

Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea:1885-1935

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Summary

Dr. Hae Jung Park stated his aim in the first chapter of *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*: "exploring the history, practice, understanding, and theology of the Lord's Supper in the Korean Methodist tradition from 1885 to 1935."¹ Dr. Park analyzed various historical sources including personal letters of missionaries as well as official American and Korean Methodist documents.² He explained how the Lord's Supper was systematically and chronologically developed in the Korean Methodist Church through contextualization.

In the second chapter, Dr. Park analyzed the early foreign missionaries' understandings of the Lord's Supper because they hugely influenced early Korean Methodists'. Dr. Park started his observation with Henry Gerhard Appenzeller the first Methodist missionary to Korea. Even though Appenzeller was born into the Reformed tradition as a descendant of German-Swiss immigrants, he was fascinated by the mission centered trend of Methodists in the nineteenth century. Later, he transferred his membership to the Methodist Episcopal Church and attended to Drew Theological Seminary, which focused on new mission fields such as Japan and Korea. While at Drew, he was educated by the great Methodist scholars of his time, namely Professor of Practical Theology Samuel Foster Upham with his heavy emphasis on preaching who influenced Appenzeller most.³

In January 1885, Appenzeller was sent off to Korea with a Communion service in the chapel of Drew Theological Seminary. And on the way to Korea in Yokohama, Japan on March

22nd he assisted in administering his first Communion. On October 13, 1885, American missionaries including Appenzeller and a Presbyterian Horace Underwood celebrated the first Protestant Communion service in Korea. Two years later on October 23, 1887, the first exclusively Methodist Communion was administered in Korea.

Appenzeller translated the *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1888)* into the Korean *Miimigyohoe Gangnye* [Articles of Religion and Ritual of the Methodist Episcopal Church] in 1892.⁴ Franklin Ohlinger, a former missionary to China, assisted him. Wilbur C. Swearer also contributed to deepen the understanding of the Lord's Supper for Korean Methodists by encouraging them to observe the Lord's Supper on Easter Sunday. In practice, however, the Lord's Supper was barely observed by congregations at all. According to Rev. Scranton, a District Superintendent in Korea, the reasons why the Lord's Supper was observed infrequently were: "Because it takes so long," "we have so much else to do," and "the people do not as yet understand."⁵ The infrequency of the practice of the Lord's Supper led Korean Methodists to misunderstand and remain ignorant about the sacrament. Understanding of the sacrament began to deepen in Korea through *Sinhakoe*. Originally a two-week institutional gathering for theological education, *Sinhakoe* evolved into a five-year curriculum. Practical Theology and Rituals including the Lord's Supper were taught in the fifth year.

In the third chapter, Dr. Park switched scope of his investigation from missionaries to early Korean Methodist leaders and analyzed their understanding of the Lord's Supper. Concerning Changsik Kim, the first ordained Korean Elder and Superintendent, and Byunghyun Choi, the first Korean pastor of Chongdong Methodist Church in Seoul, the oldest Methodist church in Korea, no documentation directly mentioned the administration of the Lord's Supper. Among early leaders of Korean Methodism, Yongdo Lee, the founding pastor of Yesu Gyohoe [Jesus Church] and revivalist had a distinct understanding of the Lord's Supper. He believed the Lord's Supper signified an encounter with Christ, a new covenant for eternal life and participation in the passion of Christ. Professor Kyungok Chung, one of the early professors in the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul, Korea, taught the Lord's Supper not as a means of grace but as the formal pattern by which sinners were united with Christ in remembrance of Christ's forgiveness and love. For him, God's grace was delivered through love and prayer.

Jusam Ryang, General Superintendent of the Korean Methodist Church, spoke about the possibility of the use of Communion service for the rejuvenation of congregations.

Despite the effort of the ancestors of Korean Methodism, the Lord's Supper was hardly practiced because of the strong emphasis on preaching. Opposed to the dominance of preaching at the expense of the order of worship or worship itself, Kyungwoon Choi, a graduate of Hyubsung Seminary in 1933, upheld the importance of the form and regulation of the worship service. With its establishment in 1926, the Korean Methodist Church emphasized in its Discipline the memorial of Christ's death through the Lord's Supper and denied the Roman Catholic understanding of the Lord's Supper including "transubstantiation, denial of cup for the laity, and sacrifice."⁶

In the fourth chapter, Dr. Park discussed aspects of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea between 1885 and 1935. By presenting historical documents concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper, he investigated how the Lord's Supper was observed in this period. Concerning the elements, unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice were widely used. Even though the bread was translated into *dduk* [Korean traditional glutinous rice cake] and the wine was translated into *Sul* [alcohol] in *Miimi*, they were hardly used in practice. Individual cups instead of a common cup for Communion were widely used because of sanitation. During Communion service, while participants went to the table and came back to their seats, Eucharistic hymns were sung, as *Doctrines and the Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (1918), *Nam-Gamnigyohoe Doriwa Jangjeong* [The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South] (1919), and *Gyoriwa Jangjeong* [Discipline of the Korean Methodist Church] (1931) state. Significantly, in *Chansongka*, the first hymnal of the Korean Methodist Church, there was a section for three Eucharistic hymns which sang the promise of eternal life and the sanctification of participants. Only ordained elders and missionaries were able to administer the Lord's Supper, even though there were a few Korean deacons. Therefore, the Lord's Supper was hardly observed due to the lack of presiding elders. For example, in 1910, when there were 36 missionaries the number of churches was 360. Also, under the influence of Confucianism, men and women were separated and people came forward to receive elements and returned to their seats. Communion was observed less than four times a year in local churches, although official documents of the Methodist Episcopal Church *A Digest*

of *Methodist Law and Helps in the Administration of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, recommended at least quarterly observance and *Nam-Gamnigyohoe Doriwa Jangjeong* [The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South] (1919) encouraged monthly observances. The Lord's Supper was observed in the Annual Conference and the Quarterly Conference presided over by the District Superintendent, and after baptism.

The infrequency of the Lord's Supper among early Korean Methodists led to misunderstanding and ignorance because the Lord's Supper reminded Koreans influenced by Confucianism of ancestor worship which took place once or twice a year. Concerning the posture for receiving the elements, kneeling, standing, and sitting were permitted. Baptized church members were permitted to participate in the Lord's Supper. Even though they have sinned, they were able to participate if they truly repented. The Lord's Supper was regarded not as a simple act of remembrance of Christ's death but as an act of experiencing the spiritual presence of Christ. Through the Great Revival of the early 20th century in Korea, Word-centered and prayer-centered liturgies developed, while the Lord's Supper became secondary in worship. The *Aechansik* [Love Feast] seemed to be widely practiced because there were neither limitations in its celebration nor limitations on who was qualified to do so.

In the fifth chapter, Dr. Park found out how the Lord's Supper was practiced and changed in the course of time by comparing official documents of the Methodist denominations of Korea. The order of the Lord's Supper was shortened as time went by. The Discipline of the Korean Methodist Church (1931) had a shorter order for the Lord's Supper than *Miimi* (1884) and the Doctrines and the Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1918, 1919). The title of the Lord's Supper was changed from "Lord's Supper" to "Lord's Holy Supper," and to "Lord's Holy Meal." The use of unfermented grape juice disappeared in later Disciplines (1919, 1931). Alms for the poor were received during the Lord's Supper and the money was given to the sick and the poor. Specific biblical texts such as Matthew 7:12 were read at the beginning of the Lord's Supper. Like *Miimi*, kneeling, standing, or sitting were recommended for receiving the elements. The pattern of the Eucharistic prayer was changed from reciting from memory to reading, as congregations became literate.

Dr. Park laid out how contextualization happened in the process of the translation of the Bible and Methodist Disciplines concerning the Lord's Supper. For example, wine was translated

into “*Sul*,” which was an alcoholic beverage, in the *Miimi* as well as in Appenzeller’s Korean translation of Gospel of Luke, *Nugabogeumjeon* in 1890. An elder administering the Lord’s Supper was translated into a pastor. “A fair linen cloth” covering elements was translated into “a pure cloth.” Hymn singing during communion was added, while the Lord’s Prayer was omitted. More inclusive language was used, such as “We” instead of “You” and “brothers and sisters” instead of “brothers” only.

In summary, Dr. Park revealed through his work that early Korean Methodists preserved practices and understanding of the Lord’s Supper from American missionaries between 1885 and 1930. During this period, he found no significant change concerning the order and understanding of the Lord’s Supper except minor changes in translation. With the birth of the Korean Methodist Church and appearance of the Discipline of the Korean Methodist Church in 1931, some real changes happened such as the emergence of a shorter order of the Lord’s Supper and the change of the title from the “Lord’s Supper” to “Lord’s Holy Meal.” However, Korean Methodists maintained the Western liturgy failing to incorporate Koreanness into their liturgies.

Evaluation

“How had understandings and practices of the Lord’s Supper developed in the Methodist churches in Korea between 1885 and 1935?” This was the primary question Dr. Park answered in his dissertation and we as readers can learn two significant points by looking at how he answers the question. First, the present pattern of the Lord’s Supper is not a *tradition* of the Church but an *old habit*. It has origin in the past, especially in the history of early Korean mission. Park showed us why Korean Methodists came to have the present pattern of the Lord’s Supper such as infrequent observance by finding historical documents of early Korean missionaries and reconstructing how they administered the Lord’s Supper.

Dr. Park proved that the present lack of understanding and practice of the Lord’s Supper originated at the beginning of the Korean mission. The number of elders who could administer the Lord’s Supper was not enough for the local churches which grew in number following the Great Revival of Korea at the beginning of 20th century. Furthermore, Revivalist patterns of worship focusing on preaching gave less or no room for celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper could not be observed even quarterly and this pattern continued for a long time in

Korea. For example, except for Anglicans and Lutherans, many Korean Methodist churches observed the Lord's Supper only twice a year in the 50's and 60's.⁷ In this sense, the present pattern of the Lord's Supper was not a tradition of the larger Church but a temporary phenomenon which later became a pattern in Korean Methodist churches and also in Presbyterian and other Protestant denominations.

Second, active contextualization was the key for the renewal of the Lord's Supper in Korean churches. Dr. Park constantly lamented throughout his work that early Korean Methodists failed to contextualize or *Koreanize* Western liturgies and blindly accepted how missionaries observed the Lord's Supper, including infrequent observance. The value of his work was not limited to present historical documents of Korean Methodists in the past concerning their observance of the Lord's Supper, but advocated learning from the past so that we can know how the Lord's Supper should be observed and how the present pattern must change. Even though present patterns of the Lord's Supper show that the present is inseparable from the past, we could have changed the Lord's Supper for the better in the future by listening to the past: "The only language available to speak the new thing...is largely borrowed and transformed from the old story."⁸

In a deep sense, Dr. Park talked about contextualization for the renewal of the Lord's Supper, which the Nairobi statement emphasized.⁹ In many ways, early Korean Methodists tried to contextualize the Lord's Supper in a Korean context. For example, bread and wine were translated into rice cake [*dduk*] and an alcohol beverage [*Sul*]. Various attempts to adjust the Lord's Supper into a Korean context occurred between 1885 and 1935. Even though there was no big change in the pattern of the Lord's Supper, we learned from how our ancestors attempted to make the Lord's Supper their own liturgy in Korean context, as we saw in *Disciplines of Methodist Churches*.¹⁰

Despite Dr. Park's contribution to understandings of the Lord's Supper in early Korean Methodism, his work had two critical weaknesses. First, the thesis was weakened rather than strengthened in many places by the evidence he found. For example, even though he started with the early Korean Methodist leader Changsik Kim to find his understanding of the Lord's Supper, he did not find any evidence or historical documents concerning the issue. We could have asked a simple question: Why did Park mention Changsik Kim if he did not have evidence of Kim

mentioning the Lord's Supper? The validity of the thesis or its cogency may have depended on a logical progression supported by solid evidence and by mutual help between thesis and evidence. The dissertation failed to connect historical data or descriptions about certain figures to the thesis. He kept repeating, "However, no documents can be found related to this issue."¹¹ In other words, he presented historical data which did not relate to Communion. Consequently, the thesis appeared weakened as well as the cogency of the dissertation by the supporting evidence.

Second, Dr. Park's work does not go further than giving information about observance of the Lord's Supper in 1885-1935, not constructing theology or understandings of the Lord's Supper of early Korean Methodists. In chapter 4, he talks about how the Lord's Supper was observed between 1885 and 1935. However, he does not seem to present understandings of the Lord's Supper in this period but to present information about the Lord's Supper: what materials Korean Methodist used in the Lord's Supper, what Eucharistic hymns were sung, and how often the Lord's Supper was observed, etc. Likewise, in chapter 5, he tries to find differences in the order of the Lord's Supper between Methodist Disciplines published recently. However, he does not go further than presenting how different orders or terms were used in each Discipline. For example, he points out that the Discipline of the Korean Methodist Church (1931) omitted the Lord's Prayer in the order of the Lord's Supper, while previous Disciplines kept the Lord's Prayer.¹² He does not explain how the omission of the Lord's Prayer affected the understanding of the Lord's Supper. What theological understanding or basis allowed them to omit the Lord's Prayer? To truly understand the Lord's Supper, Dr. Park should explore the reasoning behind the patterns not just narrate its patterns. But, Park missed it. Therefore, his thorough research became faded.

Assessment

Despite the apparent weaknesses pointed out above, the dissertation had practical implications for Korean churches today. First, it encouraged us to take the Lord's Supper seriously. Even though present features of the Lord's Supper in Korea were not studied, we could have looked at how we currently observe the Lord's Supper. We asked ourselves how often is the Lord's Supper observed in Korean churches? How do we receive the Lord's Supper? Do we hurry through the Lord's Supper in order that we may finish our worship service on time?

Have pastors often rushed people to take communion quickly when the service was running late because they preached too long? Like the early Korean Methodists, we may still be complaining that it took so long or that we have so much else to do and overlooked the importance of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper was the Sacrament Christ has instituted and from the beginning of the history of the church has been kept as a part of worship.¹³ We should continue to observe the Lord's Supper until the second coming of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the Lord's Supper does not seem to be a significant event in many Korean churches. In comparison to preaching, the time that assigned to the Lord's Supper was minor, even though observed only monthly or quarterly. While we spent almost 40 minutes preaching, we did not spend even 10 minutes for the Lord's Supper. The issue concerns not just the length of the Lord's Supper but how we understand the Lord's Supper. The people do not as yet understand the importance of the Lord's Supper, as Rev. Scranton lamented over 100 years ago.¹⁴

Second, the dissertation encouraged us to observe the Lord's Supper more frequently. Many Korean churches in Korea and in the United States observe monthly communion.¹⁵ In addition to the Lord's Supper in the church, we could observe the Lord's Supper more frequently by having it outside of the church. As Paul Huh argued, in the Korean context, we could have the Lord's Supper in funeral and memorial services.¹⁶ It is not an act of superstition inviting and commemorating the deceased but signifying the communion of the saints who went before us, because the communion of saints is one of the significant meanings of the Lord's Supper.¹⁷ In the Lord's Supper, the living and the dead have communion in the presence of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and we can have no more grief but have hope for the feast in the Kingdom to come.

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¹ Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 1.

² Methodist denominations which we call here are Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Korean Methodist Church.

³ "When Henry Appenzeller entered Drew Theological School in 1882, it was very fortunate for him to be there with a group of professors known as The Great Five who included James Strong, Henry Buttz, John Miley, George Crooks, and Samuel Upham, who represented the leaders of late nineteenth century theology in the Methodist tradition." Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 17.

⁴ From this time on, "*Miimigyohoe Gangnye* [Articles of Religion and Ritual of the Methodist Episcopal Church]" will be referred to *Miimi*.

⁵ Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 37.

⁶ Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 68.

⁷ <http://www.allthatnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=9852>

⁸ Gordon W Lathrop, *Holy Things* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 20.

⁹ Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture was made by the Lutheran World Federation in 1996. "Worship as contextual" is one of five points the statement talks about concerning the relationship between worship and culture: "Jesus whom we worship was born into a specific culture of the world...contextualization is a necessary task for the church's mission in the world, so that Gospel can be ever more deeply rooted in diverse local cultures." http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html

¹⁰ Gordon W Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 34. "The greatest monuments of liturgical documentary history are not the collections of authorized or idealized model texts for the words of the liturgy, but rather the descriptions of patterned actions, the models, and designs of an event."

¹¹ Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 48. Dr. Park reveals that he failed to find documents to support his argument throughout his dissertation: "In the course of engaging the research for this study, no document could be found in which Byunghyun Choi directly mentioned the practice of the administration of the Lord's Supper to a congregation." p. 51; "It was very unfortunate that no documents related to the use of these Eucharistic hymns in the Korean Methodist churches could be found." p. 85-86.

¹² Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 150-151.

¹³ Concerning Jesus' word of constitution of the Lord's Supper, see 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20. The *Didache* (late first or early second century) reports how the Lord's Supper was observed in the early stages of Christianity: "On every Lord's Day – his special day [kyriaken de kyriou] – come together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure." James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 18.

¹⁴ Hae Jung Park, *Understandings of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Churches in Korea: 1885-1935*, 37.

¹⁵ For example, Atlanta Bethany United Methodist Church, Atlanta, GA, observes monthly communion.

¹⁶ Paul-Junggab Huh, *Communion Ecclesiology: focusing on the 'Communion of Saints,'* Korea Journal of Christian Studies, Vol. 52 (Seoul: Korean Association of Christian Studies, 2007), 222.

¹⁷ According to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, so-called BEM document produced by World Council of Churches, Eucharist has 5 meanings: thanksgiving to the Father, Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ, Invocation of the Spirit, Communion of the Faithful, and Meal of the Kingdom. World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 10-15.