They were simply too young and too green to be paternalistic; it was the Koreans who taught their young missionary teachers. Even before the first Protestant missionary arrived, there was a church in Korea in the sense of a century of Catholic witness and martyrdom, in individual Korean believers who had accepted the faith in Manchuria and Japan, and in the Holy Spirit long at work. While the missionaries were catalysts and in some cases enablers, the Koreans were the primary agents of evangelism. Koreans participated in all aspects of the work, laboring beside the missionaries in writing the Bible, compiling hymnals, translating textbooks, teaching classes, caring for the ill, building the church building, preaching the Word and making the rules. As in the case of women missionaries, Korean church leaders were underpaid and underacknowledged, but they were valued and very real partners in the mission enterprise.¹¹

As has been clarified from the quotation, most scholars agree that for the growth of the Korean Church, there were several reasons such as *preparatio evangelica*, missionaries' effort, and nationals' initiative.¹² In this sense, it can be said that the Korean Christians were seasoned evangelists who were ready to evangelize.

Considering its remarkable success in self-propagation and self-support, the result that the Korean Church could enjoy self-government at a relatively early date was a foregone conclusion. With the establishment of the national church, the Korean Church began its missionary work in various ways: firstly, for the Koreans in the uttermost part of Korea; secondly, for the Korean diasporas in China (esp., Manchuria), Japan, Russia (esp., Maritime Province), the U.S.A. (esp., the Hawaii Islands), and even Mexico; and lastly, even for foreigners in a neighboring country, that is, China. Using new missiological terminology, these diverse works can be classified as national saturation mission, diaspora mission, and cross-cultural mission.

The Korean Presbyterian Church (The Presbyterian Church of Korea, PCK), the largest church in Korea, was a key player of the missionary movement in the period under consideration. It was involved in all of the three types of mission, and led the movement. On the other hand, the

¹¹ Martha Huntley, *To Start a Work: The Foundations of Protestant Mission in Korea, 1884-1919* (Seoul: Publishing House, The Presbyterian Church of Korea, 1987), xi-xii.

¹² Kyo Seong Ahn, "The Genesis of World Mission", 15.

Church of Christ in Korea (a primordial Baptist Church), and the Korean Methodist churches also participated mainly in the first and second types of mission.

Take the case of the PCK. With the establishment of the All-National Presbytery in 1907, it began its first official missionary ministry, Mission to the Jeju Island, then better known as Quelpart.¹³ In the ensuing years, it gradually expanded its diaspora mission to the overseas Koreans, which some expatriate missionaries viewed as the expansion of domestic mission.¹⁴ With the establishment of the General Assembly in 1912, it commenced its first cross-cultural missionary ministry, Shandong Mission, in China.¹⁵ Thus, the Korean Church transformed itself from a self-evangelizing church to a self-missionizing church.¹⁶ How could it be?

Scholars attempted to uncover the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. First, missionaries worked in Korea were enthusiastic for educating the Koreans into mission. Seong Hwan Kim maintains that American Presbyterian missionaries taught and became a role-model for

¹³ Kyo Seong Ahn, "Hanguk Gyohoe Seongyoui Giwone Gwanhan Sogo: Jeju Seongyowa Igipung Seongyousai Saryereul Jungsimeuro [Some Reflections on the Question of the Origin of the world Mission of the Korean Church: A Case Study of Jeju Mission of Rev. Lee Kipoong]", *Korea Missions Quarterly* 9/1 (31) (Autumn, 2009): 81-93. (Korean)

¹⁴ Kyo Seong Ahn, "Hangukui Diaspora Sinhak Baljeone Gwanhan Han Sogo [A Study on the Development of Diaspora Theology in Korea]", *Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology* 46/2 (6, 2014): 89-113 (Korean); "Hanguk Gyohoeui Diaspora Jeongchaeg Hoegowa Jeonmang [The Retrospect and Prospect of the Diaspora Policy of the Korean Church]" (Unpublished paper presented at the Memorial Conference to Mark the Centennial of the Maritime Province Mission, Russia, Luce Center, Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, April 20, 2010), 21-34. (Korean)

¹⁵ Kyo Seong Ahn, "Hanguk Gyohoe Choechoui Tamunhwagwon Seongyo, Sandong Seongyoui Yeoksajeok Uiui [The Historical Significance of Shandong Mission, the First Cross-cultural Mission of the Korean Church]", *Korea Missions Quarterly* 9/2 (32) (Winter, 2009): 86-100. (Korean)

¹⁶ Similarly, William D. Taylor suggests five "selves" of the church, adding self-theologizing and self-missionizing to the historic three "selves", self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. See his "From Iguassu to the Reflective Practitioners of the Global Family of Christ", William D. Taylor, ed., *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 6.

world mission. He also argues that the American Presbyterian missionaries equipped the Korean Church for world mission, using various means. In particular, according to him, there is evidence that the curriculum of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in the early twentieth century had already included courses relating to world mission.¹⁷ Second, as noted above, the Korean Church was from the very beginning a self-evangelizing church, and as meeting the need of ever-increasing Korean diasporas, it gradually widened the scope of evangelization, and finally started its cross-cultural ministry. Third, like other national churches, the Korean Church regarded as an affirmation of the nationalistic spirit its participation in world mission, which meant that it became one of sending churches.¹⁸

What then do these initial missionary efforts of the PCK tell us? What historical legacies of the Korean missionary movement challenge other churches?¹⁹ The first is that the rise of a missionary spirit was a way to affirm ecclesiastical independence. At the same time, this was closely related to the above-mentioned affirmation of the nationalistic spirit.²⁰ For instance, the

¹⁷ Seong Hwan Kim, "Joseongyohoeui Haeoeseongyo Yeoksawa Seongyodongin [The History of the Foreign Mission of the Joseon (Korean) Church and Its Motivation]" (Unpublished paper presented at the Tokyo 2010 Pre-consultation, Bangju Church, Seoul, March 20, 2010), 3. (Korean) This paper is based on his Ph.D. Dissertation. See his "Ju Joseon Migukjangrogyoseongyosadeuli Hangukgyohoeui Haeoeseongyosayeoke Ggichin Yeonghyang [The Influence of the American Presbyterian Missionaries Working in Korea on the Foreign Missionary Ministry of the Korean Church]" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Seoul Gidog University, 2008) (Korean); Chang Young Kim, "The Contributions of the North American Presbyterian Missions to the Missionary Movement of the Korean Presbyterian Church, 1890-1939: A Historical Study" (Unpublished D.Miss. Dissertation, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, 1997).

¹⁸ Kyo Seong Ahn, "The Beginning of the World Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the 'Great Revival' in 1907" (Unpublished paper presented at the 2006 Luce Conference of Korean Christianity entitled "The Korean Great Revival Movement in 1903-1908," April 19, 2006, UCLA), 41-48.

¹⁹ Although revised and enlarged, the points in the following paragraphs are based on my "The Genesis of World Mission", 25-40, and "Mission in Unity", 64-73.

²⁰ For instance, the Korean Presbyterian Church (the PCK) was listed in two parts of the report of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System (ARCPS, the precedent of the World Communion of the Reformed Churches, WCRC). On the one hand, ecclesiastically, it was

Rev. Gil Seon-Ju (or Kil Sun Chu) stated that:

It is very difficult, in many respects, for the Korean Church to send missionaries to China. However, although we lost our nation, it is the most significant thing for us to be one of the nations doing world mission, by becoming a church to send overseas missionaries... In doing so, we can practice our faith, obeying the order of the Lord that "You have freely received, so freely give." We simply do our best to accomplish this.²¹

The second is that the missionary work was a ministry of the whole church or a church-initiated mission. The leitmotif of the church-initiated mission runs through the history of the Korean missionary movement, and this is why Koreans must be careful when they endeavor to learn lessons from the history of the Western missionary movement in which interdenominational missionary societies, not denominational mission boards, have played a main role. As regards the Korean missionary movement, interdenominational missionary societies were not vigorous enough in their work until the last quarter of the twentieth century. The third is that the missionary work was carried out as a way of ecumenical mission (in a broader sense). For instance, Shandong Mission was planned and implemented based on consensus among various parties concerned such as the Korean Church, the Chinese Church, and the American Presbyterian Missions in China and Korea.²² The fourth is the legacy of teamwork, although this legacy has not been faithfully

placed under the section of Japan since Korea was then a colony of the Japanese empire. On the other, in terms of mission, it was separately placed under the section of sending churches. See J.R. Fleming, ed., *Proceedings of the Twelfth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System, Held at Cardiff, 1925* (Edinburgh: Office of the Alliance, 1926), 327, 337.

²¹ Jin-Gyeong Gil, *Yeonggye Gil Seon-Ju [Kil Sun Chu]* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1980), 243, my translation. (Korean) See In Soo Kim, *Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean Nationalism, 1885-1920: A Study of the Contributions of Horace G. Underwood and Sun Chu Kil* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 138.

²² In the similar vein, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., included the case of Shandong Mission in the list of ecumenical mission in the report of the Lake Mohonk Conference on World Mission, which became a landmark event of the so-called ecumenical mission. See *Report of the*

followed in the missionary work of the post-liberation period. The last but not least is that the missionary work was done by the powerless, in this case, the colonized, not the colonists. Facing adverse circumstances such as poverty and colonization, the Korean Church dared to repay the debt of God's grace in sharing the Gospel with its neighboring country, China. Such indefatigable missionary spirit can be a model for other non-Western churches, which suffer from the false idea of mission that only the strong and the rich should and could do mission.

3. From the Liberation to the 1970s

In the aftermath of the Liberation, the Korean Church devoted itself to the reconstruction of the church and world mission. In spite of the post-liberation and post-bellum devastation, the Korean Church never forgot to obey the Great Commission, although it could do mission only in a limited capacity at the time. In particular, the PCK decided to resume world mission ministry at its first reconstructed General Assembly. In short, for the PCK, if there was no reconstruction of mission, there was no reconstruction of the church. However, in what context was the Korean Church to do mission?

In the post-colonization period, national churches had to face the demand of the independence of nation, the church, and even mission. New circumstances exacted a new way of doing mission, and it is against this historical backdrop that the concept of ecumenical mission emerged. The message of the Lake Mohonk Conference aptly summarizes this new concept of mission as follows.

In our consultation, as we have planned for the future, we have had borne in upon us this great truth: the privilege of a sending mission belongs to every Church, irrespective of nationality, culture or financial ability. Therefore, we call upon Churches everywhere to share both in carrying the Gospel across frontiers and in welcoming fraternal workers from other Churches to help win their own peoples to Christ. We are committed to ecumenical mission... We have faced the limitations of our relationships with each other

World Consultation of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Held at Mountain House, Lake Mohonk, New York -22 April-1 May, 1956 (mimeographed), 20-21.

and with other communions. In some areas the Church has as yet little missionary vision. Many Churches are only beginning to explore the way to integrate all missionary endeavor into the Church, both local and ecumenical. The danger that isolationism and separatism will impede united action has concerned us. But we firmly believe that, with the Holy Spirit guiding the Churches, nothing can deter us from fulfilling together our world Christian mission... Our sensitivity to the need of peoples is not keeping pace with their rising demand for justice, equality, and brotherhood. For this reason, we reject as inadequate any concept of ecumenicity which expresses itself solely in terms of organization. Ecumenical mission is the whole Church in the whole world releasing its whole life in dynamic mission, with the purpose of entering directly and vitally into an encounter with the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Too long the Church has ignored His command to be one in Him, that the world may believe. In the urgency of our time it dare do so no longer.²³

As the quotation clarifies, the concept of ecumenical mission asks a new perspective of mission. First, it asks who does mission: churches, not missions. Second, it solicits ecumenical relations

²³ "A Message from the Consultation on Ecumenical Mission under the Auspices of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.," *Report of the World Mission*, 16. For ecumenical mission, see John Smith, *From Colonialism to World Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Geneva Press, 1982); Donald Black, *Merging Mission and Unity: A History of the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations* (Philadelphia: The Geneva Press, 1986); Daniel J. Adams, "The Biblical Basis for Mission, 1930-1980," Martin E. Marty, ed., *Missions and Ecumenical Expressions* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), 82-101 (This article was originally carried in *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 59:2 [Summer, 1981]: 161-77); William R. Hogg, *New Day Dawning* (New York: World Horizons, 1957). See also William R. Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth-Century Background* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1952), esp., 332-42; International Missionary Council, *Missions under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953); Ronald K. Orchard, ed., *The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, 28th December, 1957 to 8th January, 1958, Selected Papers, with an Essay on the Role of the I.M.C.* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1958), esp., 185-240.

between churches, as a prerequisite for doing mission. Third, it requests the widening of the scope of mission, which means that you should give the world, not merely souls, serious consideration. It was in this context that new missiological jargons such as fraternal workers emerged.

Asian churches were particularly enthusiastic about the concept of ecumenical mission. It is worth quoting how the Asian churches understood this new concept.

Under God, there has come to the churches of Asia a new understanding of the missionary nature of the Church and a new conviction about their privilege and responsibility within the Church's mission. This is the result of many factors. First, many sons and daughters of the churches in Asia have heard and responded to the call to missionary work outside their own lands. Secondly, by this very fact that the churches have been constrained to face up to their own responsibility as churches, to their share in the missionary calling. Also contributing to this new awareness has been the experience of the churches in Asia as they moved from the status of 'mission' to that of 'church', and from the arrangement of mission side by side with church to that of 'church in mission'.²⁴

It is not surprising, however, that not all missions and churches swept along on the tide of ecumenical mission. Indeed, the case was quite opposite. The conventional concept of world mission showed its staying power, and even the evangelicals attempted to turn the tables on the conciliar ecumenicals, by establishing an evangelical ecumenical network. It is against this historical background that the Berlin and Lausanne Congress came into being in 1966 and 1974, respectively.²⁵ How, then, did the Korean Church do mission during the period under

²⁴ "Asian Missions", *The International Review of Missions* 211 (July, 1964): 318-27; quotation, 318.

²⁵ See Carl F.H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, eds., *One Race, One Gospel, One Task: World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin 1966, Official Reference Volumes: Papers and Reports, Vols. I & II* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967); J.D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland: Official Reference Volume: Papers and Responses* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975); John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant- An Exposition and Commentary, Lausanne Occasional Papers 3* (Wheaton: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1975); W. Stanley Mooneyham, ed., *Christ Seeks Asia: Official*

consideration?

Although doing mission in the context of ecumenical mission, the Korean Church failed to fully understand the implication of ecumenical mission. The reason is that the Korean Church, particularly the PCK, was divided over the issue of ecumenism, and most of the Korean churches detached themselves from the ecumenical movement, especially the World Council of Churches (WCC). On the other hand, the Korean Church began to side with the new evangelical missionary movement such as the above-mentioned Berlin and Lausanne Congress.

Scholars in general deem that for the Korean missionary movement the period under consideration was a period of depression or stagnation. In terms of number and scale, it may be said so. It must be remembered, however, that missionary works done during this period were of very great significance. In these years, the PCK (the PCK Tonghap, after the church division in 1959) once again played a main role of the missionary movement.²⁶ The reason is that except for the PCK Tonghap, most of the Korean Presbyterian churches struggled to recover from the birth pangs of new denominations. Meanwhile, the Korean Methodist Church (KMC) began to participate in mission in 1961, first in an indirect way in which the KMC authorized missionaries to Pakistan sent by an affiliated mission school called Ewha Women's University. Other Korean churches were busy surviving the post-bellum devastation.

Take the case of the PCK again. First, in the aftermath of the Korean War, the PCK sent its missionaries to Thailand in 1955. At first, the PCK planned to send missionaries to Indonesia according to the conventional concept of mission. How, then, was the plan changed? The years of the 1950s saw the birth of numerous ecumenical bodies such as the Asian Council of Ecumenical Mission (ACEM) and the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC, the precedent of the Christian Conference of Asia, CCA).²⁷ It was at the ACEM meeting that the PCK decided to send

Reference Volume: Asia-South Pacific Congress on Evangelism, Singapore, 1968 (Hong Kong: Rock House, 1969).

²⁶ The PCK was divided into four different major groups in the 1950s: PCK Koshin, Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK), PCK Hapdong (or GAPCK), and PCK Tonghap (or simply PCK). The sub-divisions of the Korean Presbyterian Church, mainly within the PCK Hapdong, still continue.

²⁷ See Hogg, *New Day Dawning*, 25-27; K.H. Yap, *From Prapat to Colombo: History of the Christian Conference of Asia (1957-1995)* (Hong Kong: CCA, 1995).

missionaries to Thailand as a way of missionary partnership among Asian churches. Although the PCK and its missionaries participated in this new kind of mission, they were slow to appreciate ecumenical mission. Such attitude inhibited the development of ecumenical mission in the Korean Church, particularly the PCK. It is no exaggeration to say that some of the inveterate maladies of the Korean missionary movement such as individualistic tendency can trace their roots back to the underdevelopment of ecumenical mission in this period.

Second, according to the concept of ecumenical mission, the PCK sent a missionary to the U.S.A. in 1957. As Hogg suggests, "From what began as inter-church aid with emphasis primarily upon physical assistance, there has evolved a partnership in evangelism."²⁸ This kind of missionary or mission worker symbolizes the fact that mission is no more a unilateral movement from West to non-West and that mission is a mutual learning process. Nowadays this kind of mission personnel reemerges again in the context of globalization, especially mission to Europe.

Third, the PCK also began to send missionaries in various capacities. Although the PCK missionaries fell into two categories, cross-cultural missionaries and overseas evangelist ministers for Korean diasporas, it has gradually become difficult to draw a boundary between them.²⁹

While the development of ecumenical mission was arrested, the new evangelical missionary movement was beginning to take root. Some of the Korean mission leaders such as the Rev. Kyung-Chik Han and Dr. Helen Kim found this movement congenial to one of the cherished ideas of the Korean Church, evangelism.³⁰ Furthermore, young mission leaders such as David. J. Cho called attention to the importance of the non-Western missionary movement, especially non-Western missions, showing strong inclination towards the conventional concept of mission.³¹

²⁸ Hogg, *New Day Dawning*, 16-21; quotation, 18.

²⁹ Besides these categories, emerged the new category of ecumenical workers working in the ecumenical bodies or in the context of inter-church aid.

³⁰ It is important to note that both the Berlin and Lausanne Congress highlighted the issue of evangelism or evangelization.

³¹ See David J. Cho, ed., *New Forces in Missions: the Official Report of the All-Asia Mission Consultation, Seoul '73 and the Inaugural Convention of the Asia Missions Associations, 1975* (Seoul: East-West Center for Missions Research & Development, 1976).

4. Since the 1980s³²

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Korean Church found that conditions were very favorable for starting world mission in a massive scale: first, the national evangelization movement gradually developed into the world missionary movement, fostering the missionary spirit, on the one hand, and equipping the Korean Church with the evangelical missionary perspectives which mainly emphasized evangelism, on the other; second, the liberalization policy of overseas travel and remittance of the government, together with economic growth, enabled the Koreans to fan out into the uttermost part of the world. This meant the rise of the Korean Church as a young but remarkable missionary force.

In 1979, Korean missionaries finally tabled one hundred and this signaled the breakthrough of the Korean missionary movement. Soon after that year, the number of Korean missionaries began to soar. According to Timothy Lee, the Korean Church even felt that Korea was "not only a chosen but the final redeemer nation,"³³ which may be said to be a Koreanized "manifest destiny." At any rate, it is said that the number of Korean missionaries was flying over twenty thousands in 2009. At a conservative estimate, the Korean Church (58 denominational mission boards and 217 interdenominational missionary societies) sent 19,413 missionaries into 168 countries in 2008.³⁴

Not surprisingly, in the turn of the century, it is said that the Korean Church was promoted from the status of an important missionary force to that of the representative non-Western missionary force. In other words, the Korean Church has been asked to be a missionary

³² For the Korean missionary movement in the period under consideration, see Yong Cho, "Hangukgyohoe Haeoesongyoui Yeondaegijeok Jomyeong, 1974 Nyeon Buteo 2009 Nyeon Ggaji [A Chronological Review of the Overseas Mission of the Korean Church, from 1974 to 2009]" (Unpublished paper presented at the Tokyo 2010 Pre-consultation, Bangju Church, Seoul, March 20, 2010). (Korean)

³³ Timothy S. Lee, "Born-again in Korea: The Rise and Character of Revivalism in (South) Korea, 1885-1988" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1996), 223.

³⁴ Seung-Sam Kang, "Gwondueon: Hangukgyohoe Seongyosa Pasong Research Hyeonhwang [Preface: The Present Situation of the Research on the Sending of Missionaries of the Korean Church]," *Korea Missions Quarterly* 8/3 (Spring, 2009): 4-19; quotation, 5. (Korean)

leader, not merely a missionary member. Indeed, Andrew Walls regarded the Korean Church as a new leader of the world missionary movement, and G.J. Schwartz deemed that Korea became one of the countries which were rich in missionary resource.³⁵ However, to meet such demand, it is necessary for the Korean Church to upgrade its missionary thought and practice.

Scholars gradually began to doubt the way of doing mission of the Korean Church. Suffice to quote a couple of issues: individualistic tendency,³⁶ cultural blindness,³⁷ Koreanization,³⁸ and the danger of mission by the affluent.³⁹ In this sense, the Korean Church as a missionary church can be said to be standing at the crossroads in the history of its missionary movement whether it can continue to be an authentic missionary church or not.

Meanwhile, at the turn of the century, the Korean Church faced new challenges for world mission. First, the evangelicals belatedly came to emphasize the importance of partnership in mission. They were eager for developing various evangelical missionary networks. For instance, the National Consultation of World Evangelization (NCOWE) began in 1990, and the Korean World Missions Association (KWMA), an umbrella organization, also started in the same year.⁴⁰ It is also

³⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 45; G.J. Schwartz, *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement* (Lancaster, PE: World Mission Associates, 2007); 2, 45, 48.

³⁶ H.G. Underwood, "[The Korean Church]," *Gidokgongbo*, Feb., 24, 2001. (Korean)

³⁷ S.W. Sunquist, "Asian Mission to Asians," C.E. Cole, ed., *Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, the United Methodist Church, 2004), 39.

³⁸ Jong-Pyo Lim, "21 Segireul Dojeonhaneun Haninseongyosai Daecheo [The Aptitude of the Korean Missionary Challenging the Twenty-first Century]," Jong-Pyo Lim, ed., *Hangukseongyoui Banseonggwa Geu Junbi [The Reflection and Preparation of the Korean World Mission]* (Seoul: The Korean Missionary Leadership Development Conference, 1999), 176 (Korean); Peter Penn, "Critical Evaluation of Recent Developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States," *Transformation* 20/1 (Jan., 2003), 17.

³⁹ This question is particularly posed by national church leaders, not merely by scholars.

⁴⁰ For the recent history of the missionary cooperation of the Korean Church, especially NCOWE and KWMA, see Bo-Ae Jeong, "NCOWE V Gwangbeomwi Research Bogo [A Wide-ranged Research Report for the NCOWE V]" (Unpublished paper presented at the 9th Forum for Korean Mission

necessary to recognize the contribution of the Korean diasporas, especially those in the U.S.A., to this process. Second, the ecumenicals attempted to materialize the idea of ecumenical mission at the grassroots level. Third, in the era of globalization, the scope of diaspora mission has continuously been widened. In short, the focus has been moved from Korean diasporas to world diasporas. On the one hand, the Korean Church focused on new diasporas who came into Korea rather than those who went from Korea. On the other, the Korean Church searched for a new way of mobilizing new diasporas for mission to their own compatriots and/or other diasporas.

Entering into the new millennium, the Korean Church as a missionary church began to be absorbed in another impending challenge: among others, the stagnation or decline of the church, the integrity of mission, and the catastrophe of the earth. First of all, as mentioned above, the Korean Church has been famous for its remarkable growth, until recently. As a result, the Korean Church has been accustomed to extrapolate the future of almost every ministry including world mission from the viewpoint of steady growth. Reaching a plateau in church growth, however, the Korean Church painfully admitted that the scenario of expansion does not help any more in the functioning of the church, in particular world mission, which heavily relies on the church for human and financial resources. It is against this historical backdrop that has increased the talks about the themes of devolution, sustainability after handover, cost-effective mission in the age of drastic reduction of resources, etc.⁴¹ Moreover, as a way of avoiding charges of being a Maverick in world mission, the Korean Church began to organize, together with Western partners, a number of conferences focusing on the newly emerging concerns such as accountability.⁴² Last but not

Leaders, Ganghwa Sungsan Jesus Town, Nov., 3-5, 2009), 33-46 (Korean); Kyo Seong Ahn, "Hangukgyohoeui Segyeseongyoe Isseoseo Yeonhapundong 25 Nyeon Pyeongga [An Appraisal of the 25 Years of the Unity Movement of the World Mission of the Korean Church]" (Ibid.), 152-59. (Korean)

⁴¹ Bangkok Mission Forum Committee, ed., *Hangukseongyoui Chulgujeonrak [(The 9th Bangkok Mission Forum) Exit Strategies and Korean Missions: Reflections and Implications]* (Seoul: Yeyoung Communication, 2012); Seong-Hyeon Nam, "Seongyo Iyangui Sinhakjeok Gicho Suripeul Wihan Yeongu [A Study on the Theological Foundation for Devolution in Mission]" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, 2018). (Korean)

⁴² Jonathan Bonk et al., *Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011); Jonathan Bonk, ed., *Family Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies* (New Haven, CN: OMSC Publications, 2013); Jin-Bong Kim et al.,

least, over the last three decades, the Korean Church continued to host a number of conferences on "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)," which is an umbrella concept dealing with various topics of mission such as justice, peace and life.⁴³ For instance, the theme of the 10th General Assembly, Busan 2013, of the WCC, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace," was a modified version of the JPIC theme.

III. Conclusion

I have argued that the Korean Church was, has been, and is, a missionary church. Although the Korean missionary movement seems to have a checkered history, especially during the third quarter of the twentieth century, the Korean Church has never neglected its missionary mandate totally. From the very beginning, the Korean Church was enthusiastic about evangelization, and by officially launching its missionary work, it transformed itself from a self-evangelizing church to a self-missionizing church. It continues to widen the scope of mission, from national saturation mission, to diaspora mission, and to cross-cultural mission. In the midst of the agony of colonization, the Korean Church, a church of the powerless par excellence, was faithful to missionary tasks. In the aftermath of the Liberation and the Korean War, the Korean Church reconfirmed its indefatigable missionary spirit, as sending missionaries to Thailand and other countries. It is true that due to various reasons the Korean Church was slow to, or failed to, appreciate the implication of ecumenical mission. However, it is important to remember that nowadays both ecumenicals and evangelicals painfully came to realize that the issue of partnership is a must in world mission. Entering the new century, the question is no more whether the Korean Church is an important missionary force. It is whether the Korean Church can take responsibility for world mission, as one of servant leaders.

Megachurch Accountability in Missions: Critical Assessment through Global Case Studies
(Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016).

⁴³ The JPIC topic was repeatedly dealt with in the 22nd General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (now WCRC) in Seoul, 1989, the 1st WCC JPIC Conference in Seoul, 1990, and the 10th General Assembly of WCC in Busan, 2013.

