

## **The Symbolic Dimension in the Korean Protestant Worship and its Relationship with the Inculturation of the Eucharistic Elements**

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### **Summary**

Dr. Kim states in the beginning of his dissertation, *The Symbolic Dimension in the Korean Protestant Worship and its Relationship with the Inculturation of the Eucharistic Elements*: “The Greek word, *symallein*, which is the root word of symbol, meaning “to throw or put things together,” referred to a coin cut in half, which is valued when it is put together with its other part.”<sup>1</sup> There are two sides of the coin making Korean Protestant worship whole: Christianity and Korean culture. However, Korean culture, one side of a coin, is seriously missing in Korean Protestant worship because of the rejection of the indigenous cultural values continued from the early mission to Korea. “Finding the half of a coin which is lost in the symbolism of Eucharist in Korean Protestant worship” is what Dr. Kim attempts to achieve through his work.

In the first chapter, Dr. Kim points out that a human being is a *homo symbolicus*, a symbol-making being. Through all kinds of symbols, such as gestures and language, a human being signifies his or her reality as well as supernatural reality. All human activity is symbolic. In worship, especially in the Eucharist, humans communicate with God through the media of God’s creation, such as elements of the Eucharist. However, it is not adequate to use whatever medium we have. Rather, we need to be aware of “how a particular symbolic object is used for or by the people in a culture,”<sup>2</sup> because meaning of certain symbols can be different in different cultural contexts. For the appropriate understanding of the encounter of the Christian Eucharistic

elements with cultures, Dr. Kim picks up a term, *inculturation*, over *adaptation* simply seeking superficial changes, *indigenization* overlooking on-going process of change of culture, and *contextualization* easily overemphasizing the present context. *Inculturation* focuses on culturally embedded values and forms of expression in concordance with the gospel and the universal church.<sup>3</sup> The Bible shows that Eucharist was celebrated not only with bread and wine, but also with bread alone (Luke 24:30-35). Eucharist happened outside the Passover context. It was the Jewish ordinary meal with ordinary food, such as leavened bread. In early churches, ordinary food, such as milk and cheese, was consumed in the Eucharist, because they are their cultural symbolism as the other side of coin. However, in the Korean Protestant Church, Korean culture and its symbolism have been seriously absent because of the rejection of Korean indigenous culture.

Therefore, in the second chapter, Dr. Kim traces back to the early stage of Korean Protestantism between 1832 and 1910 to find the reason for the lack of inculturation. Because many Koreans, especially government officials, thought that Christianity threatened not only the foundation of the state, but also traditional culture, Christianity began to grow in an anti-Christian environment. Even in this circumstance, however, Korean Protestantism grew little by little mainly through the dissemination of the scriptures and family prayer meetings. Between 1903 and 1907, the Great Revival of Korea took place, and the membership of the churches in Korea increased rapidly. However, the symbolism of Korea could not enter into the fabric of Korean Protestant worship shaped by the Great Revival focusing on “a personal subjective religious experience, individualism and other-worldly dualism.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, early missionaries to Korea, such as Henry G. Appenzeller and H. G. Underwood, who hugely influenced the formation of Korean Protestantism, focused more on preaching ministry than the Sacrament and its inculturation. Even though these early missionaries came from the background of sacramentally awakened denominations – Scottish Presbyterian, the German Reformed Church, the Dutch Reformed Church and American Methodism –, they were more influenced by nineteenth century revivalism and this tendency has been continued in Korean Protestant churches in our time. Therefore, the non-symbolic rational mode mainly working through sermons dominates while non-verbal communication of rituals and symbols is excluded. Richness of Korean symbolism is neglected.

In the third chapter, Dr. Park brings up the rural rice culture which is the womb of the Korean consciousness. It is because, as the one side of the coin, symbolism of Korean rural rice-farming culture can enrich the Eucharistic celebration in Korean Protestant worship, when it encounters the other side of coin, the gospel. To find Korean culture and its customs, Dr. Kim analyzes the first Korean cultural system: *annual ceremonies* which are village centered. According to the lunar calendar, there are one or two annual ceremonies every month. Among these ceremonies, *Seol*, *hanshik*, *Dano* and *chusok* are called “the four greatest festive seasons.”<sup>5</sup> These ceremonies are all related to the cycle of rice production from its sowing to its reaping. These ceremonies can also be divided into three categories by season: “*chukwonsesi*, meaning ‘a blessing wish seasonal ceremonies,’ *saengjangsesi*, meaning ‘a productivity wish seasonal ceremonies,’ and *soohwaksesi*, meaning ‘a good harvest wish seasonal ceremonies.’”<sup>6</sup> Concerning *chukwonsesi* before sowing, especially in *seol*, it is believed that by performing the ancestor ritual, Heaven is satisfied and provides blessings. People erect a long pole in the yard hoping that the harvest in the fall may be piled up like the pole. Concerning *saengjangsesi*, especially in *Tano*, villagers gather together and have *ssireum*, a wrestling match, among men. The winner gets a bull, representing the strength which one needs especially in this time of seed-planting and its growth. Concerning *soohwaksesi*, especially in *chusok*, people give thanks to their ancestors with rice cake (*dduk*) made of new rice from the harvest, and they eat traditional rice cake, *songpyun*, with their family members and neighbors.

The second cultural system that Dr. Kim analyzes is “rites of passage,” which are family centered. To explain rites of passage in Korean culture, Dr. Kim uses Victor Turner’s arguments for three phases of the rites of passage: “separation, margin, and aggregation” to the social structure.<sup>7</sup> This “liminal” process is shown in three big rites of passage in the Korean cultural system in conjunction with rice. The first is birth. When a woman becomes pregnant, many rules are imposed upon her, such as not killing any living thing and not stepping over a rice straw rope. If she does not keep these rules, she may suffer a difficult delivery and the baby will be born unhealthy. In other words, society asks of her moral renewal, and she experiences “liminality.” The second is marriage. Bride and bridegroom experience separation from their old life and aggregation to new life. At the marriage ceremony, people let a live chicken eat raw rice,

signifying “vitality, prosperity, and life itself.”<sup>8</sup> The third is the funeral. At the funeral, the ones who experience liminality are not deceased, but alive. A small quantity of cooked rice is put in the mouth of the deceased for the long journey to heaven.

These two aspects of the Korean cultural system, annual ceremonies and rites of passage, based on the rice farming culture, can be summarized into two themes, “*ae-in* [loving people] in the common meal and *kyung-chun* [worshipping heaven (or God)] in the sacred consumption of rice.”<sup>9</sup> These two themes can be incorporated with the symbolism of the Christian Eucharist. First, concerning *ae-in* in horizontal relationship, whole family members gather and eat together, and rice cake is shared with neighbors in annual ceremonies, such as *seol* and *chusok*, as well as rites of passages, such as marriage. This practice of eating together has similarity with Jesus’ ministry of common meals with outcasts of Jewish society as a sign of love for others. Second, concerning *kyung-chun* in vertical relationship, the waste water left over from washing the rice is used to wash the dead body. Here, rice is the lustral element for the defilement of death for harmonious relationship with heaven (or God).

In the fourth chapter, Dr. Kim finds convergent points where the rural rice farming culture and the Eucharistic elements can meet for the inculturation of Korean Protestant worship. The first is life. Jesus calls himself in John the bread of life for the life of the world (John 6:47-51). The bread, therefore, signifies life. Similarly, in Korean rice-farming context, rice is not just a material, but the life-sustainer, as a Korean poet writes, “rice is God.”<sup>10</sup> The second is anamnesis. As the past, present and future meet together in the Eucharist, through ancestor ritual and by eating rice cake together after the ritual, Koreans affirm or reaffirm what family heritage they have received from the past and how they should live in the present and future. The third is peace. The Eucharist means not only the peace with God, but also the peace with people by being united into the body of Christ. Likewise, the Chinese character for peace, wa [和], is the combination of two words, rice [\*] and mouth [口], meaning that “unless we share rice together with all people, we will not have peace.”<sup>11</sup> The fourth is sacrifice. The Eucharist signifies Christ who sacrificed himself on the cross, and rice also signifies sacrifice of a farmer producing the grain of rice. The fifth is thanksgiving. As God’s act of salvation is celebrated and the Church gives thanksgiving to God in the Eucharist, rice is used as the symbolic medium of thanksgiving in Korea. Often, rice cake and wine are offered to graves of ancestors as a sign of thanksgiving.

The sixth is communion. As the Eucharist is also called *Holy Communion* to represent unity with God and the body of Christ, people in Korean rice-farming villages share common wells. The seventh is co-existence. Elements in the Eucharist show that nature is not an object subjected to humans, but a conveyer of divine reality as co-existence with humans. Likewise, in Korea, in the tenth lunar month, some portion of rice cake is placed in the yard to feed animals passing by.

Therefore, based on previous research on the relationship between the Eucharist and rice, Dr. Kim presents how elements of worship should be renewed for the enhancement of the symbolic dimension of Korean Protestant worship. First, the sermon should function as an invisible sacramental act rather than a mere means of teaching, because preaching is a commentary on and an interpretation of the salvation history embodied in the Eucharist. Second, the offertory should be enacted as participation of the people. Like the early church, the offertory should be taken from their products from the earth and given to the church to help the needy. “For the effective symbolism of offering, the elements of the Eucharist should reflect the people’s life.”<sup>12</sup> Third, the Eucharist should be a visible sacramental act. By using rice as elements of the Eucharist, which reflects the life and symbolism of Korean culture, connection between the sacrament and the life of the people will become more visible in Korean churches.

### **Evaluation**

“What is the Korean cultural symbol which we can connect to the gospel?” Dr. Kim answers this question by finding how symbolism of rice is interwoven with the Korean cultural system. He presents rice as a symbol able to enrich the Korean Protestant worship. Two points are especially noteworthy from his work as strengths. First, his work gives a concrete rationale for the inculturation of the Eucharistic elements for the renewal of the Korean Protestant worship. In order to argue for the need of symbolism of rice in the Korean Protestant worship, Dr. Kim does not simply say “Symbolism of rice should be brought into the worship, because Koreans eat rice every day as main food.” Rather, he provides a persuasive logic: The gospel, one side of a coin, should be incorporated with cultural symbols of a different context, which are the other side of the coin. In the Bible, the Eucharist was performed during the Jewish ordinary meal with Jewish ordinary food. The early Church also used their ordinary food as well as the bread and

wine in the Eucharist. Koreans use rice, which is their ordinary food, in annual ceremonies and rites of passage as a symbol of honoring heaven (God) – *Kyung-Chun* – and the love of neighbor – *Ae-In*, as the Eucharist signifies the communion between God and humans and between humans. Furthermore, what rice signifies in Korean culture, such as life and sacrifice, is what the Eucharist signifies. Therefore, rice is the symbol most effectively to deliver the gospel, which is embodied in the Eucharist, to Koreans.

However, Dr. Kim's ultimate goal is not limited to the change of the elements in the Eucharist, but geared toward the renewal of the Korean Protestant worship. In a sense, through his work, what Dr. Kim tries to do is to distinguish between *essence* and *accident*.<sup>13</sup> Outward appearance of the elements, accident, can be different according to cultures in which the Eucharist takes place, if the object of a given culture can deliver the essence of the gospel: the sacrifice, life, thanksgiving, peace, etc. Likewise, the *cultural* form of the Eucharist can vary, while the *theological* meaning of the Eucharist should be maintained. However, according to Dr. Kim, in Korean churches an accident, western liturgy, has been regarded as the essence that should not be changed, even though it is simply *a* cultural form and it cannot effectively deliver the gospel to Koreans. Therefore, the Korean Protestant Church should renew its liturgy through the inculcation of Korean cultural symbols to deliver the essence, the gospel, effectively.

Second, his work reminds that worship should be connected to daily life. What Dr. Kim's work implies is not just the connection between the Eucharistic elements and rice, which is the daily food of Koreans, but the connection between the worship itself and daily life. The reason why rice is so crucial to Koreans is not because they eat it every day, but because their life is based on the rural rice-farming culture. In this sense, bringing the symbolism of life to the Eucharist and Korean Protestant worship is bringing the life of Koreans to worship to live the life according to the gospel. Worship is the place where real life is presented as it is and transformed in the light of the gospel.

One of the functions of worship is to create anti-structures by allowing worshipers to “transcend social structures imposed by the dominant culture.”<sup>14</sup> However, it is by no means to have other-worldly experience in worship, to have psychological relief, and to go back to normal life without change. The other world, which worshipers imagine, such as heaven, can come alive in worship through ecstatic experience,<sup>15</sup> but the issue is that if more worshipers focus on the

other world only, the real world can be alienated, and worship becomes a mere ritual not having power to transform this world. Therefore, it is more important that the real world comes and has new meaning in worship than that the other world temporarily comes alive in worship.<sup>16</sup> Through his work, Dr. Kim brings to worship the real world of Koreans, which are signified by rice, in order to let it have new meanings in Christ, such as the sacrifice of Christ.

Even though Dr. Kim's work has valuable points which Korean Churches can apply for the renewal of their worship, his work has two weaknesses. First, his work lacks explanation of how to inculturate Eucharistic elements. In the beginning of his work, Dr. Kim clearly states that "this study is devoted to the issue of the inculturation of the Eucharistic elements in Korean Protestant worship in connection with the symbolism of the rice cultivation culture."<sup>17</sup> In other words, his goal is not the analysis of Korean rice-farming culture, but the presentation of the inculturation of the Eucharistic elements in Korean Protestant worship. However, almost all his work is devoted to the symbolism of rice and how it is connected to Eucharistic elements, while "How the elements can be inculturated in Korean Protestant worship?" is only discussed in a very small portion of the last chapter.

Furthermore, his suggestion for the renewal of worship does not give practical implications for inculturation. For example, even though he says that the sermon in Korean Protestant worship should deliver the Eucharistic message – Jesus' cross, death, resurrection, etc. –, he does not talk about how to connect the sermon to the symbolism of rice. Even when he talks about the use of rice in the Eucharist, he does not clearly say how to use rice in the Eucharist or how to deliver the symbolism of rice in the Eucharist with the gospel.

Second, his work leaves many questions for Christians who live in multi-cultural societies. For example, for Korean-American churches, what is the adequate object for the elements in the Eucharist? Is it rice? Is it bread? Or is it steak? Does Dr. Kim's work say that as the society and culture change, the elements of the Eucharist should be changed? If the bread or steak is the symbol which composes the culture of Korean-Americans and opens up their real life, should the element of the Eucharist be the bread and steak in Korean-American churches?<sup>18</sup> If Koreans eat more bread and steak than rice in Korea, as the society changes, should they use the bread again? These are the questions that remain unanswered.

### **Assessment**

Dr. Kim's work, however, has valuable points for Koreans and Korean-American churches today. First, his work helps us to focus our eyes on what we have as Koreans or Korean-Americans. The reason why the liturgy of Korean and Korean-American churches has continued western liturgy and failed to incorporate Korean cultural elements is because we, Koreans, mainly focused on "what we had not had" rather than "what we have had." We have thought in many ways that "what we had not had" – what we have received from Western missionaries and what westerners were doing – is Christian, while "what we have had" – Korean culture – is non-Christian. However, Jesus did not reject Jewish cultural objects, such as leavened bread and wine. Rather, he picked these elements and gave them new meaning. In this sense, what we need to do is to give Christian meaning to what we already have or change, from Christian perspective, the meaning of what Koreans do from generation to generation,<sup>19</sup> as early Christians fasted during Passover, rather than feasted, in remembrance of Christ's death.

Second, his work encourages pastors of Korean and Korean-American churches to preach Eucharistic sermons. What happens in Korean churches is that the Eucharistic action of Jesus, his life, death, resurrection, and heavenly banquet, is not often delivered in the sermon even on Sacrament Sundays. When the sermon does not clarify and help the congregation to understand the meaning of the Eucharist, it is easy for the Eucharist to become a mere ritual rather than a sacrament delivering the mystery of Christian faith. Even though the Eucharist is observed, it becomes a monthly event. Preachers need to articulate the meaning of the Eucharist in the sermon so that the congregation may fully participate in the meaning of the Eucharist, not just the elements.

Third, his work encourages Christians to live the Eucharistic life. Incorporating rice to the Eucharist means to bring daily life to worship, because rice is the symbol of life and culture for Koreans. In order not to make the Eucharist a mere ritual, we need to bring out the Eucharistic message and live the Eucharistic life showing the life, death, and resurrection of Christ by sacrificing ourselves and making peace with people. Preaching the Eucharistic sermon might be a work of pastors. But, living the Eucharistic life is the work of all Christians, because "Christians are called to ministry in the real spaces of the world."<sup>20</sup> If embodiment of the

Eucharist does not happen in our life, inculturation of the Eucharistic elements and the renewal of Korean Protestant worship will be useless.

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<sup>1</sup> Soonwhan Kim, *The Symbolic Dimension in the Korean Protestant Worship and its Relationship with the Inculturation of the Eucharistic Elements*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122. Korean annual ceremonies are as follows: "seol (seolnal) or wondan (January 1<sup>st</sup>), Daeboreum (January 15<sup>th</sup>), hanshik (February), samjin (March), chopail (April), Dano (May), Yoodoo (June), chilsok (July), chusok (August), Juggoo (September), Kosa (October), Tongji (November), and Keumeum (December)."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221.

<sup>13</sup> The terminology, *essence* and *accident*, in theology, comes from the Thomas Aquinas' explanation of the doctrine of transubstantiation meaning "the conversion of the whole substance [essence] of the bread and wine into the whole substance [essence] of the Body and Blood of Christ, only the accidents (i.e. the appearance of the bread and wine) remaining." Edited by E. A. Livingston, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 596.

<sup>14</sup> Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Walter F. Pitts Jr. well describes how worshipers in Afro-American Baptist churches experience emotional upheaval in worship: “The metaphoric frame, by uniting such disparate entities as speech, song, and gesture, create and control desired moods over its participants. Once initiated, the metaphoric frames control participants emotionally by imposing upon them metaphoric predicaments, that is, new identities, in the course of the ritual.” Walter F. Pitts Jr., *Old Ship of Zion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>16</sup> “Christians kept Passover at the same time as did the Jews, but instead of feasting, these Christians fasted, remembering the crucified one and waiting for the day of God.” Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Soonwhan Kim, *The Symbolic Dimension in the Korean Protestant Worship and its Relationship with the Inculturation of the Eucharistic Elements*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> But, we should be also careful here, because, as Don E. Saliers points out, “We can not simply make symbols by manipulating objects.” Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 1996), 34.

<sup>19</sup> Mountain Prayer and Early Morning Prayer are examples of Korean Shamanistic practice which became a tradition of Korean churches through encounter with the gospel.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Edward Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 135.