The Multisite Church Revolution:
Technology and Religion in South Korea and the United States

by

Heather Mellquist

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Professor Charles Hirschkind, Chair
Professor Cori Hayden
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Abstract

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"The Multisite Church Revolution: Technology and Religion in South Korea and the United States" examines technologies of religion in Korean multisite churches, and draws from two years of ethnographic field research, one in Seoul and one in Koreatown in Los Angeles. A multisite church is a single church that meets at multiple locations, often by recording the service in one sanctuary and broadcasting it to "satellite" churches. Although American churches often claim to have led the recent transformation of Western megachurches into franchise-like organizations, the first multisite churches in the world were in South Korea, beginning in the 1970s. Since the inception of the multisite church, the development and deployment of various bureaucratic and media technologies have been central to the church form. With close attention to the perspectives of both church leadership and congregants, I follow the imbrication of religious institutions, theological traditions, and technological innovation in the context of the ongoing creation of these transnational communities.

This dissertation explores the intersection of media, technology, and religion within Korean Christianity from two main angles. First, several chapters explore the development of technological instruments and their use in religious practice. For example, I detail how the practices of transnational video streaming undergird changing theological conceptions of contact and community, such that screens are said to transmit healing touches, and religious community becomes increasingly defined in terms of seeing and being seen. Second, my work reveals how the concept of "technology" helps to shape an understanding and experience of Christianity for both church management and those they serve. After the Korean War, Christianity came to be understood as a facet of modernity itself, and Protestantism's rapid spread in the late 20th century seemed to confirm its place as a major complement to economic development. Since the early 2000s, however, that growth has stagnated and megachurches have increasingly come under public criticism. Now that the role of Christianity in the imagined future of the Korean people is less clear, I explore how these churches narrate South Korea's tech economy and Protestant Christianity as co-dependent. Through multisited research in South Korea and North America—places where technological progressivism has a strong ideological presence—this dissertation traces how Christian communities seek to resolve perceived threats to social and religious authority through aligning themselves with technological futures in both word and practice.

Although South Korea has become a principle site of both Christianity and technological development, neither subject has been well attended in academic literature about Korea. Bringing recent discourses on religion and secularism together with media and technology studies, my research contributes to both fields, showing how conceptions of religion and technology are co-produced through everyday discussions about technology and the embodied use of media technologies in religious practice. This transnational, multisited research provides a comparative analysis of the materiality of religious practice, allowing a critical evaluation of the reception and utilization of church technologies across East Asian and North American contexts. Furthermore, as churches are foundational to the Korean diaspora in the United States, my research places these anchoring institutions within their transpacific context, indicating that these churches foster not only "local" Korean diasporic communities, but also enduring connections to South Korea. Finally, my research serves as a corrective to the "American exceptionalism" that can plague research on megachurch evangelicalism. My research confirms that the global congregational trend toward multisite churches began in South Korea—not the United States. In a period when many Western congregations are contemplating the ethical and theological implications of multisite churches, research in the 40-year-old Korean multisite churches can greatly inform broader understandings of such ecclesiological changes.

Field research for this project was supported by the Fulbright-Hays DDRA Fellowship, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Academy for Korean Studies. The writing of my dissertation has been supported by the Korea Foundation.

For Darlene Mellquist

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Introduction

Dawn on Kyŏngnidan Street

On the first morning I was in Seoul since my main fieldwork stay, I was restless due to a combination of the thick, June heat and jet lag. Since I couldn't sleep, I left my apartment before five in the morning. I decided to walk the mile between my place on Kyŏngnidan Street and Onnuri Church in Sŏbinggo-dong to attend sunrise prayer service and to see some familiar faces. As I stepped outside, the dense, humid air filled my throat and lungs; it was before dawn, but Seoul was already a sauna. The small trash bags that sprout at the ends of each alley for evening collection had been removed, but the scent of hot garbage hung in the air. The heavy metal door of my building clanged shut and the electronic lock beeped as it secured behind me. With sun still hidden below the horizon, the world was cast in a grey-orange haze.

In the year I had been away, the neighborhood had become one of the most popular areas among young adults. Small, independent bars and restaurants still lined the main street, but larger, trendier pubs and cafes were making in-roads. At this time of day, the vestiges of nightlife and the early signs of the workday ahead were both visible. Taxi drivers patrolled the streets after last call, looking for their final wages before public transit would begin to run in the morning and would cut into their profits. As I walked down the narrow sidewalk, a yellow cab craned its body toward my path as if in petition, but when I didn't change my course, it straightened to the road again in search of another passenger.

I first passed two young men standing at the edge of the road. One man was straddling a motorcycle, and the other steadied himself against his friend by gripping his shoulder with one hand. The man on the bike fastened his helmet as he complained about a certain woman and how there is "nothing that can be done" [*hal su ŏpta*]. Across the street, I noticed a couple of young men watching over the life on the street. They sat on plastic chairs outside of a convenience store, raising cigarettes to their scowling lips. Four empty soju bottles stood on the table before them as a record of their night's work.

I walked a few steps farther, and there was a couple seated at a bar top that jutted into the sidewalk at a right angle. The young woman was slumped over the bar, resting her head on her left arm. She faced a young man who listened to her from his stool. "The boss/department head [*pujang*] will probably arrive soon. [exasperated sigh] I want to quit," she lamented. Office subordinates were expected to arrive to work before their superiors in South Korea, and I suspect she would need to go directly to work after a quick change of clothes.

It was through such drinking marathons that I came to learn about the city's long working hours, job insecurity, demanding family obligations, pressure to have children, depression, high rate of suicide, and other symptoms of what Koreans cleverly label "developed country disease" [*sŏjin'gukpyŏng*]. Young people call the early 21st Century "Hell Chosun" [*hel chosŏn*] as a short-hand for their general sense of an insurmountable social inequality, which manifests itself through low wages, few prospects for professional advancement, high social expectations from elders, and lack of affordable urban housing.

Soon, I reach a juncture between the main road I was on and an alley that sloped uphill to my left. An older man in a brown, woolen blazer and an older woman in a navy-blue skirt suit merged onto the street before me. Their walk was purposeful, with their backs turned squarely toward me and the nightlife I had just passed. The old man clutched a Bible with a worn, leather cover at his side like a sword. Moisture had curled the book's pages, and the wrinkles on his folded hands revealed flakes of white, cracked skin. His jacket was a thick wool—it was the least appropriate garment for the blistering heat, and I wondered if it might be the only one he had. We reached the end of the street and he and his wife disappeared into the local Presbyterian Church.

This time before sunrise captured two prominent routines in Seoul. It showed how many people respond to the pressures and uncertainty of their lives. Many of my interlocutors describe their situations as almost hopeless. The terms of their employment are unsustainable, but these jobs appear to be their best option. They desire to marry, but they believe that they lack the requisite financial and social capital. They worry about South Korea's dwindling population, and yet they feel restricted by class expectations that would not enable them to afford more than one middle-class child.

Dawn on Kyŏngnidan Street displayed some common ways in which people respond to try to negotiate these varied constraints and desires. Alcohol and companionship sufficed for many to prop themselves up on their motorcycles at 5 a.m. and head home for a quick shower before starting the next workday. But others clutched their Bibles at their side in order to seek redemption ever out of their control. To many, these older Christians seem naïve or silly, to rise at dawn through a faith that is "sure of what you hope for and certain of what you cannot see." But even if such hope is naïve, it may yet be the only effective antidote to hopelessness.

In many ways, this dissertation is about faith. It is about what one draws upon, and how one acts in relation to the uncertain and unseen. It is unlikely that the man I saw walking to early morning prayer, who I imagine to have lived through the aftermath of the Korean war, totalitarian regimes, a military dictator, and the IMF crisis was unaware of what it was like to hate one's job, boss, or feel anxious about an uncertain future. But in going to sunrise prayer, he is faithful, refuting that which he has seen and acting as if he is certain of what he has not—that at any time our problems may be transcended and we might find a "still more excellent way."[1]

"The Multisite Church Revolution: Technology and Religion in South Korea and the United States" looks at how Korean Christians seek to coordinate their religious practice in relation to shifting material conditions. More specifically, it examines technologies of religion in Korean multisite churches, drawing from two years of ethnographic field research, one in Seoul and one in Koreatown in Los Angeles. A multisite church is a single church that meets at multiple

[1] Early morning prayer can be seen as a rebuke of the world as it is or things seen to be impediments. According to a CCSKC survey (Lee Timothy 2010, 131), over eighty percent of respondents said that if one is faithful, one must attend early morning prayer. This is a part of a larger association with the suppression of one's corporeal desires enable new possibilities or spiritual revival.

locations, often by recording the service in one sanctuary and broadcasting it to "satellite" churches. Although American churches often claim to have led the recent transformation of Western megachurches into franchise-like organizations, the first multisite churches in the world were in South Korea, beginning in the 1970s. Since the inception of the multisite church, the development and deployment of various bureaucratic and media technologies have been central to the church form. With close attention to the perspectives of both church leadership and congregants, I follow the imbrication of religious institutions, theological traditions, and technological coordination in the context of the ongoing creation of these transnational communities.

The relationship between humans and objects has received increased attention in an age where digital and media technologies challenge what are sometimes taken-for-granted divisions between the self and other, subject and object. For this reason, several anthropologists of religion have adopted material approaches to examine how materiality and embodiment are central to religious beliefs and practices. In this dissertation, I explore how Korean Christians relate to the objects of their practice as well as the role that these objects play in the formation of religious communities. If the church can be said to be the "Body of Christ" [*kŭrisŭdoŭi momdoen kyohoe*], as many Christians say, then I offer that it is a cyborg body (Haraway 1990, 1991) incorporating humans, spirits, and technologies.

Although South Korea has become a principle site of both Christianity and technological development, until recently neither subject has been well attended in academic literature about contemporary South Korea.[2] Bringing recent discourses on religion and secularism together with media and technology studies, this work seeks to contribute to both fields, showing how conceptions of religion and technology are co-produced through everyday discussions about technology and the embodied use of media technologies in religious practice. I ask how communities relate to their religious traditions and theology in light of rapid change to the material environments and technologies of their practice. In other words, to borrow from Max Weber, I want to examine what the "interaction of ideal and material culture" looks like (Weber 1906). The interaction of technology and religion is, of course, not a new set of issues—for example, the effects that moveable type had on Christianity in fifteenth century Europe need no introduction. However, we too often assign the study of religion and the study of technology to completely distinct fields. I draw together training in anthropology, religious studies, and science and

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[2] Notable recent explorations of Korean Christianity include Ju Hui Judy Han. "Missionary Destinations and Diasporic Destiny: Spatiality of Korean/American Evangelism and the Cell Church." (2005); Ju Hui Judy Han. "Contemporary Korean/American Evangelical Missions: Politics of Space, Gender, and Difference." PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2009; Nicholas Harkness. "Words in Motion and the Semiotics of the Unseen in Two Korean Churches." *Language & Communication*30, no. 2 (2010): 139-158, Nicholas Harkness. *Songs of Seoul: An Ethnography of Voice and Voicing in Christian South Korea*. University of California Press, 2013; Han, Ju Hui Judy. "Urban Megachurches and Contentious Religious Politics in Seoul." In *Handbook of Religion and The Asian City: Aspiration and Urbanization in the Twenty-First Century* (2015): 133-51; Nicholas Harkness. "Glossolalia and Cacophony in South Korea: Cultural Semiosis at the Limits of Language." *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 3 (2017): 476-489; Nicholas Harkness. *The Voices of Seoul: Sound, Body, and Christianity in South Korea*. The University of Chicago, 2010; Nicholas Harkness. "Encore!: Homecoming Recitals in Christian South Korea." *Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 351-381.

technology studies (STS) in order to analyze the coproduction of religion and technological artifacts.

My project takes seriously recent debates within the anthropology of secularism that attend to the historical particularity and politics surrounding the regulation of common notions of religion in modernity (Asad 1983, 2003, 2011; Masuzawa 2005; Taylor 2007; Sullivan 2009; Cannell 2010). Instead of assuming a transhistorical essence to the category of religion, these scholars call us to examine the social and political conditions that allow religion to take on particular qualities, such as traditionalism and belief. Similarly, work in science and technology studies attend to the historical production of conceptions of technology. Specifically, these scholars observe how in modernity, "technology" becomes associated with newness, change, and social transformation (Smith and Marx 1994; MacKenzie and Wacjman 1999).

Drawing upon both the anthropology of secularism and the anthropology of technology, my investigation of "religion and technology" approaches neither category as self-evident. Recent discussions in the anthropology of secularism shed light on how the category of religion, as it is often employed today, emerged under particular historical conditions and is under constant negotiation (Asad 1983, 2003, 2011; Masuzawa 2005; Scott and Hirschkind 2006; Taylor 2007; Sullivan 2009; Cannell 2010; Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun 2010). Drawing on this discourse, I explore how conceptions of religion and Christianity relate to technological change in South Korea. This includes tracing how communities negotiate a sense of continuity with their religious tradition while they debate the use of new technologies.

On the other hand, I draw on the anthropology of science and technology as I explore the constant construction of the category of "technology" itself (Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch 1987; Daston 1992; Smith and Marx 1994; MacKenzie 1996). In discursive practice, congregants and pastors reserve the term "technology" for a particular set of objects; typically these are objects to which they attribute new, radical, or transformative capabilities. For example, a ceiling is never referred to as "technology," while more controversial objects like lighting, fog machines, and projectors are usually called "technology." Indeed, it is partly because of the fact that "technology" often connotes change, while "religion" often connotes traditionalism, that these technology and religion are seldom put in conversation. By coupling these two theoretical discourses, I focus on the co-production of our concepts of technology and religion. I examine how such negotiations may adhere to or diverge from theoretical assumptions about the role of both religion and technology in constructions of modernity, particularly in the context of cultures where modernization plays a strong ideological role (Kendall 1996, 2002; Lie 1998, 2008; Abelmann 2003; Harkness 2014).

In this way, this dissertation responds to sociologist John Lie's (2008) call for East Asian Science and Technology Studies. Although social theory aspires to universality, it nevertheless suffers from provincialism because the society that forms the basis for social theory is usually a Western one. As historian of technology Gregory Clancey has also noted, "All those books covering publishers' tables about American and European technologies, however critical many of them are, seem to suggest that if the history of technology has a homeland, it is centered in the Atlantic world" (2012, 244; see also Clancey 2009; Hong 2007). Through an ethnographic study of Korean multisite churches, this dissertation will attend to the ways in which religious views and practices in both South Korea and North America are mediated through their physical environments, which today are increasingly shaped by digital and media technologies.

In this dissertation, I focus on what the co-production of technology and Christianity looks like in the context of multisite churches—a coordination of people, resources, and practices increasingly common in Protestant Christianity around the world. I want to show why the relationship between Christianity and technology matters to the people I worked with, and how they live with both the histories of these terms and the material arrangements that they have inherited and built to accompany these regnant understandings. Like all relationships, the one between self and technology is less a problem to be solved than a balance to be struck. Throughout this dissertation, I will look at the varied ways through which Korean Christians try to balance their resignation to the will of God with efforts to act in the world, taking up and giving into God-given technologies in order to realize God's kingdom on earth.

This dissertation explores the intersection of media, technology, and religion within Korean Christianity from two main angles. First, my work reveals how the concept of "technology" helps to shape an understanding and experience of Christianity for both church management and those they serve. After the Korean War, Christianity came to be understood as a facet of modernity itself, and Protestantism's rapid spread in the late 20th century seemed to confirm its place as a major complement to economic development. Since the early 2000s, however, that growth has stagnated and megachurches have increasingly come under public criticism. Now that the role of Christianity in the imagined future of the Korean people is less clear, I explore how these churches narrate South Korea's tech economy and Protestant Christianity as co-dependent. Through multisited research in South Korea and North America—places where technological progressivism has a strong ideological presence—this dissertation traces how Christian communities seek to resolve perceived threats to social and religious authority through aligning themselves with technological futures in both word and practice. Second, I explore how technological instruments figure into Christian practice and everyday life. For example, I detail how the practices of transnational video streaming undergird changing theological conceptions of contact and community, such that screens are said to transmit healing touches, and religious community becomes increasingly defined in terms of seeing and being seen. Contrary to studies that focus on religion in terms of belief, I follow how people negotiate their Christian faith (as action) in relation to the objects of their practice. Here, Christian life is principally about, in the words of Walter Benjamin (1969, 108), "the coordination of the soul, the eye, and the hand." Alternatively, in the words of Korean Christians, it is about creating and maintaining "holy infrastructures" through their bodies, actions, and the objects of their practice.

"The Multisite Church Revolution"

The title of this dissertation is drawn from my entry-point into this research project. As a first-year graduate student I began to look at the development of multisite churches in the United States. As mentioned briefly above, multisite churches are single churches that meet in multiple buildings or campuses, and their unity is choreographed through a variety of organizational strategies and technical infrastructures. A multisite church may span several countries, or it might be limited to a single city block. Pastors may record worship services at a main sanctuary or television studio in order to broadcast to smaller campuses; or they may have independent, unique services at each campus. They may use any combination of radio, television, internet streaming

platforms, or even holograms to transmit sermons and services. Or they may not. In the context of these diverse models and tactics, multisite churches in the United States debate the "best practices" for congregational life. Pastors participate in an ongoing deliberation over how to best lead at a distance, what congregant participation might mean in across multiple campuses, and how liturgical practices should be changed to accommodate this new structure. In total, the multisite model appeared to be so disruptive to many American Christians that these debates amounted to no less than an interrogation of what is essential to a church and to Christian practice.[3]

The development and proliferation of this ecclesial form is commonly referred to as "The Multisite Church Revolution"—in part, owing to a 2006 book of the same name (Surratt, Ligon, and Bird 2006). While in 1990 there were only ten multisite churches, today the number of multisite churches in America exceeds 8,000. Accompanying this trend are been dozens of books, national conferences, and consulting firms to facilitate the development of this church organizational model.[4]

Church leaders in the U.S. told me that the multisite church is a distinctly American phenomenon, with only the occasional reference to Australia's Hillsong Church as it established campuses throughout North America and Europe during the course of my research. However, one day during pilot research I read a footnote in a book that mentioned that the first multisite churches in the world were in South Korea. One of the first multisite churches was Onnuri in Seoul, which "accidently" developed four campuses simultaneously. In the late 1990s, nearby churches denounced Onnuri's multisited, "franchise" structure as unbiblical and unchristian, picketing outside Onnuri weekly (Jones 2004). The largest Protestant church in the world—Yoido Full Gospel Church—is also located in Seoul. Though it began as a single church site, in the 1990s Yoido also planted smaller locations throughout Korea to accommodate its over one million

[3] The multisite church structure shares several, *prima facie* similarities to older diocesan or parish structures in Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Such resemblance stems from the fact that all of these models draw inspiration from the first Christian churches in the book of Acts in the Bible. The first churches were small and geographically isolated from each other, and so they used a combination of itinerant leadership and letter-writing to forge networks of Christian congregations. But despite structural similarities, reasonable distinctions can be made between multisite churches and other ecclesial models because they exhibit unique conceptions of community, communication, and structures of ecclesial authority which are shaped by the socio-economic conditions of the multisite church's emergence.

[4] In the past few years, there has been increasing criticism of the multisite church model. I noted one early sign of shifting sentiments in 2015, at an Exponential Conference for church leaders in Irvine, California. I met with the leaders of the first multisite consulting group Multisite Solutions, only to learn that they had hired Wade Burnett to be a partner and senior associate of the group. This announcement was accompanied by a new orientation, "From Megachurch, and Multisite Church, to Movement." It was particularly notable that a firm marketed to provide "Multisite Solutions" was now offering their own solution *to* the multisite model. Then throughout 2016 and 2017, an avalanche of blog posts and articles have circulated throughout American Christian media, arguing that the model is itself is antithetical to Christian congregational practices. Multisite Solutions' emphasis on "movement" as a paradigm for church growth has become "multiply" as of 2018.

members. Today, these two churches combined have more than one hundred "satellite" churches throughout East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North America, and Australia.

To consider the theological and social questions the multisite church had provoked in the United States, I shifted my research focus to South Korea to see how these churches had operated for nearly half a century. In South Korea, churches are rarely distinguished according to single- or multi-site. There is no generally-recognized word for "multisite church," and the churches where I did my research are described as "megachurches" [*taehyŏnggyohoe*] because of their size rather than the number of locations.[5] Nevertheless, I have kept the title "The Multisite Church Revolution" to signal that Korean and Korean diasporic churches provide earlier precedent for this "revolution." In fact, one of the first American multisite churches, Willow Creek Church of Illinois, has a longstanding relationship with Onnuri Church of Seoul. Given Willow Creek's founding Pastor Bill Hybels had a close relationship to the late Pastor Ha of Onnuri Church, and that Hybels visited Onnuri in the late 1990s before Willow Creek became multisite in 2001, there is reason to wonder if some of the inspiration for the American multisite revolution first came from these churches in South Korea.[6] In a period when many Western congregations are contemplating the ethical and theological implications of multisite churches, research in 40-year-old Korean multisite churches can greatly inform broader understandings of such ecclesiological changes. In this way, this study of mega- and multisite churches outside of North America may be useful to correct the narrative of American exceptionalism that pervades conversations about evangelical Christianity.[7]

Christianity in Korea

Korean Christianity has a significant influence on many Christians throughout the globe, mostly through the work of megachurches like those featured in this dissertation. Today, five of the largest twenty churches of the world are in South Korea, including the world's largest Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal congregations (Chung Byung Joon 2014). Although the

[5] The term "campus church" [*k'aemp'ŏsŭ kyohoe*] provides a useful approximation, but this term refers more specifically to an auxiliary church site and does not capture the multisite church as an integrated network of congregations.

[6] As of 2018, I have not been able to verify with Willow Creek Church or Pastor Hybels whether it was merely coincidental that he "pioneered" the multisite model after visiting Onnuri Church. Several Onnuri Pastors visited Willow Creek in 1996, and Bill Hybels visited Onnuri Church nearly every year in the late 1990s through at least 2006, according to Eun Young Lee Eisley (2014).

[7] To give just one example, just days after I had returned from my extended fieldwork stay, *The Washington Post* published an article titled, "How U.S.-style Megachurches Are Taking over the World, in 5 Maps and Charts." South Korean churches were well-represented in the body of the article, making the title seem even more peculiar. That megachurches around the globe were described as "U.S.-style" when the biggest and oldest megachurches in the article are South Korean served only to perpetuate the narrative that American churches lead global Christianity, while other countries follow or imitate them.

country has a relatively small population, it is one of the world's foremost missionary sending countries as well.[8] But it is important to recognize that Protestant Christianity has a relatively short history on the Korean Peninsula.

Although there is evidence that there were modest efforts to missionize Korea as early as the 16th Century, few missionaries even arrived in the "Hermit Kingdom" before the 19th Century. The first sustained contact with Christianity occurred in the late 18th Century, when Jesuit pamphlets arrived from China and found audience with a self-organized group of Confucian scholars in Korea. In 1777, this group began to study the Jesuit tracts, and seven years later, scholar Yi Sunghun was baptized during a trip to Beijing, making him the first baptized Korean Christian (Baker 2006, 2008; Grayson 2006; Ledyard 2006). As Catholicism slowly spread among the upper (*yangban*) and middle classes (*chungin*), social and political tensions developed over the Confucian practices of *chesa*, or ancestral rites, which Catholic teachings considered idolatrous at that time. The government responded quickly to news of this new religion in order to suppress it, first by restricting its practice and the importation of Catholic texts, and later by killing select Catholics for refusing to perform *chesa* rites. The next century of Korean Christian history was marked by repeated persecution and martyrdom of Catholics, spurred largely by concerns over Catholicism's subordination to the government, the perceived threat of foreign missionaries to political sovereignty, and ongoing conflict over the practice of *chesa* rites (See Clark 1986; Yu 1996; Grayson 2006).

Formal persecution of Catholics ended in 1871. The Korean government's increasing diplomatic relations with the West provided incentive to avoid confrontations with the Catholic Church. For the next several decades, the Catholic Church pursued institutional growth on the peninsula, and by 1910 there were around 73,000 Catholics. At the same time that Catholics enjoyed a reprieve from harassment, Protestantism began to be established in Korea as well.

Similar to Catholicism on the peninsula, Korean converts were instrumental to Korean Protestantism because there was no Protestant missionary presence until 1884. In the 1870s, Scottish Presbyterian missionary John Ross employed Korean merchants in Manchuria to translate the New Testament into Korean. These texts circulated throughout the 1880s, and several Koreans converted to Protestant Christianity based solely on this translation. The arrival of Western missionaries beginning in 1884 marked a significant turning point, however. These missionaries were primarily from North America and the United Kingdom, and many of them were medical professionals. They would go on to found some of Korea's most prominent educational and Western medical institutions, such as Ewha Girl's High School, Yonsei University, and Severance Hospital. Unlike the Catholic Church's focus on institutional growth and personal conversion, early Protestant missionaries to Korea founded long-lasting institutions oriented toward providing social aid and instruction (Choi 2009; Chong 2008).

Under Japanese colonialism from 1910-1945, there were several conflicts that came to secure an association of Christianity with Korean nationalism, particularly clashes between

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[8] South Korea is commonly referred to as the number one or number two missionary-sending nation (after the United States). However, widely this myth circulates, as geographer Ju Hui Judy Han indicates, these claims are made without adequate citation. Nevertheless, even modest estimates have the number of Korean missionaries overseas in the tens of thousands. See Han Judy 2009.

Protestant Christians and the colonial government. For example, the colonial government accused 124 people of attempting to assassinate the Japanese governor-general Terauchi Masatake, and 98 of the accused were Christian. While almost all the accused were eventually acquitted, the trial created an association between Korean nationalism and Christianity.

What is known as the single greatest conflict with the Japanese colonial government is known as the March First Movement of 1919 (commonly referred to in Korean as the *Sam-Il*, or 3-1, movement). Sixteen Protestant Koreans, out of a total 33 people, signed a Declaration of Independence as an intended act of nonviolent resistance to Japan. Because nearly half of those involved were Protestants, some of the response of the Japanese colonial government was directed toward Protestant Christians. For example, Japanese soldiers burned church buildings; on at least one occasion a church was burned with Christians locked inside (Clark 1986; Grayson 2006; Lee Timothy 2010).

Conflicts between Christians and the colonial government persisted until Korea achieved independence, and these conflicts were often over the government's efforts to encourage Shinto nationalism by obligating citizens to participate in rites at Shinto shrines. Many Koreans refused to participate in the rituals, some seeing the rites as offensive and Christians, in particular, viewing it as idolatrous. Although some churches and Christians capitulated or compromised with the government, thousands refused to comply with government regulations and in turn, they were arrested, tortured, and church property was seized. By the end of the colonial period, these cases of Christian resistance to Japanese colonial rule helped to support the idea that the Christian religion was a component of an emergent Korean nationalism. Even though Christianity was a religion of foreign origin, in the case of early 20th-century Korea, imperialism was understood to be Japanese rather than Western.

In the period immediately following WWII, the American military government in South Korea had a fairly laissez-faire policy toward religious organizations. From 1945 to 1950, the Protestant population doubled from 240,000 to 500,000; still, Christians remained a marginal percent of the population until the 1960s. Historian Timothy Lee (2011) has argued that Protestantism thrived in the late 20th century because Korean Protestantism tended to complement Korean nationalism and anti-communism. In 1948, for example, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) supported the appointment of Syngman Rhee, an elder in a Methodist Church, to be the first president of the newly-partitioned state. A large portion of the highest-ranking officials of these early administrations were also Christians [9] Evangelical Christians in the 1950s and 1960s expressed strong criticism of communism, which would align with the anti-communist ideologies of several late 20th century South Korean administrations, particularly the authoritarian regimes of Syngman Rhee (1948–1960), Park Chung Hee (1961–1979), and Chun Doo Hwan (1980–1987) (Park Chung-shin 2003; Baker 2008, 86–114; Lee

[9] Historian Chung-shin Park notes that the National History Compilation Committee claims the disproportionate appointment of Christians to South Korea's first political offices was due in part to the strong presence of the U.S. government and the U.S. officials' relative comfort with Christian leadership (Park 2003: 175). However, according to historian Bruce Cumings, Americans first sought out support from collaborators with the Japanese and other upper-class, moderate nationalists, and thus claims to an overwhelming American support of Christians must be tempered relative to other selection characteristics.

Timothy 2011). Many preachers of the post-war era insisted that Christianity was the country's strongest antidote to communism (Kim Byung-Suh 1984; Lee Timothy 2010).

In addition to Korean nationalism and anti-communism, Protestantism was also seen as a complement to economic development and urbanization. The spread of Protestantism was seen to accompany the rapid growth of the economy known as the "Miracle on the Han River."[10] As the urban population grew from less than forty percent of the nation's population in 1960 to over eighty percent by 1990, voluntary associations like churches offered the opportunity to form social networks and, as some scholars argue, avoid the *anomie* that may accompany industrial, urban life. Many of the larger churches recognized the influx of Korean workers to cities as an opportunity for evangelism, and they began to develop strategies and plant churches in order to reach expanding neighborhoods. In 1980, Protestants made up almost 15 percent of the South Korean population, and by 1995, Protestantism reached its height at 20 percent (Kim Andrew 2000; Park Chung-shin 2003; Chung Byung Joon 2014; Grayson 2008; Park Joon-Sik 2014).

In the early 21st century, however, Protestant church membership began to stagnate, or perhaps even decline. One reason for this is that many churches—especially megachurches—are seen to be aligned with conservative politics, which has fallen out of favor with many young adults. In addition, several celebrity pastors have been accused and convicted of crimes such as sexual abuse, embezzlement, and political corruption, which has eroded the trust in these pastors and their churches. In 2005, almost half of the population reported no religious affiliation, around 23 percent identified as Buddhist, about 10 percent identified as Catholic, and less than 20 percent identified as Protestant. By 2015, the latest Gallup poll recorded no religious affiliation up to 56 percent, while Protestantism remained at around 20 percent. Thus, narratives that claim South Korea is a Christian nation due to the celebrity of South Korean megachurches must be tempered by the survey data that offers not only is Protestantism a minority religious identification, but that it shows few signs of growth (Gallup 2005, 2015; Kim Andrew 2000; Chung Byung Joon 2014).

Yoido Full Gospel Church

One of the two churches that figures most prominently in this dissertation is Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC or Yoido for short). Pastor Cho Yonggi (also known as Paul or David Cho) was raised as a Buddhist, but converted to Christianity as a teenager after he attributed a recovery from tuberculosis to the ministry of a Christian nurse. Cho started his first church of five family members in Daejo-dong, Seoul on May 18, 1958 (Lee Young-hoon 2009, 95). According church histories, this small church grew because news spread of its physical healings and miracles. Pastor Cho and his future mother-in-law Ch'oe Cha-sil (popularly known as "Hallelujah Mama") attributed these healings and miracles to the ministry's correct understanding of the order of material and spiritual conditions. According to them, sin and suffering in this life are symptomatic

[10] For overviews of the late 20th century urbanization and industrialization of South Korea, see John Lie. *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea.* Stanford University Press, 1998; Bruce Cumings. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

of a spiritual separation from God. The way to improve one's overall condition, therefore, was to accept God's sovereignty over one's life. Through practiced submission to God's control, spiritual and material alignment will result, they argue (Synan 1997; Park Myung Soo 2003; Lee Young-hoon 2009).

As his ministry grew, and it expanded into an old GI tent in a poor area of Seoul called Seodaemun. Cho began to minister to the most vulnerable and impoverished Koreans displaced from the Korean War (1950-1953).[11] In the early years of the church, now known as Full Gospel Central Church, it was a gathering of primarily poor, sick, or otherwise socially-marginalized Koreans.[12] By 1962, the church had a membership of around 800 people, but about a decade later that number had reached 18,000. At this point, a wealthy member of the church donated to Cho land on the island of Yŏŭido in Seoul, and in 1973, Yoido Full Gospel Church was built at its current location.

With this large building, YFGC became the location of revival meetings. Reverend Billy Graham—whose wife had attended high school in Pyeongyang, what is now North Korea—was a featured guest for several of these events. By the mid-1980s, the membership of YFGC reached over 500,000, and Cho became a celebrity throughout the globe. Cho preaches and writes not only in Korean, but also in English and Japanese. An annual, international conference called Church Growth International was established in 1977 and draws pastors from dozens of countries seeking to learn from Pastor Cho's successes in evangelism; this conference continues to this day. In 1997, YFGC reported a membership of 709,000, and the church's membership has slowed and plateaued since then. Still today, it remains the claimant to the largest membership for a single church in the world, around 800,000 congregants at the Yoido location alone (Kim Kristen 2008). I was often told that weekly attendance to Sunday services was around 70,000 at this one site, though I could not personally verify these figures.

As the largest Protestant church in the world, many consider the YFGC to be the megachurch *par excellence.* In an era when much of Western Christendom witnessed a decline in church attendance and religious affiliation, Christians around the world looked to head pastor Cho

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[11] At the time that this dissertation was written in early 2018, The Korean War has not legally ended. However, 1953 is often cited as a closing date for the War because a final armistice was signed on July 27, 1953, and since this date, there has been only limited open conflict between the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).

[12] According to a conversation I had with Pastor Lee Tae-gun, the "Full" in the name "Full Gospel Church" is a relic of an original mistranslation. In Korean, the church is titled "Sunbokum" Church, where the qualifier "sun" can mean either full, pure, or genuine. As Pastor Lee relates, it was originally meant to mean "genuine" Gospel Church, to distinguish the church from other ministries who were not attending to central truths of the Bible.

Yonggi and YFGC to learn how to grow such a large church in the purportedly secular age.[13] According to Cho, the secret is his administration of "cell groups [*sel kŭrup*]."[14]

A "cell group" is a congregational sub-group of around five to ten families. When a Christian registers as a member of YFGC, they are assigned to a cell group based upon the location of their home. If a group exceeds ten families, then that cell will divide, creating two, smaller cells—this division is the mechanism for the church's growth. Cell groups meet at least once a week, typically in the home of one of the cell group leaders, and in YFGC and many other Korean churches, cell group leaders are typically women. The cell leader serves in a lower, managerial role in the larger church, and she is responsible for organizing group meetings, praying for individual members, and, usually, for providing refreshments for the meetings. Being that YFGC has long been a large megachurch, cell groups are designed to be intimate spaces of community, and they are often described as one's Christian "home." According to the pastors, cell groups are the "life" of the church (Cho 1981, 56; Han Judy 2008; Kwon Ebaugh and Hagan 1997).[15]

A number of large churches in the world have adopted Cho's model for their own church's growth. Notable cell churches include the International Charismatic Mission in Bogota, Faith

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[13] Notably, the author of *The Secular City* Harvey Cox, one of the American religion scholars who became popular because of his initial prediction of the decline of religious affiliation in the mid-twentieth century, would later use Cho Yonggi and the Yoido Full Gospel Church to refute his own secularization narrative (arguing instead that Pentecostalism outside of the West portends a rising swell of a spiritual kind of Christianity).

[14] Cho Yonggi is fluent in Korean, English, and Japanese, and he publishes and preaches in all three languages. In Korean, Cho uses the transliteration of the English words "cell group," likely because the model is based upon an analogy to biological cells. Cell groups may be occasionally referred to as *kyogu* (teaching/faith group) or *kuyŏk* (zone, region) in the context of emphasizing either the instructive value of the meetings or the geographic proximity of the group members.

[15] The appearance of megachurches in Korea in the late 20th century was coincident with the rise of megachurches globally. Just as Cho said of his congregation in Seoul, many other megachurches, having struggled with the "impersonal" character of large churches, found solutions in cell groups. To provide one notable example, Patrick J. Brennan, president of the U.S. National Center for Evangelization and Renewal, proposed Cho's model as a blueprint for clergy who recognize the effectiveness of small support groups in revitalizing congregations but frequently have no models of how to initiate and structure such groups within a congregational setting (Kwon et. al. 1997, 248). The supposed intimacy of cell groups is appreciated in some scholarly literature as well. For example, sociologist Kelly Chong (2008) claims, "[Cell groups] are particularly crucial for larger churches that cannot easily provide the intimate family-like atmosphere of smaller churches. Indeed, the system of cell groups may be the chief reason for the success of seemingly impersonal mega-churches in Korea" (29). Sociologists Victoria Hyonchu Kwon, Helen Rose Ebaugh, and Jacqueline Hagan (1997) also support such a judgment, remarking that cell groups enable large churches to be remarkably "tight-knit." These characterizations of cell groups are mentioned not to affirm or deny these descriptions; rather, they are included to illustrate how widely it is presumed that cell groups function to provide intimate or personal communities within megachurches (which, conversely, are assumed to be necessarily impersonal by virtue of their size). See also Han Judy 2008.

Community Baptist Church of Singapore founded by Lawrence Khong, and the Willow Creek Church of Illinois, among many others.[16] In the United States alone, sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1994) records that there were over 400 cell churches in the 1990s, with over 75 million Christians participating. Among Korean and Korean American churches, cell groups are almost ubiquitous; for example, in one survey of the 33 Korean American churches in the Houston area, sociologists Victoria Hyonchu Kwon, Helen Rose Ebaugh, and Jacqueline Hagan (1997) found that each congregation, regardless of its size, had a cell group ministry (249).

Of course, Cho Yonggi was neither the first nor the only pastor to develop a model for small groups—a fact recognized by the Yoido Full Gospel Church itself. Both Cho and Young-hoon Lee (the current lead pastor of YFGC) maintain that the inspiration for their cell group model is biblical, its earliest precedent being the house churches described in chapter 2 of the book of Acts. Indeed, house churches and small group ministries were variably found within Christianity since its first days. In a historically proximate frame, the popularity of small group practices swelled among Western Protestant communities in the 18th century. In 1740s John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, advocated for house churches and smaller group meetings called "band" or "class" meetings because the small group settings were seen to complement the pietistic practices of Methodism (Foster 1976; Chong 2008). Small groups also played a significant role in the holiness revivals of the 19th century, including Pheobe Palmer's "Tuesday Meetings" (Lee Young-hoon 2004, 5). The popularity of small groups in the late 19th and 20th centuries ensured that North American missionaries brought these ideas and practices with them to the Korean peninsula in the earliest Protestant missions. Thus, small groups had operated in the small Protestant population on the Korean Peninsula for decades prior to Cho's ministry, so one could say that the basic form of Cho's cell groups is far from revelatory. However, it was Cho's particular "cell group system" that proliferated in the late 20th century, such that, in the words of Cho's successor, Young-hoon Lee, "the cell system is considered an internationally registered mark of YFGC" (2004, 15).

A few other characteristics stand out as central to YFGC. First, there is the celebrity of Cho Yonggi, particularly his ability to bring physical and spiritual healing through prayer. Second, the church is known for its prayer practices. All services at the YFGC are marked by prolonged periods of vocal, collective prayer, known as *t'onghapkido*. Many congregants will pray "in tongues," or speak in a "spiritual language" which is unintelligible to anyone except for Christians with the spiritual gift of "interpreting tongues."[17] For many people within the YFGC, the ability to pray in tongues is a distinctive marker of one's spiritual health and maturity, and so there is often significant social pressure (sometimes in the form of training) to develop this gift.

The church's theological identity centers on two messages. First, Cho Yonggi's "five-fold gospel" includes regeneration (or Spiritual rebirth) as necessary to salvation, "fullness of the Holy Spirit," divine healing, the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and the gospel of blessing. The first

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[16] For a more extensive list, see Harley Atkinson. "Small Groups: Context and Strategy for Christian Formation and Evangelization," *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2014), pp. 71-74.

[17] For an extended, linguistic analysis of *t'onghapkido* at YFGC, see Harkness, Nicholas. "Glossolalia and Cacophony in South Korea: Cultural Semiosis at the Limits of Language." *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 3 (2017): 476-489.

four of these principles are consistent with the four cardinal doctrines of the Assemblies of God (the Pentecostal denomination to which Yoido Full Gospel Church belongs). But the fifth principle—the gospel of blessing—is Cho's own inclusion, and communicates that God desires for humans to be blessed and to live fulfilling lives.

Cho's fifth principle is further expanded in the second main message of the church: the "three-fold blessing." Cho preaches that God wants material prosperity in this life for his followers, including "spiritual well-being," "general well-being," and "bodily health." With this message, Cho sought to emphasize that Jesus' ministry in the Bible was both saving souls and healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and comforting the marginalized. One may distinguish between spiritual, material, and physical well-being, but Cho insists that these are interdependent, and that all depend upon establishing the proper relationship to God and Biblical teachings (See Cho 1987). The theological emphasis was originally placed on one's individual transformation, not a broader social or relational commitment to corporate well-being. A broader social consciousness was added in the 1980s, coincident with South Korea's economic prosperity and the pro-democracy movement (Lee Young-hoon 2010).

It is because of this "three-fold blessing" that Pastor Cho is often characterized as a "prosperity gospel" preacher [*kiboksinang*]. Offered as a criticism, the label "prosperity gospel" signals that Cho preaches that one's material condition is directly correlated with the health of one's spiritual relationship with God. For example, Cho offers that the "righteous understanding of the material world" follows from a recognition that everything in the material world was created by God. "God's blessings began from the very creation of this world. Before God created man, He created the world and saw that it was good (Genesis 1). All things in this world were made to be good. Man enjoyed his first days in a world filled abundantly with things which were good. This was the original intent of God's desire for mankind" (YFGC "Theology). However, many current and former members of the church have challenged the label "prosperity gospel." Such a characterization is oversimplified, the claim, because it ignores the abject poverty out of which the church arose. As one Christian who grew up in the Yoido Full Gospel Church, but who now attends a medium-size Presbyterian Church offered:

> Of course I can see how people would say this is a gospel of prosperity. But when you go to the church, what do you see? Most of the people there are very poor. And when he started his church, the whole country was really poor! He has preached to them from the beginning that God loves the poor because the poor surrender themselves to God. He wants to see them blessed materially, right? But he does not respect them less because they are poor. After the War, he was that poor, too. But it is out of that poverty that he learned to rely on God. I understand how you can hear the rumors about financial corruption with him and his son. That is extremely bad, of course! But you have to look at the big picture.

Lastly, YFGC is known for its use of media. In 1988, the church founded the *Kukmin Daily News*, a daily newspaper that they intend to write from a Christian or Biblical perspective (YFGC 2008). As of 2010, the church claims that the newspaper has around 500,000 daily subscribers and is one of South Korea's top five newspapers (Lee Young-hoon 2010). Pastor Cho was one of the

first televangelists in South Korea, and the ecclesial and theological significance of media at YFGC will receive further elaboration in chapter 3.

Onnuri Church

Although not as large as Yoido Full Gospel Church in terms of overall membership, Onnuri Church is another popular multisite church in South Korea and the Korean diaspora. Its founding Pastor Ha Yong-jo was born in 1946 in what is today North Korea, but moved south during the Korean War in 1951. He became a Christian through his attendance of a Korean Campus Crusade for Christ event during college, and he was an active leader on the campus of Konkuk University. After college, he attended Korea's Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, and he began the ministry that would become Onnuri Church by leading a small group of celebrities in private worship services at the request of Kwak Kyu-sŏk from the pop music group Flyboy.

Even before he established Onnuri Church, Ha founded Duranno Publishing in 1980, which is today the print publisher of Onnuri. However, soon after founding Duranno Publishing Ha and his family moved to England for three years for further education and mentorship. Pastor Ha returned to Seoul in 1984, and this time, he set out to found Onnuri Church. With a leadership team of 12 families, Onnuri Community Church was founded in 1985 in Hannam-dong, Seoul. The church would grow exponentially throughout the 1990s, drawing a large number of congregants because of the church's reputation for having a "high production value" service, in terms of preaching, music, design, and media. Onnuri Church is a member of the Presbyterian Church, and in contrast to the Pentecostal Yoido Full Gospel Church, the typical Onnuri congregant tends to be middle or upper-middle class and much more restrained in physical expressions of spirituality and emotion at the church (Easley 2014).

In 1985, Pastor Ha announced the theological vision statement that would guide the church until 2015. The vision was called "Acts 29," and it communicated that Onnuri Church would model itself on the example of the church of the book of Acts. There is no 29th book of Acts, of course, but Pastor Ha believed that Onnuri Church could continue the work of the church of Acts, and thus, write a new chapter. Ha's Acts 29 Vision had three main features: healthy churches multiply, commission its members to evangelism overseas, and plants churches overseas. The 2015 vision statement will be explored further in chapter 2.

Onnuri Church invested heavily in media and information technologies in order to coordinate their geographically expansive ministries. In the 1990s, with increasing membership, they hired computer engineers to create their own database system. They named the system "Ezra," which allowed pastors to scan the 10000-member roster in seconds. The software was updated, named sequentially (Ezra II, Ezra III, etc.) and came online in 2007. With the online version, data was now available for statistical analysis. "The register was not the only thing that needed good management, as other functions were added for managing missionaries, offerings, the 10000 ministers, donations, church properties and various forms and certificates. Domestically and abroad, the stage was set for an administrative networking for all the campuses of Onnuri" (Onnuri 217).

Onnuri Church experienced a membership surge in the early 2000s, immediately after the IMF Crisis of 1997. Pastor Ha told his church during the crisis, "Now is the time to wake up because God is telling us to be cautious.…God is shaking us awake to open our eyes to the realities of the world" (Onnuri 2017, 300). Soon after, *Onnuri Newspaper* ran a series of columns entitled "The Digital Revolution, the new way of thinking for the digital age and the deceptive digital devices." This helped to facilitate the broader spread of Onnuri Church campuses internationally. In 2003, the church reached 34 vision churches in South Korea, the U.S., Oceania, Japan, China, and the Middle East. Beginning May 17, 2004, Onnuri started to broadcast Sunrise Prayer live via satellite daily from Sŏbinggo campus. Later that same year, the Church established an agreement with one of the largest domestic telecom companies, Korea Telecommunications (KT). As the church explains, "With the country's biggest satellite system and the underwater cables made available by KT, the network connected the church to the rest of the world" (Onnuri 2017, 2013). This was their first test of widescale, international broadcasting, but they would soon establish their own network.

Since the year 2000, Onnuri Church has taken a great interest in "digital ministries" as well. As Pastor Ha explains:

> In explanation of the reason for the digitalized pastoral ministry, he cited seven goals that sought: not to go against the current times, to throw into shape the vision of 2000/10000, to accomplish the church's mission to reinforce weaker churches and build up saints, to instantly fill the essentials of missionaries in need of attention, to evangelize the vast number of younger generations and Internet users, to bring the church to cyberspace, and to carry out church ministry unbound by limitations for time and space (Onnuri 2017, 217).

To support both these churches and missionary efforts abroad, Onnuri soon established their CGNTV satellite network in 2005. This was seen as a turning point for their ministries, as the church explains, "CGNTV also pioneered a new 'digital ministry' era, by expanding to the cyber world, reaching living rooms to spread the Gospel via the Internet, cable, and mobile networks" (Onnuri 2017, 107). Under its pastor Lee Jae-Hoon, Onnuri continues to operate across dozens of campuses and via its parachurch media organizations. CGNTV broadcasts to 170 countries in 12 languages, and as of 2015, CGNTV had placed almost 10,000 satellite dishes around the world. One third of Korean missionaries throughout the world (approximately 26,677 men and women according to data published by Korea World mission Council in December 2014) use CGNTV programming in the field (Easley 2014; Onnuri 2017).

Figure 1. A donation box to support Onnuri's satellite television network, CGNTV. On the box, the late founding pastor Ha extends his hand upon a satellite dish, and the words "Dream On Antennae" adorn the box. Photo by author.

Founding pastor Ha Yong-jo died unexpectedly from a brain hemorrhage in 2011. Leadership success at many Korean megachurches has been fraught with controversy and internal conflict. When YFGC's Cho Yonggi retired, for example, the promotion of Lee Young-hoon caused several campuses to secede out of a preference for other, local pastors. In a few other cases, founding pastors have appointed their sons as head pastor, which has triggered a number of debates over both the propriety of nepotism and whether or not a church may be "inherited" as if it were property. However, Onnuri Church's leaders democratically elected pastor Lee Jae-Hoon with little contention, and under his leadership, Onnuri still enjoys a reputation for being one of the only megachurches in South Korea to have avoided major scandal.

Methodology

The majority of my research data is drawn from two years of ethnographic field research in Seoul and Los Angeles, focusing on congregations of Onnuri Church and Yoido Full Gospel

Church. To examine the multisite church's technological development, governing strategies, and how congregants practice Christianity in their cultural setting, I collected data via participant observation, formal and informal interviews, and archival research. Although the "main" congregations of Onnuri and Yoido are in Seoul, conducting multisited field research at "satellite" locations in the United States allowed for the cross-cultural comparison necessary to gaining a larger theoretical understanding of the interaction of church technology, social order, theology, and religious practices. Because different congregations respond differently to the same televised sermon, I noted how rhetorical styles, leader personality, and sermon message carry particular meanings when conveyed through media technologies and within certain social contexts.

I engaged in participant observation at several campuses of Yoido Full Gospel Church and Onnuri Church from 2014-2016. I attended several church services each week, joined small groups and Bible study groups at branches in both Seoul and Los Angeles, and I volunteered on technology teams in these churches for over 8 months. I conducted one to two-hour interviews with several full-time pastor of the churches in order to explore how media pastors, preaching pastors, education pastors, and others negotiate the organizational hierarchy both within the church site and within the multisite church as a whole. I also spoke with people who are familiar with, but do not attend these churches. I accompanied several Christians to services at other large and small churches upon invitation. Because I found that I had connections to architects, pastors, and members involved in conversations surrounding Sarang Church in Seoul, I spent considerable time visiting this church, and it provides much of the data for chapter 4.[18]

Additionally, I attended special events and conferences held by these churches and their parachurch organizations (such as their television stations, partnering non-profit or mission organizations, and publishers). One of these programs, the IT Mission School held at Onnuri Church and led by FMnC (Frontier Missions and Computers), forms much of the data for chapter 2.

Fieldwork both within and without Onnuri and Full Gospel congregations helped me to situate multisite church activities within their broader context, including local practices that express gender, class, ethnicity, and national identity. This is critical because social contexts and relationships inform ideas about technologies. Thus, informed by coproduction theories of STS (Pinch and Kline 1996; MacKenzie and Wacjman 1999; Hayden 2003; Jasanoff 2004), I explored the multisite church's broader sociopolitical setting through participating in a variety of church events, daily administrative work at each church, as well as regular social activities outside the church. Participant observation and interviews with congregants will also provide a necessary check to what Howard Becker (1998) calls the "hierarchy of credibility"—the assumption that the highest ranked members of a group can best represent the collective. Throughout all participant observation, field notes were collected on site with either a notepad or a laptop, as deemed

[18] Sarang Church might or might not be considered a multisite church. Although most pastors and members told me that it was not a multisite church, it should be noted that because of the controversy over the new Sarang Global Ministry Center and their head Pastor Oh, the congregation meets at two locations in Seoul. Furthermore, there is a Sarang Church in Koreatown, Los Angeles that was founded by Pastor Oh prior to him becoming head of the church in Seoul. This church displays the same logo, slogan, and many elements of its "brand."

appropriate. When real-time note taking is not possible, I recorded my observations as soon as was feasible.

Participating in various church groups and socializing with church members in informal situations allowed me to answer more personal questions about many congregants: What are their individual attitudes toward the church hierarchy or multisite structure? What trajectories led them to join a multisite church? How do they feel about their relationships with other congregants, or with the pastors who, though not physically present, lead their worship services? Building such relationships is crucial to understanding the reception of new technologies, and based on previous fieldwork experience.

All interviews were conducted with adults with their informed consent. Almost all of the participants that appear in this work have been given pseudonyms, and some identifying details have been altered to protect anonymity as well. In reference to published material or to prominent public figures when anonymity is not feasible, I have given full attribution. These proposed measures for human subject protection align with the precedents set by other ethnographers of evangelical communities (Griffith 1997; Frederick 2003; Lee Timothy 2006, 2010; Chong 2008; Elisha 2011; Luhrmann 2012). I have completed the CITI training, and the Internal Review Board at UC Berkeley approved this research.

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Technological Systems

One may ask why I should focus on technology when in many situations and to many people, it is not a factor that is perceived as most relevant to Christian life. For example, one woman asked me frankly why I was interested in technology [*kisul*] as I introduced myself for the first time to number of congregants over lunch at Onnuri Church, Los Angeles. She was skeptical, it seemed, that I had used the appropriate Korean word for what I had meant to communicate. “Technology [*kisul*] are things like computers systems, wiring, and software,” she explained. I responded to say that this was, indeed, what I meant. I drew her attention to some of the most prevalent technological objects in her church, like the projection screens by the altar, the sound equipment, and the computers used to stream video sermons. She nodded to suggest comprehension, but her face still expressed some skepticism, and she quickly lowered her eyes to her soup. A few weeks later, I asked her why my research topic appeared unusual to her. “In the church I just don’t often think about technology,” she said. “Even though there are technologies, like you said, I don’t think about them. If you are studying our church, I expect you would be thinking about something else. Like preaching or prayer.”

As many scholars have noted (Larkin 2013; Nye 2007; Jasanoff 2004; Star 1999; Marx Leo 1997), it is often technology’s invisibility or apparent absence that makes technological systems all the more influential and all the more deserving of a researcher’s attention. As I will show in chapter 2, this aspect of technology enables the pursuit of certain Christian virtues. In

these churches, "faith" is a response to that which is *not* seen or that which one doubts. By being present while simultaneously unseen, technologies become in many contexts objects invested with faith. Furthermore, because of technological object's proven ability to transcend apparent limits—of time, space, or presence—this transcendence secures an association between technological function and the Holy Spirit. Insofar as Christians strive to be the means of God's transcendent redemption of our fallen world, technological transcendence can become models for social behavior.

Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999) offered the concept of "infrastructural inversion" as a lens through which one might seek to denaturalize the ways in which infrastructures (broadly defined) can be taken for granted, experienced as second nature or even ignored. This is a mode of analysis that seeks to foreground what is often the background of a given social or material form. It may seem counterintuitive to imagine a social scientific analysis that is not—on some level—such an infrastructural inversion. However, exactly which infrastructures one seeks to invert is a choice that one can make. In addition to bringing out what is "background" to a given sociocultural context of one's study, one might just as much seek to invert the conceptual infrastructures of the ethnographer's own categories and conventions. One might do so through dwelling within the lived experience of technological systems as it was offered to me in my fieldwork, rather than necessarily venturing into a prehistory of the technological form, as fruitful as those analyses have been.

Thus, I make limited effort to unpack the "black box" of most technologies I explore in this dissertation. I offer little description of the technical operation or engineering, for example. This is not because it is not an important or valuable thing to do; but rather, it is to stay in the context of the church communities—communities in which technological systems are seldom made full scale, but only adopted, used, and adapted as necessary.

This does not mean that Korean Christians do not play a role in the "making" technologies what they are, however, because what we take as the genesis of an object or idea is a strategic choice. For example, in Tung-hui Hu's *A Prehistory of the Cloud,* he demonstrates that to understand the cloud, one could begin with server in a workshop, or one might also want to trace the genesis of their constitutive parts. One could think about a network of fiberoptic cables, or one might wish to show the telephone and railway networks upon which it was grafted.

The operative point for me is that there is no universal perspective from which one can definitively say when an object is made, nor when one is forever finished—these moments must be marked according to one's perspective and interests. I have chosen to take an interest in technology in this particular context, and that may not be best illustrated through pre-history that would turn away from their understanding of social media networks, for example, to offer an alternative perspective of what those networks "really" are. The way certain technologies are "background" is, at times, central to their role in Christian practice. In such moments, I will not seek to unmask their operation, but to consider first and foremost how they are used and described by my informants.

Chapter Overview

Chapter one, "Religion and Technology," situates this dissertation in relation to key conversations on religion and technology. After providing a brief overview of recent works, this first chapter will highlight why an interdisciplinary attention to both critical studies of religion and secularism, as well as science and technology studies enables a way to view religion and technology as co-produced in everyday life. In the process, I will illustrate briefly how this co-production shapes the ideas and practices of those who attend Korean multisite churches in contemporary South Korea, which will be a central theme in the subsequent ethnographic analyses.

Chapter two, "Faith in the System," begins to account for the co-production of religion and technology in Korean Christian communities. This chapter focuses on the author's participant observation on the church technology teams at Onnuri Churches and Yoido Full Gospel Churches, as well as attendance of an IT Missions School in Seoul, and an IT Missions Conference in Silicon Valley, California. I recount how pastors—sometimes drawing explicitly in Max Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis—narrativize South Korean Christianity and the Korean tech industry and mutually-dependent, and I illustrate how such social and theological understandings are made manifest in the ways technological objects are used in religious practice and life outside of the church. I will illustrate that technology becomes a special object of interest for Christian practice both because of its convergence with broader nationalist and social scientific narratives, and because technological systems capacitate Christian faith by virtue of the uncertainty of predicting the efficacious working of opaque technological systems. This chapter will conclude by positing what is a central ethical concern for both Korean Christians and to scholars of complex infrastructural and technological systems: how does one act ethically when one find's oneself to be incapable of obtaining the knowledge or aptitude that might ensure a desired effect?

Chapter Three, "Screen Christianity: Video Sermons and the Creation of Transnational Korean Churches," examines the role that screens play in the ongoing formation of transnational congregations. When I spoke with people who attend YFGC's satellite congregations, I often heard them describe experiences of having received God's grace when they watch Pastor Cho on the screens of their church. This chapter illustrates how the relationship between congregants and the screens themselves is a condition for the emergence of a particular configuration of Christian community, which I will peirastically call "screen Christianity." The place of screens and their related practices undergird theological conceptions of contact and community, such that screens are said to transmit healing touches and pastors are understood to be present through the proliferation of their screened image. Thus, this chapter highlights how particular material configurations animate these church bodies and ultimately make such transnational communities imaginable.

Chapter four, "Holy Infrastructure," focuses on the construction of Sarang Church, another megachurch in Gangnam, Seoul.[19] The Sarang Global Ministry Center (SGMC) is a well-known building in South Korea due to its architecture. Like some popular churches in Seoul, it resembles an office building or luxury department store, which further signals to some Koreans that Sarang Church and other megachurches are "just businesses." The contests surrounding this church illustrate the shifting terrain of the sacred/profane and religious/secular in contemporary Seoul.

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[19] Sarang Church could also be considered a multisite church, as it has a sort of "sister campus" in Koreatown in Los Angeles. However, in this dissertation focusing on this church and the conflicts surrounding its construction serve to illustrate two aspects of megachurch Christianity in contemporary Seoul.

As I will show, these distinctions are particularly salient in a series of legal contests between Sarang Church and its neighbors: Opponents of the building argue that certain architectural features are unjustified and/or illegal due to transgressions on public space, but Christians have argued that those features are "holy infrastructures" that enable the transmission of grace and the Spirit. In other words, these disputes test whether the building project should be understood as the material conditions for social life—which falls under secular governance—or material conditions for not only the human bodies that practice Christianity, but for the Holy Spirit itself to flow, communicate, and otherwise participate in the lifeways of Seoul. The construction of this building and its mixed reception illustrate ongoing debates over Korean Christianity, of businesses, and the space for both within the larger social and political order. Moreover, this scene offers another illustration of the ways in which capitalism, infrastructural technologies, and Christianity are often interwoven in contemporary Seoul.

Chapter 1

Constructions of Religion and Technology: Toward Theoretical Symmetry

Religion and Technology

In 2012, anthropologist Kristen Bell reflected upon the emotional fervor surrounding Apple products. This "light hearted" post highlighted several parallels between Apple product consumption and a Judeo-Christian type of religion, and it was followed by a flurry of articles in the news media: *Tech Eye*'s headline on the topic read "Apple is a Modern Religion, Anthropologist Confirms," while *CNET* more definitively declared that "Apple is a Religion."[20] Two years later, computer scientist Allen Downey's account of the historical coincidence between increased internet usage and decreased religious affiliation in the United States confirmed—for some researchers at M.I.T.—that "the Internet Is Taking Away America's Religion."[21] Nearly every day there new explorations of the relationship between religion and technology (predominantly information technology), generating a number of questions. Is technology a new religion? Or perhaps has religion always been, in some sense, a technology? Scholars have yet to agree upon an investigatory framework, but there seems to be strong agreement that religion and technology are powerful elements of social life, and that understanding the relationship between them could not be more important.

I have had a long-standing interest in the material culture of religion, studying how humans relate to the objects they make and use. For this dissertation, I came to focus on technology (as a particular subset of material culture) because of the widespread interest in the presence of technology in presumably a-technological spheres of life. My peers and some professors were bemused and intrigued when, as a student at Harvard Divinity School, I completed half my coursework at MIT in science and technology studies. Yet despite their bemusement, these scholars and practitioners of religion were also eager to share their perspectives about the "proper" role of both religion and technology in our lives. When I spoke with people in religious communities, their central concerns related to technology's seemingly inherent power to direct our lives – discussions not unlike public debates over what Facebook "does" to its users or what is the "appropriate" relationship one should have with her or his cell phone. These questions continued to pique people's curiosity throughout my field research in both the United States and South Korea.

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[20]Chris Matyszczyk. "Anthropologist: Apple is a Religion" *CNET.* October 25, 2012 via https://www.cnet.com/news/anthropologist-apple-is-a-religion/. Nick Farrell. "Apple is a Modern Religion, Anthropologist Confirms" October 25, 2012 via http://www.techeye.net/hardware-2/apple-is-a-modern-religion-anthropologist-confirms. For a response by anthropologist Kristen Bell on her comments that originated this media story, see Kristen Bell. "What I Actually Said about Apple Product Launches." October 9th, 2014 via http://www.notkristenbell.com/what-i-actually-said-about-apple.

[21] "How the Internet is Taking Away America's Religion." *MIT Technology Review.* April 4, 2014, via https://www.technologyreview.com/s/526111/how-the-internet-is-taking-away-americas-religion/.

However, it is not my intention to assume a role in these debates as they are commonly framed. My research set out, instead, to study people's preoccupation with the relationship between religion and technology. I examine how theological debates about the role, utility, and supposedly transformative power of technology play out in everyday negotiations of particular technologies within Korean and Korean American Christianity. How should social scientists understand the attributed power of technologies, particularly in the context of a religious community, given the oft-assumed antinomy of religion and technology? Why is "technology" so enthralling?

Despite the increased publication on this broader topic, inquiries into religion and technology seldom draw equally from theories of both fields. Instead, studies tend to give priority to one side of this pair. Although there is now a well-developed academic discourse for both the study of religion and the study of technology, these two discourses are rarely put in dialogue. This asymmetry has yielded a disordered array of investigations rather than a focused conversation. Most importantly, the asymmetrical application of critical academic discourse often reproduces the central theoretical problems addressed in the literature. The remainder of this paper considers the primary ways in which scholars have approached the study of religion and technology. After considering some main themes, I will suggest ways in which the combination of critical theories of secularity and critical technology studies might promote inquiry congruent with both disciplines.

It must be noted that the scope of this piece excludes literature on religion and media/mediation/mediatization. Work on religion and media is often incorporated into discussions of religion and technology, and with good reason. Indeed, contemporary social scientific work on religion and technology most often considers media technologies in particular (such as audio-visual technologies, print technologies, etc.). As a result, one might say that the literature on religion and media accounts for the largest subset of literature within broader discussions of religion and technology, and thus, some scholars believe that we can almost think through these categories interchangeably. Anthropology of media will figure prominently in other sections of this dissertation, as they provide tools for working through semiotic elements of religious practice that "technology" may not. But this chapter intentionally disentangles "media" from "technology" for several reasons.

First, they are distinct conceptual categories that carry disparate connotations. "Technology" itself carries a sort of deterministic force that contemporary discourse about "media" does not. Alternately, the idea of "media" often connotes inter-mediacy and mediation (ways of imagining relations between people and objects) that may stem from particular religious traditions, as has been argued by anthropologist Charles Hirschkind (2011).

Second, one might say that media is a subcategory of technology, but all technologies (and hence, broader conceptions of technology) cannot be contained within the category of media. Discussions of media technologies and religion can certainly inform studies of religion and technology; however, conversations about media do not sufficiently capture the relationship between religion and technology that I set out to explore here on its own terms (Marx Leo 1994, 1997).

A Technological Turn in Religious Studies

Especially with regard to work in religious studies or the social sciences of religion, technology is often described as an all-encompassing, determinative force of history. For many, technology is understood to be so powerful and hegemonic that the very age in which we live is defined by it. This is captured in the titles of numerous works, such as philosopher Ian Barbour's *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (1993), religion scholar George Pattison's *Thinking about God in an Age of Technology* (2005), philosopher Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* (1964), and theologian Paul Tillich's *The Spiritual Situation in our Technical Society* (1988). Similar to the way that other epochs have been defined by particular implements—such as the Paleo-, Meso-, and Neolithic Periods, the "bronze age," or the "iron age"—contemporary life is understood to be driven by the course of technology. Still, a significant difference in describing the "age of technology" is the lack of specificity of the defining object. According to what definition of "technology" is our age "technological"? And how do such definitions differentiate our age in ways that are useful or revealing?

Alternately, others scholars do not explicitly deem our age "technological," but may nevertheless focus on the determinative force of technology, describing what it "does" to humans and societies. For example, John Caiazza (2005) argued that the primary reason for the advance of secularism is not epistemological; it is a result of the power of technology to shape our lives. In geography, Lily Kong's (2001, 2013) work explores the ways in which technology "opens up" cultural and geographic boundaries. Other scholars contend that technology should shape religious life (rather than the other way around), with religion scholar Elizabeth Drescher (2011) insisting that we must first "grasp the nature of technology" to orient our moral and religious lives. In a turn toward somatic experience, sociologists Chris Shilling and Philip Mellor (2007) argue that technology transforms our every moment due to our "contemporary technologically-driven embodied condition" (533).

It is important to understand the potential social and political implications of such claims. Here we can consider what anthropologist Michael Silverstein (1976) and several others have called the "animacy hierarchy" of language. Briefly, animacy is the quality of vitality, sentience, or liveness of a noun or noun phrase. This animacy often has syntactic consequences, whereby certain nouns appear more often as the subject of active verbs, for example.[22] Animacy hierarchies within language use can indicate value hierarchies of beings or matter. Thus, animacy hierarchies both reflect and create cosmologies. Making strong claims about what technology *is* or *does* can reinforce a sense of technological determinism, or the idea that technology drives the development of social structures, human behavior, and cultural values. Technologies are so commonly ceded a high level of animacy within contemporary English language use that historians of technology regularly insist, in the words of historian Leo Marx, "Technology, as such, makes nothing happen. By now, however, the concept has been endowed with a thing-like autonomy and a seemingly magical power of historical agency. We have made it an all-purpose agent of change" (1997, 577).[23]

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[22] See also Mel Y. Chen. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Duke University Press, 2012; Paul Kockelman. *The Chicken and the Quetzal: Incommensurate Ontologies and Portable Values in Guatemala's Cloud Forest*. Duke University Press, 2016.

[23] See also Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx, eds. *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.

Why do so many scholars speak of technology as such a powerful agent in history? Historian Merritt Roe Smith suggests that this may result from the fact that technological determinism is deeply embedded in American culture (1994). The idea that technologies emerge as powerful agents of social change is neither new nor a relic of the past—it persists in the widely shared, tacit knowledge of modernity, which is evident as people frequently attribute inherent capabilities and limitations to an artifact and discuss how its qualities will guide the course of society. This perspective is not limited to those who believe that technologies drive progress. Smith indicates that, ironically, even the greatest critics of technological progressivism—including Walter Benjamin, Lewis Mumford, and others—often endow technologies with a degree of influence that may exceed that given by techno-optimists.[24]

Perhaps most tellingly, some form of technological determinism is embedded in the very definition of technology. "Technology" is not a self-evident category, but one being constantly (re)constructed. The very act of classifying something as technology denotes that it overcomes a perceived barrier to action, and by that virtue, is determinative of history. For example, when I first began to research church technologies in the U.S. in the early 2000s, conversations tended to focus on projection equipment. The propriety of projecting hymn lyrics as opposed to using printed hymnals was controversial for many communities, but by the mid-2010s, in few places was the overhead projector considered a "technology." Thus, defining technology in certain ways may obscure the constant re-definition of the category, but its constitution is significant in that some artifacts, spheres, and people become aligned with the future and change, and others with the past and the status quo by virtue of definition as technological or not.

As a consequence, scholars should be wary to make strong claims about what technology "is" or "does" because technology is neither a stable—nor a universal—category. "Technology" has different connotations for different people, different societies, and at different times. For example, historian Jung Lee's (2013) account of "self-made Korean inventors" under Japanese colonialism upended Western and Japanese assumptions about technology. Rather than the result of universal, scientific activities, early 20th century Korean inventors often lacked formal education and shared an understanding of "technology-without-science" that was particular to a bourgeoning Korean national identity. I will return to this history in chapter 2. However, under contemporary conceptions of technology in South Korea as in many other societies, objects are often categorized as technology if they are understood to be novel and/or socially transformative.[25] Over time, what is novel will change, and with it what is understood to be a technology will as well.

In response, it may be tempting to flatten the definition of technology to "tools," in order to bypass the historical particularity of the category, but anthropologist Alfred Gell (1988) notes that "technology" consists not only of tools, but also the knowledge that makes the invention and

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[24] See Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986; Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (eds.). *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 1994.

[25] This paper focuses on contemporary Western conceptions of technology because it is appropriate to the Western, English-language literature in question. This is not meant to flatten or ignore sociocultural difference in conceptions of "technology," nor to imply that Western notions of technology should be universalized. East Asian and Korean understandings of technology will be considered in greater depth in later chapters.

use of tools possible.[26] Still, the trouble with defining technology as a set of tools is not only that it is too narrow; it is that definitions of technology ignore the ways in which understandings of technology are being constantly made and re-made, often in ways that explicitly differentiate technology from other tools. Imagine, for example, the response one might receive in trying to pitch a San Jose-based lead pencil factory as part of the "tech industry" of Silicon Valley. While a pencil could be defined as a technology in the sense that it is an effective writing tool, it might fail to fit a common-sense definition of technology, which carries other key connotations.

In my own research, this manifests in several conversations I have had with (graciously patient) informants, who entertain the awkward or obvious questions an anthropologist may ask. Stage lights or fog machines, I have been told, are technologies; but when I inquire about the walls upon which they are mounted or the screws used to mount them in place, my informants tell me of course those things are not technologies, expressing an understandable mixture of frustration and confusion. For these communities, "technology" is, by definition, a powerful agent of change. As a consequence, to flatten "technology" to "tools" would be to elide many of the characteristics that give technologies their categorical specificity as a certain type of tool, associated knowledge, or practice. These semantic distinctions help to explain why it is often difficult to think about technology outside of theories of technological determinism: determinative force is often implicit in the term "technology" itself.

Furthermore, historian Leo Marx (1997) has traced that the term "technology" itself is more recent than the vast history it is said to determine. Human history is sometimes portrayed as the product of a technological progression from stone age tools to Ford cars, but the contemporary understanding of technology did not catch on until around 1900. Writers like Thorstein Veblen and Charles Beard attributed a pivotal role in shaping modern industrial society to the mechanical arts, newly referred to as "technology." From there, the term spread from intellectual circles and gained popular currency around the 1930s.

Marx attends to the historical emergence of technology to indicate that our contemporary understanding of technology carries with it a historical legacy. Its emergence is owed, in part, to the political and economic interests attendant to early industrial capitalism. Technology—as any term—is never purely descriptive, but operates to secure certain social and political formations while foreclosing others. As technologies became powerful agents, these machines and systems could be blamed for the social and economic inequality that often accompanied them. The greatest danger for Marx is that viewing history and society as the product of technological change obscures how technologies are always the products of human and social action.[27]

Seeking to avoid the coupling of technological change with social progress, many writers have instead focused on exploring certain technologies as sacred, secularizing, and/or magical in quality. Central questions of these inquiries include: Is a technology sacred? Is it secular? How might particular technologies operate within a religious tradition? But several scholars in science and technology studies argue that in the case of emerging technologies, to describe what a

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[26] See also Michel Foucault. "Space, Knowledge, and Power." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. Pantheon, 1984.

[27] For an extended history of the emergence of the word "technology," see Carl Mitcham. *Thinking Through Technology: The Path Between Engineering and Philosophy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

technology will "do" is not purely descriptive. To a great extent, to predict what emerging technologies "do" is to take part in that technology's invention. Looking at technological artifacts as instantiations of particular sets of knowledge, STS scholars indicate that in their invention technologies are not yet stable objects, let alone stable actors. As sociologist Harry Collins and others in the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) school explain, stable knowledge—or a stable technology—is like a ship in a bottle: As it is now, it is difficult to imagine how it was ever just a collection of sticks. We know human agency put the ship in the bottle, but how the ship became manifest in the bottle appears as a mystery. We must not forget that human actions shape technologies, and thus, technologies (only after a long process) come to be seen as stable instantiations of the social and political process of its creation.[28]

The seemingly fixed qualities of technology and technologies, Marx stresses, is precisely what makes it so "hazardous." In his words:

> The hazardous character of technology—the word, the concept—is a consequence of the history just outlined. As I have argued, the generality of the word—its lack of specificity, the very aspect which evidently enabled it to supplant its more explicit and substantial precursors—also made it peculiarly susceptible to reification. Reification, as the philosopher George Lukacs famously explained, is what occurs when we endow a human activity with the characteristics of a thing or things. It thereby acquires, as he put it, "a 'phantom-objectivity,' an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people (1997, 575).

For this reason, this dissertation illustrates the human and social labor involved in constructing a stable conception of technology. When people disagree about the use and nature of technology, it reveals broader negotiations among these actors for social positions, expertise, and forms of authority. In many of the churches I will discuss, both having the correct knowledge of technology—understanding its nature—as well as having the capacity to manipulate the technology is understood to be authoritative and, in many cases, necessary to maintaining an elevated social position.

Science, Technology, and the "Remnants" of Religion

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[28] See Donald Mackenzie. "How Do We Know the Properties of Artifacts? Applying the Sociology of Knowledge to Technology," in Robert Fox (ed.), *Technological Change: Methods and Themes in the History of Technology*, London: Harwood, 1996, 247-263; Langdon Winner. "Do Artifacts have Politics?" Daedalus, 1980, 109: 121-136; Wiebe Bijker, Thomas Hughes, and Trevor Pinch (eds.), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987; Harry M. Collins. *Changing Order: Replication and Induction in Scientific Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

The preceding discussion is not meant to suggest that studies from an STS perspective do not have their own limitations, particularly with regard to the study of religion. Several works within STS uncritically refer to the presumed transformative power of technology over the last several decades. For example, there were several conversations produced in response to Lewis Mumford's warning that "...I have been driven, by the wholesale miscarriage of megatechnics, to deal with the collective obsessions and compulsions that have misdirected our energies, and undermined our abilities to live full and spiritually satisfying lives" (Mumford 1970); and also to Martin Heidegger's 1949 lament that "technology threatens to slip from human control" (Heidegger 1977, 289). But when these scholars refer to the power or uncontrollable force of "technology" or "machines," they refer not to particular artifacts, but rather to the modern concept of "technology" and the social milieu that cedes too much power to these ideas. They are criticizing the "faith in the religion of the machine," to quote Mumford. We may note that these accounts have often rehearsed cultural evolutionary narratives stemming back to the late 19th-Century, narratives that see "religion" and "faith" as mere cultural survivals that are obsolete to modern life (See Tylor 1871; Frazer 1914; Malinowski 1926). While these scholars have produced a more historical-critical understanding of technology, they are less likely to approach the study of religion with adequate historical sensitivity or nuance.

Instead, technology studies have had a tendency to approach religion as a phenomenon which needs only to be defined by a common set of characteristics to be analyzed a-historically. A widely-cited, paradigmatic example of work situated in this nexus is historian David Noble's *The Religion of Technology* (1997). Noble's argument shares much with Leo Marx's useful historical interrogation of the connotations surrounding technology. But whereas Marx focuses on the emergence of the word "technology" and the ideas that accompany its emergence, Noble seeks to trace the roots of those ideas or desires. In his words, "It is the aim of this book to demonstrate that the present enchantment with things technological—the very measure of modern enlightenment—is rooted in religious myths and ancient imagining" (3). Seeking to denaturalize contemporary assumptions about technology, Noble locates the origin of modern conceptions of technology in the European middle ages, building on Mumford's argument that it was the "faith in the religion of the machine" that undergirded early investments in scientific and technological development. Noble highlights the continuity between contemporary technologists being "driven by distant dreams, spiritual yearnings for supernatural redemption," and the medieval religious motivations that initially cultivated investment in the machine arts (3).

Noble considers and rejects several frameworks that focus on a relationship *between* technology and religion, "For modern technology and modern faith are neither complements nor opposites, nor do they represent succeeding stages of human development." He identifies that we see, on the one hand, "a widespread infatuation with technological advance and a confidence in the ultimate triumph of reason, on the other a resurgence of fundamentalist faith akin to a religious revival. The coincidence of these two developments appears strange, however, merely because we mistakenly suppose them to be opposite and opposing historical tendencies" (3). Instead, "[Technology and modern faith] are merged, and always have been, the technological enterprise being, at the same time, an essentially religious endeavor" (4-5). But in what way does Noble suggest that modern technological development is "an essentially religious endeavor"? What is Noble's understanding of "religion" and what qualifies something as "religious"?

Religion, to Noble, relates to a "revival of spirit (4)," "emotions of omnipotence, devotion, and awe (5)," and an "other-worldly" orientation that, perhaps, has "its own clerical caste, arcane

rituals, and articles of faith" (6). Noble titles his book the "religion of technology" in order to reveal that "the technological enterprise has been and remains suffused with religious belief" (5-6). However, embedded in this and like descriptions is a rehearsal of several problematic assumptions about religion.[29] First, we see that religion is defined primarily through its relation to "belief," an issue that was addressed by anthropologist Talal Asad in "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category." In this response to the writing of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Asad provides an extended critique of Geertz's popular definition of religion, demonstrating that elements of the definition are ambiguous, *a priori*, and, in the end, theological. Geertz' approach to religion, he argues, overlooks the ways in which any definition of religion and its constituent elements is the product of historically-specific relationships and discursive processes.

Asad argues that the modern category of religion "has a specific Christian history" and is related to a particular stratification of society into distinct spheres (2009, 44). The construction of "religion," "nature," and other universal categories emerges through early modern encounters between Europeans and the non-European world, and the very exercise of seeking to define religion has been critical to secularism in modern Europe (2003, 35). Defining religion as primarily a matter of private belief or faith, he argues, contributed to the propagation of secularism as a system that, in the West, has sought to create a space for religion that is separate from the state and public spheres. In a similar vein, historian Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) supports Asad's claim: "The modern discourse on religion and religions was from the very beginning...a discourse of secularization…[and] a discourse of othering" (20). As Asad and Masuzawa's work highlights, modern discourse on religion promoted the separation of religion and politics, often neutralizing religious differences through defining religion as a matter of private belief.

In other words, we must see conceptions of a religious "essence" as central to secularizing efforts both within the West and beyond through colonial efforts. As Asad has written elsewhere, "The concept 'religion' is not merely a word: it connects to vocabularies that bring persons and things, desires and practices together in particular traditions in distinctive ways" (2011, 3). Many contemporary conceptions of religion, which primarily understand religion to be a matter of private belief or other-worldly orientation, separates religion from the larger domain of its articulation in social and political life. Accordingly, Noble's description of religion (primarily related to belief and the supernatural) reinforces a conception of religion that is immaterial and inappropriate to the "practical" matters of technology and the mechanical arts.

Second, Noble's assertion that "the technological enterprise has been and remains suffused with religious belief" implies that technology is rational and progressive, while religion belongs to an irrational past. For what other reason would "technological enterprise" be described as *remaining suffused* with religious belief, as if that needs to be shed with its historical progress and maturation? He echoes this suggestion in several statements, for example:

> The legacy of the religion of technology is still with us, all of us…. in our utter inability to think and act rationally about this presumably most rational of human

[29] Noble writes in his introduction, "Although today's technologists, in their sober pursuit of utility, power, and profit, seem to set society's standard for rationality, they are driven also by distant dreams, spiritual yearnings for supernatural redemption" (3).

> endeavors… [This book] is offered in the hope that we might learn to disabuse ourselves of the other-worldly dreams that lie at the heart of our technological enterprise, in order to redirect our astonishing capabilities toward more worldly and humane ends (6).

Much of Noble's work makes valuable contributions to contemporary conceptions of technology and progress. Most importantly, he draws attention to the social and political interests that undergird investments in particular technologies and "technology" broadly defined. It is only with this recognition that we may better assess changes to our social and material worlds. Nevertheless, to attribute these problematic underlying ideologies to "religion"—as if it were a universal, transhistorical entity—furthers a particular understanding of "religion" (e.g., as anachronistic, irrational belief) that has been central to modern secularism. Ultimately, this seems to be what Noble has in mind – that "…we disabuse ourselves of our inherited other-worldly propensities in order to embrace anew our one and only earthly existence" (208).

Deus In Machina?

Most recently, Jeremy Stolow's edited volume *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between* (2013) examines the interaction of religion and technology in several cultural contexts. Composed of essays by historians and social scientists, the book adds new depth to the topic. It offers a corrective to the assumption that religion and technology are opposed phenomena, stimulating further conversation through its collection of diverse, interdisciplinary reflections on this topic. This volume warrants special attention, as it displays an awareness of many of the theoretical pitfalls outlined above. Stolow frames the conversation with theoretical foundations in both the anthropology of religion and science and technology studies, revisiting and revising the "very supposition that religion and technology exist as two ontologically distinct arenas of experience, knowledge, and action," and instead he acknowledges that neither technology nor religion are natural, fixed categories (2). Stolow recognizes that how these particular categories emerged as antitheses to one another—analogous to the binaries such as faith and reason, fantasy and reality, magic and science, and enchantment and disenchantment—is itself a fundamental concern of their study. In this way, the volume is commendable and makes a meaningful contribution to scholarship on the topic for its awareness in intending "to displace those reigning narratives of religion and technology that fail to reflect on their own parochial status as predominantly Christian and Western, or that are myopically focused on contemporary technoculture at the expense of a longer historical view" (18).

A religion scholar himself, he demonstrates his familiarity with the historical emergence of concepts of religion, citing not only Talal Asad, but also David Chidester, Tomoko Masuzawa, and Guy Stroumsa. Stolow indicates that any study of religion must attend to the way that "the very idea of religion as a transcultural category is rooted in a specifically Christian theological distinction between, on the one hand, the internal, timeless, private experience of faith and belief and, on the other hand, the external, temporal, public domains of politics, science, social habit, and cultural expression" (18). This, as Stolow rightly notes, has profound implications for studies of religion and technology in particular:

> This slippage between the particular and the universal is especially clear in the way studies purporting to talk in general terms about "religion and technology" silently assume a model of post-Reformation Christianity: as a theological template; as a structure of belief; and as a mode of conduct distinct from the public domains of law and politics or, for that matter, of science, industry, and the capitalist market (18).

He rightly argues that such assumptions should be (whenever possible) bracketed or treated with suspicion. However, upon closer examination we find evidence that this critical reflexivity has not been consistently applied to his own deployment of the category "religion." Several times he offers implicit or explicit definitions of religion, including several descriptors—transcendent, emotion, belief, magic, and miracle—that align with the Protestant theological (and/or modern secular) legacy he hopes to resist.

In relation to the concept of technology, Stolow is also conversant in some of the foundational works in science and technology studies. For example, his description of technology's historical emergence resonates with that of historians Carl Mitcham, Leo Marx, and others. "It was only in the nineteenth century," Stolow writes, "that people began referring to technology in the singular, an abstraction that was furthered over the course of the twentieth century with the rise of large-scale, increasingly bureaucratized networks of scientists, engineers, planners, and managers working in trade, industry, and government" (13). Yet, as with "religion," Stolow follows his critical reflection on technology with explicit and implicit definitions that align with progressivism and technological determinism.

Some remarks suggest that "technology" is a force that acts upon the religious, such as "religious power and experience have been shaped—historically and in the present— by technologies that reorganize social time and space" (4). Additionally, it is sometimes implied that all ideas, experiences, and actions are dependent upon technology, to an extent, because it is technology that uniquely enables their manifestation:

> Technology—in the enlarged sense of materials, techniques, instruments, and expertise—forms the gridwork of orientations, operations, and embedded and embodied knowledges and powers without which religious ideas, experiences, and actions could not exist, even if such mediations are denigrated or repressed in the name of transcendent immediacy (or an unmediated transcendent) (5).

From such examples, it becomes clear that for Stolow technology remains somehow animated. His interest in technology and religion is, in part, motivated by an interest characterizing technology's perceived animus—what it is and what it does. As he writes elsewhere, "How exactly can and should scholars disentangle the 'merely instrumental' dimensions of instruments from other—dare one say transcendent?—powers that also seem to inhabit them and shape their representation and use?" (20). Such descriptions reinscribe the sort of "phantom objectivity" to technology that Marx and other STS scholars have revealed.

Inscriptions of what technology "is" or "does," historians of technology inform us, is not only a conceptual slippage; it facilitates certain sociopolitical effects, as Marx warns:

> By treating these inanimate objects—machines—as causal agents, we divert attention from the human (especially socioeconomic and political) relations responsible for precipitating this social upheaval. Contemporary discourse, private and public, is filled with hackneyed vignettes of technologically activated social change—pithy accounts of "the direction technology is taking us" or "changing our lives" (577).

Thus, Stolow reversion to common conceptions of both "technology" and "religion" confirm the strength of their phantom objectivity, as well as the difficulty in thinking and acting otherwise. Stolow introduces his study by writing, "By emptying out the words "religion" and "technology," and thereby drawing attention to the underlying disjuncture between these words and their (absent) referents, might not this serve to make new room for the many hybrids that lie beneath this semantic divide, each awaiting its own opportunity to be made visible as a god *in* the machine?" (19). These remarks presuppose that inquiries into religion and technology would necessarily reveal the "transcendent" force that "inhabits" the machine, giving considerably less attention to cases in which religious discourses on technologies may refer to them as "secular," "worldly," or banal.

By naturalizing particular qualities as being inherent or necessary to technologies, Stolow's framing unintentionally furthers a narrative of technological determinism and reifies the division between religion and technology that it hopes to dispel. While he seeks to reject the idea technology and religion are antithetical or irrelevant to one another, the volume focuses on the question, "What sorts of things come to light when one allows religion and technology to mingle freely?" thus reinforcing that "technology" and "religion" are two, distinct things which interact. If one were to consider the on-going construction of these categories, one might want to question the very distinction that allows one to speak of religion and technology as "interacting."

Toward Greater Symmetry

What can be gained in what I am calling a "symmetrical" deployment of contemporary debates within both the anthropology of religion and secularism and science and technology studies is a scholarly investigation into religion and technology—as lived and experienced in contemporary life—which may avoid perpetuating problematic notions of either technology or religion. What I suggest, in other words, is that new insights about social worlds may result from a careful consideration of the histories presented by both Marx and Asad. It is notable that Leo Marx's and Talal Asad's accounts of the historical construction of "technology" and "religion" (respectively) are not philosophical arguments abstracted from social and political particularities. Both scholars indicate the ways in which contemporary understandings of each concept served particular political and economic interests, with "technology" in the West developing in relation to modern, industrial capitalism; and the emergence of "religion" being fundamentally a history of racial and political "othering." Most critically, these accounts should remind the reader of this:

The definition of such objects is never principally "academic" (in a sense of being disconnected from sociopolitical consequences), and they are never arrived at by disinterested actors in outcome-neutral discussions.

In the following, I attend to the ways that technology, both implicitly and explicitly, figures centrally in daily operations of Korean multisite churches. They do so, I will argue, in order to create certain associations between Christianity and technology that will secure Korean Christianity an imagined pivotal position in the present and future of the nation and the globe.

In one particularly striking example featured in chapter 2, I recount a presentation by a deacon of Onnuri Church. He refers to the thesis of sociologist Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and argues that Christianity and technological development are inexorably linked. Weber's account refers to industrial capitalism and not "technology," and his argument is not that Christianity and industrial capitalism are inexorably linked, but rather that at a given historical moment, Calvinist theology provided an ideological foundation that allowed for the development of industrial capitalism. The deacon's interpretation of Weber's landmark text, however, led him to a rather different conclusion. With charts and graphs, the deacon showed that technological advancement began in the Western European countries where and when Protestant Christianity flourished. To this point, he stressed France's marginal role in the industrial revolution resulted from their relatively high rate of Catholicism. Subsequently, the "Christian" United States became the locus of technological development, as the prominence of Christianity in Europe waned.

In recent history, however, South Korea has taken a prominent role in technological advancement through the work of companies like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai. To this deacon, this was a direct result of the rapid Christianization of the Korean people and God's blessing upon them. The brunt of his argument was that the future wellbeing of Korea was dependent upon its mutual advancement of both Protestant Christianity and technological innovation. Now that Protestantism had enabled Korea to become a technological power, Christians needed to harness technologies so that they could continue to spread the gospel and suffer the same fate as late modern, secular Europe.

This example and others will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters, but for the present I introduce it to indicate the significance that discourses about technology have on how a religion is understood, practiced, and what role it may have in a given society. Conversely, it suggests that the potential understandings of religion in Korea (in this case, Christianity)—as either an anachronistic tradition related to private belief or a set of ideas and practices upon which a society's future depends—help to shape conceptions of technology and its social role. It is with these and similar considerations that the subsequent chapters will focus on the mutual imbrications of religion, technology, and their attendant people, objects, and places.

Chapter 2

Faith in the System

This chapter will begin to illustrate how the imbrications of Christianity and technology manifests in the lives of many Korean Christians. It shapes how people relate to one another, to various non-human elements of their daily lives, and to larger social and national projects. What "technologically-mediated" communities will look like is dependent upon what one understands technology to be and the human (either communal or individual) relationship to it. For this reason, the ways in which technologies are central to these churches is inflected by both particularities about technology and techno-nationalism in South Korea as well as their own Christian theology involving the human subject and its relationship to God and the material world. This might be understood as a type of "co-production" argument about technology and society, to borrow from Sheila Jasanoff (2004). Still, whereas "co-production" depends upon a vision of society from which technology is extracted or can be considered independently, I hope to capture the ways in which what is called Christianity and technology are entwined in such a way that belies any understanding of one acting upon the "other."

One question which may arise is why does technology figure prominently within multisite churches. This is a complicated question that will not seek to answer entirely, but only to gesture to some potential reasons. First, broader social scientific and Korean nationalist narratives converge with Korean Christian narratives about the affinities between Christianity and technology. Associating Christianity with Korea's technology industries can be strategic for the image of Korean Christianity in a time when the number of Protestants is in decline and megachurches are widely criticized. Second, conceptions of technology align with Christian theological ideas about transcendence and the human's limited role in accessing it, making technology ministries an auspicious site for enacting the Christian virtue of faith. While studies of technology tend to focus on making the opacity of technological systems clear or their invisible function visible, Christians involved in technology ministries sometimes find this opacity to be conducive to Christian ethical alignment toward resignation and humility.

I will proceed through an ethnographic account of my participation in an IT Mission School held at Onnuri Church in Seoul in 2015, participant observation on technology teams at Korean multisite churches, and an IT Missions Conference in Silicon Valley, California, organized by a Korean mission organization in 2016.

First, I will focus on narratives about Korean Christianity and its relationship to technological development that circulate within Korean multisite churches and parachurch programs. I attend to how these narratives emerge in sermons, presentations, and testimonies. The accounts often weave in and out of extant social scientific, theological, and historical narratives. In relating the imbrications of Christianity and technology this way, such narratives seek to reveal how Christian practice and technological progress are interdependent, and that this dynamic can be revealed as latent within histories of social development. In this process of narrativization, Christians participate what Donna Haraway (1997) has called a "world-building," by which their representations of Christianity and technology render particular worlds possible. Through shaping and circulating such narratives, Christians negotiate their own commitments to religious, national, and social projects that arrange the religious, technological, social, and political.

This type of "world-building" is often analyzed according to Charles Taylor's concept of a "social imaginary," which connects a mode of subjectively inhabiting the world with the production/reproduction of that world. The entanglements of social imaginaries (Anderson 1983, Taylor 2003, Appadurai 1996) to the production of sociotechnical systems (Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch 1987) has found sustained engagement, first through anthropologist George Marcus' (1995) "technoscientific imaginaries," and more recently through Sheila Jasanoff and Sung-hyun Kim's (2015) conception of "sociotechnical imaginaries." Marcus' earlier work focused almost exclusively on the imaginaries of professional scientists, but Jasanoff, Kim, and many others have sought to give greater detail to what Jasanoff identified as the coproduction of science and social order more generally (Jasanoff 2004). Jasanoff and Kim (2014) define "sociotechnical imaginaries" as "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology" (4).

These accounts usefully highlight the central role that science and technological advancement play in many visions of the future. Jasanoff and Kim offer this emphasis as a corrective to Anderson and Taylor's work, which they argue focuses more on the ideal than the material production of social imaginaries.[30] Their concept of sociotechnical imaginaries aims to strike "a better balance…between the theoretical poles of abstract idealism and deterministic materialism." In their words:

> By turning to sociotechnical imaginaries, we can engage directly with the ways in which people's hopes and desires for the future—their sense of self and their passion for how things ought to be—get bound up with the hard stuff of past achievements, whether the material infrastructures of roads, power plants, and the security state or the normative infrastructures of constitutional principles, juridical practices, and public reason (22).

I share Jasanoff and Kim's interest in thinking through the ways in which science and technology seem critical to many social imaginaries. However, it is important to remain attentive to the ways in which the very concept of a "sociotechnical imaginary" participate in cementing understandings about science, technology, society, and their relationships that, as I argued in the last chapter, are contextually specific.

The analytic of sociotechnical imaginaries deliberately places "advances in science and technology" at its core, as both the conditions for and the telos of such social imaginaries. But, as the last chapter details, one must be attentive to how the "technical" and "technological" of sociotechnical imaginaries emerges itself through the varied imaginaries which people inhabit. The analytic of "sociotechnical imaginaries," as described in the quotes above, is based in the assumption that science and technology are "the hard stuff" (22) that can be analytically

[30] For example, Jasanoff and Kim argue that even though Anderson's imagined communities formed through the medium of newsprint, "technologies of communication as such play little or no role in his storytelling, except perhaps via the inclusion of museums and maps (along with the census) in the book's expanded second edition" (Jasanoff and Kim, 8).

disaggregated from their own imagining. In fact, it is only through a particularly limited definition of science and technology that one could claim that Anderson's discussion of print publication does not attend to communication technology. This point becomes salient in the context of South Korea. As I will discuss later in this chapter, conceptions of "technology" and "science" in Korea were shaped through Japanese colonialism and postcolonial development in the 20th Century. As historians like Sungook Hong and Jung Lee have indicated, colonial and postcolonial Korea's commitment to "technology without science" deserves attention not pre-scripted by regnant Western dyad of "science and technology."

Furthermore, discourses on "sociotechnical imaginaries" focus on the future, the assumed temporal location of imaginaries of science and technology. Yet imaginaries are also retrojected toward shared understandings of the past and collectively inhabited in the present. Because of this future orientation of Jasanoff and Kim's sociotechnical imaginaries, such accounts tend to focus only on human activity insofar as they are engaged in collectively envisioning social futures, yet to be realized. This focus on the cognitive envisioning of futures reflects an impoverished version of Charles Taylor's (2004) conception of social imaginaries, particularly of his insight that understandings of the social and its futures are immanent to practice. This is critical for the social sciences because, as Craig Calhoun (2015) has argued, "the reproduction [of social imaginaries] isn't in a purely symbolic, purely cognitive realm, but is in practice, and it keeps being reproduced because you can't do various things without being a part of it, and that inside perspective of the actor is, I think integral to the concept" (191).

This chapter will seek to ground that discussion in the ways these ideal commitments are made, but also manifest in the social and spiritual lives of the Christians at an IT Missions School. Thus, this chapter will both attend to the narrativization of Christianity and technology in these contexts and also focus on the IT mission school's primary pedagogical subject: the IT missionary herself.[31] Taking particular technologies—and technology more generally—as essential to Christian practice, participants work to cultivate Christian virtues in themselves, which I will detail in part II of this chapter through the example of select participants and of my own participation at the IT missions school.

In his influential work *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre defines a living tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (222). As "arguments," traditions are said to "embody continuities of conflict" through various planes and practices. In the process of self-cultivation, "The self *has to* find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities" (221, emphasis mine), perhaps most acutely when the communally-defined good and one's perceived ability to embody them appear to be at odds. In this way, the work of MacIntyre and many who have written since (Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2005) affirm that doubt, value-conflict, and ambivalence are constitutive of tradition, and not necessarily threatening to it. This can be seen in the context of many Christian communities in the practice of "faith," which facilitates actions in accord with a tradition when one's pursuit of the good appears at odds with one's ability to realize it. This presentation will explore acts of faith in an "Information Technology Missions School" in

[31] As cultural geographer Judy Ju Hui Han (2008) writes of overseas Korean missionaries, missions convert Christians into missionaries, whether or not missions are successful in creating new converts in the mission field.

Seoul, South Korea. I focus on the students' struggles to negotiate moments when their visions of material transcendence (articulated both in Christian and technological progressivist frames) appeared at odds with their missionary efforts to "click and touch" the whole world. In these circumstances, the technological objects—whose workings were often opaque—became sites through which such ambivalence was worked through in what Michael Lambek (2010) identified as "ordinary ethics," or everyday practices that simultaneously "recognize human finitude and sources of hope." In these moments, many Christians expressed doubts about the spiritual and material transcendence offered in progressivist narratives. Additionally, some expressed that they see themselves as fundamentally incapable of producing the type of results that they seek. Nevertheless, they perform technology missions anyway. By virtue of the opacity of the technologies of their practice, they sought to cultivate an IT missionary Christian subject who embraces one's human limitations while still hoping to transcend such limitations through the faithful use of technologies, being "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

Part I: Techno-theological Imaginaries

We Must not Be Slow

There is a common proverb about Korea: "*korae ssaume saeu tŭng t'ŏjinda,*" or "When the whales fight, the shrimp's back becomes broken." It is usually said to comment upon the Korean peninsula's geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia. It serves to illustrate Korea's vulnerability, caught—as in some tragic, historical accident—between rivaling whales, Japan and China.[32] Korea becomes a triumphant underdog through the repetition of this proverb—a nation that, despite its diminutive size, has endured the collateral damage of its neighbors' contests. Now that South Korea has the eleventh-largest economy in the world, this proverb is often said tongue-in-cheek, suggesting that it is a bit absurd to think of South Korea as just some shrimp.

But were I to picture South Korea as an aquatic creature, I would think not of a shrimp but of a shark. It is not a shark in a sneaky or predatory sense, but rather, as a creature compelled to move perpetually forward. A shark must swim constantly to breathe, and were it to stop, it would die. Just like the shark, there seems to be social pressure toward incessant, usually rapid, movement in contemporary South Korea, at least in its large cities like Seoul.

I had never been to South Korea before beginning my primary fieldwork stay in Seoul in 2014. Generously, people were eager to help orient and steady the overwhelmed ethnographer. Many people offered me what they expected an anthropologist might want: broad, pithy descriptions of their society. I was told most often that "Korea is the land of *balli balli*." Said quickly and percussively, "*Balli balli*" means "fast fast," and goes a long way to describe the often dizzying, frenetic activity of Seoul. But as much as analogies and metaphors have descriptive merit, they each have their limits, and it may be best to attend to closer descriptions of daily activities.

[32] More recently, as the United States may be seen as advancing its own geopolitical interests through its military use of South Korea, it is sometimes characterized as another of these "whales."

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I tried to assimilate to what I saw as Seoul's normative pace. I arose before dawn for early morning prayer, and spent the day doing research or in Korean language lessons. This meant darting back and forth across the city, and in the evenings, I usually joined new friends for eating and drinking marathons (known as "*hwoe sik*" when they follow work). These evening activities gain momentum as groups migrate to as many as four or five locations; it is common for these gatherings to continue until two or three every morning. The next day, I would try to wake up before dawn and do it all again. This, I imagined, was what I was there to do, but I soon realized it was not conducive to reflection, converting thousands of new words to memory, or recording detailed notes. I felt constantly panicked and frantic, and a few weeks in, I gave up on living "*balli balli*."

It was then that I realized that while I had been rushing around, I had also lost my internet service because I had not yet discovered how one pays for utilities. I asked a neighbor, and then paid my bill at the nearest 7-11. Once my bill was settled, I called my service provider to ask if they could send someone over to restore my service. They said someone would be by later that day. I hopped in the shower, and before I had toweled off, there was a repairman buzzing my doorbell. Embarrassed at my wet hair and total lack of composure, I made small talk with him. I complimented him on the incredibly fast response time, and I asked him if he had been in the area already. He said no. That was not the reason for the fast service. He repeated that familiar description: In Seoul everything is "*balli balli*." "You know we have the fastest internet in the world, right?" he asked proudly. "With the fastest internet, we must not be slow."

This preference for speed and dynamism carried into the church as well. Onnuri Church—one of the two churches I studied—has an annual mission slogan they use to unite the church's vision across its dozens of campuses. In 2015, the church celebrated its 30th anniversary, and did so with the announcement of the vision statement "*yesubabohaengjŏn*," translated by the church to mean "fools for Christ."[33] The lead pastor explained that this vision meant that Christians need to follow Christ without hesitation or reflection—the church would be following Christ as "fools," not relying on their own understanding or reflection, but instead proceeding as best they can toward realizing God's Kingdom at any moment. After all, as the pastor said, Jesus didn't tell his apostles to sit down, think about it, make a plan, and then go make disciples—he just said, "Go." In a slightly different idiom, another church leader explained this as convergent with Korean culture as well, in that Korean institutions are strictly hierarchical and leaders tolerate relatively little insubordination or criticism:

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[33] Onnuri Church translates their vision into English as "Fools for Christ," which is what I have chosen to employ in my own writing and speaking. However, the translation omits useful information. The original Korean vision can be broken down word-by-word as follows: *yesu* [Jesus] *pabo* [fool] *haengjŏn* [Acts, as in the book of Acts]. For the thirty years prior to 2015, Onnuri Church had previously been guided by founding Pastor Ha Yong-jo's "Acts 29" vision. There is not 29th book of Acts, of course, but Pastor Ha believed that Onnuri Church could continue the work of the church of Acts, and thus, write a new chapter. In other words, the Korean version captures the continuity of the preceding "Acts 29" vision within its slogan, but this does not translate well into the English version.

> Korean society, it changes so fast because people *don't* [challenge the overarching order/vision]. It's our *hyosin*.[34] They don't, they can't do things exceptional to the rule. So when we have a new project, we can do it faster. That's why Samsung was possible. That's why LG was possible. So yeah, in our society that's a positive thing, but it can also be a negative…. I think the American churches who have meeting after meeting, really fact check and all that…we have something to learn from that model, but our culture…we don't have time to discuss things. We just have to find a good leader and follow him. Our very survival depended on it, maybe. I don't know, I think historians and sociologists could talk about all of that.

These vision messages are hung on banners around the church throughout the year, but this one was also repeated to me as I was working on the technology team at Onnuri Church. I was trained to use some of the simpler equipment—projection and lighting. Hyeri, who taught me how to design slides for music lyrics, explained how I should click through the slides to project them on the large screens in the sanctuary. These lyrics slides were seen as important because the congregation relied on them in order to sing worship songs in the service, like at a *noraebang* or karaoke bar. Our team had been given a cue sheet that outlined the worship set for this service. This sheet detailed not only the order of the songs, but also how the band would proceed through the verses, choruses, and musical interludes of a song, and if they would repeat any parts.

This cue sheet was provided to coordinate the worship leaders and the tech team, but Hyeri explained that we technicians could not rely on the musicians in the band to follow the written plan. Sometimes worship leaders expressed that they felt "led by the Spirit" to repeat a chorus or a bridge, or they might interrupt the set with an impromptu prayer. These improvisational elements were a challenge for whomever was in charge of the projector. "There are two ways of thought," Hyeri said. We could either wait to change slides only after we were sure which verse or chorus the band was going to play next *or* we could try to anticipate what would come next, and that way the lyrics would never be late. "I change slides a little earlier—to keep the service going," she said, rolling her hands forward to indicate this continuous motion. "Sometimes this means that I make a mistake," she said. "You can guess wrong, but I think it's better to guess wrong than to fall behind. But it's hard to know either way, so it's a personal choice." She paused, then added, "Or maybe you should ask the pastor to be sure."

Clicking through the lyric' slides was a much more stressful task than I had expected. With thousands of people looking to the screens to lead their singing, I felt a lot of pressure. Even after I had become more practiced, I sat at the computer with my chest tight, breathing shallowly. I often felt a rush of adrenaline as my eyes darted across the sanctuary, vigilantly watching the musicians for any indication of what line they might sing next and double checking what was projected on the screens. During my first few shifts, Hyeri sat beside me as "support," ambiguously both technical and emotional. When I made mistakes by switching to the wrong slide, she comforted me by telling me not to worry about it. If I made multiple errors in quick succession, people's attention might drift away from their singing and toward the projection operator in frustration. In

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[34] *Hyosin* is often translated as filial piety, which is central to Confucian role ethics. In the briefest terms, it is an ethical sensibility centered on giving respect and honor to those who are one's elders, parents, and ancestors.

these moments, I especially appreciated that Hyeri's mere presence beside me signaled that I was an apprentice, and that made my mistakes more forgivable.

But eventually, I was on my own, and I became nervous that I would disrupt the service by turning to the wrong slide. I began to stretch out my transitions. I became careful and conservative. Of course, this sometimes meant that congregants could not sing the first few words of a line, but this was less disruptive than if I had turned to the wrong slide altogether.

Or so I thought. This practice did not last long. At the first prayer break during one service, the pastor in charge of our team, Pastor David, came over to the tech booth and explained to me that I needed to be faster and I needed to anticipate the transitions. I started to explain my thinking to him, but he was unsympathetic. He anticipated even my excuse, and he cut me off, "That's okay, just keep moving through them. *Balli balli*. Don't over think it," he said with a smile. "Fools for Christ, right?"

Later that week, I asked Pastor David about it over coffee. A man whom I consider to be a friend, David was kind, and he said that *he* understands how people might want to be conservative in switching the slides. The head pastors, on the other hand, have especially strict expectations for the role of technology in the services.

> I, personally, try not to be harsh with the tech volunteers, but in the eyes of the larger church it's different. If the tech is not fast enough, and if the tech operator is not watching closely enough to anticipate, it's not just a small mistake. If it's too slow, it's almost a sin.

"Really?" I asked incredulously. His explanation fascinated me as an anthropologist but added new depths to the anxiety I felt as a fieldworker with months of tech team service ahead.

> Yes. Even in the early days of our church, Pastor Ha focused on the [pause] 'quality' of the service. Right? There's a certain floor that it couldn't fall below. The singers, the stage, the image—it was all really important, and so if you weren't there [he said with his hand raised at eye level to gesture toward a high bar], you'd be replaced quickly.

This reputation for "high standards" in the production value of services often distinguishes Onnuri Church from other megachurches in Seoul. Beginning in the 1970s as a church for celebrities at the request of Kwak Kyusŏk from the pop music group Flyboy, founding Pastor Ha Yong-Cho focused attention and resources on the music, the performance, and design. Consistent with Pastor David's description, Ha was insistent throughout his writing and public speaking that ministries must remain "relevant" to the "modern world" by attending to trends and popular culture (Ha 2008, 8). As he wrote in his book about founding Onnuri Church:

> People are dominated by their environments [*hwan'gyŏng*] and culture [*munhwaŭi chibaerŭl pannŭnda*]. Environment and culture are not substance but a bowl, they are not the seed but the shell. However, in order to drink one needs a bowl, and in order to protect the substance, one needs a form (2008, 147).

Onnuri Church does not invest as much of their resources in aesthetics as they could—not nearly as much as other upper-middle class megachurches in Seoul do, for example. Nevertheless, aesthetics is a priority. Appearances, including what appears and disappears, express one's values and virtue. Ha's writing continues:

> The condition of the physical building also reflects the heart of the church…. if there's trash strewn about and in between the chairs, this is a telltale sign that the church building is not loved, and that the people do not love…. This is why I emphasize that the church should be made with the best design and made the most efficient…. Our love for God is expressed in our best efforts. This includes our best efforts in keeping God's house and His people, His Church (2008, 103).

In my conversation with Pastor David, he ended his comment by repeating that there is a deep moral failure associated with technological failure:

> To some people it's serious like that, that the technology has to be perfect or else it's almost as if you're sinning.

Several factors could have qualified my performance on the tech team to be considered sinful in this way. My first transgression seemed to be temporal: my clicking was ill-timed. More importantly, it was slow. Here we may draw on anthropologist Maria Jose de Abreu's indication that technical materialities (including form, matter, speed, and saturation) help to structure people's relationships to technology. For her, the relationship between people and technology should not be confined to searching for a technological object's "meaning," but must take into account how particular materialities and ontologies inform those meanings (de Abreu 2013, 268).[35] Switching the slides was an almost instantaneous process. It is achieved through the click of a button, so when there is a lag between the music and the projected lyrics, there is little question who or what is to blame. The "perfect" technological operation was "*balli balli*," but I was not.

As I felt a tension between my customary pace and the one to which I was being conditioned, I was reminded of sociologist Max Weber's description of the moralization of time under rational capitalism. He writes, "Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins….Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation" (1906, 104). Under early modern capitalism, Weber argued, whether one's use of time was good or sinful had to do

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[35] See also Hirschkind 2006, 2017,

with its relationship to laboring in one's calling. But this also speaks to the sin I committed in that many would see my delayed clicking as the result of misplaced attention. Perhaps I was not "watching closely enough to anticipate," and thus, not taking my service as one of the church's technology operators seriously enough.

What makes the timing of my slide transitions morally condemnable could be my failure to optimize my labor or productivity, but it may also be simply its lack of fit with the normative pace of social life. Sin is temporalized, in ways that are informed by the technological apparati to which humans should adapt. This is particularly the case in a society often defined by its tech industry. In a country half-jokingly referred to as the "Republic of Samsung," (*Samsŏng konghwaguk*) immediate technical operation is assumed; my slowness brought that forth. "With the fastest internet in the world, we must not be slow," I was reminded. I had failed to align myself with the reflexes of the technological systems I was tasked to operate. For that, I was to be corrected, however gently, until I had internalized these subtle norms.

When church technology appears "perfect," in Pastor David's words, part of what makes it so is its near invisibility. This invisibility is secured through its automatic function and through the physical placement of equipment and its operators. By design, the sanctuary of all Onnuri Churches I have seen place the sound, light, and other technology booths toward the back of the sanctuary, so that all congregants will face away from these machines. Where this cannot be avoided, things like cameras or camera operators are visually minimized to the extent possible. Cameras are brought onto stage only occasionally and briefly. Camera operators wear all black to hide their own presence. Worship leaders typically match their outfits for each Sunday and will often wear bright clothing. But while someone playing a guitar might wear a bright white shirt, camera operators are meant to be invisible and always wore black.

The conversations in one meeting of the church technology team confirmed that the invisibility of technologies had a moral significance within the church. In December of 2014, I received an email from Pastor David with an announcement: a new version of our projection software, Easy Worship, was out. During my year in Seoul, the release of this software marked the only time in which the entire tech team gathered at once. We met at the pastor's home for a group orientation to the new program, followed by dinner. Around twenty people gathered on sofa sectionals and the floor surrounding a laptop he had hooked up to the television in his living room. The meeting began with some introductions and discussion.

Pastor David set the tone for the meeting, thanking us for volunteering and emphasizing how special the tech team is among all volunteer groups.

> I think that the work that you do on the tech team is such a blessing for the church. It is *truly* service because it is thankless. It is all in the background. It's so much in the background that I know many of you have never even met each other before. You could volunteer as ushers or in the praise team, and people see you and they see your service. They get to know your face. But people only notice the tech team when we mess up! It really is selfless service! We can think about the sermon from a couple of weeks ago that was about integrity. Remember, integrity is about what you do when no one is looking. Who you are when no one is looking is the real you, and I think you are all doing something really special for the church by doing this kind of service that no one sees. Well, of course, they see the slides, but only really

> notice is if we mess up. They don't see all the hours you put in to make it go perfectly, but I know all you do and I am really thankful for your hard work.

Another volunteer in his forties echoed Pastor David's announcement:

> The Bible talks about how important it is to serve selflessly, remember. It says that people who do good things, and get credit for it now, that's good and all, but that's their blessing. People look at them and thank them for their service and pat them on the back, you know. We don't get that. Like Pastor David said, we're in the background. So the Bible promises us that our reward is in Heaven. The reward for this work will be waiting for us in Heaven because it isn't about us at all! I think about that sometimes because I know that nobody appreciates what we do. They only get impatient when there's a problem, but when everything is good, they don't see what we do. But that's ok because, you know what, we need to have God's perspective.

Even among the church staff and volunteers themselves the tech team might be overlooked on occasion. For example, when I attended a church-wide retreat for volunteers, I found that the tech team was not even listed on the program's list of volunteer groups. I turned to a tech team member who was sitting beside me at a large, round table. I pointed to our omission, and she responded to this gesture with a smile that appeared at once proud and amused. "We weren't on the program last time, either."

In these ways, technology ministries within the church were particularly virtuous because of this invisibility and thanklessness. It was seen as almost self-sacrificial. When we do everything perfectly, they noted, people in the church will forget that we are there. Our service becomes completely assumed. But when there are technological "issues," those issues immediately become attributed to *us*. Even if a technological malfunction is, as one volunteer joked, "an act of God," we often receive the blame for it, and quite publicly.

We can also find this in founding Pastor Ha Yong-jo's design for Onnuri Church. He taught that participation within the church was to be built on an individual's subsumption within the larger, cooperative institution. The ideal Christian subject, then, humbly resigns oneself to a role that only God can fully direct. He writes, "Cooperation is only possible when I learn to die to myself. If I only seek to push my own agenda and ideas and get my own way, cooperation simply doesn't happen. As the body of Christ, we must cooperate….. Faith is revealed in fellowship, in service and ministry with brothers and sisters is true faith. We become less, and as we become less, Christ is ultimately revealed. I become of the crowd instead of becoming unique [*han sarami toenda*]" (Ha 2008, 78-79). Theorist Elias Canetti (1960) wrote that there is a mutually-influential relationship between crowds and crowd symbols. Canetti argues that "behind every recognized crowd symbol one can find the concrete crowd that nourishes it," This can be located in "the human urge to become [the crowd symbol]" (79). Throughout this chapter, we will see in greater detail the ways in which technology is not embraced merely as a tool for human use, but a model for life and community in which individuals are integrated into a larger system.

Later in this chapter, I will return to focus on this type of Christian subject, its crowd symbols, and how these ideals are negotiated in practice. But first, I want to consider another reason why technology of all things would figure so prominently in Christian life and practice. For this, I will turn to what happened immediately after my conversation with Pastor David at the café, which reveals how the elevated role of technology in Christian churches converges with broader social scientific and Korean nationalist imaginaries.

Love without Limits

After my interview with Pastor David on that Tuesday afternoon, I sat in the café at Onnuri Church in Sŏbinggo-dong to write notes and reflect. On any weekday, according to service and meeting schedules, the café is periodically flooded by people as the rising of a tide. Those who serve the church often coordinate the color of their clothing with the rest of the team on which they serve. Groups of older women in white, men in dark suits, or young people in vibrant, solid colors would completely transform the plain, minimalist space. A din fills the room as voices, laughter, and the screech of sliding chairs echo off the walls, stone tile floors, and un-upholstered furniture, until gradually the crowd ebbs, revealing new intimacies once obscured by the rush of people. Those who remain are in smaller groups, talking one-on-one with pastors about their hopes and daily struggles, or sitting alone reading the Bible over coffee. A woman I knew named Sowon—which means "wish"—sat down beside me at one point, telling me about her "international business" at great length, but in the vaguest terms. She explained she was there to meet with clients for her business. I knew that a program for adults with special needs had just ended in another part of the building, but I complimented her business card and listened to her until it seemed that I bored her and she took her leave.

Several hours passed as I sat in this space. It was the early evening when I went to use the restroom and noticed a bespectacled man grinning at me in a pristinely white, button-down shirt with crisp lines pressed down the sleeves. I made eye contact, but he said nothing. He just smiled at me from the foot of the stairwell holding a sign which read "IT Mission School, 2nd Floor" [IT *sŏn'gyohakkyo*]. I paused, gave a restrained smile, and approached him. "Excuse me, I'm an anthropologist from America, and I am researching technology in megachurches like Onnuri Church. I'm curious, what kind of people will be attending this mission school?"

"Can you use a smart phone?" he asked in reply, with the same, unfaltering grin that was welcoming, if a bit unsettling in its earnestness. "Anyone who can use a smart phone is welcome." He bowed slightly and extended his hand to usher me upstairs. I was excited by the prospect of attending, but I was skeptical that I could join so easily without committing an administrative taboo. I hesitated.

"Sorry, but I didn't know that this was happening. I haven't registered; is that really ok?"

"Yes, yes," he said, now leaving his post in order to accompany me upstairs. "Anyone who can use a smart phone is welcome."

Upstairs, I entered a children's Sunday school room, today filled with adults. In the middle of the room, a folding table served as an *ad hoc* tech booth, around which two men were setting up a tripod, camera, and a portable sound board. A group of young women were at the back of the room registering students and serving us a simple dinner—a Burger King chicken sandwich and a paper cup of juice. They also handed me a program. On the cover was the image of light-skinned hands holding an electronic tablet. On the tablet was a simple world map and the school's slogan, "Let's build up IT missionaries and carry out the work of this calling [*samyŏng*]." Several short tables were set up on the floor, oriented toward a short, raised platform and projection screen. I was told to sit on the floor at a low table on the left side of the room and enjoy my meal. We would start praise soon.

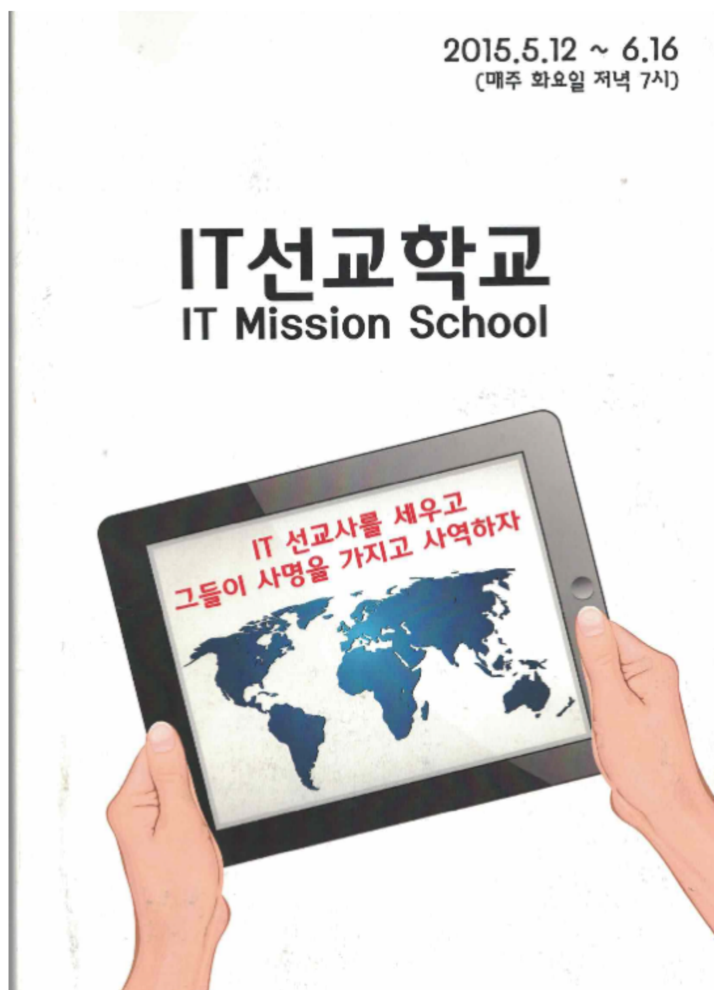

Figure 2. Program cover for the IT Mission School.

Middle-aged men in suits sat together on the floor toward the right side of the room. Some of the men were occupied with their cell phones, some conversed with one another, but many of the men simply stared at me as I found myself to be matter-out-of-place, at least until the other young women completed their hospitality tasks and joined me on the floor. Glancing at the program I learned the meeting was led by two organizations in cooperation with Onnuri Church. These were SWIM (*segyeint'ŏnessŏn'gyohakhoe*; World Internet Missions Institute) and FMnC

(*kisulgwahakchŏnmuninsŏn'gyohoe*; "Frontier Mission and Computer" is the basis for their acronym, but their Korean name translates roughly to Missionary Center for Technology and Science).[36]

Soon after I had sat down, a young man with a guitar stepped onto the stage, another volunteer projected praise music onto the screen behind him, and we sang popular praise songs for about fifteen minutes. One of the songs was new to me:

Lost hope in broken life
Not a penny
You came to see me.
I don't know why
Your infinite/boundless [*hanŏmnŭn*] love
I am going to make my dreams come true.
…
In spite of a hard life
You did it.
By my inner hope
In the midst of it
There is victory [*sŭngni*].
Your infinite/boundless love
I am going to make my dreams come true.
The reason why You came.

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[36] FMnC's work began in 2000, offering periodic mission schools and working with Korean missionaries abroad to build the work of IT missions. Throughout my interactions at the IT Mission School and the IT Missions Conferences, the word "mission" [*sŏn'gyo*] is intended to apply to any work in sharing the Gospel of Jesus. It does not imply foreign activity exclusively, as distinct from "evangelism" [*pogŭm chŏndo*] which often implies domestic activity. Nor does it apply only to the sharing of Christian messages with non-Christians, and throughout the course of the IT Mission School it was clear many of the "mission" activities made no distinction between Christian/non-Christian others.

While many of the leaders and speakers focused on their missionary activity abroad, almost none of the attendees of these events were professional missionaries. They were office workers, housewives, and a generally diverse assortment of committed church-goers who were interested in hearing what Christianity had to do with SNS (literally taken "Social Networking Service" in English, but applying broadly to several social media and messaging platforms), computing, and, for some, a concern about groups like ISIS [*ai esŭ*]—perceived spiritual enemies who had recently proven very successful in using internet services to spread their messages. That the intended audience of the school and the conferences was any person, regardless of their career, was reiterated frequently during the presentations, many of them concluding or beginning with the mantra "*paro tangsin*!" or "It's you!" In fact, the slogan for the 2013 IT Mission Conference, which centered on English wordplay as it typically does, was "IT's you!" with the "I" and "T" emphasized to suggest the double meaning of the English word "it" and the abbreviation for "information technology."

The phrase "infinite/boundless love" [*hanŏmnŭn sarang*] was repeated throughout the song. We sang of a world in which life is difficult, even hopeless. Yet the gift of God's love transcends all limitations. It is that boundless, infinite love that provides the hope to carry on. Once the hope is provided by God's love, the singer expresses the intention to live in faith: "I am going to make my dreams come true."

After that final hymn, we prayed aloud for several minutes, until the ambient music from the piano faded and one of the organizers led us to say, "Amen."

A New Paradigm

We raised our heads from prayer and gazed toward the platform; the man who I had met at the staircase stood before us for the orientation. "New Paradigm" [*sae p'aerŏdaim*] was projected in large white letters on the screen behind him. He posed the rhetorical question, "What is the biggest change in human history?" This change has happened within our lifetimes, but the transformation is not complete. It is unfolding in our lives and all around us, he offered. This is because we are living in the "IT Age" (with "I.T." said as transliterated from English, IT *sidae*).

Pronouncements that we live in a technological age are so common that they go without much comment. Such statements establish as matter-of-fact that the current era is defined by technology. The "technological"—whatever that might denote for a given speaker—is presented as the ground upon which we stand. At the first meeting of the IT Mission School, little apology was required to build a consensus that our age is technological; it was not just assumed, but it constituted the central premise for the program.

Our grinning leader stood before us on the platform, gazing intently toward each audience member. He mentioned that the philosopher Thomas Kuhn argued that scientific revolutions are accompanied by what he called "paradigm shifts"—that is, changes in the concepts and practices foundational to science itself.[37] "In the IT age," he continued, "Christians need a new paradigm!" The implication was clear that our world had changed and would continue to do so; the things and people who fail to align themselves with the IT age might be left behind.

Shouting with the cadence of a megachurch sermon, his unusually high-pitched voice pinched and squeaked on words with emphasis. "Amen!" rang out from the small audience of missionaries, businessmen, teachers, and housewives before him. At one point, he lowered the tone and volume of his voice. He admitted that when he was younger, South Korea was not "developed" [*kaebaldwaeji ant'a*]. The small country had to endure [*kyŏndihada*] war and colonial oppression for centuries, and only recently had South Korea become an industrialized society. He recounted this history gravely and seriously. But then he raised his voice again, shifting the narrative to announce that God had—materially as well as spiritually—redeemed the Korean

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[37] See Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

people. "God has raised up the Korean people as leaders of the IT age!" he said to the crowd's vocal affirmation. As if God had designed a spiritual system for our own mechanic coordination, "We will plug-in [*p'ŭllŏgŭ in*] to God's ministry. All of us in various ways [*moduga tayanghage*]. This age is *your* age." The "amen" which followed this last pronouncement came almost exclusively from the younger women seated near me. They smiled up at the speaker. A woman beside me moved her torso forward and back, both signaling an affirmative nod to the speaker while resembling the regular, bowing motion that many women assume during prayer. I found myself wondering what about the context of the lives of these IT missions' students made the phrase "this age is your age" seem resonant or warrant such a strong pronouncement.

At that point, he led us in a brief prayer. We prayed that the Spirit would be present in our meetings, that God would prepare us to create God's Kingdom through our use of technology, and we thanked God for giving us the IT age. "In this age, through I.T., thank you for leading us to become missionaries: Whenever, Wherever, and Whomever [*ŏnjena, ŏdisŏna, nuguna*]. Amen."

After we raised our heads, he continued to detail his vision of our IT age and the opportunities that it offers. Citing another social scientist, he talked about Alvin Toffler's theory of "future shocks"—shocks resulting from rapid social changes, of which information technology was a prime example. Toffler's arguments confirmed our leader's claim that our technological age is marked by jarring material changes, but he disagreed with Toffler's concern that such a "future shock" would destabilize a religion like Christianity. As our world is changing, he explains, "We need to keep checking into what God is saying." [*hananimŭi malssŭmgwa hwaginhaeya hamnida*]. Gesturing toward large PowerPoint slides projected on a screen behind him, he assured us that this new paradigm would not be external to Christianity. "God is presiding [*chugwanhada*] over this era! God made this age the IT age! And God is calling you directly to the IT age!"

An evolutionary progression of chimp-to-human forms appears on the screen, except the stages of evolution are defined not so much by biological, but technological changes that drive human progression. The course progresses from phonograph to Walkman to CD player to the cloud. Each of these new technologies change the way that we play music, but the music, he insists, remains the same. "There have been changes to the Bible as well, but it is always God's Word." Onnuri's founding Pastor Ha Yong-cho often made a similar claim. "Our worship style is changing all the time to be relevant with our changing lives. The message is the same pure Gospel but the medium changes" (Ha 2008, 173). The point of this illustration was to emphasize that God's Kingdom is not limited to a single material form. Instead, God works through technological changes, and if we want to be missionaries of this IT age, we need only plug in.

Whenever, Wherever, Whoever

Efforts to mark history according to "paradigm shifts" can be traced back to philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn's *The Social Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). In it, Kuhn identifies at least two meanings of a paradigm. The first is the set of implicit and explicit values, techniques, and assumptions that are held in common by a given community. For the Western scientific community of the mid-20th Century, the regnant paradigm included experimentation, value-neutrality, and objectivity, for example.

In a second sense, a paradigm is something that acts as a common model or example according to which a member of the community might be judged as adhering to or diverging from a tradition. For example, Isaac Newton's *Principia* is said to be paradigmatic for many scientific communities. Practitioners may be expected to adhere to *Principia*'s ideals for investigative practice, and one's recognition as a scientist might depend on one's capacity to do so. By each of these definitions, Kuhn's concern was primarily social. Paradigm shifts were significant historical markers insofar as they evince and structure changes in what qualifies a person to be included within a community of tradition (which he understood science to be). In other words, paradigm shifts are shifts within a tradition and how one might relate to it.

So why do Christians need a "new paradigm," and what would that look like? As our leaders insisted, when it comes to God and God's Word, the medium is *not* the message (See McLuhan 1967). The material changes of the IT age or the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" do not affect God's Word in itself. God is the source of technological change, and therefore, these arrangements are the result of His will. Such changes may only require corresponding shifts in how humans try to engage with God's Word. Therefore, the "new paradigm" refers to a new paradigm for Christian living and community. The task, then, is to discern what the ideal Church community is and how Christians should live as its constitutive elements.

Elias Canetti's work *Crowds and Power* (1960) is helpful here. Through imagery, analogy, and typification, Canetti tries to capture the crowd as forms of assemblage variously seen and experienced in the world. There were several types of crowds, and not all crowds are exclusively human. For Canetti, crowds could be human, but they were also crops, forests, and fire.[38] For example, anthropologist Rosalind Morris (2000) used Canetti's work to typify the crowd as urban traffic, shaped by routine and event in Northern Thailand.

Canetti finds a key distinction between "open" and "closed" crowds, and he uses the figure of a church as the epitome of a "closed" crowd. Closed crowds seek permanence and endurance; they are conservative in that sense. Resonant with Weberian characterizations of religious institutions, churches are said to be guided by routinization, repetition, and ritual (Weber 1963). Hence, the "regularity of church-going and the precise and familiar repetition of certain rites safeguard for the crowd something like a domesticated version of itself" (45).

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[38] The idea that human crowds might be based on analogies to other assemblages can be seen in earlier anthropological writings as well. Mary Douglas (1986), for instance, argued that social institutions depend upon individuals identifying with a common analogical model.

> Individuals, as they pick and choose among the analogies from nature those they will give credence to, are also picking and choosing at the same time their allies and opponents and the pattern of their future relations. Constituting their version of nature, they are monitoring the constitution of their society. In short, they are constructing a machine for thinking and decision-making on their own behalf (63).

Fragile social institutions, she indicates, can strengthen their attendant social order through the use of founding analogies understood to be natural or intuitive. To be so, these founding analogies must not appear as analogies, but must appear natural to hide their analogical operation (53).

These characterizations of religious institutions continue to be paradigmatic for many social scientific analyses of churches, but they are less helpful in thinking about many evangelical churches today. Canetti writes that the "first thing to be noticed about [a closed crowd] is that it has a boundary. It establishes itself by accepting its limitation" (17). While one cannot deny that churches have boundaries established by walls, initiation rites, and so forth, it cannot be said that mega- and multisite churches are particularly accepting of limits to their growth. The transformation of mega- into multisite churches is itself motivated by the rejection of such limits. Facing the constraints of seating, transportation access, and parking, operating across multiple locations offered megachurches the potential for limitless growth. One multisite church pastor explained the multisite church to me thusly: "You can have one mega-McDonald's or a smaller McDonald's in every neighborhood; which do you think is going to feed more people?"[39]

For these reasons, many evangelical churches are better understood as a type of "open crowd," whose very driving and organizing principle is transcending apparent limits to growth. "The open crowd," Canetti writes, "exists so long as it grows; it disintegrates as soon as it stops growing," just as the spiritual authority of evangelical leaders is often buttressed by numerical growth and undermined by stagnation.

Protestant Christianity in South Korea grew rapidly in the late 20th Century largely according to this dynamic. The growth from only 500,000 Korean Protestants in 1950 to almost 9 million Korean Protestants (according to Gallup polls) is strongly associated with the popularity of certain megachurches and their regular revival meetings.[40] The spiritual gifts of charismatic pastors such as Cho Yonggi seemed to grow in proportion to his expanding congregation. This self-fulfilling prophecy mirrors what sociologist Byung-Suh Kim calls the "bigness syndrome" in Korea, referring to the cultural association of greater size with higher quality.[41]

But just as growth breeds growth, stagnation can precipitate a crisis. Since the 1997 IMF crisis, the growth of Protestantism has slowed, at best. There is reason to be skeptical of the precision of any set of surveys or statistics because the "bigness syndrome" encourages double- and triple-counting in many churches, as well as incentivizes those critical of Korean Protestantism to demonstrate numerical decline. I only offer that by most accounts, there has been a stagnation or decline in Protestant church-going and identification since at least the mid-2000s, which had become so apparent by the 2010s that many pastors then began to admit this trend publicly. The place of Christianity in Korea and the world, many Christians fear, is not as secure as it once was.

It is these social changes which inform the need for a "new paradigm" to catalyze growth within this 21st Century IT age. Since the Church operates as an open crowd, Christians need to reorient themselves according to a "new paradigm" in order to transcend apparent limits to growth.

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[39] While there is much debate about the appropriate definition of "evangelical," here I will note only that these communities often earn that descriptor because place the highest value on spreading their religious messages and trying to convert non-Christians. They flood the streets of Seoul, distributing Bibles to whomever will receive them. In fact, on several occasions I was handed evangelistic materials for Yoido Full Gospel Church near my apartment as I began my one-hour commute to that church on Sunday mornings.

[40] See Gallup Korea 1998, 2004, 2015.

[41] See also Chapter 4.

At the IT Mission School, the paradigmatic symbol of Christian living in the IT age, as elevated and animated by the IT missionaries, is "technology" itself. While not the only crowd symbol circulating within Korean multisite churches, technology emerged with regularity. For example, in speaking of the corruption he perceived in other megachurches, one pastor at Yoido Full Gospel Church announced from the pulpit, "[In such cases, Christians] need to download the right operating system. It's because there was a virus in the other system."

As I explored in chapter 1 and to which I will return later in this chapter, the capacity to transcend perceived limitations is a key component of the definition of technology as a class of objects. Video broadcasting in churches, for example, is a technology by virtue of its ability to overcome perceived geographic limits. This is operative in Martin Heidegger's statement that "The essence of technology is by no means anything technological." Rather, he locates the "essence" of technology in a set of relations; it is an "enframing" of the world such that all of nature—rocks, trees, rivers, and even human beings—become transformed into a "standing reserve" for -technological progress.[42] The evangelical desire for ceaseless ecclesial expansion chafes at any perceived limits to its growth. Transcendent by definition, technology itself is the new paradigm to which Christians can adhere, joining everything and everyone into the Kingdom of God—"whenever, wherever, whomever."

The Power of God's Word

Each week's session followed a similar program. We would begin with singing and prayer, then we would listen to a speaker or two, followed by an hour in which we would assemble in smaller groups to work on missionary projects involving technologies. At the second meeting, the presentation was preceded by a promotional video for the 2015 IT Missions Conference, to be held later that year.

The video began with Loren Cunningham, the founder of the largest international missionary organization Youth with a Mission (YWAM), proclaiming: "Korea are [sic] poised in just the right place to lead out in something amazing." This video is accompanied by the type of dramatic music that one might hear behind the battle scene of a film. After advertising the speakers and programs, the video's final scene showed a network of connections expanding from Korea rhizomatically across the globe. The abbreviation "I.T." appears on the screen, and then it transforms into the slogan "I.T.ouch You" in the foreground, framing both the way in which the Lord will touch each person and the contagious spread of the spiritual network by means of information technology. Notably, in the Korean translation of this slogan, the "I" of "I.T.ouch You" is identified as "the Lord," [*chunim*] who is the ultimate source of IT's touch.

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[42] Technology is often attributed the definition as a means toward particular ends, but Heidegger signals that this does not conform to how people act in relation to the technological. The world is so enframed when people are drawn to structure social life in order to make it accord with technological means. See Heidegger 1977.

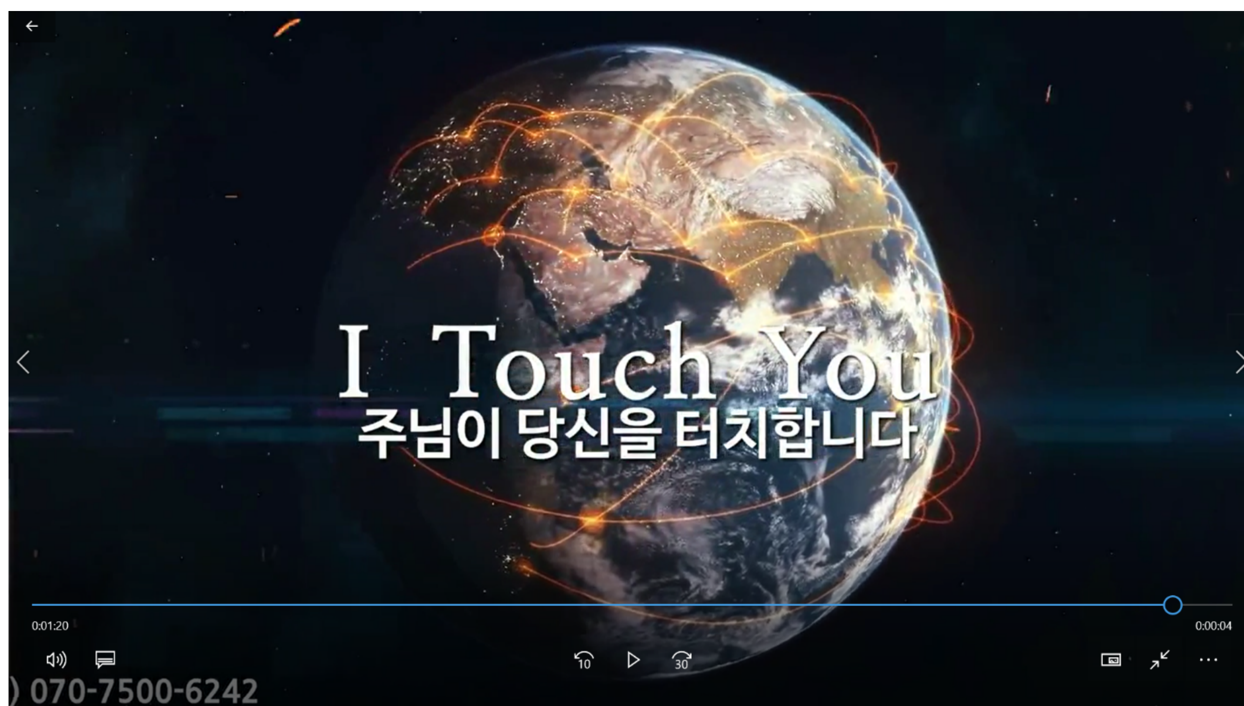

Figure 3. A screenshot from the 2015 IT Mission Conference Promotional Video shows a streak of golden light—symbolizing the movement of the Holy Spirit through technology ministries—branching across the globe rhizomatically.

As light returned to the room, a slightly hunched, older man in a suit appeared on the platform before us. "Hallelujah," he said, to which the crowd instinctively responded, "Amen." This speaker was Professor Ko Gun. Ko had held several positions of authority: he was a Professor of Computer Science, the former President of a small university near Jeonju, Chair of the FMnC Missions Research Institute, and an Elder at Onnuri Church. It seemed everyone had reason to treat Professor Ko as our most honored guest. Unlike the other speakers, who attended each week of the program and led smaller project teams, the professor only attended this one meeting to deliver his presentation. The presentation took the form of an academic lecture. His arguments were supported by scholarly citations of the work of historians (many from my home institution, UC Berkeley) and social scientific theories. Although his title was "The Power of the Word of God," the soteriological potency of the Bible was mentioned only on occasion. Instead, he seemed to focus more on establishing a particular historical narrative—one that cemented Christianity and technological development as co-dependent.

His talk began by looking at Christian history prior to moveable type. The technology of paper printing [*chongi inswaesul*] marks a turning point that inaugurates the history he is about to tell. The first PowerPoint slides track the course of paper printing on a map of the Eurasian continent. The path begins in China in the year 105 C.E., then continues westward through the middle east, then North Africa, and finally up through Western Europe in the 12th -15th Centuries. This map is immediately juxtaposed with another that erases the central course of paper printing, now deemed irrelevant, indicating only China's invention and the Western European development in the 15th Century. What becomes relevant, however, is the religious labels that appear directly

below the regions—China is Confucian Buddhist [*yugyo pulgyo*] while Western Europe is Christian [*kidokkyo*].[43]

Drawing upon Max Weber's famous thesis of the elective affinity between Protestantism and rational capitalist development, his lecture argued that South Korean Christians had a unique calling to become IT missionaries. Weber, he said, demonstrated the close relationship between Protestantism and industrialization as each developed in Europe and North America. With charts and graphs, he traced technological advancement throughout modern history, beginning in the Western European countries where and when Protestant Christianity flourished. To this point, he stressed that France had only a marginal role in the industrial revolution because of the relatively high rate of Catholicism there. French society was full of vice because they did not follow the right gospel. At this point, he addressed me directly, switching to English. "Are you French?" he asked me kindly, hoping for a negative answer. A few men who spoke English laughed. "I'm American," I answered. "Ahh. America. OK!" he said, giving me a firm thumbs up. After the secularization of Western Europe in the 19th Century, he continued, the United States became the locus of technological development, as the prominence of Christianity in Europe waned.

Notably, Weber's famous work ends on a less triumphant note. Religious values helped to constitute and legitimate this new economic system; Weber feared, however, that rational capitalism would pull the meaning that initially supported their work ethic out from under individuals forced to live under conditions of modernity. He writes, "For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved'" (123). This is how modern, rational capitalism—falsely convinced of its own progress—would eventually lead humanity into an "iron cage." The repressive force of the iron cage is felt as the modern individual becomes completely regimented by the necessities of vocational activity, now stripped of its sustaining structures of meaning. Hence, one famous passage from the book explains, "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so…. In [the Christian ascetic's] view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage." The IT Mission School speaker Professor Ko, too, disavowed Weber's concern that modern individuals were destined to lose their source of meaning because of particular material arrangements. This was the real "power" of God's Word. In places like the United States in Weber's narrative, Christianity and capitalist industry found synergy.

In recent history, Professor Ko noted, South Korea has taken a prominent role in technological advancement through the work of companies like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai. In

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[43] The label "*kidokkyo*" (or Christian) is typically used by Korean Protestants to refer specifically to Protestant Christianity, while Catholicism receives its own term "*k'at'ollik*". Although the historical period in question precedes the Protestant Reformation (and, therefore, the distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism does not apply), it is notable that he describes 15th Century Europeans as "Christian" using the term that implies Protestantism. In this way, he can imply a kinship or continuous lineage between contemporary Protestant Christians and the European Christians who came to adopt printing technologies in ways that would (as he would soon describe) bring about democracy, women's liberation, other social goods seen to be the product of reason and virtue based in the Bible ["*sŏnggyŏng kiban isang* + Virtue" (English original)].

his view, this was a direct result of the rapid Christianization of the Korean people and God's blessing upon them. The point that he most stressed was that the future wellbeing of Korea was dependent upon its mutual advancement of both Protestant Christianity and technological innovation. Now that Protestantism had enabled Korea to become a technological power, Christians needed to align their efforts with new technologies so that they could continue to spread the gospel and not suffer the same fate as late modern, secular Europe. Material and spiritual prosperity were not the same, but they had a unique co-dependence.

Such narratives may be said to echo what historian Carter Eckert has called Korea's "will to greatness," to him being a "psychic presumption that Korea is inherently a great country, destined to play a leading role in the history of the world" (Eckert 2000, 119). Yet as much as this conception may indicate a broader theme in many narratives, there is reason to focus on the specificity of each narrativization and its context. For example, anthropologist Nicholas Harkness records competing historical records of Korean progress in and around Somang Church. In 2008, he explains, some see the election of Somang congregant Lee Myung-bak to consummate Korea's status as an advanced and Christian nation, while others saw the country as embroiled in an ongoing struggle between elites and the people [*minjung*] (Harkness 2014, 48-79).[44] The narratives of the IT mission school, too, were distinctive. Addressed to an audience of Korean Christians in an upper-middle class multisite church in Seoul, it cemented an association between Christianity and Korean nationalism in which technological development (and its attendant economic prosperity) plays a central and inextricable role. It is not just that Korean Christianity and technological development were coincident with other markers of national progress. Christianity and technology are to be seen as mutually imbricated. They suggest that there might have been no Samsung or LG as we know them without a vibrant Korean Protestantism. Today, it is time for Christians to embrace this technological advancement as constitutive of whom they were meant to be.

A Country Built on Technology

I reflected on my own reading of Weber as I listened. Particularly, Weber's account refers to industrial capitalism and not "technology," per se. Also, his argument is not that Christianity and industrial capitalism are inexorably linked, but rather that at a given historical moment, Calvinist theology provided an ideological foundation that allowed for the development of industrial capitalism. In this way, it is an historical analysis of the "interaction of material and ideal *interests*" (emphasis mine), which are the motivations behind particular ideas or material arrangements. This is why Weber argues that upper classes are the most likely to advocate the religious views that validate their wealth. I wondered what Weber might have to say about this presentation and about the "material and ideal interests" of 21st-Century urban Korean Christians that may be animating such spiritual investment in technology. Exploring this requires a broader historical frame, asking how and why "technology" came to be understood in the way it is, and how that aligns with Korean developmentalism and nationalism.

Since the end of the Korean War, technology has figured prominently in the formation of the nation as an image and ideal. Early government programs and investments placed science and

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[44] For a history of the *minjung*, see Namhee Lee. *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

technology at the center of Korea's imagined future, and when the national government announced its first official slogan in the early 1970s, South Korea became "A Country Built on Science" [科學立國] (Hong 2012, 263). Historian Sungook Hong has usefully traced how the terms used for science and technology in Korea have shifted since mid-20th Century and continue to change, in part through linguistic contact with English and the United States' central role in national development. Hong explains that when the government labeled the Republic of Korea "A Country Built on Science," "science here did not mean merely natural science but largely meant technology and engineering. Since people tended to think that technology was a science, engineers did not have to emphasize the 'scientific' side of technology" (Hong 2012, 263).

Contemporary Western understandings of science and technology tend to identify science as a "higher" discipline, based on a pure or abstract pursuit of knowledge, whereas technology is typically the material application of scientific knowledge (Nye 2007, 9; Marx Leo 1997). These understandings are culturally specific, however, and do not hold true always and everywhere. Elite Koreans who attended Japanese schools and universities in the early 20th Century were offered a slightly different understanding of science and the technical arts. Historian Gregory Clancey indicates that relative to Western universities, engineering was considered more prestigious and of a higher status in the first institutions of higher learning in Japan (Clancey 2012, 246). Still, engineering and technology were understood to be dependent upon science in early 20th-Century Japan and in the colonial administration of Korea.

By contrast, Koreans shared a unique perspective that technological innovation was independent of science, according to historians Sungook Hong and Jung Lee. This conception of technology first developed through the Japanese colonial period of the early 20th Century. Lee argues:

> The colonial authorities and Korean cultural elites portrayed invention as a universal activity practiced by scientific professionals and thus grandly innovative and foreign. But self-made Korean inventors upended all these notions because these individuals were scarcely educated, knew little science, and worked on seemingly trivial devices or small improvements of often familiar tools associated with everyday life in Korea. Gradually, however, some indigenous elites, informed by the practice of self-made inventors, began to shift their perspective to argue that invention was native, culturally embedded, incremental, and could be undertaken by anyone who would persevere through the long process of trial and error. For these elites, the grassroots activities of self-made inventors could and should define what invention and technology meant for colonial Koreans instead of imported things like the telegraph and steam engine. Science, which at around this same time in most Western countries and Japan was increasingly tied to technology, was hardly considered an essential element of invention in this new Korean formulation. By locating the new concept securely within a society bound by colonial restraints, colonial Korea created a concept of invention without science (Lee Jung 2013, 783).

The independence of technology from science in Korea was significant in that it offered the means through which many Koreans could understand their new nation as technological by nature.

Neighboring countries offered slogans such as "Japanese science, Western technology," but postcolonial Korean nationalists were able to eschew any dependence on foreign knowledge because even under Japanese colonial rule, uneducated Koreans proved themselves to be inventors without science. Koreans' proclaimed native capacity for invention shaped domestic investments in technological industries for economic development. This complements Hong's point that to many 20th Century Koreans, "Developing technological capacity, which cannot be imported, should be supported. To them, science was exogenous, while technology was endogenous" (Hong 2012, 261).[45]

In the formative period directly following the ceasefire to the Korean War, "technology" was reinforced, even deliberately, as an essential aspect of Korean-ness. This provided both the impetus for further investment in technological industries and in the narratives told about them. For example, technology often played a formidable role in national narratives. As Hong reflects:

> There is little doubt that the advancement of science and technology and the establishment of a higher educational system to train scientists and engineers were crucial factors in Korea's development. Or, at least, we were taught so from our elementary school days. In Korea, between science and technology, technology has played a more crucial role in economic development (Hong 2012, 259).

Additionally, technology was consistently linked with the developmental stages of Korean society (see Lee Jung 2013, 806). Historian Carter Eckert argues that post-colonial Korean nationalism manifests in late 20th-Century industrial histories of the Korean peninsula, such that it is sometimes claimed that Korean companies of the 1960s and 1970s used Korean technology exclusively. These "historical distortions" and "myths," as he calls them, are noteworthy not for their historical accuracy or inaccuracy, but because they "at least serve to emphasize the important role that technology inevitably plays in the production process as well as in permitting a developing nation to achieve a certain economic autonomy" (Eckert 2014, 141). Particularly when technology is understood to be a requirement for political and economic independence, securing the association of Korea with technological advancement can further Korean nationalist narratives.

Anthropologist Robert Oppenheim has usefully traced the ways in which this future-oriented—what he terms "fulfillationist"—logic becomes worked through in the curation of Korean tradition in the city of Kyŏngju. He notes:

> Shortly after taking power in 1961, Park Chung Hee himself had highlighted the 'evil legacies' of Korea's precolonial past, seemingly espousing a position

[45] The unique conception of science and technology in postcolonial South Korea may be, in part, what has allowed for the technological and the religious to be aligned in distinctive ways, as the alleged epistemological opposition of science and religion was never brought to bear on it. The Korean "invention without science" was not understood to be the product of an immanentist and purely secular tradition, and as such, technology and Christianity could be configured in less-than-oppositional ways.

relatively close to the ruling American synthesis of modernization theory in which tradition was simply modernity's antithesis and a trap from which nations must escape (Oppenheim 2008, 29).

In the early 21st-Century, technological progressivism is evident in the sights, sounds, and the most quotidian aspects of life in Seoul. One need not be in Seoul for very long before one sees a government-sponsored advertisement encouraging its citizens to continue to build on its technological achievements. Or before one hears a speech announcing Samsung, LG, and Hyundai's leadership in the global technological order.

Figure 4. An old man on the subway reads a public announcement by the Seoul Municipal Government. The main text reads, "Let's walk together! Rebuilt." Against the background of Seoul, several people walk in succession. The lead figure representing "living history" is a middle-aged man wearing a tool belt and carrying a wrench, followed by a young adult woman and man carrying an architectural model and operating an overhead drone, respectively. These are "young makers" of the "4th industrial revolution." At the end of their procession is a young girl walking hand-in-hand with a silver, metal robot. This younger generation, comprised both of humans and their robotic companions, are the "dream-trees" will be grown from the "sprouts of future technology." In total, the poster announces Seoul as the place of both the history and the future of technology. Photo by author, taken July 2017.

The association between technology and South Korea is further cemented in the country's monuments and folklore. The Korean writing system—*han'gŭl*, meaning "the great script"—is itself a point of national pride, having been invented in the 15th Century in order to encourage literacy among the populace and the wider use of the Korean language rather over Chinese characters [*hanch'a*]. In every Korean language course I have ever taken, the script was touted as a technological achievement itself because it is so "scientific," "logical," and/or "rational." This is far from a new characterization of *han'gŭl*. For example, the 1446 publication of *Hunminjeongeum Haerye,* the first instructional text on the alphabet, *assures the reader that* "a wise man can acquaint himself with [the characters] before the morning is over; a stupid man can learn them in the space of ten days" (translated in Ledyard 1966, 258-259).

Korea's national patron of *han'gŭl*, King Sejong the Great, sits in effigy in the administrative heart of Seoul, in Gwanghwamun Square. With his throne atop a platform that bears etchings of the original *Han'gŭl* alphabet, King Sejong is exalted by the "highly rational" alphabet he helped to create. Out from his extended hand three other technological inventions of his rule proceed before him: a sundial, rain gauge, and celestial globes. These four technologies (language, rain gauge, sundial, and celestial globes) are said to be fundamental to a new way of life, in that they offered the Korean people improved means to relate to one another, the weather, time, and the universe.

Figure 5. In Gwangwhamun Square in the cultural and political heart of Seoul stands a large statue of King Sejong the Great, seated before a procession of his technological achievements.

These technological artifacts include [from left to right] a sundial, rain gauge, and celestial globes. Photo by author, taken July 2017.

Professor Ko's presentation can be seen as another iteration of a longer national myth, as it reinforces an essential connection between Korea/Korean-ness and technological innovation. Yet, Ko's narrative justified the connection between technology and Korea in a unique way. While earlier narratives imply that Koreans have a native capacity for technological invention, or praise the government for prudent investments in science and technological research, the IT Mission School suggests that Christianity is pivotal to the realization of this relationship. Put simply, the nation is technological in-so-far as it is Christian.

Moreover, Ko's historical tracing of the inherent Christianity of technological development was also linked with histories of capitalist development, democracy, emancipation from slavery, women's liberation, and, generally, modern liberal virtues. Tech-savvy Christianity, in Ko's presentation, was a key element of the world-historical development of the ideal person and social order—one defined by characteristics such as sexual purity, education, equality, democratic participation, bourgeois material comfort, and sobriety. In the most somber tone, Ko instructed us, "Social reform [*sahoe kaehyŏk*] has only succeeded once in history, and that is when citizens receive the Word of God [*sŏnggyŏng*]."[46] For this reason, evangelism was not just a religious but a civic duty. As the number of Protestants in South Korea slowly declines, IT missions are seen to be more critical than ever.

"Technology" [kisul]

Are these various instantiations of technological progressivisms promoting the same imaginaries? Certainly not, or at least not exactly. While commonalities might be drawn, the characteristics of "technology" and the "technological." *Han'gŭl* is technological in the sense that it has a regular written structure and/or that the shapes of written characters reflect the oral mechanics necessary to producing the character's phoneme. This is quite different from the sense in which Korean society is highly "technological." This communicates that the South Korean government prioritizes technological infrastructures, that Korean society is as "advanced" or "future-facing" as any, and/or that its citizens are frequent cell phone and computer users. Again, this is quite different from the technological patronage of Sejong the Great, in which "technological" is a short-hand for the development of not only tools, but also scholarship and the arts under his rule.

This is not meant as a critique of technological progressivism, but an indication of one of technological progressivisms greatest strengths. The success of the idea that technology drives progress is in part due to the breadth of topics to which technology can be attached.

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[46]*Sahoe kaehyŏgŭn kŭndaeyŏksasang tan hanbŏnman sŏnggonghaessŭmnida: sŏnggyŏng malssŭmŭl kungmindŭri padadŭryulŏssŭl ttae.*

As Heidegger wrote long ago, "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological." By this, he indicated that to understand the "essence" of technology one must look past the particular mechanics to the underlying, logical arrangements that have made technology seem so determinative. Heidegger explains that the essence of technology, from his mid-20th Century perspective, was an enframing of the world such that all of "nature"—rocks, rivers, animals—are a "standing reserve" to be employed toward particular ends. This in itself is a problematic relationship to nature according to Heidegger, but he also feared humans were, or would be soon, included in this standing reserve. One can see the seeds of the neoliberal subject here, a human shaping oneself for maximal employment.

One may also see this vision of a "standing reserve" informing the ways in which we are all meant to be "plugged in" to the missionary "network," "whenever, wherever, whoever." Thus, the technological becomes not just a symbol of human progress, but also a model for human life. The Korean-American artist Nam June Paik's 1986 work *Family of Robot* illustrates this point. It is a series of sculptures of families constructed entirely out of television sets and radio components. This work has often been interpreted as prophetic of the ways in which technology use and consumption might fashion its human users into its prosthetics, rather than the other ways around.

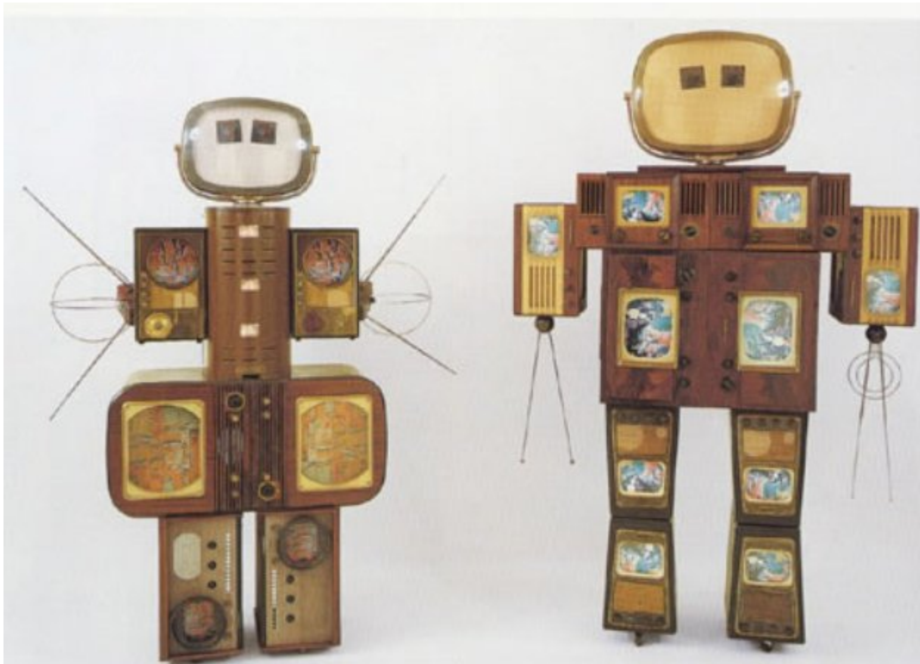

***Figure 6. Family of Robot: Mother* and *Father* (1986) by Paik Nam June.**

These concerns or critiques of the technological age may indicate in part why Christians, in particular, have recently adopted such a vision since there is a long, theological precedent for understanding everything in the universe as being a potential instrument of God's plan. From such a totalizing theological perspective, people were always already a part of a "standing reserve," or as I will detail in Chapter 4, a "holy infrastructure" [*kŏrukhan inp'ŭra*].

There are many ideas with which a Christian group might find association, and one could point to other symbols of the Christian crowd. For example, flocks of sheep are common metaphors for congregations because of the sustained shepherding metaphors in the Bible. As I discussed briefly in the introduction, there are also bio-physiological metaphors about cells (as in "cell groups" [*sel kŭrup'ŭ*], informed at least in part by the sustained Biblical metaphor of the church as a human body. But apart from these analogies that are rooted in scripture, technological systems are one of the more common analogies for the church and Christian practice. So what is technology and why is it, in particular, so compelling?

The essence of technology for Korean Christians is, in fact, transcendence itself. This is not to say that technology is necessarily deified or that it is supernatural. It is to point out the operation of technological transcendence. Some scholars have argued that an object gains membership to the category of "technology" if and only if it is seen to transcend. As Alfred Gell (1988, 1992) argued in other terms, technology exemplifies an ideal of magical efficacy to realize what may appear impossible by any other means. An object becomes recognized as a technology by that achievement. The technological, by definition, cannot abide a limit; an object becomes initiated as a technology by virtue of this capacity. The essential quality of technology relevant here is transcendence, and it is the Protestant Christian desire to transcend, not just their personal fallenness, but the world-as-fallen, that provides a theological link, as historian David Noble has shown of early modern Europe. It is almost as if these narratives assert that they could technologically construct a new Eden, in which there was no pain, want, or limit. What seemed common to these two ideological commitments was a denial of limits and vulnerabilities, turning limits into barriers that can be overcome, or turning existential struggles into problems that can be solved. [47]

William James' (1902) famous Gifford Lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, argues that at the heart of religious happiness is this duality of resignation and transcendence. "Religious happiness is no mere feeling of escape. It cares no longer to escape. It consents to the evil outwardly as a form of sacrifice—inwardly it knows it to be permanently overcome" (50). James admits he cannot himself relate to religious sentiment "of the extremer type," but he insists that the type of personal surrender to "sheer mercy" is a fact of the human condition. "Religion thus makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary" (52) such that "the hour of our moral death has turned into our spiritual birthday" (47-48). This is evident throughout many Christian messages that circulate throughout these evangelical churches. For instance, Yoido Full Gospel's head pastor Young-hoon Lee preaches, "God will make a way for us through our troubles when

[47] By saying that technology cannot abide a limit, I am referencing Karl Marx and Geographer David Harvey's (2010) articulation of the movement of capitalism predicated on transforming limits into barriers that can then be overcome. While capitalism faces certain limits in its constant drive toward expansion of markets and profits, Harvey insists, "Capitalism cannot abide a limit… instead, capitalism progresses by turning limits into barriers that it can then surmount." This statement is drawn from a similar characterization that Karl Marx (1973) wrote in the *Grundrisse*: "But from the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier and hence gets ideally beyond it, it does not by any means follow that it has really overcome it, and, since every such barrier contradicts its character, its production moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited" (410).

we trust him as Moses did when he tried to part the Red Sea. When we become humble God will help us, but if we are proud, God cannot help us."[48]

As we will see in the part II of this chapter, many Christians involved in IT missionaries submit themselves to the logics and practices of opaque technological systems. Sometimes they do so because of the promise of an almost magical efficacity, but sometimes they do so despite skepticism toward triumphalist socio-technical imaginaries. The doubt of these larger narratives should not be seen as a lapse of faith, but perhaps its consummation. To resign oneself to accept one's human limits and uncertainty, but to act anyway, is the epitome of faith.

From these examples, we see that the association of a particular form of Christianity with technological development aligns with a historical, nationalist narrative. They claim the coincidence of Korean Protestantism and the development of the economy through technological development to be the product of synergy. This narrative aligns with several social scientific arguments as well. In addition to the works Professor Ko drew from for his lecture, I frequently heard American social science cited from the pulpit to support the claim that Korean technology and the economic livelihoods depend upon Protestant Christianity. Just three weeks before I attended the IT Mission School, for instance, a pastor at Sarang Church drew upon sociologist Rodney Stark's book *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (2005). Stark writes that Christianity is the reason for technological advancement in the West. But as we have seen in South Korea, the pastor claimed, following the Gospel of Protestant Christianity will lead inevitably to technological and economic prosperity. "When Jesus comes into your life," he preached, "you start to become more of who you were meant to be." In other words, the technological advancement seen in South Korea, and more specifically in the technological conglomerates that make up a significant portion of the country's economy, is the outgrowth of Christian living. Such technological advancement is "who you are meant to be" when properly aligned with God's will. Thus, these narratives naturalize technological progress and capitalist development in South Korea as the result of Christian living and mark the symbiology of activities in these spheres as central to Korean nationalism (as far as these are identified to be central elements of late 20th Century South Korea).

In part II of this chapter, I will explore in greater detail how individuals responded to these broader narratives in their Christian practice. As important as it is to examine the makings of sociotechnical imaginaries--the narratives that shape and are shaped by lived experience--there is a limit to what these explicit narrativizations can tell us about our communities and ourselves. It is not always a matter of simple cognitive acceptance or rejection of these narratives. Indeed, the binary of belief and doubt fails to account for the ways people live their lives in relation to these narratives.

Several people who worked on church technology teams with me or attended the IT mission school expressed some doubt in these narratives. Not only were they not certain of the plausibility that Christianity and technology were linked, but they also doubted that their actions could realize the goals to which they collectively aspired. Identifying themselves as "computer

[48] Field notes, Yoido Full Gospel Church service, May 3, 2015.

illiterate," [*k'ŏmmaeng*] many individuals emphasized their ignorance of technology. This ignorance, however, did not discourage them from participating in technology ministries. Rather than seeking mastery over technological systems, many expressed their humility and resignation in relation to the technologies that God has provided them. In this way, they engaged in technological ministry to reconcile themselves with circumstances that are more often than not out of their control and beyond their understanding. To borrow from William James (1902), they saw this resignation to what is unknown and out of one's control to be the very condition of their transcendence. They worked to "make ourselves channels through which the Infinite Intelligence and Power can work… to attach the belts of our machinery to the powerhouse of the Universe" (99-100).

Part II: Faith in the System

> *"The mastery of nature, so the imperialists teach, is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education above all the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery, if we are to use this term, of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is not the mastery of nature but of the relation between nature and man."*
>
> -Walter Benjamin, *To the Planetarium* (2009, 104)

Technological systems and infrastructures have become a popular concern for social scientific study. An almost universal point of departure for many of these studies is to focus on a system's invisibility. As many STS and media scholars have noted, technological systems often seem opaque, concealing their logics and their operation. Studies frequently highlight the opacity, invisibility, or misdirection of infrastructures in order to bring them into greater visibility and, thus, greater knowledge. This knowledge will enable people to be more attentive to how technological systems structure our sociality, subjectivity, and self-relation (Barry 2001; Mitchell 2002, 2011; Collier 2011; Elyacher 2010; Larkin 2008). Of course, some scholars have criticized this approach by offering instances in which the *visibility* or even spectacle of a technological system is central to its function (Barker 2005; Carse 2012; Larkin 2013). Nevertheless, the concern for the opacity or invisibility that accompanies many technological systems is considerable, as it is still identified as an aspect of a vast number of technological systems.

Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's *Sorting Things Out* (1999) may be cited as a turning point in the study of infrastructures. Bowker and Star's work is not confined to a narrow understanding of infrastructures as wires and pipes, but rather an invitation to think through the way that basic categories and standards are formed and become ordinary, opaque, or invisible. Seeking to make these invisible categories, conventions, and systems visible, they proposed the term "infrastructural inversion" to characterize how scholars should critically approach the building blocks of social life (see also Collier 2011; Elyacher 2010; Larkin 2008). The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) school of science and technology studies also produced a series of works that attend to the politics embedded in technological artifacts. As sociologist Harry

Collins (1985) has written, a technology can appear like a ship in a bottle—the scholar's work is to portray how human hands are behind the ship's construction (see also Winner 1980; Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch 1987; Mackenzie 1996; Callon 1998).

Media scholars share a similar interest in technological systems and infrastructures. Marshall McLuhan worried that media technologies had created "somnambulists" who must be brought to greater awareness of their mass mediated environments. Friedrich Kittler (1999) wrote:

> Whosoever is able to hear or see the circuits in the synthesized sound of CDs or in the laser storms of a disco finds happiness. A happiness beyond the ice, as Nietzsche would have said. At the moment of merciless submission to laws whose cases we are, the phantasm of man as the creator of media vanishes. And it becomes possible to take stock of the situation (xli).

Since at least Karl Marx there has been concern for the ways in which power relations are camouflaged in the operation of industrial systems of production. But this concern goes beyond a deconstruction of mechanical objects; it is an interest in the naturalization of a relation between oneself and the world. In media scholar John Durham Peters' (2015) summation, "The greatest thinkers of infrastructure were never interested only in the gear; they always wanted to know why awareness of essential things so quickly fades into 'beaten paths of impercipience'" (34).

Recently, Michael Warner (2018) has turned to thinking about how modes of attention are attendant upon technological systems, making them a critical site for political and ethical concern. He explores how life "on the grid" (electrical and others) engenders an obliviousness toward the technological systems within which one lives. Warner indicates that grid life is not only opaque, but it has tended to recede from attention until we come to imagine ourselves as essentially "users" who never consider opting in/out of these systems. Looking at life in the United States in the 19th Century to the present, Warner is concerned by how the opacity of grid life forecloses ethical action toward energy consumption, ethical here defined by aligning one's agency with one's values. There is a problem with the way that grid infrastructures mediate our agencies because grids recede from view, foreclosing informed action. Current environmental ethics oriented toward a "greening" of the grid—that is, powering existing grids with renewable resources—are insufficient because they lack a self-limiting principle, in Warner's view. Quoting Henry David Thoreau, Warner expresses concern that in searching for a "greener grid," we might be looking to engineer our way out of environmental ethics: "There is a transcendentalism in mechanics as well as in ethics." The issue is that people relate to both the grid and the green grid exclusively as users, unaware of the workings of the grid and the option to abstain from it.

The invisibility or opacity of infrastructures and technological systems is achieved, in part, through our characterizations of them. As I discussed earlier, key metaphors or analogies can activate certain ways of seeing technological operations. In his book, *A Prehistory of the Cloud*, Tung-hui Hu analyses the computational networks commonly referred to as "the cloud." The book works to trace a "prehistory" of the networks of railroads, telephone lines, and the associated practices upon which the cloud's networks are grafted, inheriting them as well as transforming them. Despite the nebulous image that the cloud conjures, Hu traces how data travels upon much older cable routes. Data is stored not in the un-hackable sky, but in data centers (which he calls

"data bunkers" and are sometimes even located with National Security Agency facilities and other militarized locales). As a consequence, marketers, hackers, and state surveillance draw upon the same ideological apparatus as military targeting, Hu argues, when they isolate digital data.

But just as important as the prehistory of these cables is the prehistory of "the cloud" as a metaphor for how these networks do or should function. Early diagrams of the internet-as-cloud illustrate the cloud's genesis as symbol. He writes of one 1970 AT&T network diagram:

> The cloud icon on a map allowed an administrator to situate a network he or she had direct knowledge of—the computers in his or her office, for example—within the same epistemic space as something that constantly fluctuates and is impossible to know: the amorphous admixture of the telephone network, cable network, and the Internet (x).

He traces how over time, the cloud metaphor has exceeded its technological context to become a potent metaphor for contemporary society, captured in portraits of the "nebulous" Occupy Wall Street protests or "cloudlike" Al Queda-affiliated movements (22).

I find Hu and Warner's analyses particularly generative because they explore the ways of life that grid obliviousness and cloud sociality produce in the process of offering their ultimate, moral concerns. Warner (2018) notes how "obliviousness of grid mentality" comes to be "experienced as freedom." Hu explains how the cloud is seen as something that is universally accessible and tailored to each individual, and as such, "precisely because there are fewer explicit institutions, spaces, or rules to restrict the subject' s behaviors, these systems are often experienced as freeing" (xv). While these experiences of the world are not explored in significant detail, there is the acknowledgement that these material arrangements and imaginaries capacitate experiences of the world, even if Warner and Hu ultimately conclude that these experiences are incongruent with ethical life. "The perversity of the cloud is therefore not that it explicitly causes death. Rather, the cloud transmutes the mechanism of death and presents it to us as life" (xviii). The cloud can be experienced as life-giving, but we must look past this appearance to the reality of its operation through death.[49]

The dynamic of an "infrastructural inversion" suggests that the discontents of the current techno-social order might be overcome with greater knowledge of how these systems operate on the technical level. What must be recognized here, however, is that even those critical of technological systems, technological progressivism and its attendant hubris are themselves motivated by a desire to control or manage, rather than yielding to being controlled or managed by things not fully known, seen, or understood. For example, while Michael Warner argues that

[49] In other places, Hu has offered that he does not want his work to be seen as unmasking the truth from its presentation in false images. He writes, "Images do not necessarily function by making the invisible visible or a hidden truth tangible, as an epistemology of exposure assumes, but rather mediate between an abstract totality and the frame of human experience" (143). For Hu it is not that the cloud "conceals" while another image "reveals," but just that these mediate life in a particular way. Still, as I have noted above, Hu regularly presents the experience of freedom/life through the cloud as being a misrecognition of its ultimate relationship with death.

infrastructural ethics must have a self-limiting principle, he offers that ever-greater awareness to the grid and its operation will enable such ethical action. Alternatively, Hu argues that if we can learn to see the cloud differently, and to describe it in language that is not its own, then we will be able to have a better and more ethical relationship to this technical system and its attendant social order. For both authors, there is a concern for how technological orders are outside of one's control because the cloud and the grid engender obliviousness. We must overcome this limit to our understanding and reassert our control through seeing more or seeing differently.

According to many Korean Christians who engage in technology ministries, however, this level of awareness is unrealizable. It is itself a misguided search for mastery in this world, and one which will always be frustrated. Just as Warner argues humans need a self-limiting principle toward energy consumption, many Christians suggested that we need a self-limiting principle to our search for mastery through greater knowledge.

In the ethnography that follows, many of my interlocutors related to these opaque and obscuring systems with a distinctive ethic, rooted in their Christian theology. I hope to dwell with their activities and perspectives to explore what is positively opened up by the obscurity of technological systems that "the cloud" symbolizes. This is to consider ignorance or obliviousness not simply as limits from which one should seek emancipation, but as conditions for a particular kind of subject and community. To see this, we may turn our attention first to an earlier Christian theological writing the presents the cloud as a space of possibility.

The Cloud of Unknowing is a work of unknown authorship from the 14th Century that stands in as emblematic of the bourgeoning practice of "negative theology," sometimes called the "*via negativa*" or "apophatic theology."[50] Negative theology argues that God is perfectly transcendent, and thus, beyond the reach of human understanding, sense perception, and language. Constructive theology is misdirected from the start because humans cannot posit anything about the divine without such statements being mired in human fallibility. For this reason, humans can only achieve a state of unity with God through the resignation of their human capacities, entering into a relation of total ignorance and dependence upon divine revelation. As St. Denis once wrote and is quoted in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, "The godliest knowledge of God is that which is known through ignorance" (96).[51] One must approach God through "a humble stirring of love," but one will only

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[50] The *Cloud of Unknowing* was written in England in the second half of the 14th Century, most likely by a priest. Some scholars have suggested that he was a monk and a member of the Carthusian order in particular. Beyond this, the author remains anonymous. As Nike Kocijancic Pokorn summarizes:

> "Up to now sufficiently convincing evidence to establish the identity of the author of the Cloud corpus has not been produced, and Walter Hilton no longer seems to figure as one of the possible candidates for the authorship. As far as the vocation of the author is concerned, in spite of the fact that it has not been possible to assert with certainty that the author of the Cloud was a Carthusian himself, it has been at least impossible to contradict such an assumption."

See Nike Kocijancic Pokorn (1999) "The Author of *the Cloud of Unknowing*: Medieval Anonymity and Barthes' Death of the Author." *English Studies*, 80:6, 490-498.

[51] Scholars have debated whether the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* may have drawn their metaphysical outlook from Buddhism rather than from Christianity. However, the work's later

find between the human and God "only a darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing, you do not know what." Rather than struggle against this condition, humans must "remain in this darkness as long as you can" and "not give up, whatever happens."

We may note similarities between *The Cloud* and recent philosophical discussions about the tension between the pursuit of the transcendent and the limitations of human language, the senses, or intellect. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida, for example, each attend to the challenge of understanding that which is at the limits of language. The trouble is that once one searches for what is beyond language the mind is quickly filled with images, many of which may obscure the intended object of thought. As Wittgenstein (2009) summarizes this challenge, "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (47). Through language we may try to approach an understanding of what exceeds language, but for Derrida (1997 [1967]), we can achieve only a suggestion of that which transcends the limits of language by locating "the crevice through which the yet unnamable glimmer beyond the closure may be glimpsed" (*Of Grammatology,* 14).

I draw out the similarities between *The Cloud of Unknowing* and these other works that may be more familiar to contemporary social scientists to highlight a common concern. However, it is important to note that the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is resigned to the utter impossibility of completely transcending the limits of language or form through human effort. Indeed, this resignation is critical to apophatic theology. As one of the works' translators, A.C. Spearing, explains:

> In the *Cloud* author's work, language is neither a transparent medium nor an obscuring cloak for theological thought; it is the very means by which theological thought operates. The author uses the materiality of the vernacular as a skillful wrestler uses the strength of his opponent in order to defeat him…. though he is a master of language, his mastery, like that of other poets, sometimes involves relinquishing mastery, allowing language to release potentialities of which he is not fully in control and sometimes perhaps not fully aware (xxxvi-xxxvii).

Hence, the cloud is the perfect symbol through which the author can capture the *via negativa*. It is ever-shifting, shapeless, sensually disorienting, and all-encompassing, and yet this ill-defined space is the space of divine encounter.

Tung-hui Hu seeks to capture the cloud in language not of its own; *The Cloud of Unknowing* seeks not to capture, but to inhabit such a cloud. The cloud does not merely deceive but enables desirable ways of being. It engenders a certain type of humility of one's incapacity to know, to see, or to touch; and with that recognition of incapacity, it gives greater appreciation of what is beyond oneself.

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emphasis on love as a bridge between the human and the divine suggest that the work is at least primarily informed by Christian theological traditions. Still, the work's unknown origin warrants consideration of the ways in which its central themes overlap with multiple philosophical traditions.

Most importantly, the recognition of one's incapacity helps to enable the Christian virtue of faith. There are numerous conceptions of "faith," many based in a Kierkegaardian model of a leap in cognitive assent. To have faith, under this conception, is to believe an idea or a promise, regardless of any evidence to the contrary. But there are other ways to understand faith. In the context of Korean megachurches. Faith is sometimes defined by the presence of doubt rather than an unshakable belief. One has faith if and only if one does *not* believe something to be the case. In this sense, faith is not about belief, but about action despite lack of belief. One has fundamental doubts about the promised ends of one's actions, as well as the means to achieve those ends, and yet one acts to try to obtain those ends anyway. Some useful comparisons can be drawn here to the work of anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki (2000), who in his work with Fijian Christians has outlined a conception of faith based in an abeyance of agency, as I will explore later.

In part II, I detail how people come to be ethical Christian subjects in negotiating the relations between themselves, God, and the objects in the world with which they try to live virtuously. The Christians who attend the IT missions school may be said to belong to the category of techno-optimists. They participate in a social imaginary in which God-given technologies are seen as the means of material and spiritual transcendence. However, the Christians that I spoke with significantly differed from some of the more common depictions of techno-optimism. For example, it is often argued that techno-optimists use technology in order to extend their control. They are said to believe that increased technological control and management will enhance human life, yielding material and/or social progress. Whether engaging in geoengineering projects designed to alter the course of climate change (Fleegal 2018), or cultivating a "quantified self" through the use of wearable, tracking technologies (Schull 2016), the subject of these projects is one who adopts technologies as appendages or prostheses of the self. In response, a common criticism is that such projects are based in narcissism, hubris, even "playing God." (Freud 2005; Mumford 1970).

However, the IT missions school produces a different sort of technological and Christian subject. Many Christians appreciate and embrace the perceived power of technological objects, but they employ them as protheses or extensions of God's power rather than their own. In fact, these Christians regularly emphasized their fallenness or sinfulness. Because of this, they emphasized it would be wrong to attribute any successes or progress to their own actions, because they are inherently weak and limited. They do not use technologies to extend their control. By embracing and emphasizing the capacities of God-given technologies, they consciously subordinate themselves to God's will. They seek to abdicate control, so that they may properly recognize their own finitude and, thus, their proper, subordinate position in the world. The promise and success of their technological Christian practices could only be achieved through acts of faith, incorporating technological indeterminacy into their Christian tradition.

To summarize, part II will illustrate that technology becomes a special object of interest for Christian practice both because of its convergence with broader nationalist and social scientific narratives, and because technological systems capacitate Christian faith by virtue of the uncertainty of predicting the efficacious working of opaque technological systems.

Finally, I end the chapter by briefly exploring the question at the heart of many criticisms of technological systems: how can a person act ethically when one's agency is mediated by systems that one cannot see, understand, or control? As I explored above, this is critical to studies that approach technological systems through an infrastructural inversion. It is also central to Sheila Jasanoff and other scholars who focus on the politics of widescale technological change. She writes

in *The Ethics of Invention* (2016), “Technology, in short, is not merely about achieving ends that we already foresee but an open door to an uncharted, often uncertain future where current social understandings and practices may be fundamentally transformed” (213-214). But for others, such as media scholar John Durham Peters (2015), this question may invite people to rethink whether or not such awareness is possible. He writes, “The history of media is the history of the productive impossibility of capturing what exists. The black of night gives us our most exact science, astronomy; clouds that vanish yield some of our most beautiful paintings, and clouds that obscure give us some of our most precious meteorological knowledge” (11). For that we must consider what emerges through the unknowing that the cloud evokes.

“I Don’t Know”

The IT Mission School’s printed program contained the PowerPoint slides for a few of the presentations. Professor Ko’s lecture was especially well-documented in the program, so before that week’s meeting, I sat in the Onnuri Church café for a few hours to preview its content and translate unfamiliar vocabulary. As I sat there, I met eyes with one of the middle-aged men from the School, who had arrived at the church an hour early. We greeted each other, and as I sat back down, he leaned his body over to peer at the program. The book was open to a page about industrialization in early modern European countries, marked in relation to that society’s dominant religion.

After looking for a minute, he smirked at the book. “Do you understand this?” he asked me with a smile and pointed to a chart listing significant inventions of the 17th-19th centuries and their countries of origin.

“Yes,” I answered. Then, I qualified my response. “I think so. I have learned about many of the books he mentions on these slides before.” I turned to the end of the slide presentation for that day. “You see many of these professors and books written here? These professors teach at the same university where I am studying. So I have heard this kind of story before.”

He raised his eyebrows and smiled. “Wow.” He said, briefly complimenting me, but then he shrugged again, signaling a dismissiveness toward this history.

“Do you think the presenters are right? What did you think about the lecture last week?”

“Sure.” [*kŭlsseyo*] he said nonchalantly. “I mean, I don’t know. It’s such a complicated history, right? Whether or not there is that kind of story about technology and Christianity, I don’t know.”

I nodded in gentle agreement. “Do you think differently?”

“No. But I don’t know.” He spoke these words with remarkable confidence. He seemed almost boastful of his ignorance. “But that’s fine. Not knowing is not a problem [*munje*]. It’s fine that I don’t know because I am attending [the IT mission school]. Even though I don’t know, I am trying to do God’s work.”

“Do you believe the stories in the presentations? [*palp'yoŭi iyagi*]”

“Well, I have faith in God [*mitta*].” He paused and read confusion on my face. “Is it strange that I say, ‘I don’t know’ like this? [he laughed] It looks like maybe you don’t hear many Korean

people say this. [he laughed again] In Korean society it is rather strange to admit your weaknesses, but is it a problem that I don't know much about technology? Many IT experts can be wrong. Sometimes problems arise because they think they know everything! But I am a Christian and I know that God is needed. We must have faith in God."

"I see." I paused and showed him the front of our program. "But, please explain this to me. This is called an 'IT Mission School,' right? Do you hope to learn things to know more about technology? Because it is a school we are attending."

"Of course. God has given us technology, and there is a responsibility [*ch'aegim*] to try to obey God by using them well. Through technology we can help people. It is good to help each other and to appreciate God's blessings. But even though we learn things, we still need God. No matter how much we learn, we cannot get a good result [*kyŏlgwa*] unless God leads us."

This man emphasized to me that it was not only fine to admit what one did not know—it was the proper posture that a person should take toward certain kinds of knowledge. Several pastors and congregants told me that above all, people should recognize that they will never have a full understanding of God, how God will intervene in the world, or when. Christians should regularly (ceaselessly, if possible) seek God's guidance in prayer. However, our knowledge will be limited according to what God wants to reveal.

In his writings, Onnuri's founding Pastor Ha stressed this absolute dependence upon God's leadership. "Through my struggles, I had also learned that I was a servant. When God tells us to leave, all we can do is obey" (Ha 2008, 73). I asked several people if they could explain to me how one learns to listen to God's command when Ha or another pastor says "all we can do is obey." Most people explained that they hear from God in varied and unpredictable ways. Sometimes one could hear God speak like a voice in their head. Sometimes one could sense God's message like a feeling of "peace" [*p'yŏnghwa*] that fell upon them about a certain topic. Sometimes one could hear God speak through a friend or a pastor.

Several people emphasized that there was not one method [*pangbŏp*]. To ask the question, "How does one listen to God" and expect a definitive formula would be to position the human as being one who can use their own devices in order to access God. This is backwards. As one pastor from Yoido Full Gospel Church once told me, "God can never be an object to us. We cannot study him like we study things in a lab. We can never approach him; we always need Him to approach us." So even if through one's efforts—such as prayer—one is able to arrive at an answer or to hear God's voice, this person should be careful to understand that this outcome is a revelation and the work of God alone.

Onnuri's Head Pastor Jae-Hoon Lee similarly describes how one cannot possibly come to a better understanding of God through our intellectual efforts. When asked what he thought was the greatest error that Christians make in thinking about God, he answered that it was their conception [*kaenyŏm*] of God. "It is a limit [*chehanhanŭn kŏt*] to God, what kind of person they think God is." He continues to explain that not only does God exceed people's conceptions of God, but that knowledge of God does not come from one's own mind. "Revelation is a transcendental being communicating to a finite being." It is very important, according to Pastor Lee, that Christians understand the things humans know about God—including those in the Bible—to be the result of such a revelation (Lee Taeung 2017). These messages resonate with the apophatic

theology described in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. "However much spiritual understanding a person may have in knowing about all created spiritual beings, still by the work of his understanding he can never gain knowledge of an uncreated spiritual being—which is God alone" (96).

God was not the only topic to which a person's intellect and knowledge proved insufficient. Throughout one's life there were several circumstances in which it was appropriate to accept one's knowledge or understanding as incomplete, as was described by the man from the IT Mission School. He did not know much about technology and he was not convinced that technology and Christianity depended upon one another; nonetheless, he insisted that this was not just a fine condition, but the most appropriate one. Christians do not need a method to try to overcome the limits of their knowledge, but they must recognize this as their human condition.

I noticed a similar resignation among the Onnuri Church tech team in situations when our new Easy Worship software frustrated our intentions and outstripped our understanding. The new program was introduced in January, but by mid-February, we felt no more comfortable with the program. I recorded my frustration in my field notes, "EW [Easy Worship] is frustrating. As Mina said today, 'it seems to have a mind of its own.' But I am trying to go with the group sentiment. They seem determined to deal with it as it troubles us and have yet to offer larger questions or criticisms of the program. I offered to Mina and Hyeri that there has to be something that we just don't understand about it, but they both brushed it off. It was as if they had given up trying to understand it and encouraged me to not waste my time overthinking it either.…There's a lot of fudging around with aspects of EW that 'act up'—we kind of play defense, but Hyeri doesn't bother to stop these issues by figuring out EW more thoroughly. She said she doesn't even know if we can. After a very stressful service, Hyeri simply packed up the laptop, and Mina offered to return it to the church office on her way out."

The Christian value of humility and self-resignation was also evident in the ways in which they spoke of fortunate events or successes more generally. Christians would seek to avoid attributing successes to their own qualities or effort. They attribute triumphs to the qualities of others, technological objects, and God, but rarely to their own. For example, pastors are often described as being successful not only because of God's help, but also because they are smart, they have an attractive voice, or they work hard. The same is true of technological objects. These, too, are praised for being attractive, fast, or powerful.

Christians should never boast about themselves in this way. Pastors are most practiced in this regard. A pastor will communicate that the ultimate agent of any success is God with remarkable consistency. Rarely will a pastor boast about an accomplishment without adding that God made it all possible. People who are less practiced of speaking about God and their faith tried to adopt these speech habits as well. But on many occasions, I heard lay Christians catch themselves, often doubling back to correct their lapse into immodesty.

When a Christian takes credit for the ultimate success of a given action, this is often regarded as a lapse in judgment or perspective. It is often met with immediate correction by the speaker. For example, a member of Yoido Full Gospel Church described his success in evangelism thusly:

"I invite people ceaselessly, and so I have brought many people to the church. At first, many people refuse, but over time I convince them to come to church on one Sunday. If I see them in the street, I will invite them again. If I see them at work, I will invite them again. I am persistent. I think if they will try to come one time, they certainly will come back."

"Why do you think this way?" I asked. "If they attend once, why do you think they will return?"

"Because if they come to a service, they will be blessed by the Holy Spirit [*sŏngnyŏngŭro ch'ukpokhada*]. Even before they come to the church, the Holy Spirit is working. When they accept my invitation, that also is not because of me. That is the Holy Spirit working in our lives [*sŏngnyŏngi uriŭi sam kaunde irhasinŭn kŏsida*]."

Similarly, when people describe the success they see in their technology ministries, there is a slippage between whether God achieves X *through* technology or if the technology itself is an "agent" of such change. When I ask explicitly, clarification is given that, of course, God is the ultimate source of all things. But the slippage reflects a sort of perspectival change as people live their lives. Such a practiced renouncement—clarifying that good results are always God's action through them, rather than the good resulting from one's own ability and action—is a way to hone the proper Christian orientation to the world around them. Humility is seen as a virtue the Christians should hone, but also, there was the awareness that without humility, one would not be as receptive to God's direction. Through practicing this subjective orientation, people reinforce that they in themselves, as individuals, face limits that they cannot transcend. If they could, one may not gather together, seek to learn from one another, or pray to God at all.

It is important to clarify in what cases people emphasize their incapacity, as well as where they define what is within our outside of their control. Indeed, it is difficult to see how one would go about one's day if one were to see each act, each step, each breath to be the result of an action outside of the incapacitated human. So to what incapacity do Christians resign themselves? What exactly are the limits of their knowledge and actions?

People regularly offer that they can try to ask for God's direction, often through prayer. They are sure that they can pray, but even if they request something in prayer, they are often uncertain that this will happen. In terms of technology ministries, as will be further elaborated below, they know they have the ability to click a button on a screen in hopes that it would project an image to a given audience or to another person on social media. However, whether or not the image will ultimately appear, be viewed by the intended audience, or have the ultimate, spiritual effect that they hope the image would achieve, they are less certain. They are incapable of ensuring the function of the complex or invisible systems and/or their actions' ultimate social or spiritual effects.

One can see a parallel type of logic in E.E. Evans-Pritchard's (1976) famous exploration of witchcraft among the Azande. He noted that one can notice many causes to any given event. When a granary collapsed and hurt people who were sitting beneath it, this tragedy was the result of both termite damage to the structure as well as witchcraft which caused the coincidence of its collapse with the presence of particular people beneath it. In this way, when the Azande attribute the tragedy to witchcraft, they do not deny the termite damage; it's just that in the context of their explanation, witchcraft was the most socially relevant cause. It explains why the collapse caused misfortune.

There is also a certain similarity with Godfrey Lienhardt's (1961) depiction of the Dinka myth of Divinity's withdrawal from humans. The myths are told among themselves "not to suggest an improving moral judgment on human behavior. It is to represent the situation of the Dinka today." The wisdom that the story is meant to impart is not a better procedure through which they can avoid greater separation from Divinity. The myth instructions them that life is insecure, people err, and that they will experience unintended consequences for their actions.

> To the Dinka, the moral order is ultimately constituted according to principles which often elude men, which experience and tradition in part reveal, and which human action cannot change…. The myth of Divinity's withdrawal then reflects the facts of existence as they are known. The Dinka are in a universe which is largely beyond their control, and where events may contradict the most reasonable human expectations (54).

While certain things are under one's control if one follows certain protocols for action, one should not be mistaken to think one can ever be master of one's universe. In the same way, IT missionaries understand that they play a role in missions, and they also do have a particularly understanding of the technologies they use (even if they understand that knowledge to be ever-incomplete). They know how to log-on to a platform, for example, and they believe they have the ability to try to upload a message onto it. But this does not contradict the ways in which technological missions allow for them to practice Christian resignation to human incapacity. What is left unknown and out of their control is the inspiration of the message they are to upload, the working of the technological system, and that their efforts would meet a receptive audience somewhere in the world. It is not outside of their control, perhaps, to upload a message; but how that message would be transmitted to given server, be seen, and have an impact on another person—these cannot be controlled by any individual, they offer. Because of this, they have it is misguided to believe that one could master such situations through better knowledge, ability, or effort. On must, nevertheless, act.

Missions at the End of One's Hand

For the last hour of each session of the IT Mission School, we broke into smaller groups centered on a particular "team project." For example, one group focused on the further development of a software translation application to help missionaries communicate in foreign languages. I participated in a small group project on social media evangelism, the title of which roughly translates to "Missions at the End of One's Hand" [*sonkkŭssŏn'gyo*]. These projects were meant to provide concrete [*kuch'ejŏgin*] strategies for engaging in IT missions. Nonetheless, they continued to link the South Korean, technological, and Christian destinies, for example, in our project slogan: "CLICK & TOUCH: Through the IT God put in our hands, click and touch the whole world." Repeatedly, our leader prayed that God would inspire projects to transform cyberspace into the Kingdom of God, particularly in this period when, he argued, ISIS [*ai esŭ*] was successfully bending cyberspace in their own spiritual direction.[52]

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[52] Even though technology was never discussed in negative or even ambivalent terms, the same "blessing" was not associated with ISIS' use of IT. The argument was still understood to be that the technological advancement God had allowed Korea was the result of Christian obedience, whereas the technological advancement of ISIS was seen to be a threat or a test of Christians' obedience in competing with and destroying this rival religious movement

At once a plea to God and a motivational speech to his team, his prayers advanced a vision of cyberspace allowing IT missionaries to do the kind of missionary work befitting God's omnipresence—"whenever, wherever, whoever." The prayers alternated between giving thanks and making requests. He thanked God for showing us His love, for providing us with our time together, and for giving us technologies to help us bring about God's Kingdom. God was often asked to hear our prayers, to be with us, to lead us, and to help us. The consistent source of all things and all power was God; our capacities as humans were rarely mentioned, only in our capacity to follow God/Jesus/Holy Spirit as we are led/shepherded [*indohada*].

Figure 7. Two leathery hands cradle a smart phone whose screen, like the hands themselves, is cracked. On the phone appears the image of a smiling Jesus Christ amidst a throng of disciples. This picture appears in a video advertisement for "Smart Bible," an IT missions project that uploads Christian media onto donated smart phones such that short-term missionaries can leave these devices with people in their mission field. Image produced by FMnC.

In discussions among my project team, IT was lauded insofar as it transcended human capacities. Though our bodies often appear as limited in reach and destined to deteriorate with the linear unfolding of time, we spoke of technology as enabling us to act in ways more appropriate to spiritual life. Like the workings of the Holy Spirit, technology was invisible, yet omnipresent. In our alignment with it, so could we participate in that extended Spiritual reach.

Figure 8. IT missionaries place their hands on donated smart phones, praying that God would touch people through the use of these devices. Image produced by FMnC.

In a theological tradition in which hands and the sense of touch figure prominently in spiritual transmission and healing, epitomized by the Pentecostal practice of laying on hands in prayer, the technologies that mediate religious practices came to mimic or take on the qualities formerly attributed to human hands. As I will detail in chapter 3, large screens in telecasting churches are said to "embrace" [*anajuda*] congregations, wrapping around sanctuaries like the outstretched hands of a pastor giving a benediction. Many charismatic Korean pastors became famous for their ability to heal through laying hands on the sick, and now those same pastors are understood to heal through the broadcasts of their sermons. Most salient for our project, the ability for apparently distant or disembodied sociality to "touch" is emphasized, in slogans such as "Click and Touch" and "I.T.ouch.U." In the words of the pastor of Bethany Church, Seoul, featured in the IT missions promotional videos, "God will serve the coming world with Korean technology, and we should want to *become* the hands of God." The idea that technologies alienate is well-rehearsed, as is the idea that social media use creates as much social distance as it presumes to overcome (Turkle 2011, 2015). But in these Korean Christian imaginaries, the "digit" of "digital technology" is clear and unironic, reconfiguring how souls might feel a spiritual touch with each click from an IT missionary's hand. These sociotechnical imaginaries and their enactments within this Christian tradition achieve what Walter Benjamin (1969) characterized as the art of storytelling: "the coordination of the soul, the eye, and the hand" (108).

We were asked to create evangelism projects with the guidance of an experienced, professional missionary. Over the course of the six-week program, each day we were told to pray daily for thirty minutes about our projects in order to seek God's guidance. Then, we were to spend

time working toward whatever we understood God to be leading us. The time in prayer was crucial. Without God's direction, we were told, our efforts would be in vain. So before undertaking any IT missions work, we were to pray to God so that His will—not ours—would be done, and also to request God's help because without it, our efforts would be hopeless.

We were required to account for these efforts on a group chatroom on the Korean social media platform Kakao talk. Each day people wrote when they had prayed, what they had done to further their project, and asked for prayers and support when they had concerns. Such accountability exercises were a central mode of discipline and they also served to maintain our particular social imaginary. That is, through our communications we came to recognize our individual efforts as part of a larger, collective project (Warner 1990, 2002; Hirschkind 2006; Cody 2011; Hirschkind, de Abreu, Caduff 2017).

Participants began cautiously offering ideas for projects that would turn their daily activities on social media into a mission field. A thirty-year-old woman name Sae-mi offered that she could use her Instagram and Pinterest accounts to spread positive, Christian messages. People spend time on these apps, she noted, because they may feel bored or perhaps are attracted to pretty images, designs, and inspirational quotes. "A couple of users I follow post touching [*kamtongchŏkin*] pictures. Paintings of scriptures, too. Often, these posts really touch my heart [*maŭm*]. Because of this, I think for my project, I can pray over Pinterest and ask God to tell me with whom I should share certain pictures."

When I asked Sae-mi one-on-one if she could explain in greater detail how she related technology missions to feeling touched or feeling in spiritual contact with another person through her device, she resisted, saying she didn't have the words to explain it. "Truthfully, when I am using technology, I'm not really thinking about it like that. That is to say, I feel something in my heart [*maŭm*] and I think, 'that is the Spirit [*sŏngnyŏng*],' but at that moment the phone or the internet, how exactly they operate—those things are not really important. It's an interesting question, but to think about technology and to use technology at the same time is a difficult thing."

I appreciated that Sae-mi refused to answer my question, which she found less relevant to her practice. Instead, she urged me to dwell with life as it is perceived. Although scholars might want to explore the precise workings of technological objects, these concerns are not always shared by people who use technologies. It brought to mind the words of Milan Kundera (1992): "Man does not relate to the world as subject to object, as eye to painting, nor even as actor to stage set. Man and the world are bound together like the snail to its shell" (35). To the extent that we recognize ourselves as individuals, extracted from our entanglements with the objects, organisms, and spirits that we may believe to be around us or within us, these are never more than useful fictions abstracted from what Donna Haraway (1990, 1991) described as a "cyborg" life.

Sae-mi lived with her husband on the outskirts of Seoul. She had worked as a teacher in her early twenties, but the familial responsibilities she felt as a new wife and daughter-in-law led her to quit her job. With her husband at work for most of the day and night, she spends more time than she might wish on the internet as a way of passing time when she is alone. The idea of becoming an IT missionary, then, seemed appealing to her because of its promise for social and spiritual connection despite geographic isolation in her apartment. But throughout our weeks, she was thoughtful and reflexive, and she expressed some ambivalence toward her mission activities.

She felt touched, and she knew it was spiritual, but sometimes she wondered if the mediation of SNS (social networking services) seemed to make some difference she could not describe:

> It's not exactly the same [as evangelism in person]. Just like Kakao is not exactly the same as how we are talking now. Even so, like they say, the Spirit can move through technology, and I really do feel touched sometimes. But it might be silly—I don't know. Sometimes when I am sitting alone at home, just posting things and commenting on strangers' posts, I think, 'I'm a real fool [*pabo*], huh?' [laughter] I mean, it's weird [*isanghajyo*], right? You can spend hours on Instagram, and then suddenly realize all that time is gone. And what have I done?

She smiled brightly and continued. "At those times, I don't know whether or not I am doing anything at all. I must have faith/believe [*mitta*] that God is doing things for us that I don't know about. But if I pray and follow Him, I have faith that the Lord will lead."

I am far from certain whether or not Sae-mi thought that her cell phone offered her the type of communion with others for which she had hoped. Elias Canetti wrote in his reflection on crowds, "there is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown. He wants to *see* what is reaching towards him, and to be able to recognize or classify it." The opacity of the technological medium seemed to leave Sae-mi apprehensive in a way I did not recognize in our time together. She befriended me without hesitation. When we spoke, she listened intently and looked at me with warmth. She was quick to smile, and would often reach out and touch my forearm, embodying our connection through what is sometimes called "skinship" [*sŭk'insip*].

Sae-mi's efforts to make sense of what it means to be connected, in contact, to touch, and to relate to others appeared to me as a common experience as people think about their relation to media, especially new media objects. For example, the increasing use of the phonograph and telegraph in the late 19th Century United States was accompanied by a renewed interest in spiritualism and mediumship (Schmidt 2000). Seances, as telegraphy, provided ways to perceive someone who was understood to be both present and absent. One might not see a spirit, but who wouldn't reconsider its absence when a message of unknown origin rapped upon the séance table? Similarly, for many people telegraphy that tapped a message of unseen origin reconfigured the sense of self, other, contact, and communion. It is little wonder why the first message sent by Morse code was not one of triumphant pride, but rather a word of caution: "What hath God wrought?"

Anthropologist Charles Hirschkind's work provides extended consideration of the ways in which media technologies shape one's moral and political commitments through conditioning human sensorium, affect, and awareness. He elaborates an extended critique of the argument that moral and political commitments are forged through disembodied reason, and he demonstrates how embodied sensibilities and habits forged through media practices are central to social and political life. In his words, "The affects and sensibilities honed through popular media practices such as listening to cassette sermons are as infrastructural to politics and public reason as are markets, associations, formal institutions, and informational networks" (2006: 9). From these insights, we recognize the long-standing interest the implications of media technologies to be a

recognition of the ways in which they help to condition the human sensorium, and in doing so, the "transfers, exchanges, and attachments that hinge the body to its environment" (2006: 29).

Nevertheless, the persistence of these concerns does not foreclose action, which in the case of IT missions is now supported by the virtue of faith. This perspective was consistent with the messages I heard at Onnuri Church more generally. The Holy Spirit was understood to work through "mysterious methods" [*sinbiroun pangbŏp*]. For this reason, it was impossible to anticipate how the Holy Spirit would work through people or in people's lives. As Onnuri's Pastor Ha wrote, "We should be careful not to judge how the Spirit works based on our opinions and our five senses" (Ha 2008, 109). Although the workings of the Holy Spirit were a common topic, it was typically approached with great humility. But for this reason, the efficacy of one's ministry efforts was often unknown. Still, uncertainty did not dissuade the action itself. As Pastor Ha teaches members of Onnuri, Christian life requires active service more than certainty:

> When we work for Him, we do not need wisdom of the world or its modus operandi or power. What we need is divine wisdom, methods and power descending from the heavenly throne. When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and filled with the Holy Spirit, the glory of God is manifested through us, working wonders and miracles. We ought to receive the divine power from above, in total reliance on him to realize his visions.
>
> Secondly, we must take the initiative and assume an active role in pressing the mission through. It takes faith. Confessing that God is our trust, we must confide in him and look to him. Again, in Hebrews chapter 11, the apostle says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Hence, faith makes everything possible as it has inherent power that is active, positive, and productive. Of course, God is the sole giver of faith, and the Holy Spirit anoints us with faith. But at the same time, faith can be an expression of one's own free will. When the Holy Spirit that dwells in us is moved and inspired, we respond by assuming an active voice, taking the initiative and making a decision of our own volition. No matter how much the Holy Spirit wants to work through us, if we stay put--dormant and faithless--all His wondrous power will be of little avail (Onnuri 2017, 354-355).

Although particular objects appear as more destabilizing than others, the coordination of the self in relation to the world around them is a constant process in which people are engaged. Marilyn Strathern provides a particularly useful explanation of these processes in her work. Rather than seeing oneself as immutable, and that one should bring one's material environment to conform to the demands of the self, she argues that we should attend to how the self is constituted through relating to one's environment:

> The person is construed from the vantage points of the relations that constitute him or her; she or he objectifies and is thus revealed in those relations. The agent is construed as the one who acts because of those relationships and is revealed in his or her actions. If a person is an agent seen from the point of view of her or his

> relations with others, the agent is the person who has taken action with those relations in view. In this, the agent constitutes a "self" (273).

But it is through negotiating these shifting conditions new media technology seem to offer that that Sae-mi is also engaged in cultivating herself as a particular type of Christian subject—one who perceives human limitations as not necessarily desirable but must rely on things outside of oneself to overcome them. For this, she turns to God and, to an extent, God-given technologies.

My Faust: Technology

Artist Paik Nam June made a series his *Cathedral* series of sculptures between 1989 and 1991. Each of the thirteen sculptures presented a Gothic-style cathedral fashioned out of materials signaling a given theme. The themes he chose included nationalism, communication, arts, and transportation, among others. Inside each cathedral was a collection of television monitors to be worshipped at the altar. The screens emitting images emblematic of the given theme.

Paik sold twelve of the thirteen sculptures to Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul, and only retained one for himself: *Technology*. This sculpture is constructed of metallic gears, tubes, and gadgets. On its screens, video clips take us through an oscillation of technological progression/catastrophe as it alternates scenes of the Wright Brothers' first flight, obsolete armored vehicles, West African masks, Albert Einstein, South Pacific art, catastrophic fires, and computer chips. Along with the medieval Christian construction, within a discarded control box stands a miniature of the Hindu god Shiva, god of both destruction and renewal.

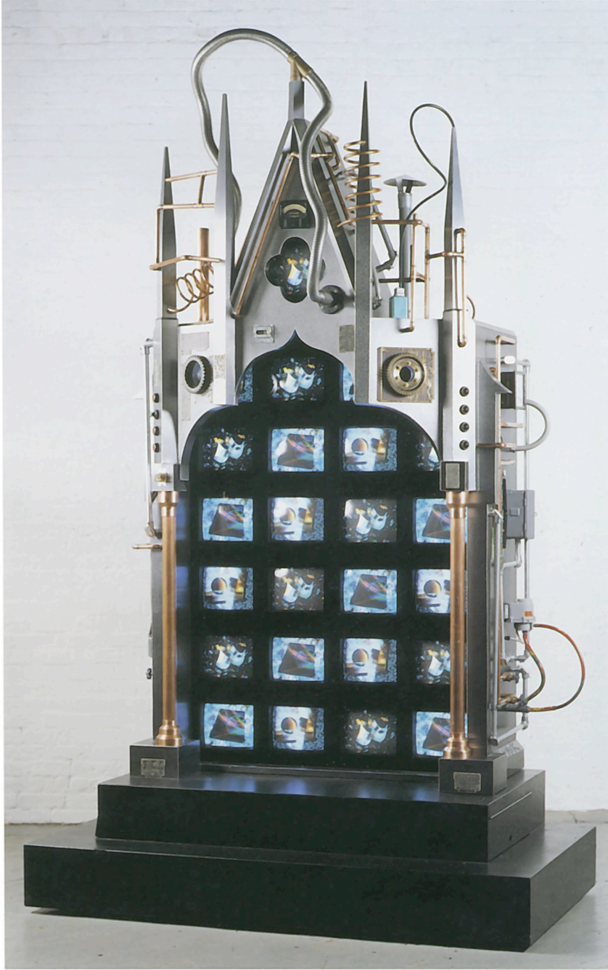

Figure 9. Nam June Paik, Technology, 1991.

To the collection, Paik gave the subtitle *My Faust*, with reference to the German legend about a man whose ambitions lead him to forge a deal with the devil. Art historian Jacquelyn Serwer (1994) describes how:

> The dual nature of technological developments-the trade-offs, compromises and tragedies that have come with progress, like the dark side of Faust's bargain-are all part of the message communicated by this piece. *Technology* alludes to the complexity of the contemporary human dilemma in which the boundaries between good and evil are sometimes difficult to distinguish. The notion of magic involved in the Faustian story is especially central to *Technology* (90).

Thus, *Technology* is Paik's commentary on the indeterminacy of our "technological age," an age which shares with Shiva at once the prospect of redemption or destruction.

For as much one may wish to criticize an IT missionary's relationship to technology as a dangerous fetishism or a naïve alignment of human life with the logics of exploitative systems, to the extent that IT missionaries are seeking out sources to live beyond one's expectations these activities may also be recognized as faithful. Their actions evince the presence of great hope, but it is also more than hope. For "one who hopes is always haunted by the sense that he is hoping for the impossible, that his hope is, deep down, a hope for life everlasting or absolute security, and that he knows, equally deep down, that he is bound to die," writes Michael Jackson (2011, xxii-xxiii).

There was something about the smile with which Sae-mi expressed her uncertainty about her efforts. Perhaps this apparent comfort with uncertainty was rooted in the pursuit of an apophatic relationship to the divine. This apophatic desire is at the heart of a simultaneous confirmation of one's own incapacity and of God's ultimate transcendence. That combination mirrored her use of technology, which was both opaque and the potential means to overcome the barriers of what one knows, sees, and can touch through the skin. Technology ministries provide, then, at once a means through which one disavows their own control and a means to try to act faithfully in pursuit of some transcendent end. Such actions are an image of what anthropologist Michael Lambek (2010) called "ordinary ethics," or everyday practice that simultaneously "recognizes human finitude but also hope" (4).

Some of my fellow students were IT professionals, but for most of the students, their mastery of technology did not extend beyond basic social media aptitude. The invisible workings of technologies and their systems were opaque, and in their opacity, incited some reservation or ambivalence. The book of Hebrews states, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." To act in faith in the pursuit of goodness and virtue while conceiving of the world and oneself as inherently weak and limited is, in Peter Gomes' words, "an act of defiance against the powers and principalities both within oneself and without." At least in the context of IT missionaries, technological progressivism is far from hubristic; it is enabled through one's resignation of their own human limitations, which allows God and God-given the technology to reach no bounds.

IT Missions Conference: Silicon Valley

Nearly a year after I attended the IT Missions School in Seoul, the FMnC held the 2016 IT Missions Conference, Silicon Valley at Emmanuel Church—a medium-sized Korean Presbyterian Church in San Jose. I followed the FMnC's plans through their Facebook page, and when they announced the conference, I asked my former Missions School leader if I could attend, and he agreed.

While at the IT mission school in Seoul they emphasized the way that South Korea was uniquely aligned with the future of both Christianity and technology, they modified this narrative in Silicon Valley. Although the conference was entirely in Korean and set at a Korean/Korean-American church, they spoke of Seoul and Silicon Valley as "partner" centers for technological innovation. This conference brought Korean IT missionary activities into conversation with Silicon Valley Christian communities.

Most of the conference attendees came from the host church, but several people came from other nearby Korean/Korean-American churches. The conference included lectures, panels, and some smaller workshops on topics such as data management, online publication, and protecting oneself from scams or phishing. Because it was only a two-day event, it was more oriented toward forging relationships between IT professionals based in America and Korean missionaries and soliciting prayer and financial support for IT missions. It was networking, in the professional sense of the term. Several of the congregants (at least the ones who attended this conference) worked in what is known locally as "tech"—a vague term with strong connotations with internet services and information technologies, but also including at times other hardware companies and most generally, any industry associated with both computing and creative "disruption."

Still, many of the people who attended the conference seemed to be lay Christians who did *not* work in tech. Two different, middle-aged women expressed to me that they were hoping they would learn from the conference how to better parent their children in the IT age. On the second day of the conference, I was eating lunch with one of these women and talking about her anxieties about her daughter's social media activity when she received a series of text messages. Somewhat frantically, she gathered her things and said she had to pick up her daughter to give her a ride. She left for an hour, but she would return for the afternoon panels.

I sat there in the cafeteria for several minutes, now alone, without a lunch companion, at a table that was peripheral to the crowd. I scrawled some memos into my notebook, but after a few minutes felt my behavior was ill-fitting the context. I thought about inviting myself into another conversation, but as I looked around, I realized there were primarily two types of conversations. The first was of members of the church, sitting with each other and their children, laughing and talking with the kind of intensity that only comes with intimacy. The other conversations were among groups of FMnC representatives from Seoul, leaders of Emmanuel Church, and IT professionals. I felt that, at that moment, to insert myself into those interactions would spoil moments that seemed to be precious to many of them.

I left the room and went to get a cup of coffee and write notes near the lobby. It was empty besides one older woman tarrying with a cup of coffee. I greeted her as my elder before I approached a line of folding tables and drew coffee from a large percolator. She smiled back, and thus began a customary ritual with new acquaintances—exchanging questions and answers about my ability to speak Korean and how I learned the language.

"I am an anthropologist, so I studied a little in America, but then I lived in Seoul for one year and now live in Koreatown so I can still practice Korean every day."

"When did you start learning?" she asked.

I take a moment to count. "About 3 years ago," I answer, feeling self-conscious about whether or not my fluency will strike her as appropriate to what seemed to me at the moment a long period of study.

"You speak really well!" she insisted again. I deny her compliment, as is culturally expected, but in this case, it was also sincere. "No, you are. I moved to California in 1976, but I still can barely speak English." I smile and express sympathy for how difficult it can be to switch between these two languages.

Then the ritual is over. She asks me why I am here at this conference, and I talk about my research and my connections with FMnC from my time in Seoul. I return the question, and she searches herself for the answer as she speaks.

"I don't go to this church, but my church is nearby. Missions are very important to me, and so I work with the mission team there, and that's how I received the invitation to this conference. I don't really know much about technology, and so I'm not a tech leader like the other people. [Her posture slumped as she said this, and she made her body small in reflection of her humble role within tech missions]. But despite that, I know that technology is really important, so I'm very interested in these talks. It's exciting/fascinating. And important. It is the future. Really."

"Are you having a good time? Are you learning a lot?" I asked.

"Am I learning a lot? I'm really not sure!" she said, bursting with laughter. "Really, technology is such a pain! [*kolch'i ap'ŭn kŏt*] I am really a computer-illiterate person! [*k'ŏmmaengida*] So whether or not I'm learning, I don't know."

I laugh with her in agreement.

"But in everyday life [*saenghwal*],[53] that's common [*pot'ong*]. It must be different for people like you—PhDs. You have such high abilities! But there is so much that I don't know. Everything is because of Jesus. It's not me; rather, I follow Jesus. My son, he works here in Silicon Valley at [a small, but prestigious tech firm]. They do amazing things with technology, but there too, it is all because of God. All I can do is keep praying, keep going to church, and attending conferences. I have big hopes/expectations [*kidaehada*] that God will lead us to change the world with these computers God gave us. Even if we don't understand technology, God can use us, isn't that right?"

I was surprised to find that the IT missions events were regularly attended by so many people who considered themselves to be "computer-illiterate people" [*k'ŏmmaeng*]. They saw themselves as having only a minimal understanding of technology, and yet they were so certain that new technologies would be determinative of the future. Despite their own limitations and flaws, they attended these events in relative certainty that they could "plug-in" to such a world order. Even in their relative ignorance, their technology use would transform lives and souls.

From various attendees of the IT missions school, conference, and on church tech teams, there was the prevailing sentiment that technology was important and beneficial for Christian ministry, that Christians should seek to adopt technological systems as they are led, but that they also do not need to have special knowledge or aptitude of these systems in order for their adherence to accomplish God's will. Similar attitudes are being recorded among other Korean Christian and missionary groups as talk of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" (4IR) has become more common following the term's use at the 2016 World Economic Forum.[54] For example, a 2017 survey of

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[53] For an exploration of the emergence of *saenghwal,* or the everyday, see Jae Won Edward Chung. "Picturing Everyday Life: Politics and Aesthetics of *Saenghwal* in Postwar South Korea, 1953-1959." Dissertation, Columbia University, 2017.

[54] Although the term "Fourth Industrial Revolution" is used less commonly in many parts of the world, the concept of another industrial revolution marked by tech industries was widely embraced in South Korea. In the 2017 Presidential election following the resignation of Park Geun-hye, many of the Presidential frontrunners made the 4IR a key term of their campaign. President Moon Jae-In launched the Presidential Fourth Industrial Revolution Committee soon

more than 150 Korean missionaries measured a similarly low level of familiarity with elements of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" (or developments in IT and computing sectors), but a similarly high conviction that whatever it is, it would be transformative of their mission work. Although almost 70% of respondents said they know nothing, little, or "neutral" amounts about technological changes, nearly 80% responded that these technologies would have "quite a bit" or "very much" an impact on Christian missions. Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents welcomed the influence that technologies would have on their mission work. Less than 15% said there was little or no need for these changes in the mission field (Moon 2017). Taken together, these survey results indicate that for the Korean missionaries surveyed, a lack of knowledge about information technology and computing did not keep them from affirming that these fields would have a great influence on their work, and that this influence would likely be beneficial.

For many people technology ministries is a faithful commitment to act toward a world one cannot see, through actions for which one understands themselves to be less than capable. A computer-illiterate IT missionary acknowledges her ignorance, may doubt the larger sociotechnical imaginary being proposed, sees herself as ill-equipped for the task, and yet acts in accordance with the sociotechnical imaginary anyway.

There is great discrepancy over what faith is, so here I can only try to articulate the type of faith as I encountered it in my fieldwork. When people speak of faith, they may speak of a variety of things. For example, to "have faith" is most often expressed in Korean by the verb "to believe" or "to trust" [*mitta*]. As an extension, the noun "faith" [most often *sinang* or *midŭm*] is sometimes nominalized from the verb "to believe." However, upon listening closely to sermons and speaking with congregants, I found that "faith" as a noun is most commonly *not* the same as what we might call in English "belief," even in cases when they are denoted by the same noun.

Thus, what I am describing as the faith of IT missions work is not a matter of belief. As I was often told, faith *requires* doubt. Without the presence or threat of doubt, there is no faith. This leads to an uneasy relationship between the terms faith and faithful in English: Faith is exercised precisely when the ends to which one works is precisely *not* faithful to the world as perceived. Instead, faith here is based in action, action that runs athwart one's understanding or belief. If faith is based in doubt, then it is about action in adherence to a particular program or tradition. This conception shares many similarities to what religion scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1998) articulated as the difference between "belief" as it is commonly used in the 20th century and "faith." As he famously indicated, when a Christian recites a creed saying, "I believe…" that person is not necessarily confessing a list of ideas that one knows without question, but more likely committing to a journey of faith within a tradition. Smith, thus, describes faith as "the search for conceptual clarification of man's relation to transcendence." As Onnuri's Pastor Ha summarizes, "One's faith [*sinang*] is not a theory or method or philosophy [*ironina hyŏngsik*]. It is life [*sam*]. Loves isn't a word, it is action [*haengdong*]" (Ha 2008, 85).

Anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki has presented an analysis of faith which may be usefully compared to the faith of those involved in technology ministries. Faith, according to

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after his election, as the term seems to galvanize business and government efforts in robotic, computing, and automotive sectors. See JiAe Sohn. "President Emphasizes 'People-Centered Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Korea.net*, 12 October 2017, via http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/policies/view?articleId=149973.

Miyazaki, is sometimes less about a leap of belief than an enactment of a particular subject position. Writing about Fijian Christians, he indicates that people of a religious faith may be less concerned with understanding the agency of supernatural beings than is often presumed. For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1997) identified this as a central problem that historians face in "handling imaginations in which gods, spirits, or the supernatural have agency in the world" (35). Many social scientific analyses of religious faith have drawn upon linguistics to explore the problem of translation, or the limits and possibilities of language to capture experientially inaccessible entities (Coleman 1996; Hanks 1996; Keane 1994, 1997; Chakrabarty 1997). The issue for Miyazaki is that

> The subjects of anthropological inquiry, however, may not share the social scientist's problem of how to render experientially inaccessible entities accessible. Religious practitioners may even…insist that what is at issue is not so much the agency of these entities as the limits of human agency—their own or others (2000, 32).

His main theoretical intervention echoes Marilyn Strathern to indicate that "Scholars trained in the Western tradition cannot expect to find others solving the metaphysical problems of Western thought" (3). Miyazaki highlights that Fijian Christians are less interested in making non-human agents accessible, but rather on capacitating a temporary suspension of their own agency. At least temporarily (often in ritual settings), Miyazaki illustrates how Fijian Christians practice an "abeyance of agency" that characterizes religious faith not so much as a Kierkegaardian belief in the incomprehensible, but as the capacity to place limits on one's own agency. In order to respond to anthropological interest in how rituals generate faith (cf. Asad 1993; Geertz 1973), Miyazaki proposes a definition of faith that is not rooted in "theory of the intentions of non-human agents." Rather, "Fijian rituals are founded on an aesthetics of completion that calls for a temporary negation of human agency. By limiting human capacity to act, at least temporarily, participants in these rituals create space for the intimations of the fulfillment of their faith" (44).

Miyazaki's analysis helpfully points away from both belief-based conceptions of faith, troubles the assumption that social scientists and religious subjects share an interest in translating or disclosing the ineffable, and indicates how agency is changeable within the context of certain rituals and exchanges.[55] Miyazaki's clarifications are instructive here, as they propose a

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[55] This is not to say only that people moderate their relationships to "faith" and "reason." More recently, anthropologist Jane Guyer has proposed that attending to temporal frames through which people approach future action demonstrates that evangelical Christians (and many economists) have become more interested with distant futures than near ones. Without interest in the near future, Guyer is concerned that a "faith in the ultimate truth" has displaced the capacity to "render our moment in time subject to reason." (Guyer 2007) But Miyazaki indicates that there is often a simultaneous belief in and doubt of certain ideas, which complicates firm distinctions between "faith" and "reason." After exploring how the practice of arbitrage in Japan is based in the ambiguous relation to faith and reason observed in speculative actions, he concludes of Guyer's approach, "I wonder if this attention to temporal resonances has obscured yet another possible locus of affinity between these discourses, that is, the tension between faith

conception of Christian faith for which "reason" is not its other. The faith described above is exercised both with and without reasoning. This is because faith is fundamentally defined as adherence to a particular relationship, or the enactment of a particular subject position.

Still, I should note that the Christian notion of faith operable in technology missions differs from Miyazaki's proposed "abeyance of agency" significantly. The position that Christians may find in their technology ministries can be said to be capacitated by a *potentially unmitigated* rejection of their own capacity. This can be seen in regular, ritualized moments in the way that Miyazaki describes. However, it is not a temporary abeyance of one's agency to which many Korean Christians aspire. It may be impossible to constantly embody the ideally resigned and humble position, but this is an ideal that many Christians strive for outside of institutionalized or established ritual contexts. The goal is often to perfect their submission to God's will, which means becoming God's instrument in the world in essence rather than as a temporary submission.

In addition, Miyazaki stresses that hope is a critical result in the Fijian practices of faith. Rituals culminate in a ritual fulfillment of their faith. This is vital because it helps to sustain "a hope for an ultimate response" (44). But as was the case for the man I spoke with in the café, sometimes the people who participated in technology ministries were not necessarily hopeful that their actions would lead to a desired result. As Sae-mi offers, it may be that her actions are foolish. They expressed having trust or faith in God, but that does not mean that they require a particular redemptive vision in which they find hope. They participate in a ministry even in times of seeming despair. As Sae-mi described, she believed that God would lead her efforts, but that did not necessarily foreclose her doubts that her faithful effort would bear any fruit.[56]

Without a necessary relationship to hope or optimism, this kind of faith is closer to what political scientist Wendy Brown (2018) has recently proposed as "grit." Like the faithful actions of Korean Christians, Brown argues that hope should not be understood as prerequisite to action. When hope is unreasonable or unavailable in times of crisis, she argues, perhaps people should seek to draw on grit to act in the face of uncertainty, rather than waiting for the renewal of hope or optimism.

Nevertheless, the critical similarity between these models of faith is that they are concerned with enacting a particular subject position. Unlike many techno-optimists, Christian IT ministries are attractive not exclusively or primarily for the way they empower people. The opacity, invisibility, or uncertainty people feel about technologies is not seen as a problem that forecloses ethical action, but that enables its own ethics through enactments of faith. As Pastor Ha suggests,

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and reason and its resulting ambiguity and ambivalence. As a result, Guyer may have overstated the current predominance of faith over reason in economics and religion and failed to critically examine her own faith like commitment to reason." (431) See Hirokazu Miyazaki. "Arbitraging Faith and Reason." *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007): 430-32.

[56] In addition, I wonder if discussions of "agency" serve us here, either in Miyazaki's terms or in those proposed by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, which highlights the ways in which non-human entities participate in social life as actors. One could see the utility in speaking of technological systems that constrain and enable social relations as "agents"; however, this might be a bit of a red herring because it would depend upon analytically fixing what is an "action" or "agency" itself.

"When you can share the Gospel no matter what your condition, that is true liberation [*chayuhan kŏsida*]" (Ha 2008, 152).

Technological progress is asserted as a sort of fate, which creates a shared sense of the world and how one is to act within it. Referring to life among other social and technological systems, Craig Calhoun has suggested, "I wonder if there is a social imaginary at work in how we think about these clusters of unseen forces that we don't completely understand but which we believe are determining our lives" (2015, 220). The participation of "computer-inept persons" in IT missions might have significant similarities to other ways in which people may envision determinism of objects that outstrip their understanding. After all, few people understand the workings of our genetic code, but many people act in accordance with medical advice based on its analysis. Similarly, many people take actions that they believe will be effective because of published statistics, while very few of those people will explore the data upon which those results are based, let alone acquire the quantitative analytical skills to be able to do so. In other words, humans regularly act in ignorance and regularly act despite doubts in one's own abilities. Whether or not this condition forecloses ethical action deserves reflection.

Ethics of Incapacity

In the foregoing discussions, I have tried to outline the type of relationship to God, to technology, and to other people that the efforts of the IT mission school and IT mission conference advocate. In many of these interactions, we find people striving to recognize their incapacity to understand technological systems, to be certain of larger socio-technical imaginaries, and to be able to realize a particular effect through their individual actions. As I have described, this sense of fundamental human incapacity emerges in relation to particular actions and occasions; otherwise, one would cease to attend to everyday exigencies. Nevertheless, a recognition of ultimate human inadequacy and incapacity is seen as an ideal to which a Christian should aspire. With this ideal in mind, the opacity or invisibility of technological systems is not a problem to be solved; it is an opportunity to enact their faith. It may be related to what anthropologist Michael Lambek has termed ordinary ethics, or everyday practice that simultaneously "recognizes human finitude but also hope" (2010, 4).

As mentioned earlier, many recent investigations of technological systems and infrastructures have been oriented toward an infrastructural inversion, through which a system's invisible workings and logics are made explicit. This point of departure contains two primary concerns that we may disaggregate. First is the concern over infrastructure's invisibility or opacity, and thus, it is a concern for what kind of vision, attention, or perspective would bring various infrastructural objects to our attention. What follows from this is the second concern, which is an ethical concern about *what it is that* infrastructures obscure or make invisible. It is not merely the fact of invisibility, but specifically *what* is made invisible, that matters to many scholars who express concerns about technological systems.

To take one example, when Hu reveals the material arrangements obscured by the metaphor of "the cloud," one thing that he means to expose is the human labor that maintains these networks. "By producing a seemingly instant, unmediated relationship between user and website,

our imagination of a virtual 'cloud' displaces the infrastructure of labor within digital networks" (xii). Thus, an ethical response to unjust social relations might be constrained.

> The cloud constructs a way of perceiving the world that fundamentally constrains our range of actions by co-opting the very idea of action itself…The longer-term effects of cloud seeing are to deaden our ability to see people as anything but users, and ultimately, to become complicit in the actions of the regime itself as it maps our patterns of use and activity and triangulates our associates (143).

Similarly, Michael Warner's exploration of "the grid" is rooted in a concern that "grid mentalities" condition an obliviousness that forecloses ethical action because people can only perceive themselves as "users" on an omnipresent energy system. In seeking to discover the hidden workings of these systems—both in terms of their mechanics and in their structuring of social behavior—these authors hope that this recognition will enable a more ethical relationship to these systems, such that one's actions can be more closely aligned with one's values.

Ethics here is most often construed as awareness and agency in the face of obligations that are universally salient, but because infrastructure often eludes our awareness, it presents a unique challenge for ethical action. Many of the authors who perform an "infrastructural inversion" are trying to capacitate an awareness requisite to ethics. Many scholars draw on Michel Foucault's later work on Augustinian ethics here. Foucault articulates a model for ethical agency centrally attendant to the human capacities required for specific moral actions. These capacities (which may include corporeal techniques, spiritual exercises, and modes of attention) are rooted in the historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed. Such a model for subjectivation highlights the paradoxical, but essential, role of subordination in the process of building a subjects' agentive capacities and skills. Furthermore, it insists that subjectivation occurs within the delimitations of a particular historical and cultural context. Foucault's analysis of ethical formation I find particularly helpful insofar as it attends to the ways in which a subject forms herself through the moral codes and material conditions that proceed and exceed her (See also Mahmood 2005).

Drawing on Foucault's "technologies of the self" focuses on ethical capacitation, then infrastructures and technological systems are understood to be a problem insofar as they are enchanting and opaque. To the extent that technological systems obscure their own workings or the human labor behind them, then they pose a challenge to ethical decision-making. Thus, many critical studies of technological systems hope that we can then better know how to direct our attention and to act with intention toward desired effects by learning to see these systems differently or more clearly.

Defined in this way, ethical conduct includes both the actions performed and capacities exercised intentionally by a subject for the purpose of engaging in morally approved conduct. But in my fieldwork within Korean megachurches and particularly at the IT missions school, many Christians would insist that ethics is found in the humble recognition of their human incapacity. Theologically, this is offered out of an apophatic tradition that emphasizes human dependence upon God's revelation. An understanding of ethics that stresses capacitation can work at cross purposes to humility and the recognition of human limitations, they might offer.

Although many scholars critique techno-optimists as trying to engineer a hubristic mastery over the world (and such is the basis of Michael Warner's call for a "self-limiting principle") there appears nevertheless a consistent idea that intellectual awareness will enable a greater degree of control over one's actions and their effects. The issue for Warner is that ethics involves aligning one's agency with one's values, and there is a trouble for him when grid infrastructures mediate our agency. But this is perhaps a too limited understanding of agency, solely defined by one's conscious and well-informed action within a given context. As the older "computer-illiterate" woman insisted, it is a common experience in everyday life to be out of one's depths. How often are one's actions based in certain knowledge or control? The ethics of infrastructural inversion depend upon an especially enlightened subject, one that is required to pursue greater knowledge of all systems which mediate one's agency—technical as well as social. If ignorance to or the invisibility of systems forecloses ethical action, how can one be ethical when so much of one's action is structured by systems and social conventions of which one is rarely conscious? To put it otherwise, what if the cloud is not a problem for what it obscures, but an apt metaphor for human life that allows for a reconciliation of oneself to circumstances that one does not fully control or understand?

As a point of clarification, social scientific studies of technological systems provide extremely valuable ways of understanding one's relationship to technologies and their social and political significance. These studies yield information and critiques that are sound and we would be wise to heed them. I am also not offering the perspectives elaborated in this chapter as a model for life in the "IT age." What I am elaborating here a concern about the common implication in technology studies that ethics are reserved for only the most enlightened.

As my interlocutors stressed, ignorance should not be seen as a total foreclosure to pursuing the good because ignorance and uncertainty are the rule, not the exception. As William James (1902) wrote:

> That is, we shall have to confess to at least some amount of dependence on sheer mercy, and to practice some amount of renunciation, great or small, to save our souls alive. The constitution of the world we live in requires it…. For when all is said and done, we are in the end absolutely dependent on the universe; and into sacrifices and surrenders of some sort, deliberately looked at and accepted, we are drawn and pressed as into our only permanent positions of repose (51).

The Christians involved in IT ministries saw their efforts as aligned with how the world is.

This conclusion is offered not as a dismissal of the important ways of viewing social relations that are opened up by seeking greater knowledge of the cloud, the grid, or any other technological system. It is merely a provocation to think through how this approach to ethical action that demands an awareness or enlightenment that might be inaccessible to many (or all) people engenders a certain relation to oneself, other people, and the conditions in which one lives. Considering the student of the IT Mission School, we might consider to what extent uncertainty is not the exception, but the rule of human life. And if that is the case, how might one capacitate the ethical action of incapable humans who are always subject to forces and systems outside of one's control.

Chapter 3

Screen Christianity: Video Sermons in the Construction of Transnational Korean Churches[57]

Introduction

The last chapter explored how technology as a category is central to a social imaginary that operates within Korean Christian communities. This chapter will focus on one particularly important object within transnational multisite churches: the screen. At Yoido Full Gospel Church's satellite campuses [*Yŏŭido Sunbogŭm Kyohoe*; henceforth YFGC], congregants attend services like Christians of other churches do, but during some services they watch pre-recorded sermons by founding Pastor Cho Yonggi on large screens on the sanctuary walls, in communities from Gangnam in Seoul, to Central Los Angeles.

These screens have communal and theological significance. For example, one congregant described the role that screens play in her worship experience thusly: "When I watch Pastor Cho's sermon through the screen I receive God's grace [*Sŭk'ŭrinŭro Cho moksanimŭi sŏlgyorŭl pomyŏn Hananimŭi ŭnhyerŭl patkŏdŭnyo*]." For this reason, the screens may be read as repositories of social values. As anthropologist Brian Larkin explains:

> Technologies are unstable things. We think we know what a radio is, or what a cinema is used for, but these phenomena, which we take for granted, have often surprising histories. What media are needs to be interrogated and not presumed. The meanings attached to technologies, their technical functions, and the social uses to which they are put are not an inevitable consequence but something worked out over time in the context of considerable cultural debate (2008, 3).

This chapter will focus on the central role of video and projection screens in Korean multisite churches that operate both in South Korea and the Korean diaspora in order to interrogate the relationship between this particular media object and the transnational Christian community it helps to sustain.

[57] Material from this chapter was first published in *Acta Koreana,* as Heather Mellquist Lehto. "Screen Christianity: Video Sermons in the Creation of Transnational Korean Churches." *Acta Koreana* 20, no. 2 (2017).

Figure 10. Congregants watch a Sunday service on video and projection screens in an overflow space of Onnuri Church, a Korean multisite church operating across over forty campuses in multiple countries. Photo by author.

A significant source of the contemporary interest in the relationship between media and social form is found in the work of Benedict Anderson. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson famously argued that nationalism and the concept of "the nation" itself was supported by particular media practices. Print capitalism, he reasons, "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (2006: 36). This work brought greater attention to the ways in which social groups are not based exclusively, or even primarily, on face-to-face interactions. Media technologies enable people to imagine themselves as being together despite spatial distance, cementing the idea of the nation and national belonging within individuals who have no "direct" relationship to one another.

Following Anderson, scholars of media have begun to problematize the relationship between media technologies and social organization in a variety of ways. For example, anthropologist Birgit Meyer pushes Anderson's analytic in stressing that imagining community is not strictly a cognitive process, unmoored from sensations and embodiment. Instead, she examines how material configurations and embodied practices allow us to imagine community in certain ways. She writes:

> Imaginations are required to become tangible outside the realm of the mind, by creating a social environment that materializes through the structuring of space, architecture, ritual performance, and by introducing bodily sensations. In brief, in

> order to become experienced as real, imagined communities need to materialize in the concrete lived environment and be felt in the bones (Meyer 2009, 5).

Without denying that communities are imagined, Meyer insists that images of community are informed by the material conditions of their imagining. How social groups materialize through media practices has similarly become a significant theme in contemporary media studies, where it is widely acknowledged that implicit definitions of "community" vary according to the mode of engagement. Thus, with the emergence of numerous online communities, there is increasing interest in what it means to belong, participate, or communicate under such conditions (Turkle 1995, 2011, 2015; Boellstorff 2008; Gershon 2010; Miller 2011; Kelty 2012; Horst and Miller 2012).

This chapter adopts such a materialist approach in order to illustrate how the relationship between congregants and the screens themselves is a condition for the emergence of a particular configuration of Christian community, which I will peirastically call "screen Christianity." Seeing multisite churches as engaging in screen Christianity highlights how particular material configurations make such transnational communities imaginable.

This chapter explores Korean multisite church screens and their accompanying video sermon practices in three main sections. First, I discuss how church leaders understand their use of video sermons. To many pastors, the sermon broadcasts are a "practical means" to create a church that is centralized and hierarchical despite the challenges presented by its transnationality. Presenting video sermons as "practical" normalizes their presence, such that they receive little attention from congregants as a matter of religious concern. Nevertheless, screens are deployed toward particular purposes, ones that make certain modes of authority available to the church's main pastors. Media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan (1964), Jean Baudrillard (1984), Walter Ong (1982), and Friedrich Kittler (1999) have opened up useful lines of inquiry here, offering that studying communication extends beyond the study of the apparent "content" to include the ways in which particular media encourage and foreclose social relations. Following these theorists, I explore how the projection of the head pastor on screens (placed prominently in sanctuaries) evokes the spiritual co-presence—even omnipresence—of the head pastor.

Of course, social understandings of media technologies—what they are and what they do—are not given, but emerge and stabilize through their use over time. In the case of church screens, the apparent capacity for screened sermons to extend pastors' "control" or presence over congregations is informed by their liturgical use within this Korean Christian context. In the process of displaying sermons and other liturgical elements, the screens themselves take on theological significance, such that they become a "holy infrastructure" [*kŏrukhan inp'ŭra*] through which powerful experiences of God result from mediated contact with celebrity pastors.[58] In the second section, I discuss how screens came to occupy central locations within church spaces and religious practices. Church leaders incorporated screens in both the material and theological order of the church, such that today, congregants engage ritually with screens within aesthetically similar worship spaces across the globe. The resulting media design both illustrates and reinforces certain ideas of how Christian communities can, and should, relate to each other and relate to God vis à vis the screens.

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[58] See also Chapter 4.

In the third and final section, I discuss the role of screens in creating communities—both within a church site and across campuses—through congregants' sensory experiences. The ways that congregants discuss video sermons and the screens that display them provides greater detail to the mutual configuration of technological and theological models within Korean multisite churches. I give particular attention to congregants in Los Angeles, who attend "satellite campuses" in which services with Pastor Cho are qualified as "broadcast." Such qualifications may suggest imagined divisions within the multisite church, but to the contrary, the screens allow for a ritual co-presence that spiritually overcomes apparent geographic and physical barriers, demonstrating the screens' operation as a "holy infrastructure" that can channel Cho Yonggi, the Holy Spirit, and enable the multisite church to be imagined and embodied as one.

Video Sermons, Ecclesial Hierarchy, and "Control"

Multisite churches have developed into their own subculture within much of North American Christianity. There is now an entire cottage industry of "how-to" books, conferences, and consulting firms urging pastors to "go multisite" and teaching them how to do it. But contrary to the highly strategic "Multisite Church Revolution" in America, in the first Korean multisite churches the decision to extend across multiple campuses was considered simply "practical" [*siryongjŏk*] rather than ideological.[59] To reiterate, Yoido Full Gospel Church became multisite in the early 1970s because Pastor Cho Yonggi's popularity led smaller churches to offer their buildings to Yoido in exchange for becoming satellite campuses. Another of the first multisite churches, Onnuri Church, became multisite in a similar way. Pastor Ha Yong-jo founded Onnuri Church across four campuses in the mid-1980s because a few wealthy supporters had, independent of one another, donated multiple properties to the church and Ha saw multiple campuses to be the best use of those resources. For these churches, the donation of campus spaces preceded deliberate efforts to create a franchise-like organizational structure.

In this way, the advent of multisite churches was somewhat improvisational; however, once multiple campuses were established, church leadership wasted little time in exploring how media technologies might facilitate communication and a sense of unity among the varied congregations. Celebrity pastors like Cho Yonggi saw media use as a priority, to which he devoted "a considerable portion" of the church budget (Cho 1984, 55). Cho used media as a primary means to provide leadership to the entirety of the congregation—which, by the 1980s, already numbered in the hundreds of thousands—within the constraints of his busy schedule. Cho delegated tasks to other pastors, elders, and cell group leaders, but he believed strong, hierarchical relationships to be critical to the success of the church, much in keeping with broader South Korean organizational norms (Janelli and Janelli 1978, 1993; McNamara 1999). Thus, the use of uni-directional media to distribute Cho's messages and directives to his subordinate leaders became a means of both coordinating leadership and reinforcing his supremacy (Cho 1997, 123). Many churches relied upon weekly newspapers and audio tapes before video recording became widely available. However, video broadcasting was understood to be ideally suited for a multisite church. In Pastor Cho's view, "If television was not the best medium of communication, then the financial and

[59] This quality of the multisite church development is in keeping with what historian Timothy Lee has described as a broader "practical bent" in Korean evangelicalism. See Timothy S. Lee. 2010. *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 115–138.

commercial world would not spend such large sums of money trying to influence people through television" (Cho 1984, 57). Since video technologies became more easily affordable in the 1990s, video sermons have been the central mode of communication to the dispersed campuses.

Most satellite campuses have their own, local pastor, but how much that pastor will preach varies by location. Many Korean multisite churches do not have firm video broadcast protocols, preferring to cater flexibly to the needs of local congregations. Sermon broadcasting may be used *ad hoc*, shown selectively on special occasions and weekday sunrise prayer services [*saebyŏk kidohoe*]. During these services, the founding pastor and/or most senior pastor will broadcast his message to all campuses. This is even the case in Onnuri Church today, several years after the sudden passing of its founding Pastor Ha Yong-jo; recorded sermons by late Pastor Ha may be screened several times throughout the year in both South Korea and the United States. Yoido Full Gospel Church offers one of the most regimented approaches to sermon broadcasting. At nearly all of Yoido Full Gospel Church's satellite campuses, the first afternoon service on Sundays is reserved for a broadcast of Pastor Cho's service from Seoul, South Korea. Where time zones allow, this service is simulcast; in North America, Europe, and other distant locations, congregations watch a recording of the service, which is accessible on the church's website.

Although the use of media in multisite churches is presented as merely "practical," the judgment of their practicality and efficacy are, of course, embedded within a larger set of values. Claims that the use of screens is merely "practical" imply that screens facilitate a set of ends that are generally agreed to be desirable. The screens can be said to offer a "practical" means to make a single pastor visible to larger congregations and communities around the world, for example. If those ends are contested or deemed undesirable, however, then the use of media technologies will be understood less as a purely pragmatic decision (and hence, value-neutral) and more as a strategic one.[60] Anthropologist Birgit Meyer has noted that "Technology… never comes in a 'purely' instrumental or material form—as sheer technological possibility at the service of the religious imagination, but is to be embedded in the latter through an often-complicated negotiation process in which established authority structures may be challenged and transformed" (Meyer 2009, 14). As the above comments from Pastor Cho suggest, the use of video sermons is often a deliberate attempt to reinforce the head pastor's centrality to the church. This is true not only of Yoido Full Gospel Church but of others as well. In any multisite church where sermons from the head pastor are projected to satellite congregations, this use of media privileges the voice of the senior pastor while muting the campus pastor, even if only for the duration of the message.

Mediated pastoring was rarely considered ideal, but it was welcomed by the rapidly-growing congregations. For congregants, it was a means to access their celebrity pastor's unique

[60] Screens offer a seemingly "practical" means to build larger and larger congregations, but if that desire to expand is suspect, then the use of screens toward those ends is not "practical," but highly political and can be called into question. Throughout my field research, such criticisms were regularly expressed by Koreans and Korean Americans outside of the churches I studied. I was surprised initially that the first (and sometimes only) criticism that people offered is that those churches are, simply, "too big" [*nŏmu k'ŏyo*]. For a long time, I puzzled over why the first thing that came to mind about these churches was a critique of their size, especially since many of them regularly face scrutiny in the news over allegations of financial misconduct, sexual abuse, and political corruption. It became clear over time, however, that many of these more specific "misdeeds" were viewed as outgrowths of a misplaced prioritization of size.

vision and voice; for the pastors, it was both a means to accommodate larger congregations and a means to reinforce a centralized, hierarchical ecclesiology within an increasingly dispersed congregation. According to Pastor Cho, success is dependent upon a strong leader providing a single vision for the church. Given that Cho believed television and radio to be "powerful" media, he was concerned that allowing multiple leaders to use these media technologies would pose a threat to the ecclesial structure.

> At this time the airwaves are full of evangelists who are preaching the gospel. Yet, in my opinion the evangelist needs to work with the church, not outside of it…. I believe that the person who should be using the media to a greater extent than anyone else should be the pastor (Cho 1984, 69).

If video sermons had a directive force on the congregation, which Cho believed that they did, the head pastor alone should use this medium because "without the pastor, the system will not hold together. It *is* a system, and a system must have a control point" (Cho 1981, 93).

It is not clear whether Cho meant to suggest that he occupies the control point of his church or that he *is* the control point. Supporting pastors and congregants, however, offer the impression that Pastor Cho is more than the temporary occupant of the church's "control point." Cho is technically retired, having stepped down as the head pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in 2008. Nevertheless, he remains an important figure in the church and still preaches once a week at the main campus in Seoul. This sermon is broadcast weekly to many satellite campuses, and these video sermons are said to be critical in that they reinforce that Cho himself is indispensable to the church.

This became clear in conversations I had, for example, with Pastor Lee Tae-gŭn.[61] Yi spent much of his career as the head pastor of Full Gospel Churches in Chicago and Los Angeles in the United States, and he has recently served as the associate pastor to Yoido Full Gospel Church, the co-chairman of the Christian Council of Korea (CCK), and he is currently the main pastor at Full Gospel's third largest Korean campus at Bundang. In his current roles, Yi describes much of his work as an overseer of subordinate pastors' activities, investigating "like the FBI." On behalf of Pastor Cho, he "hunt[s] these things out and finds out what's legitimate and what's illegitimate," and then he makes recommendations about how pastors should be assigned among the campuses. He watches every pastor of the twenty main satellite churches and evaluates them. "Oh, this pastor is not doing well. OUT! [*I moksanimi chal mot hae—aut'ŭ*!]" he demonstrated colorfully, jerking his right hand backward with his thumb extended like a baseball umpire.

Pastors are regularly moved between campuses for various reasons. Assignments are determined in order to ensure high-quality preaching and fit with the congregation. Shuffling campus pastors also deters them from trying to secure a permanent position at a single campus, or even trying to extricate their campus from the YFGC altogether. Cho and other high-ranking pastors began to reassign pastors every five years after the church's unity (and the hierarchy upon which the unity is seen to depend) was challenged on a few occasions; today, that term has been

[61] This following interview was conducted in a combination of Korean and English. When Yi spoke in Korean words or phrases, I have included both my translation and the original Korean.

limited further, to around two years. Regularly circulating the subordinate pastors accentuates that Pastor Cho and current head Pastor Lee Young-hoon are permanently fixed in the highest positions. The most important thing for the church, in Yi's eyes, is that Pastor Cho remain the focus and sole leader.

In addition to alternating local leaders, the consistency of Cho's appearance through the media and screened sermons are reminders of his singular leadership. "For example, in Europe," Yi explained, switching to English:

> "Some pastors see the Bible and they think, 'Oh, it is edited.' [scoff] Of course it is not edited! It is the Holy Spirit! But last year, we had one of our pastors from Europe come speak at our university—Hansei University [*Hanse Taehakkyo*]—he spoke like that. He said the Bible is edited. We removed him. But a lot of people in Europe think of the Bible this way, but they are wrong. This is why it is important to have Dr. Cho preaching at each campus through the video. So he can correct their thinking. Of course, at satellite churches, we accept the culture. But we keep our heritage—our traditions."
>
> "What traditions? [I switch back to Korean] When you say, 'Full Gospel traditions [*chŏnt'ong*],' what does that mean to you? What is the meaning, or why do you think they are so important?"
>
> "Prayer [*kido*]," he answered immediately. "And Dr. Cho's spirit and theology. Many places in Europe, in North America, the churches are in decline. That is not the Pentecost. That is not the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit, there is growth. This is why Dr. Cho's preaching is so important. He leads with the Spirit, and without it, these churches cannot compete with the culture."[62]

He continued, explaining that Cho is the key to the continuing global success of Yoido Full Gospel Church.

> "In Europe, in North America, even though there are campus pastors, it is all because of Dr. Cho. The campus pastors' faith and their theology come from Dr. Cho. Even though they don't live here—it is no problem! Every pastor goes out, but it's no problem. Because Dr. Cho stays the center, it is not a problem."
>
> "But what about when Dr. Cho passes away?"
>
> "Dr. Cho is now retired. But even when he's not here, it is Dr. Cho's spirit. That is still here. Even when he passes away, still I respect Dr. Cho's spirit, his sermon, his theology, everything. His control will remain. Control not by money. Control is not governing! Control by his faith and his Holy Spirit movement…. But Dr. Cho is different from Bill Hybels [the pastor of Willow Creek Church].[63] Bill Hybels

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[62] It seemed to me that "the culture" to which he refers here is secularity, given his attention to the historical critical method of Biblical scholarship in the preceding comment.

[63] Willow Creek Church is a multisite church based in the greater Chicago area. The church is largely credited with creating the multisite church system in the late 1990s, although as I

> sends people. Some satellites are dying or alive because of the pastor. Sometimes the pastor seeks power. But we, in our branches, every Sunday receive Dr. Cho's preaching. Still. So he is still visiting our churches everyday….so at Bundang Full Gospel Church, [they are] not *my* members; [they are] Dr. Cho's member (*sic*). Even when Dr. Cho's physical body is gone, we are left with his spirit, and so he will still control each satellite church."

Notably, the statements of both Pastor Cho and Pastor Lee reveal the intersection of technological and theological models. When Cho says, "without the pastor, the system will not hold together. It *is* a system, and a system must have a control point," he presents the church community through a technological model in which a pastor can exercise "control" throughout the "system" by means of corresponding technological apparati. In this case, it is the projection of his moving image on screens around the globe that lend him the "power" to be known "personally" to his congregants—both those within the stadium-sized sanctuary in Yoido and in the satellite campuses.

As Pastor Cho's and Pastor Lee's comments suggest, the power of the screens is their capacity to materialize Cho's image which, according to Pastor Lee, also materializes Cho's spirit, making him present in time and space to his congregants. This stands in contrast to the theorization of mass media in Walter Benjamin's seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which he suggests that the authority of a work of art dissipates through the proliferation of reproduced copies. Benjamin argued that the technical reproduction of art cannot access the "aura" and "authenticity" of the original because it lacks "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin 1986, 220). The unicity of the work of art is "inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition" (223), but reproduction "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (221). Interestingly, in the case of screen Christianity, the Christian theological tradition in which the technical reproduction of Cho's image is embedded contradicts the presumptions of "original" and "copy." Cho is understood to lead the church through the very multiplicity of his broadly-disseminated video sermons. The absence of Cho's body at satellite campuses does not diminish his authority. Rather, when Cho's image is understood to be an authentic "original" in a spiritual sense, the presence of that image on the screens is an enabling condition for his spiritual "control" over all the church. Just as the screens are understood to allow his image to overcome material barriers, they also make possible an imaginary in which his spirit transcends physical limitations such as geographic distance and, perhaps, even bodily death. The multiple ways in which Christian theologies of spiritual omnipresence inform how Cho's image operates on the church's screens is evinced further by congregants' testimonies detailed in the final section of this chapter.

"The Screens are the Hands of God"

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mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, multisite churches had been in operation in South Korea for decades prior to Willow Creek opening its second campus.

The remainder of this chapter will attend to how screens take on particular characteristics in the context of Korean multisite churches, presenting an analysis of video screens that "follows the thing," in anthropologist George Marcus' words (1995). Screens are a standard fixture of multisite churches today, but it was not long ago that the religious use of such new media technologies was controversial to Christians and non-Christians alike. Opponents considered the novelty of screened sermons to be dangerous or inappropriate to religious practice. Proponents saw the novelty of new media as a blessing and/or a means of revival. Both views exoticize video sermon practices by emphasizing the medium's novelty and perceived rupture with traditional practices; however, it is also important to recognize that debates over such new media can be incorporated into a much longer history of Christian theology.

The materiality of religious practice has long been considered pivotal to Christian liturgy. Well-known historical examples include conflicts over iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, or Reformation debates between Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli over whether the Eucharist *is* Christ's body or just a symbolic representation of it. Themselves educated in these historical debates, pastors at Korean multisite churches are cognizant of the social and theological import of church design. As a consequence, the main pastor will send a team to implement the design of each new campus so that it is coordinated aesthetically with the broader church. These designers stress that "it is important that the environment/atmosphere [*punŭigi*] of the campus matches [the main campus and larger church]." If a campus church has a beautiful sanctuary, but it is not recognizable as a site of that particular multisite church, then church leaders expect that the congregants will feel as if they only belong to their local congregation. Thus, these designers understand themselves to be building the church-as-campus and the church-as-religious-community at the same time.

As mentioned above, debates about new media in religious practice have often erred on the side of overemphasizing apparent ruptures caused by their introduction. Large screens, in these accounts, are characterized as profane contagion that threaten traditions purportedly incompatible with material change. But according to Korean church designers, screen media in church make congregants feel *more* comfortable because screened sermons are congruent with their everyday practices outside of the church. The centrality of screen-viewing weaves their work, leisure, and worship into a seamless, continuous experience. From the church architects' and designers' perspectives, media technologies such as screens contribute to the relative success of large, multisite churches over smaller churches.

Figure 11. A recorded sermon plays on a television screen mounted near a bank of elevators at a multisite church in Seoul. It is common for Christian services to be projected continuously onto screens throughout church spaces, similar to the ways that screens constantly display television shows and advertisements to residents of Seoul on city streets, restaurants, and public transportation. Photo by author, taken April 2015.

Congregants also admit that they enjoy the "modern" [*hyŏndaejŏk*] qualities that are said to accompany the widescale use of audiovisual technologies. Within Korean studies, there is a vast literature attending to the relationship between the growth of Christianity in Korea and the concomitant processes of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, the association of Protestantism with what it means to be modern has been shown to be critical to understanding South Korean religion and social change

(Cox 1997; Kim Andrew 2001; Baker 2007). Much less has been said, however, about *how* this association was secured. Government actions certainly played a role. Scholars note that a disproportionate number of political leaders of the new nation were Christian, due to the cooperation of the U.S. military and paramilitary forces with the Syngman Rhee administration. Christians occupied up to 40 percent of the first political leadership positions in the late 1950s despite constituting less than ten percent of the South Korean population, according to historian Chung-shin Park (2003, 174).[64] The way that these leaders articulated and encouraged a particular image of "modernity"—often associated with American Protestantism—cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, "modernity" and "the modern" are phenomena that are far from encapsulated in expressed statements and definitions. These concepts are also greatly informed by embodied experience. As anthropologist Brian Larkin explains, "Infrastructures create a sensing of modernity, a process by which the body, as much as the mind, apprehends what it is to be modern, mutable, and progressive" (Larkin 2013, 336-337). More discussions are needed to account for *how* Korean Christianity's "modern-ness" figures into Korean life. Recently, anthropologist Nicholas Harkness' (2011, 2014) work on the voice in Korean Christianity has made a significant contribution to this conversation by illustrating how the materiality of the voice—its qualities and embodied expressions—can signal the vocalist's place in Korean Christian modernity while simultaneously forming the modern Christian subject.

The transcendental role of screens is both reflected in and reinforced by their placement within spaces of worship. The screens occupy the most spiritual vital point within religious spaces. Above the altar, they are where communication with the transcendent is most possible, what religion scholar Mircea Eliade (1957) famously termed the "axis mundi." As I mentioned briefly in Chapter 2, the centrality of the screens can come at the expense of other possible modes of social and religious experience. When I volunteered on the media and technology teams within multisite churches, the sound technicians often lamented that it is nearly impossible to create their ideal aural *and* visual experience simultaneously. To create the best sound quality, they explain that they would need to place the sound booth in the middle of the sanctuary. From there, they could mix microphones and balance sound qualities in real time. Some churches do this, but it is not a popular choice because it is seen as a disruption to the congregants' visual experience. "Pastors don't like the idea that people are looking at the back of our heads or at our computers during the service. They think it's distracting," one sound engineer explained. So instead, churches often place the sound board at the very back and top of a sanctuary, where the fewest eyes will be upon them. "When we do the mic checks, I can walk around the sanctuary, and I can go back-and-forth to the board to try to balance [the sound]. But it's not ideal, and you can't fix everything in this way."

Anthropologist Charles Hirschkind has written extensively on the senses in religious practice, and his work clarifies the social import of embodied practices and the sensory attunement that they enculturate in the practitioner. Privileging the visual over the aural, as is done in multisite

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[64] Historian Chung-shin Park notes that the National History Compilation Committee claims the disproportionate appointment of Christians to South Korea's first political offices was due in part to the strong presence of the U.S. government and the U.S. officials' relative comfort with Christian leadership (2003: 175). However, according to historian Bruce Cumings, Americans first sought out support from collaborators with the Japanese and other upper-class, moderate nationalists, and thus claims to an overwhelming American support of Christians must be tempered relative to other selection criteria.

churches for example, informs how one comes to perceive one's relation to others, to one's environment, and to the divine. In his words, "Disagreements about the role of listening do not simply reflect different ideologies of eye and ear, speech and writing, but also concern the range of institutions that embed these practices, the goals they promote, and the forms of sociability they sustain or are indifferent toward" (Hirschkind 2006, 63). The widespread adoption of screen media within Korean multisite churches suggests analogous shifts in religious formations and liturgical understandings. Instead of sound or touch, vision is the sense that is privileged by sanctuary design and liturgical practice. Most Korean megachurches today design sanctuaries in "thrust" stage formation—sanctuaries tend to be rounded and wrap the congregation around the altar on three sides. Pillars and other visual barriers are minimized, and sanctuaries with open fields of vision are said to enable the "unobstructed communication of grace" [*makhim ŏmnŭn ŭnhyeŭi sot'ong*].[65] If there are visual obstructions like pillars inside a sanctuary, churches typically mount flat-screen televisions on such barriers so that they may maintain the visual participation of congregants who cannot see the main screens.

Across the churches in which I conducted field work, the attention congregants gave to the screens was remarkably similar.[66] When I attended services as part of my ethnographic research, I varied where I sat within the sanctuary so that I might observe the congregation from different vantage points. Almost universally, congregants sitting with obstructed views of the stage or in the distant recesses of the balcony would, universally, direct their attention toward the screens throughout the service. This is unsurprising, perhaps. But in churches with large video screens, few congregants would look directly at the stage or pastor, no matter how small the sanctuary or how close congregants were to the pulpit. The first few rows of a sanctuary may be exceptional, as congregants there were more likely to look at their leaders rather than crane their necks uncomfortably toward the large screens above. In some churches, however, the first few rows were even provided with their own screens, mounted to the base of the stage—consequently, congregants are not only provided a convenient opportunity to watch the sermon on a screen, but also seem to tend in that direction, even with equal opportunity to watch the pastor himself.

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[65] "*Pondang ŭn makhim ŏmnŭn ŭnhye ŭi sot'ong ŭl wihayŏ oebu e poinŭn kidung i ŏmnŭn mujiju konggan ŭro…*," in *G'Story: Sarang ŭi Kyohoe Kŏnch'uk Iyagi.* Seoul: Sarang Church, 2014, 48.

[66] See also Chapter 4.

Figure 12. Even congregants with unobstructed views of the sanctuary stage are often provided the opportunity to watch on a screen. This photograph was taken from the first row of one of Onnuri Church's main campuses in Seobinggo, Seoul. Photo by author, taken June 2017.

From an autoethnographic perspective, I noted over time how my own embodied participation and attention shifted as I became more attuned to the services. At first, it appeared strange and a bit disconcerting that congregants oriented their sight away from the pastor himself and toward the reproduced images of the pastor on the video screens; but I soon adopted the same habit. Even in close proximity to the preaching pastor, I found my eyes drawn back to the screens repeatedly, despite some effort to do otherwise.

The typical megachurch sanctuary may have a single screen behind and above the central pulpit, but it is more common for there to be at least two screens at the sides of the stage, mounted at a slight angle toward one another and facing opposite sides of the congregation. The new Sarang Church's sanctuary features this design. The sanctuary walls are curved in an oval, and two enormous screens flank the main stage. As the architects (The Beck Group of the U.S.) and designers at Sarang attest, the rounded design is intended to create a sense of intimacy despite the expansive space of the 6,500-seat sanctuary. Within the space, two 24-meter by 4-meter screens bend toward the congregation in embrace, as if, I was once told, "the screens are the hands of God [*sŭk'ŭrinŭn Hananimŭi son ida*]." Church leaders regularly describe the curved arrangement of the screens as symbolic of the embrace of God and/or God's love. In head pastor Oh Jung-Hyun's words, "In this place, here and there you can feel the love of God who embraces us. The whole

building forms the embracing image of God as well [*Konggan yŏgijŏgiesŏ urirŭl p'umŏjusigo anajusinŭn Hananimŭi Sarangŭl nŭkkil su issŭmnida. Kŏnmulŭi chŏnch'e imiji ttohan anajusimŭl hyŏngsanghwa hayŏssŭmnida*]" (G'Story 2014, 47). If two screens angled toward the congregation are meant to symbolize God's hands, arms, and an embrace, this anthropomorphized image of God's open arms is mirrored by the outstretched hands of a pastor giving a benediction at the end of each service.

Figure 13. Two large, projection screens flank the altar of Yoido Full Gospel Church, angled toward the center of the congregation. Pictured on the screen, Senior Pastor Lee Young-hoon extends his hands at his sides in a blessing of the congregation, mirroring the placement of the screens. Photo by author, taken June 2017.

In the context of screen Christianity, the anthropomorphism of screens as hands signals the particular attributes and capacities that screens amass within multisite churches. In theological traditions in which hands and the sense of touch figure prominently in spiritual transmission and healing, the technologies that mediate religious practices come to mimic or take on the qualities also attributed to human hands. At these churches, it is common for people to "lay hands" upon each other in prayer, and similar postures are mimicked in the way pastors extend their hands toward the camera lens during prayer. Many charismatic Korean pastors have become famous for their ability to heal through laying hands on the sick. This is true of no one more than Cho Yonggi,

one of the most well-known Pentecostal healers in the world. Now that screens mediate several religious rituals, these charismatic pastors are perceived as "touching hearts" of viewers through the medium of the screens [*maŭm kamdong sik'ida*]. In some cases, the distinction between the Christian leaders' hands, the screens, and the hands of God is elided, as in the words of the head pastor Kwak Chu-hwan of Bethany Church: "God will serve the coming world with Korean IT, and we should want [*wŏnhada*] to become the hands of God [*Hananimŭi son*]."

"I want to be a part of that. So I attend"

> *"A problem that most preachers have with television is that they don't understand the medium. Television is primarily a personal medium…. When I look into the eye of the camera lens, I think of just one person. I speak to him from my heart, just as if I were in his living room talking to him heart to heart."* –Pastor Cho Yonggi (Cho 1984, 61).

After my time in Seoul, I conducted field research at one of Yoido Full Gospel Church's North American satellite churches. Los Angeles Full Gospel Church [*Nasŏng Sunbokŭm Kyohoe;* henceforth LAFGC] is considered the flagship Full Gospel Church site in North America. It is one of the oldest and largest Full Gospel Churches outside South Korea, located just north of L.A.'s Koreatown where over two million Koreans and Korean Americans live.

L.A. Full Gospel Church is significant to the larger Full Gospel network of churches, but its relationship to Yoido has been tested over time. L.A. Full Gospel Church was founded by Cho Yonggi's mother-in-law, Ch'oe Cha-sil, in 1974. Due to its size, the campus has functioned as a sort of "farm team" for up-and-coming pastors within the broader church. For example, in 2001 Cho Yonggi sent Pastor Lee Tae-gŭn to the congregation after Chicago Full Gospel Church had grown exponentially under Pastor Lee's leadership. The Los Angeles congregation, however, was unreceptive to Yi's leadership, and his tenure was characterized by frequent conflicts between Pastor Lee and the site's elders and deacons. After just a few years, Lee was replaced by a pastor named Lee Young-hoon and Yi Tae-gŭn was reassigned to Bundang Full Gospel Church, the third largest Full Gospel Church in greater Seoul.

Soon after Pastor Lee Young-hoon's assignment to L.A., he was selected to be Cho's first successor as head pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church. However, his promotion was not the result of a successful tenure in L.A. He, too, was far from popular among the Los Angeles congregation. When I first arrived at L.A. Full Gospel Church after a year of research at Yoido Full Gospel Church, many congregants mentioned this connection to me, asking, "Do you know that Pastor Lee Young-hoon was our last pastor here?" When I responded with eager recognition and approval, I expected there would be some enthusiasm over the success of their former pastor. But to my surprise, my interlocutors never wanted to continue discussing Pastor Lee—it became clear that they mentioned this as a matter of fact rather than as a statement of kinship with the church in Seoul. After Lee Young-hoon was tapped to lead Yoido Full Gospel Church, the elders of the L.A. congregation requested permission to select their next pastor, an exception that was granted and seems to help to maintain the relationship between L.A. and Yoido.

The strongest bond that remains between Yoido and L.A. is the continued significance of Cho Yonggi to much of the L.A. campus' founding members. Some of these older members attended Yoido Full Gospel Church's main campus before moving to the U.S., but for other congregants, their relationship to Pastor Cho developed exclusively through their interaction with his screened image. These relationships, though mediated, are significant to congregations in the diaspora. This is precisely the type of "power" that Pastor Cho himself attributed to the materiality of broadcast media. In Cho's words:

> With the use of television and radio comes a special type of power. The medium of television especially causes people to view you differently than anyone else. They all feel as if they know you personally…. They feel as if they have been with you personally, that is, if you have done a good job. This kind of power in the wrong person's hands can have a corrupting effect (Cho 1984, 71).

Congregants understand that they are watching pre-recorded services, but through images on the screens Cho is, nevertheless, understood to be present with them in the ritual space.

As is the case at most Full Gospel campuses globally, each Sunday there is a broadcast service [*yŏngsang yebae*] in the early afternoon. At L.A. Full Gospel Church, this service is nominally directed by a young, male deacon, who consistently attends the video service with his wife. He presides over the offering and communion. However, it became clear after I had attended the service on several Sundays that the *de facto* leader of the service is an older, female deaconess [*kwŏnsa*], who sits at the back of the room and intercedes when she perceives that the younger leaders are lapsing in their duties.

An enthusiastic worshipper, it is hard to differentiate her participation at the broadcast service from that of a deaconess at any other Full Gospel service. She claps and sings loudly along with the hymns. On some Sundays, the video buffers and the praise music proceeds only in awkward fits and starts, but she and many of the other women continue to sing and clap along, undeterred by the technological static. She interjects an audible "amen" with her head bowed in prayer along with the Seoul-based prayer leader. She listens intently to Pastor Cho and repeats key phrases aloud as we are prompted.

When I spoke with her about her faithful attendance at the broadcast service, she answered my questions without any hint that there might be a meaningful difference between this service and any other. Now in her eighties, she had attended Yoido Full Gospel Church for decades before emigrating to the U.S. with her daughter thirty years ago. She participates in a morning service led by the local campus pastor, but she attends the broadcast service as well "because of Pastor Cho Yonggi." She continued, "I miss Yoido Full Gospel Church, but the Holy Spirit still flows through the screen."

Toward the end of each service, Cho leads a healing prayer, directing congregants to place their hands on ailing parts of their bodies. If the affliction is emotional, spiritual, or if they have no immediate request, he tells them to place a hand on their chest. He then leads them in prayer, and afterward, lists a series of healings that he has discerned from the Holy Spirit. "A person with stomach cancer has been healed." The congregation responds, "Amen." "A person with back pain has been healed…" and so forth. Cho is known for his ability to bring physical healing through the

Holy Spirit, and so I asked her if she thinks healing can occur through prayer at this service, even though the broadcasted prayer was recorded hours ago and in another place. When Pastor Cho announces successful healings, I asked, did she think he could be referring to healings at campuses like L.A. Full Gospel Church?

"Of course," was her immediate answer. With unshakable confidence, she continued, "There's power in Pastor Cho's words, right? No matter where, Pastor Cho can heal with prayer."

"Since you came to L.A., do you think you have experienced healing from Pastor Cho?" I asked her.

"Yes. Many times. Not just for me, but for my family and friends, too. It's the Holy Spirit [*sŏngnyŏng*]. By way of the screens, the Holy Spirit flows from his hands to us and healing occurs [*Sŭk'ŭrinŭl t'onghae, sŏngnyŏngŭn Cho Yonggi moksanimŭi sonesŏ uriegero hŭrŭgo ch'i-yu toegŏdŭnyo*]."

As anthropologist Mayfair Yang has noted, transnational media can enable the mobilization of a subjectivity detached from state boundaries, allowing one to "link up with alternative…subjectivities far away" (Yang 2002, 205). Similarly, screen Christianity enculturates alternative sensibilities about participation and presence. The Holy Spirit flows from the pastor's outstretched arms to each congregant through apparent fractures in time and space, due in part to the continuity of religious media.

Another consistent attendee of L.A. Full Gospel Church's broadcast services is a single woman in her late thirties. She always arrived at the service late, but her tardiness never seemed to bother the other congregants. Carrying a violin case in one hand, she would greet others with a smile and a bow as she made her way to her regular pew in the center-left of the room. I had long assumed she was a musician for L.A. Full Gospel Church, delayed by orchestra practice. She corrected me one Sunday—she is a member of a small, nearby church where her brother-in-law is the pastor. "I come to this service because of Cho Yonggi," she explained. "When I lived in Seoul I used to go to Yoido Full Gospel Church, and I love Pastor Cho's sermons."

The broadcast services displayed on the screen in the chapel are played from Yoido Full Gospel Church's website. The service is accessible to anyone with an internet connection, and so I asked her why she comes to this service, especially given that she is not a member of the church. "Why don't you watch the service at home?" I asked.

> I could. Sometimes I do. But it's different. When I see Pastor Cho on the screen, I really feel God's presence. Sometimes at home I will watch devotional videos from the church, but the service is different. It's a special, spiritual experience to watch it in the church. Also, it makes me feel like I am in Korea. His voice is the same. [On the screen] I see people I know; people I used to sing with in the choir. We clap to the same songs. It even smells a bit like the [Yoido] sanctuary in here. [pause] So when I watch it here with other members, I realize that we, too, in L.A. are the church. If I just watched at home, that wouldn't be good for the sake of the church. I receive so much grace from Dr. Cho, and I want to be a part of that. So I attend.

While this multisited community is certainly imagined, the practices and statements of its members demonstrate how this imagination takes form and is enacted through their participation. Screen media practices not only unite Korean Christians in shared content. These practices also unite them through the shared practice of aesthetic attunement to what is important and in how one sees, hears, or feels the Holy Spirit or one's community. The imagined community is configured through the "matching environment," the experience of physical healing, the synchronized singing and clapping, and even the common smell.

Conclusion

As Michael Warner writes, there is no such thing as a "mere technology, a medium itself unmediated" (Warner 1990, 5). In this case, the screens of screen Christianity are always already mediated by the Christian tradition in which they are embedded, such that the unique capacities of these screens reflect the situation of their use. As is evident in the anthropomorphism of screens as human hands, what the screens themselves "are" and "do" emerge in their situated deployment; a screen within the church is different from just any screen.

In screen Christianity, the screens themselves are implicated in the configuration of the religious subject and religious communities. The screens' placement and their associated practices undergird corresponding theological conceptions of contact and community, such that screens are said to transmit healing touches and religious community becomes increasingly defined in terms of seeing and being seen. The attributed ability of screens to "touch" or "embrace" gives material form to the relationship satellite congregants form with their head pastor. This contact is perceived not just cognitively, but also through corporeal sensations of spiritual comfort and physical healing they experience through religious participation with the screens. It is through shared, embodied practice that one comes to see, hear, feel, and imagine community, which has implications for how we understand social worlds to be animated by everyday screen use. With the Holy Spirit "flowing through the screens," it is each congregant's participation in the sermon-viewing and its "spiritual touch" that cultivates the Korean multisite church. In this way, screens can be understood as central to and constitutive of Korean multisite churches and its unique modes of religious authority, conceptions of what it means to belong to a congregation, and a particularly screen-based spirituality.

By virtue of the screens' technological capacity to surmount barriers of time and geographic distance, the projection of the pastor's image and sermons upon the screens visually and metaphorically enlarges the main pastor and extends his "control" to the limits of the medium's technological reach. Considering Cho Yonggi's advanced age, one might wonder whether the screens' technological reach will transcend his corporeal death. It is impossible to predict exactly what will happen to the broadcast services of Yoido Full Gospel Church after Cho passes away. Despite Pastor Lee Tae-gŭn's assurances, it is difficult to imagine that a congregation like L.A. Full Gospel Church—which was indisposed to Cho's successor Lee Young-hoon when he led their congregation—would continue to devote one service each Sunday to broadcast his sermon from Yoido. Yet if Onnuri Church's relationship to late Pastor Ha Yong-jo is any indication, founding pastors like Cho Yonggi may well remain essential to the church, healing people and sharing a life eternal through the screens long after death.

Chapter 4

Holy Infrastructure: Church Architecture, Gangnam Style

Introduction

In each of the previous chapters, the idea of "holy infrastructure" has been used to capture the ways in which Korean Christians imagine their efforts to coordinate themselves and the objects of their practice to best facilitate God's will. I draw this concept from conversations surrounding the controversial construction of the Sarang Global Ministry Center (SGMC; also known as Sarang Church) in the Seocho district of Seoul. This chapter will examine this building project because it brings forth what is at stake in negotiating these relationships, including the relation between Christianity and capitalism, the space religion can hold in public life, and the workings of secular governance.

I will first introduce the church building project and the church's reputation within South Korea. This church was especially likely be described as "just a business [*kiŏp*]" by people outside of this church, although this criticism was occasionally brought against each multisite church that I studied.[67] The construction of the SGMC only strengthened this association because the building is said to resemble a corporate office building or a large shopping mall. I will examine some of these associations to contextualize the ongoing negotiation of Christianity and capitalism in contemporary Seoul.

In the latter part of the chapter, I will focus on the concept of "holy infrastructure" and the role that this idea plays in legal disputes surrounding the building project. During the construction of Sarang Church in Seoul, a series of conflicts between the church, its neighbors, and the municipal government culminated in lawsuits that briefly halted construction. Addressing these disputes has tested the ability of South Korean state bureaucracy to arbitrate contests that are based upon incompatible ontological claims. Opponents of the building argue that certain features are unjustified and/or illegal because of encroachments onto public space, but Christians have argued that those features are 'holy infrastructures' that enable the transmission of grace and the Spirit. This essay takes a theoretically symmetrical approach (Bloor 1976) to both secular and theological positions in a situation where religious difference manifests itself materially. Considering multiple conceptions of this church architecture, however, is a necessary step toward building the onto-ethical foundations (Zigon 2017) for better negotiating such difference. In sum, the conversations and contexts surrounding the SGMC offer another entry point to explore the ways in which people create their sense of self, their relationship with others, and their relationships to God as their material and technological surroundings shift, at the same time that these material shifts reflect their efforts to relate.

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[67] When megachurches [*taehyŏnggyohoe*] were described as being "really" or "just" businesses, *kiŏp* was the word most often used. This word carries a connotation of being a large institution, like the word "corporation." The English transliteration of the word "business" [*pijinisŭ*] was also common.

Since the late eighteenth century, the architecture of Western banks, large offices, and public buildings have featured neoclassical architectural features such as polished, stone exteriors or towering columns. Structures like the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, and the Royal Exchange in London are just a few notable examples. European and American architects of this period conspicuously drew from the architecture of religious temples, particularly from Hellenic designs, because employing the physical elements of temples lent a sacred air to political and financial spaces and, by extension, to the activities within them. Because of this aesthetic association, activities such as paying debts and performing public duties came to be seen as sacred covenants of obligation (Hamlin 1952, Palmer 2015). This logic helps to account for the similarities between, for example, the New York Stock Exchange and the Parthenon.

Figure 14. Left: The New York Stock Exchange. Right: The Parthenon.

Churches have also drawn upon the associations between architectural form and types of authority and/or sacrality. Churches often reproduce architecture that signals that a building is a religious space for this reason, and consequently, an archetypal Christian church might feature crosses, stone pillars, steeples, and stained-glass windows.

Church architecture in South Korea today, however, favors a different aesthetic. While more conventional styles of church architecture still remain and are featured prominently in churches such as the Catholic Cathedral in Myeongdong or the nearby Youngnak Presbyterian Church, many large and popular churches in Seoul are designed to resemble places of business. Completed in 2013, Sarang Global Ministry Center (*Sarangŭigyohoe*; henceforth the SGMC) in the wealthy area of Seocho in Seoul is perhaps the most notable example. While the building is controversial, admirers and critics alike describe it as resembling a large office building or a department store due to such features as its numerous escalators and curved, glass façade.

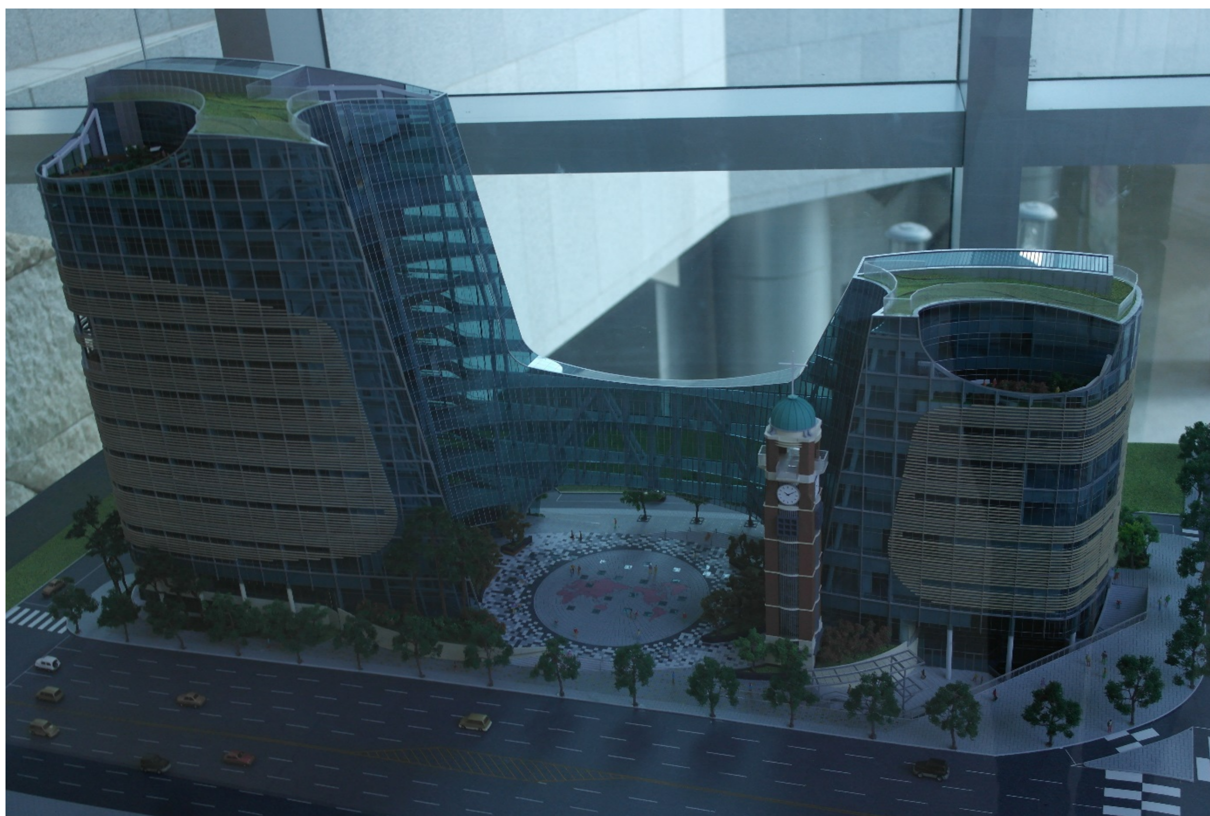

Figure 15. The architect's model of the SGMC, which after the buildings' completion was on display within the church for several years. Photo by author, taken March 10, 2015.

This trend in church design is not simply a reflection of contemporary architectural trends. In fact, it runs athwart the aesthetic tastes of several prominent architects. Korean architects occasionally belittle such designs, in one case saying, "These new church buildings with so many windows, they aren't timeless. They're just a 'fashion' [*p'aesyŏn*]."[68] One architect with whom I spoke, Mr. Lim, is a partner at one of the most sought-after firms in Seoul. Although the firm does not specialize in church architecture, he feels pressured to secure such lucrative and prestigious contracts. The commission alone, he says, is enough to draw any major firm to compete. With a penchant for "high-design," Mr. Lim also recognizes megachurch contracts as opportunities to realize one's artistry through a large-scale project. This is, at least, what he explains as we speak in his office, surrounded by models and artistic renderings of the secular buildings and public spaces that have defined his life's work. His designs seek a "balance" with the natural surroundings and fuse a simple, modernist aesthetic with Korean traditional themes—all of which seem to contradict his insistence that he sees megachurch projects as welcome opportunities and his reported admiration for his peers' futuristic megachurch designs. I smile and nod as I record my

[68] The word commonly used to express the triviality of these architectural trends is the transliteration of the English word "fashion," also signaling an association of such trends with Westernization.

notes. He sighs. "But I only compete for these contracts because they are good opportunities for the firm. Truthfully, I don't know why churches need to be so big at all."

Megachurch buildings in South Korea may be opportunities for artistic expression, but the resultant designs are never the architects' vision alone, or even principally. Church leaders give significant input, and most often, they order architects to make their proposals "even more modern" throughout multiple iterations of the design.[69] In the case of the SGMC, Sarang Church held an international competition for the project in 2009, eventually selecting a design by The Beck Group of Dallas, Texas. Beck's Chief Design Officer, Rick del Monte, led the project. When I spoke with del Monte in 2015, he communicated to me that he has enjoyed working on the SGMC and other Korean churches because the leadership is typically open to church designs that diverge from precedent—in fact, they often insist on it. When Sarang Church decided to work with The Beck Group, they did so with the condition that del Monte and his team would redesign their original submission because it seemed dated. As del Monte explained:

> Koreans—they want "the new," right? If you have last year's model of the [Samsung] Galaxy phone, it's like you can't be seen with *last* year's model, you have to have *this* year's model… it's all about the newest, greatest thing. So when we competed with Sarang, when we showed them the scheme which we thought was really good and actually fairly far-out they said, "No, that looks like a 90s scheme. We want something that looks *newer*—'more advanced.' You know, some *cooler* image." So they are really into the latest, greatest, coolest thing, even in terms of aesthetics.[70]

These requests center around a desire for the "modern" [*hyŏndaejŏk*], not to be confused with the architectural school known as "modernism."[71] Many scholars have noted the strong appeal of all

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[69] SaRang Church provides a detailed exploration of the SGMC design process and the theological and social significance of its details in their 500+ page book *G'Story: Sarangŭigyohoe Kŏnch'ugiyagi* [*G'Story: The Story of the SaRang Church Building*], published in 2014.

[70] Interview with Rick del Monte, lead architect of SaRang Global Ministry Center. 12 February 2015.

[71] The term "modern" is in quotes to distinguish contemporary Korean understandings from what architects might call "modern architecture" and historians what might call "modernity." When speaking with Korean architects, the word modern [*hyŏndaejŏk*] denotes the architectural school of modernism that arose in a particular period (20th century) and has certain characteristics (described as functional, rational, and/or lacking ornamentation); however, apart from conversations with architects, references to the "modern" carry a particular set of connotations that are not necessarily defined by one period or aesthetic "school." Similarly, references to the "modern" are not to be confused with the characteristics of the (variously defined) historical period often called "modernity." While a comprehensive or phenomenological outline of the Korean concept of "the modern" is outside the scope of this paper, it is perhaps relevant to note that in general terms, "modern," as used in common parlance, refers to a shifting set of aesthetic

things modern in South Korea, but as anthropologist Laurel Kendall notes, "The objects of these valorizations, however, are not fixed but are fluid, variable, and sometimes contradictory" (Kendall 2002, 5). The desire for a "modern" appearance has more to do with creating strategic associations in a given moment than conforming to a stable set of characteristics. As we hear in Sarang's rejection of the so-called "90's scheme," in South Korea "modern" often implies social or technological innovation and a rejection of what is seen as "traditional" or of the past.[72] With regard to church architecture and aesthetics, being perceived as a modern church depends upon aligning with trends and currents perceived to be "up-and-coming," and in many cases, with the future itself.

Efforts to construct a "modern" appearance with church architecture indicate not only that the ideas associated with modernity are seen as authoritative in Korean society; they also illustrate the concern that Christianity would be perceived as *not* modern. This is a relatively recent concern because for the latter half of the 20th century Protestant Christianity was understood to be one of the elements that constituted Korean modernity itself (Baker 2007, 301-310; Kim Andrew 2001). In the period following the Korean War, Protestantism spread at a staggering rate—there were only around 500,000 Protestant Christians in Korea in 1960, but reported figures topped three million only ten years later (Baker 2008, 75; Kim Andrew 2000; Gwak 2000, 39).[73] By the 1990s, South Korea had many of the largest churches in the world, including the single largest church Yoido Full Gospel Church. As Protestantism became associated with modernity, "Koreans who wanted to appear modern began to do what Christians did" (Baker 2007, 299). In addition, because the growth of Protestantism accompanied the so-called "economic miracle" in South Korea from the 1960s to 1990s, some Koreans interpreted this coincidence as a sign of the unique compatibility of Christianity with economic development, the modern nation-state, and other markers of an American conception of modernity (Cox 1997; Baker 2007; Kim Byung-Suh 2006; Park Joon-Sik 2012).

But in the same way that Protestantism's rapid growth made it "modern"—seemingly a feature of the future rather than the past—its stagnation and decline in the early 21st century was

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attributes that is often associated with futurity, novelty, the physical markers of economic development, and often, the West. For more detailed articulations of the "modern" and "modernity" in Korean society, see John Lie. *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea.* (Stanford University Press, 1998: 39-42); Laurel Kendall, ed. *Under Construction: The Gendering of Modernity, Class, and Consumption in the Republic of Korea*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); Uchang Kim, "Confucianism, Democracy, and the Individual in Korean Modernization," in *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, eds. Chang Yun-Shik and Steven Hugh Lee (London: Routledge, 2006).

[72] See also Robert Oppenheim. *Kyŏngju Things: Assembling Place*. University of Michigan Press, 2008.

[73] Because such statistics are often reported by religious organizations themselves, and several scholars have documented that survey results are greatly dependent on the vocabulary employed and its relationship to local understandings of religious identification, there is reason to doubt the accuracy of any one survey or specific figures. Nevertheless, nearly all reports confirm that since the immediate post-war era Protestants grew within decades from a marginal religious group in Korean society to one of the largest.

arresting. Although it was not until the 2010s that many Korean churches began to acknowledge slowing growth rates, national polls indicate that in the 1990s the number of Koreans who identified as Protestant Christians plateaued at around twenty percent of the total population (Gallup Korea 1998; Gwak and Hendriks 2001; Kim et al. 2009). Although potential biases of sampling, church self-reporting, and the ambiguous language used in survey questionnaires do not instill confidence in any precise statistical figures, studies of Korean church growth are in near-unanimous agreement that the growth rate of Korean churches slowed in the 1980s and the number of both churches and church-goers began to decline near the turn of the century (Ro and Nelson 1995; Gwak 2000; Gwak and Hendriks 2001). Because of this high rate of defection since the 1990s, many figures suggest that there are more *former* Protestants in South Korea than there are Protestants (Baker 2007, 303).

As a consequence, Protestant Christianity's relationship to Korean modernity and modernness has been called into question, and today, churches need to forge the appearance of modernness. They sometimes attempt that through creating an association with unquestionably modern and authoritative spheres within contemporary Korean society—specifically, spheres of business and capitalist consumption (Nelson 2000; Kendall 2002; Abelmann 2003), as well as technology, as I explored in Chapter 2. By evoking business and commerce through architectural elements, church leaders hoped that their church and the religious activities within them would be seen as "modern," thus defined.

Arguably, Sarang Church was quite successful in building this perception. Under the leadership of Pastor Oh Jung Hyun, the church has become strongly associated with a "modern," corporate culture and received an influx of new members since the completion of the SGMC. Many of these new members expressed to me that they were initially drawn to the church because of the location in an upper-class district and their curiosity about the new building, describing the new space as beautiful [*arŭmdapta*] or comfortable/convenient [*p'yŏnhada*]. According to several long-standing members of Sarang and neighboring churches, most of the newcomers to Sarang are Christians who previously had been attending other churches. Some allege that the newcomers only want to be and be seen as "the kind of person who goes to Sarang." Often embedded in such comments is a judgment of new members as status-seekers hoping to elevate their social standing by associating with this church and its wealthy congregants.[74]

As an evangelical church, attracting new members is not only edifying for the leadership, but it also may be interpreted as a sign that the ministry or church is especially anointed or empowered by God. For this reason many members and leaders of Sarang Church are pleased with the congregation's growth subsequent to the building's construction. With the new building, church attendance has increased, affirming the pastor's leadership and the SGMC's prominent position in the imagined future of Korean Christianity and society. In this way, the claimed or attributed "success" and "growth" of Korean megachurches operates as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Just a Business"

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[74] Nicholas Harkness has noted similar perceptions of the people who attend Somang Church, another upper-middle class megachurch in Seoul. See Harkness, 2014: 52.

While Sarang is a popular and prospering church by many measures, some Koreans argue that the church has been too successful in adopting not only a corporate image but also a corporate culture. Throughout my field research in Seoul in 2014-2015, when I explained my research project, Koreans often informed me, "If you really want to know about Korean religion, then you shouldn't go to those big churches. They are just businesses."[75] Some churches help shape these characterizations and make these connections explicit. For example, in the bookstores of the churches in which I conducted my research, one would commonly find publications with titles like *CEO Cho Yonggi: Yoido Full Gospel Church Surpassing the World's Companies* [*CEO Cho Yonggi: Segye Ch'oillyu Kiŏbŭl Ttwiŏnŏmnŭn Yŏŭidosunbogŭmgyohoe*].

The apparent "business-like" quality of Korean Christianity has been well documented by several scholars. For instance, when religion scholar Harvey Cox examined the coincident growth of Korean Christianity and capitalism, he found the key to understanding their relationship was not Max Weber's Protestant ethic thesis, but rather the writings of Peter Drucker, a popular management consultant. Drawing on Drucker's theories about successful businesses, Cox explains the growth of both the church and the economy result in part from Cho Yonggi's organizational management. Cho's discipleship and evangelism training, Cox offers, puts his congregants through "a concentrated crash course in what millions of others who fill the lower and middle echelons of modern corporations learn at business schools and sales institutions" (Cox 1997; 234). To stop the analysis at this point, however, would be to perform and cement the very categories that are being contested through Cho's own insistence on being a CEO or critics' insistence that megachurches cannot be both like a business and a legitimate church. After all, Cho's relationship toward his congregants might, from another perspective, be illustrated using an analogy to stewardship, apprenticeship, or parenting, so one must wonder why Cho is being described as a CEO, alternately meant as either a compliment or insult. To begin to understand the frequency of such conversations about religion, business, and the authority that is delegated to each sphere within Korea, the analysis must not itself subscribe to those assumptions.[76]

What is required, instead, is a denaturalization of common assumptions about "religion" and "business" in order to examine the politics involved in maintaining and reshaping such distinctions. How these categories are defined is far from inevitable, as one could point out that religious institutions always need to earn money in order to maintain property, pay staff, and fund services, just as businesses constantly make moral decisions (including when that decision is, most commonly, to claim business activities are a-moral). We must ask, then, why would a church

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[75] This particular quote is taken from a conversation with young, male Korean acquaintance on 1 December 2014. It is, however, indicative of a broader sentiment I recorded in several conversations throughout the course of my field research in 2014 and 2015.

[76] Gil-Soo Han, Joy J. Han & Andrew Eungi Kim (2009) "Serving Two Masters": Protestant Churches in Korea and Money, International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church, 9:4, (333-360) provides a less reductive account of what they call the "religio-economic entrepreneurship" of Korean churches; however, their account, like Cox's, still presumes a strict division between money/economics and religious or sacred work and similarly describes Korean churches as "the rampant religio-economic entrepreneurship which facilitates the operation of churches almost as business organizations" (352).

fashion this particular identity? Why would critics of a given church want to label the church "just a business?" And what is to be gained or lost in establishing one identification over another?

Several Christians and pastors—both at Sarang and at other churches—offer that the critique that certain churches are "just businesses" reflects the speaker's jealousy. Because shame and "saving face" [*chemyŏn*] are important in Korean society, Koreans might label competing churches as "businesses" in order to discredit their perceived or attributed level of success. While this should not be ignored, this is not the only reason people would liken certain churches to businesses. This label's rhetorical force as an insult also depends upon certain historical commonalities between businesses and churches.

The derogatory nature of the phrase "just a business" is rooted in the 20th century economic history of South Korea. Since the 1960s, Korea's economy has been dominated by *chaebŏl*—large Korean conglomerates such as Samsung, LG, or Hyundai. These conglomerates initially followed the Japanese *Keiretsu* model, and, supported by government policies that discouraged imports and weakened foreign competition, these companies grew to the extent that in 2012, the largest ten *chaebŏl* accounted for over 75 percent of the South Korean gross domestic product (Kwŏn Ŭn-jung 2012). By the 1990s, *chaebŏl* and *chaebŏl* families were widely lauded for the so-called Korean "economic miracle" that unfolded through them (Janelli 1993, 81-88). However, the business failures surrounding the 1997 Asian financial crisis shook popular belief in this so-called miracle. The International Monetary Fund's bail-out and corporate governance reforms were experienced as a national shame. Consequently, Koreans began to challenge the triumphalist narrative of the "economic miracle," and many blamed *chaebŏl* for causing the crisis through widespread nepotism, financial mismanagement and misappropriation of funds, and imprudently generous government support extended to the largest firms.

Chaebŏl dominate the Korean economy to this day; they do so, however, under greater scrutiny from the public, with many Koreans holding conflicting feelings about *chaebŏl*. Korean people's conversations with me—a foreigner—often communicated this ambivalence about the success, power, and also perceived corruption of *chaebŏl*. If a person did not know me well, she would often express pride in *chaebŏl* companies because *chaebŏl* are the means through which Korea became prominent on a global scale. She would joke with me about Samsung phones being superior to iPhones or delight in the fact that my car, in America, was a Hyundai. On the other hand, closer acquaintances (especially younger workers or students of my own age) would express frustration or exhasperation with the hegemony of *chaebŏl*, the excessive lifestyles of *chaebŏl* executives, and the pressure that young workers experience at the bottom of the steep *chaebŏl* hierarchy.

That megachurches and *chaebŏl* have been censured for similar faults in recent years undoubtedly contributes to their association. Just as many *chaebŏl* families have been criticized for accepting exorbitant salaries, bonuses, and for forging contracts for the sake of personal gain, several megachurch pastors have been accused of embezzlement and fraud. Due to their size and influence on the domestic economy, *chaebŏl* have been criticized for suppressing smaller businesses, just as megachurches are often blamed for the failure of smaller churches, captured in, among other things, the title of a recent theological book, *Megachurches Must Die so Korean Churches May Live* (Lee Kye-Shun 2009).[77] This is fed by what sociologist Byung-Suh Kim calls

[77] Some studies indicate that the growth of some megachurches since the late 20th century results from Christians moving from smaller to larger churches. See Gallup Korea, *Han'guk*

the "Bigness syndrome" in Korea, referring to the cultural association of greater size with higher quality. Because Korean institutions are prejudged according to their size, larger institutions are given a competitive advantage, against which smaller institutions seldom survive (Kim Byung-Suh 2006). Additionally, just as *chaebŏl* leadership tends to remain within the family of the founder, it is not uncommon for founding pastors to appoint their sons as head pastor when they retire, as in the case of Somang Presbyterian Church and Myŏngsŏng Presbyterian Church. These resonances have intensified public criticism of each type of organization by showing the predominance of such practices across Korea's largest institutions.

Many Koreans also condemn the perceived government favoritism toward both *chaebŏl* and megachurches. This concern came to the fore during the construction of the SGMC. Not only is the building conspicuously across the street from the Supreme Court of South Korea, but in order for the adjacent Seocho subway station to flow directly into the SGMC, the church built part of the complex beneath the street separating the church from the government building. To its critics, the construction project had quite literally undermined public space and allowed the church to dig its way toward the seat of the Court.

Building beneath existing public streets is common in the United States, but (unbeknownst to the SGMC's American architects) this project was the first of its kind in South Korea. When construction began to encroach upon space under the adjacent road, 300 neighbors filed a suit with the Seoul Administrative Court, claiming that the Seocho District Office gave undue authorization for the construction and asking that its building permits be revoked. The court eventually decided to allow the SGMC to continue as designed, and the SGMC signed a lease with the government for the use of the space under the road. Many attribute this decision, however, to a confluence of factors that include political pressure from prominent members of the church; the fact that the judge and several managing Seocho District Office workers were devout Christians; and the fact that, by the time the court made its decision, the church had already invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the project and construction was well underway.[78] Arguably, the government was more lenient with Sarang because of its size and influence than they might have been with a smaller organization, and because of occasional situations like this, many view large Korean churches like Sarang as being, along with *chaebŏl*, the product of alliances between capitalist interests and the state.

Sarang Church is also associated with businesses because it is located in a district where many of Seoul's wealthiest families reside, and its congregation includes several business leaders and politicians. Geographer Ju Hui Judy Han has written about one particularly striking conflict at Sarang church between labor unions and a former Sarang Church elder, Sung-su Park, the CEO of

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Kaesin'gyoinŭi Kyohoe Hwaldonggwa Sinang Ŭisik [Report on the Survey of Church Activities and Religious Consciousness of Protestants in Korea]. (Seoul: Gallup Korea, 1998), 57.

[78] It is worth noting that SaRang now has to pay rent under the terms of its lease for the use of the space beneath the public road, an arrangement that could cause more significant issues for the church in the long-term. However, most people I spoke with believe that there will be no issue in renewing the contract due to the social and political prominence of SaRang's members, as well as the overwhelmingly Christian make-up of the deciding powers.

E-Mart Group.[79] When, in 2007, Park laid off over a thousand workers just days before a new law would have required E-Land to convert long-term irregular workers to full-time employees, protests erupted, including a few outside of Park's Sarang Church. Matters only worsened when Park, who is widely known to be a Christian, began to frame said protests as "Satan's temptations" and contest the morality of labor unions by indicating the absence of labor unions in the Bible. The conflict received national attention, and Park was repeatedly lampooned in the media. As Han explains, "What the convergence of E-Land protests…highlighted once again was the extent to which the prosperous megachurches like Sarang had become identified not with the suffering of low-wage workers but with the might of powerful conglomerates and political elites" (Han Judy 2015, 140).

While much more could be said to help contextualize contemporary sentiments about Korean businesses and megachurches, it is clear that when people describe churches as businesses, it is often intended to be an insult and in particular, an indictment of the church as corrupt in at least two senses. Financial corruption is the most apparent criticism implied in the accusation that a church is "just a business." Korean news media regularly report on alleged financial abuses within large churches, as exemplified by the unrelenting attention given to the charges of embezzlement and tax evasion brought against Yoido Full Gospel Church's lead pastor Cho Yonggi from 2011 through 2014. Yet the "corruption" of Korean churches is not limited to financial transgressions. Perhaps more significantly, referring to a church as "just a business" suggests that Koreans believe that churches and businesses should be markedly distinct. Thus, corruption is a charge of both social immorality and of perversion of the church's *raison d'être*.

The "Reformers"

> *"It can be a creative adventure for modern men to build a palace, and yet a nightmare to have to live in it."*
>
> -Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*

A united, public voice for these criticisms issues from a group of Sarang congregants who protest across the street from the building each Sunday. This group refers to themselves as the "reformers" [*kaengshinwiwŏnhoe*] and to them, the SGMC building is not only problematic because of its expense.[80] They believe that the church's daily use of the lavish building functions to shift the church's theological values while reinforcing both the idea of the church as a "franchise" or "business," and the steep organizational hierarchy centered on the main pastor, Jung Hyun Oh.

The reformers are long-standing members of Sarang Church; in fact, many of them helped to found the church in the 1980s. They are primarily middle- or upper-class Koreans between fifty

[79] E-mart Group is a subsidiary of Shinsegae, one of the largest retail corporations in South Korea.

[80] Estimates of the total project costs reach as high as $300 million USD.

and eighty-years-old, although younger family members may accompany them to church. The reformers insist that they have not left Sarang Church, but refusing to worship in the SGMC under Pastor Oh, they hold separate services each Sunday at the former, smaller location of Sarang Church just a few miles away near Gangnam station. They believe that the church's daily use of the lavish building operates contrary to the formation of a Christian spiritual community.

On one cold Sunday morning in March of 2015, I spoke with a dozen reformers who were protesting across the street from the SGMC. They held signs urging pastor Oh to "repent for his lies." They summarize their protest in a short list of three grievances. First, they claim that pastor Oh is dishonest and unrepentant because they have evidence that he plagiarized part of his doctoral dissertation; he insists that he did not. Second, they believe pastor Oh's authority as head pastor is illegitimate. Although founding pastor Ok Han-hŭm had appointed Oh, in 2013 (after founding pastor Ok's death) Ok's son alleges that he uncovered a letter the late pastor Ok had written expressing disapproval of his successor's leadership and stewardship of the church's resources. Third, they suspect that pastor Oh mismanaged the SGMC building project and embezzled funds. Though the congregation funded the SGMC's construction, Sarang leaders refuse to release financial records to the congregation. As I spoke to more protestors several weeks that winter, it was the third complaint and other concerns about the SGMC building project that received the most attention and elaboration.

Figure 16. "Reformers" protest across the street from Sarang Church on a Sunday morning in early 2015. Photo by author.

One picketer, a woman in her seventies, expressed that she was not only upset with Sarang Church, but also with the larger trend toward mega- or multisite churches of which the SGMC is a part. "Big and expensive churches are not good at all," she repeated. "There should be only small, community churches. There is no need for a church to be so excessively big like this." When I asked what a church should do when they have a gifted or charismatic pastor that many people want to hear preach, she paused for a moment. She smiled warmly and agreed that this was a difficult question. Still, she was unsympathetic to this concern and explained that megachurches will always have problems which are inherent to their size. Smaller churches enable a "community of spirit"; this is more important than the quality or entertainment of a sermon, no matter how famous or talented a pastor may be. "The pastor needs to speak to your heart [*maŭm*]," she said as she pressed her gloved hand firmly into the down coat over my chest. "This is the kind of close relationship the pastor and congregant should have. You should touch to each other's hearts, but because of a building like this, it is impossible."

The most common complaint I heard was that the SGMC—with its modern appearance and expensive or luxurious features—signals a dangerous transformation of Korean Christianity that prioritizes money, numerical membership, and other markers of institutional success over other (what they consider to be more Biblical) concerns like spreading the Gospel or helping one's neighbor. When I spoke with another reformer, he tried to politely tell me his opinion of head pastor Oh by saying, "Maybe he is a good businessman, but…", communicating both that business leadership can be seen as admirable while also communicating that pastors should be held to different standards. When I asked him explicitly if he thought frustrations with megachurches were related to a larger social dissatisfaction with the actions of *chaebŏl*, he immediately said no, and then his expression turned blank, as if this were the first time he had considered the parallels. Finally, he said, "No, I do not blame the leaders of *chaebŏl* because they are not trying to be Christian."

For him, Christian tradition and Biblical teachings—not business ethics or legislation—define the standards for church practices, and he regrets that his congregation lost sight of this in the construction of the SGMC. A successful businessman himself, he made significant financial contributions to the SGMC building fund because he initially believed the church was being called to grow in this way. Yet as construction progressed, he began to see his initial support as motivated by an uncritical acceptance of Sarang's preoccupation with numerical and financial growth. Upon reflection he laments:

> We took pride that Sarang was leading Korean Christianity…but the new building is such a monster, and we realized that we are monsters.

For this former church elder, the debates surrounding the SGMC building were no less than debates over the true nature of the work that would take place within its walls. When I asked him if the new membership after the completion of the SGMC somehow tempered his criticisms of the project, he told me plainly, "Some people may feel a good experience when they enter luxurious buildings, but we may lose the main purpose of our church."

In conversations with several reformers, it became clear that their anxieties were focused on the SGMC building project and what it might signal for Sarang Church or Korean Christianity more generally. Anthropologist Laurel Kendall captures this mood in her description of South Korea at the turn of the century: "We witness the vertigo of a society that has come to question the social costs of its own swift success, posing its critiques and frustrations" (Kendall 2002, 4). We can see such critiques and frustrations now coded through their critique of churches as "just businesses." For the reformers, the SGMC confirms their deepest fears that their church and its pastor are now only a business run by a C.E.O.

In late 2014, a mock-documentary entitled *Quo Vadis* was released, which focused on the financial malfeasance and sexual abuse that allegedly pervades Korean megachurches. In the film and its promotional posters, the SGMC is featured as emblematic of alleged megachurch corruption.

Figure 17. Movie poster for the 2014 mock-documentary, Quo Vadis. An actor, intended to resemble Michael Moore, stands before Sarang Church's SGMC, holding a sign that says "Quo Vadis" (Latin for "Where are we going?") with the subtitle, "This thing is not a church." (Kim Jae-hwan, 2014).

The film was well-received and represented an endorsement of the reformers' criticisms of the SGMC by the media and general public. But many portrayals of the conflict overlook the ways in which the reformers are themselves also a part of this larger culture in which business has become strongly authoritative. For example, their greatest objection is that pastor Oh misused funds and mismanaged the church by building such an extravagant campus, and so they demand that Pastor Oh resign. They believe that if this happens, then the church will be able to resolve its issues, becoming less of a "business" and more of a "church." At first glance this may seem like a logical solution: if Pastor Oh is causing the church to act too much like a business, then by firing Pastor Oh, the church will begin to correct its course. However, the logic underlying this solution would suggest that conceptions of "religion" and "business" in South Korea are more entangled than is often acknowledged.

During a sermon in May of 2015, the pastor of Sarang Church's English ministry, Douglas Park informed the congregation that the previous day a man was arrested in Seoul subway station for taking cell phone pictures up women's skirts, and that this man turned out to be a pastor at Sarang Church. Although he openly acknowledged the church's embarrassment—he even joked, "Sarang already has enough problems"—he mentioned the event because he wanted to consider how the church should respond. Pastor Park said that although he does not endorse the pastor's actions, if he were in charge of the church he would not fire the pastor because this response would be inappropriate to a church. "The moment you insist that the pastor should be fired you are insisting that the church is a business and not a family. Family members can't be fired." Such an argument (made by one of the auxiliary pastors, no less) calls into question the reformers' own understanding of "church" and its supposed difference from a "business." While the reformers argue that the church should not behave like a business, what pastor Park's remarks bring to light is that the reformers may, nevertheless, unconsciously think of their relationship with their head pastor in terms of an employment contract: because Pastor Oh mismanaged the church organization and its resources, he should be fired.[81]

Moreover, in spite of the fact that some take issue with the building and its aesthetics, its general popularity signals that the prevailing architectural design gives expression to something extant within the society, reflecting many other elements of a particular moment in time. Attractive architecture, as with any work of art, is not merely the product of an autonomous individual or small group (Bourdieu 1993). A work of art is always the product of complex practices involving not just the apparent "creator," but also the culture and infrastructures that favor some objects over

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[81] While I found Pastor Park's sermon to be revelatory of the underlying business logic of the SaRang church reformers, the categorical distinctions he invokes in his discussion are likely influenced by his upbringing as a Korean American. I thank Professor Jung Hyang-jin for this critical insight. While in the United States there is a clear demarcation of "business" and "family" spheres—a demarcation that marks nepotism as taboo, for example—this distinction does not transfer to South Korean society well. One could argue that over the past several decades, Korean notions of business and family life have become significantly more Western and, to some extent, align with American norms, but as Samsung, LG, Hyundai, Hankook, and any number of the *chaebŏl* families can attest, a firm distinction between business and family cannot be well articulated; not only is nepotism permissible, it is often the *modus operandi* of management succession.

others. So in the case of the SGMC, the resulting building should not be seen simply as del Monte's or Pastor Oh's creation, as if it were in direct opposition to the will of the society at large; rather, it is a product of the social negotiation between several perspectives, interests, and tastes (Bourdieu 1993). Thus, the SGMC project illustrates that many South Koreans find business aesthetics appealing and appropriate to a church building. On the other hand, despite these indications that the business sphere enjoys an elevated, almost hegemonic, authority within South Korean society, the fact that *some* churches (and not others) are derogated as "just businesses" signals that many still believe that the role of religion is, or at least should be, held distinct.

Secularism in Seoul

"The challenge we face as designers [of religious buildings] isn't just about architecture, it's about religion as a whole -- what role does it play in society?"

-Andres Jaque[82]

Thus far, this chapter has focused on debates surrounding the SGMC to illustrate how the categories of "business" and "religion" are contested in South Korea. Put in familiar sociological terms, one might say that the debates about whether the SGMC and the church's public image are appropriate is a debate about whether or not the church has been somehow "profaned." Following religion scholar Mircea Eliade's assertion that religious thought, at its foundation, rests on the division of space and time into the sacred and profane (Eliade 1959), many scholars employ the language of the sacred and profane to characterize religious activities and beliefs. The terms "sacred" and "profane" are useful here; however, it is perhaps not in the sense of Eliade's discussion of "sacred" and "profane," which assumes religion has a unique relationship to the "sacred." While few would argue that a space that Christians use to praise and commune with God is anything but "sacred" space, in this case the sacrality was achieved in part through denying the aesthetics traditionally associated with the Christian religion.

If we accept my informants' descriptions of sacrality as being a perceived quality of space, then in the case of the SGMC we find that although architects understand that churches of an "older style" (with steeples and stone or brick facades) might be immediately identifiable as religious spaces, they aim for a different aesthetic because megachurches that conform to more traditional church design often fail to achieve sacrality. "We've lost the kind of sense of sacred space," del Monte explained, "just because [churches have] just gotten so big that this whole tall cathedral thing, and light and vertical—it just doesn't work anymore." "Traditional" churches conform to expectations of religious space, but in doing so they may fail to inspire awe and foster communal sentiments. Indeed, one of the main reasons why del Monte and his firm have become popular with large churches around the globe is that they strive to create a sense of "awe, wonder, but also

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[82] Quoted in Sheena McKenzie. "How do you design a building when your client is God?" CNN website, 23 December 2013. Accessed July 28 2016. www.cnn.com/2013/12/23/world/how-do-you-design-a-building/.

community" in each context, even if it diverges from conventional Western understandings of Christian space. In the context of Seoul, they have found that the sense of sacredness can be elicited by luxury department stores and office buildings, and thus, they argue churches would do best to adopt this aesthetic.[83]

Yet, at the same time that this view has advanced a new trend in Korean church architecture, clearly not everyone is as comfortable with the SGMC's deviation from the assumed analogical relationship between the categories sacred/profane and religious/secular. This is why so many insist upon labeling the SGMC *either* sacred, religious space *or* profane, commercial space, as if this dichotomy were natural or necessary. It is also why embedded within conversations about the SGMC we find a coded, largely unconscious contest over not just religious space, but the very space of religion within South Korean society.

The terms of this debate—the sacred and the profane—have long been a centerpiece of social scientific theory about religion. Eliade's work was seminal to discussions of sacred and profane space, and the same concepts were central to several other influential social scientists. Emile Durkheim, the founder of sociology, asserted that religious life is, at its heart, a preoccupation with shaping and maintaining a distinction between the sacred and the profane. His definition of religion makes that explicit: "This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought" (Durkheim 1915, 37). But while the classification of the world into the "sacred" and "profane" is common enough to make such an analytic tool useful, examples like Sarang Church and other large churches in Korea might challenge Durkheim's assertion that the regulation of sacrality and profanity is "the distinctive trait of religious thought," and, instead, suggest that under different conditions religion itself may be an object undergoing classification as either "sacred" or "profane." After all, if a church, as a religious entity, could determine what is sacred or profane space, then we would not hear such critical discussion about whether or not their building is indeed a church and not just a place of business.

The voices of Sarang Church leadership have made little appearance in this paper. The primary reason these voices have not received extensive attention thus far is that the official positions of the church seem largely insignificant when it comes to public discussions of whether or not their church building is sacred. To Sarang leadership the SGMC is simultaneously sacred, religious, and modern, without contradiction; yet, notably, Sarang Church leadership does not have a definitive or final word on whether or not their building is sacred, nor on whether their organization is profane or "just a business." To focus on the church's official position would be to continue in the assumption that religion is the arbiter of the sacred and the profane, which as this article posits, it is not. Instead, messages from the larger society have informed the church leadership that the corporate sphere is, in a certain sense, sacred because it will elicit feelings people consider to be sacred. At the same time, the church is being told by the "reformers" within the church, as well as many critics within the broader society, that to act like or look like a business is profane. "Religion" is not the regulator of the "sacred" and the "profane," or the "pure" and the "corrupt;" rather, "religion" itself is one of the realms that undergoes regulation.

[83] For an ethnographic analysis of how religious practices and aesthetics attune to different media forms and sociopolitical landscapes, see Charles Hirschkind. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

For this reason, recent scholarship on secularism and the secular may help to explain why Koreans care whether a church like Sarang is a church, a business, or both. Anthropologist Talal Asad first brought this discussion to the forefront of the anthropology of religion. He offered that what is "religion" or "religious" is not a natural object, but rather a category that is constituted through practical means in social and political life (Asad 2011, 28). Tracing the emergence of the category of "religion" and its policing in varied secular contexts, he states, "the concept 'religion' is not merely a word: it connects to vocabularies that bring persons and things, desires and practices together in particular traditions in distinctive ways" (Asad 2011, 3). Many other scholars have moved this debate forward by illustrating that "religion" as a category emerged through the social and political processes of secularism in modern Europe,[84] and the process of its definition regulates a particular relationship between religion and the political in various contexts (For expanded historical accounts of this process, see Asad 2003, 2009; Masuzawa 2005; Taylor 2007). This helps in part to explain why assumptions about a unique relationship between religion and sacrality can be misleading. Because "religion" is a category constructed through modern, social life—not a single phenomenon with certain positive content—it follows that religion would have no necessary or distinctive relationship to the sacred.

From this turn toward secularism, a considerable body of literature today attends to the role that the state or the political sphere plays in regulating the place of religion, particularly under Western liberal forms of governance. Because South Korea is a constitutional democracy founded expressly on the separation of church and state, such arguments can be quite illustrative in this case. Anthropologist Hussein Ali Agrama's "active principle of secularism" is useful in this regard (Agrama 2012, 72). Agrama argues that under modern liberalism, the law concretizes and produces an unstable relationship between the state and religion so that legal secularism can both limit religion—through defining it—and intervene in religion for the sake of "public order." Agrama indicates how secularism is the working out of this relationship (religion and the political), as we see through the government's legal entanglement with large churches like Sarang in matters of space and city planning.[85]

What Agrama's concept of the "active principle of secularism" highlights about the SGMC is the complex entanglement of not just religion and politics or religion and business, but the way that contemporary secularism in South Korea fundamentally involves economics and business governance. While discussions of secularism tend to focus specifically on the regulation of the religious and the political, in South Korea the economic sphere is central to the secular order. Because of the widely presumed relationship between 20th century "economic miracle" of capitalist development and Protestant Christianity, the economic sphere plays a pivotal role in

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[84] For expanded historical accounts of this process, see Talal Asad. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. (Stanford University Press, 2003) and *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Tomoko Masuzawa. *The Invention of World Religions: or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. (University of Chicago Press, 2005); Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[85] See also Ju Hui Judy Han. "Urban Megachurches and Contentious Religious Politics in Seoul," in *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City: Aspiration and Urbanization in the Twenty-First Century* edited by Peter Van Der Veer, 133-151. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

constituting the place of Christianity within the nation. For example, the criticism that a church is "just a business" is undoubtedly due in part to the numerous indictments and convictions of pastors for fraud or embezzlement. But this begs the question: why would the state have interest in or power over the financial proceedings of a religious institution, given that there is a legally-defined separation of church and state?

Following Agrama, the answer is that the legally guaranteed "separation" of church and state allows the secular government to constantly redefine what that separation looks like in the name of the "public order." In contemporary South Korea, the alleged mismanagement of funds by the leaders of large organizations (religious or not) is found to be in the interest of the public order because it too closely resembles the alleged financial mismanagement of the *chaebŏl* that, most believe, lead to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis in South Korea and brought national shame to the country by throwing its "economic miracle" into question. Reinforcing financial practices that the government perceives to be in the best interest of the nation is of critical importance, which supersedes any guarantee to the "free" exercise of religion. In other words, secularity in South Korea cannot be understood as simply a regulation of religion in relation to the state—it is critically also about regulating the relationship between religion, the state, *and* the economic sphere, particularly in a nation where the regulation of consumer capitalism has played such a pivotal role in nationalist projects.[86]

The Korean public, on the other hand, seems to be invested in maintaining distinctions between church and businesses, or religion and economic life, as well. Their motivations are different, however. We can perhaps best see these varied concerns in the city government's interactions with Sarang over the underground spaces occupied by the SGMC. In the face of the contractual resolution of the legal conflict, much of the Korean public has chosen to reject the legitimacy or propriety of such entanglements between church and state. Rather than redefine the role of religion in their society, they deny that megachurches who engage in such practices are churches at all by labeling them "just a business." As the SGMC and its success can attest, the precise definition of "business" and "church" are still unclear, with new members attracted to the commercial aesthetic at the same time that other members are repulsed by it. Yet both sides of these conversations seem to understand that the labels are more than merely semantic; they make fundamental claims about the position that religion can occupy within Korea, and whether churches can or would be able to stand in opposition to the state and other powerful economic actors.

Illegal Ontologies

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[86] For ethnographic accounts of the social and political regulation of the consumer economy, see Laura Nelson. *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea*. Columbia University Press, 2000; Nancy Abelmann. *The Melodrama of Mobility.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003. For a brief discussion of Christianity's presumed role in economic development and nation-building, see Andrew Eungi Kim. "Political Insecurity, Social Chaos, Religious Void and the Rise of Protestantism in Late Nineteenth Century Korea." *Social History.* 26-3 (October): 122.

Official church positions about the building have had a greater influence in the ongoing legal conflicts about the building project. Completed in 2013, the SGMC is famous not only for its design, but also for the circumstances surrounding its construction and a series of conflicts between the church, its neighbors, and the municipal government office. These conflicts culminated in suits that briefly halted the building's construction. In the first legal dispute, three-hundred neighbors filed a civil suit at the Seocho district office and alleged that the construction project was in violation of key building codes. For example, the church design—which extends eight floors underground—incorporated space beneath the city street that separates the SGMC and the Supreme Court building. The design also restructured the adjacent subway station such that it would exit directly into the church. If not explicitly illegal, the unprecedented use of underground, "public" space was seen by many neighbors to be presumptuous, at best. They asked the district office to intervene lest the church undermine the public space and dig its way toward the seat of the Court. Sarang Church, on the other hand, argued that not only were none of the building features explicitly illegal, but that these features should be considered "holy infrastructure," or material arrangements critical to their religious practice. After a brief hold on construction, the district office allowed the SGMC to be built as designed, but leased the space beneath the city street in a contract set for renewal or expiration in 2019.

Infrastructures, or what anthropologist Brian Larkin has defined as "material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space," (Larkin 2013, 327) have become an important object for many anthropologists, who have attended to infrastructures in their various modes: technical, technopolitical, aesthetic, semiotic, and so forth (Mitchell 2002, 2011; Mrazek 2002; Larkin 2008; Collier 2011; Fennell 2011; Anand 2011; Appel 2012). Sociologist Armand Mattelart (1996, 2000) noted that, much like the concept of technology, Enlightenment ideas of human progress as emerging from the free circulation of goods and ideas have informed the emergence of the concept of infrastructure. For this reason, it is not surprising to see infrastructures and "infrastructure" discourse at the heart of conversations about the shaping of modern society and its futures. Even more recently, the theoretical "turns" toward alternate ontologies and multispecies ethnography have further expanded discussions about infrastructure. Scholars have explored how non-technical (that is, plant, animal, or even "elemental") infrastructures participate in the structuring human, social worlds. For example, recently media scholar John Durham Peters (2015) has explored both technological and natural environments as types of media infrastructures enabling human life. Moreover, multispecies ethnographers such as anthropologist Anna Tsing (2017) are bringing attention to the ways in which infrastructures participate in structuring *more than human* lifeways. For example, she considers how anthropogenic water engineering can be said to create infrastructures that provide favorable conditions for certain plants and bacteria to thrive, at the expense of others.

Returning to Sarang Church, these varied shifts and turns in discussions of infrastructure invite the question: What could be learned from an object such as "holy infrastructure" if explored in terms of both the social *and spiritual* lifeways it might structure? In other words, what might emerge if we consider symmetrically (Bloor 1976) the theological position that the SGMC's design provides the material conditions for not only the human bodies that practice Christianity, but for the Holy Spirit itself to flow, communicate, and otherwise participate in the lifeways of Seoul? This paper engages in theologically engaged anthropology (Lemons 2018) to consider the social and theological investments in this building project and the challenges they pose for its regulation by the municipal government. The contested ontological status of church infrastructures as either holy or not is something that the existing legal separation of church and state struggles to adjudicate.

I conclude by suggesting that the recognition of theological and secular ontological claims does not necessarily forestall their negotiation. Rather, this recognition may be a first step in the process of worldbuilding (Zigon 2017), through which we might imagine and build onto-ethical foundations that are more adequate to negotiating claims to space in increasingly dense cityscapes.

Holy Infrastructure

In Seoul, a bustling city of fifteen-million people with three times the density of New York City, delimiting one's activity and attention can help to make life more legible, as I had done when I constructed the scope of my ethnographic field. I reinforced those boundaries to focus my attention, and I insisted to interlocutors on numerous occasions that Sarang Church was not really the type of church I was interested in. Yet despite my attempts to exclude Sarang Church from my attention, too many invitations and opportunities arose, and I found myself in the thick of the SGMC building controversy. It was as if I was pulled in.

The first question I sought to answer was: how did such a large construction project, with an estimated cost of up to 300 million U.S. dollars, proceed without prior consent from the district planning office for the use of underground space and its connection to the subway station? One common answer that I received is that the American architects of The Beck Group of Dallas, Texas misunderstood Seoul's building codes. Building beneath existing public streets is common in the United States, but (apparently unbeknownst to the American architects) this project was the first of its kind in South Korea.

When I spoke to the project's Chief Design Officer, Rick del Monte, in 2015, he said his firm was unaware that this element would be an issue. He could not say whether the South Korean actors involved proceeded with the design in either knowledge or ignorance. Yet, he did describe how Sarang Church leaders were intimately involved in the project. Church representatives consistently tried to boldly "push" the design to accord with their architectural ideals. The final design reflected some of the church leaders' influence, which he jokingly referred to as "Gangnam style." It includes the elements that would prove controversial, such as the underground walkway, and a large courtyard (which the church presents to the neighborhood as a concession for "public space"). Taking on the aesthetic qualities of a corporate, office building and transgressing boundaries presumed to separate "public" from "religious" space, these design choices created the impetus for the civil suit. Still, I never received a clear answer as to whether the apparent transgressions were deliberate.

Figure 18. Left: the original proposal from The Beck Group. Right: the final architectural model for the SGMC.

I asked another South Korean church architect if it was conceivable that among all the contractors, Korean architects employed by Beck, members of the church, and Sarang church project managers, no one recognized that this design was a departure from precedent, if not legal stricture. The topic brought a wry smile to his face. Sarang Church's presumed knowledge or ignorance—though critical to the moral assessment of the building project—was of little consequence to Korean architects, builders, and city planners. Building codes, he explained, can proceed improvizationally, with new codes being determined largely by the political, economic, and social pressure of those invested. Codes can be the result of "asking for forgiveness rather than permission," and then if forgiveness is granted, that creates precedent for future construction projects. "Of course, it is usually *large* projects that are more willing to test the rules, and a smaller project probably couldn't do that," he added. But the large size of such projects also makes them more conspicuous and, thus, more likely to be challenged in court.

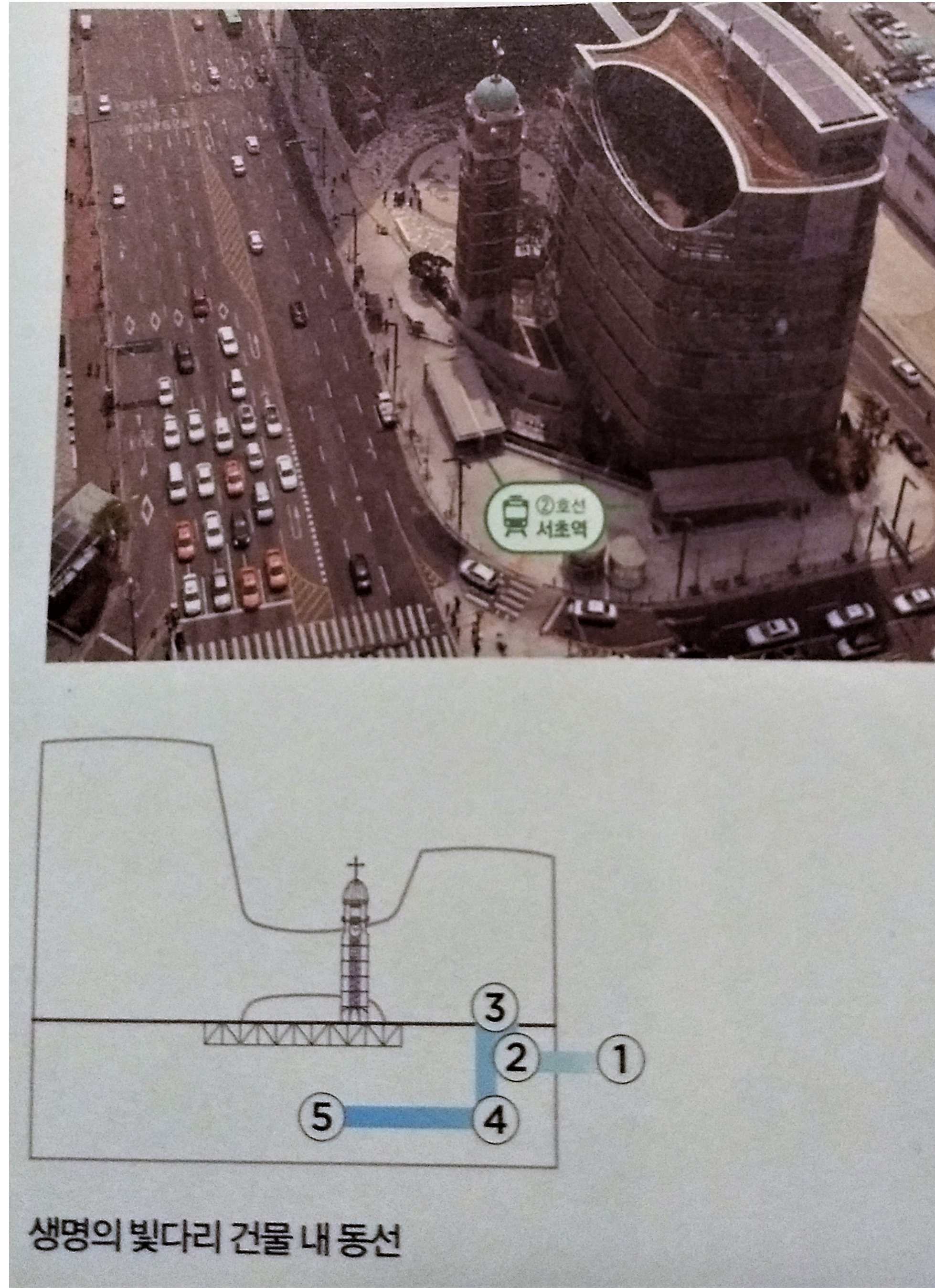

Figure 19. A photo and diagram of the SGMC building in relation to the new Seocho station exit, as captured in Sarang Church's book on the project design.

The decision to allow the church to be built as designed, however, was far from the end of the conflict, and the decision was appealed. In a suit filed at the Seoul Administrative Court, neighbors now claimed that the district offices' decision was illegitimate because several officials in the Seocho district office either belonged to Sarang Church, were Christians (and thus, too

sympathetic to the church's case), or were potentially influenced by church members, many of whom were wealthy or otherwise powerful citizens of Seoul. This suit, too, was ruled in the church's favor.

Since these decisions, Sarang Church continues to try to repair relations with their critical public. As Sarang Church's Senior Pastor Oh Jung-hyun stated at a press conference, 'The controversy made me realize the importance of communication between the church and society. The Church will put effort into restoring the spiritual motives in Korean churches….We are not pushing the construction just for us. We will build a strong missionary infrastructure and serve regional churches and, furthermore, local churches as well.' Sarang Church representatives continue to communicate their position through regular public statements and the publication in 2015 of a 500-page book which offers justifications for even the most minute design decisions, characterizing them as a part of their 'holy infrastructure.' [*kŏrukhan inp'ŭra*]

It is worth noting that within the Korean phrase "holy infrastructure" [*kŏrukhan inp'ŭra*], "holy" is an adjective form of the verb "to be holy." Thus, "holy" modifies the noun "infrastructure" instead of indicating within the phrase itself that the infrastructure transmits holy substances. Nevertheless, the building is characterized as a medium for the sacred regularly. According to Pastor Oh, the building's features enable the communication, flow, and manifestation of grace, love, spiritual experience, and God's Kingdom. For example, the use of a "mega-truss" to eliminate interior walls and pillars that might visually or physically separate a person from the sanctuary's altar is said to achieve the "unobstructed communication of grace" [*makhim ŏmnŭn ŭnhye ŭi sot'ong*]. The passageway from the redesigned subway station into the church is called the "Bridge of Living Light" [*saengmyŏng ŭi bit tari*] through which "breathing, Spiritual communication with Jesus begins" [*Yesunimgwa hamkke hohŭp'anŭn yŏngjŏng sot'ongi shijaktoemnida*].

Figure 20. The "mega-truss" that enables the "unobstructed communication of grace." This photo. which was shot from a perspective that gives the mega-truss a visual similarity to a cross, is featured in Sarang Church's book about the building project.

Sarang Church's publication of the design book mentioned earlier and the ongoing display of building materials and blueprints within the finished church further encourage the imagination of "holy infrastructure." Infrastructures often disavow their own importance, and it is through receding into the background that their directive force may be animated, as others have shown (Star 1999, Collier 2011, Elyachar 2010, Larkin 2008). But here, the exhibition of building materials invites congregants to reflect on the mundane—but deliberate—choices that coordinate certain spiritual effects.

Figure 21. Building materials, architectural renderings, models, and blueprints displayed in the completed SGMC building in 2015, two years after the projects' completion. Photo by author.

Of course, the technical operation of "holy infrastructure" as enabling forms of spirituality is much less important to non-Christians than the building projects' symbolic operation relative to the "place" of Christianity in South Korean society. The South Korean Constitution defines church-state separation such that: All citizens shall enjoy the freedom of religion, no state religion shall be recognized, and religion and state shall be separated. The building challenges the circumscription of Christianity demanded by some interpretations of church-state separation. Restructuring the subway station, eliding the distinction between "public" space and the church's courtyard, and building beneath a street that separates the church from the Supreme Court can be

seen as attempts to symbolically redefine the relationship between Christianity, the state, and the public.

For this reason, non-Christian neighbors have urged me to take a cynical position toward the theological argument about "holy infrastructure." It is all a rationalization or a public relations strategy, they insist. Indeed, it would be too simplistic to frame this conflict as exclusively about the opposition of religious and secular claims on urban space. For example, I have written elsewhere that political economic concerns about the place of large firms in South Korean society are also being staged through this particular controversy. Without denying that other factors play a role, the theological concept of "holy infrastructure" is pivotal to this conflict between Christian and secular claims to objects and city spaces. It is a sincere concern that structures debates within Korean Christian communities as well. For example, Sarang Church's Pastor Oh makes the theological import of "holy infrastructure" explicit by claiming that the construction project has brought about spiritual renewal: "God not only did the task of constructing the building, but in the process, worked until we ourselves were made new on the inside." A similar appreciation for this spiritual, transformational capacity of built space animates Christian objections to the SGMC building as well. Critics within Sarang Church agree that the material construction is reflective and determinative of spiritual conditions, but they see the SGMC as an almost "*un*-holy infrastructure." As one man told me, "[When the project began] We took pride that Sarang was leading Korean Christianity…but the new building is such a monster, and we realized that we are monsters."

While there may be many other factors shaping the SGMC building project, focusing briefly on the theological significance of "holy infrastructure" brings forth the ways in which divergent understandings of church infrastructure contour Sarang Church's relationship to its critics and to the municipal government. We might call these conflicting ontological claims about who or what is structured by this infrastructure, and as a result whose movement or what movements the city government can or should regulate. The district office, and later the administrative court, is asked to answer what is being regulated. Is it the material structure of social life—over which the district government has legal jurisdiction; is it the material structure of grace and the Holy Spirit—which might challenge the government officials who are restricted by law from impeding the freedom of religion; or is it some combination of both? And it is this indeterminacy or disagreement that makes the SGMC case so vexing.

We might imagine this situation in line with the recent work of scholars like anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2016), who has illustrated the ways in which certain secular ideals are contradicted by their enactments regularly, if not by necessity. In this case, secular governance is based on the promise that the state and its bureaucratic arms will accommodate multiple ontologies without intervening or contravening ontologies identified as "religious." Such a pluralistic position is perhaps easiest when ontology—like certain understandings of religion—is understood to be purely ideal, philosophical, or a matter of cognitive belief. But clearly, the promise of plurality is challenged when religious "beliefs" require their own infrastructures, or when they become concretized in streets, subway stations, courtyards, and human actions.

People as Holy Infrastructure

The difficulties in accommodating a plurality of ontological claims becomes even more intractable if we consider sociologist AbdouMaliq Simone's (2004) theorization of "people as infrastructure." Extending from a Foucauldian understanding of discipline and the role of individuals in the dispersion of governmental power, Simone's work details how a person in her or himself can be seen to be a "platform providing for and reproducing life in the city" (2004, 408). This notion is useful in considering the SGMC's second legal conflict: the appeal of the Seocho district office's decision. "People as infrastructure" accords with both a Christian understanding of humans as the "instruments of God" and the concerns of the SGMC building's critics, who argue that Christian sympathies and beliefs disable Seocho district officials from being legitimate officers of a secular society.

After the initial suit was unable to halt or alter the construction of the SGMC, neighbors and business owners appealed the decision and turned their criticism toward the public officials and their alleged inability to act impartially. This second conflict was mediated by preceding events that presented similar challenges to constitutional secularism after the 2008 election of President Lee Myung-bak, who was a Christian and megachurch congregant. Lee appointed Christians to several high-ranking positions, including those responsible for producing national maps for public administration. These new maps marked churches as significant places within the city, while other religious sites such as Buddhist temples were excluded. In 2008, many Buddhists protested, claiming the map showed state favor toward Christianity, and as a result, the South Korean legislature created a new article to a law which states that public officials shall conduct their affairs impartially without discrimination owing to their religions.

This recent law was the grounds for the appeal of the district office's decision. Plaintiffs claimed that the Seocho district office's decision could not be understood as 'impartial' because of the religious beliefs and/or sympathies of the officials. Being Christian, in other words, cast doubt on their ability to represent and serve the public—a public which in this appeal is presumed not just to be secular in the sense that no particular religion is favored, but perhaps secular in the sense that its individual members should not have religious commitments at all.

The potency of individuals as infrastructure, in many ways, galvanizes social discord. On the Sunday morning that I spoke with reformers protesting near the SGMC, a woman congregant of the church named Esther saw me (a tall, blonde woman) with the protestors and grew curious, if not concerned. Once she learned I was an anthropologist, Esther was insistent that I needed to speak with her in order to understand the situation properly. At this point, the older woman reformer to whom I was speaking was holding my left hand, which I understood to be a tactile demonstration of the kind of 'close' relationship she argued that Christian practice should foster.

I told Esther that I would love to talk with her as soon as I was done speaking with the reformers. She stayed close, interrupting the reformers whenever she disagreed with their remarks. Esther urged me repeatedly to go back across the street to the church; "*there*," she stressed, we could talk. After several minutes, Esther took hold of my right hand. With each disagreement, she tried to draw my body away from the protestors and toward the church, until I became the rope in a tug-of-war—the two elderly women, each holding one of my hands, pulled me in opposing directions both toward and away from the SGMC. Men shouted at Esther, urging her to leave. "Stop bothering her!" they yelled. During my ethnographic research, I sometimes found myself searching for interlocutors who might be willing or interested to speak with me at all; this was not one of those occasions. Instead, nearly everyone I spoke with seemed to understand the

infrastructural potentialities of people, as I found my body pressed into the role of mediator—a conduit that they believed could be activated for either camp.

If we extend our discussion of infrastructure to take "people as infrastructure,"—in this case, 'people as holy infrastructure'—we may consider differently who may or may not constitute a secular body politic (within any particular formulation of secularity). People's ideas, attitudes, and actions can be obstructions of grace just like non-human, material arrangements can; indeed, this is far from a new idea from a Christian theological perspective. But again, this is the very understanding that Sarang Church's neighbors argued made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Seocho district officials to legitimately enforce building codes. This is all to say that in this chapter, consideration of the ontology of "(people as) holy infrastructure" can open up perhaps another entry point to thinking through the ongoing challenges of secular democratic societies; it is an opportunity to imagine how one might secure equality among its citizens, irrespective of the what they, in their buildings and their bodies, may enable or foreclose.

Coda

In this dissertation, I have explored how various technologies—and the economic, national, and moral investment in technology itself—are imbricated in the Korean Christianity found in transnational multisite churches. Technology, here, is not antithetical to religious life. Technology is not a profane contagion to Christian tradition, nor is Christianity seen as something external to life in the IT age. Rather, the foregoing chapters illustrate how technology and Christianity are mutually constitutive.

In some contexts, people may disaggregate religion from technology or technology from religion. In the case of the IT Missions School, narratives about the IT Age serve to illustrate that technology carries special prestige in contemporary life. It is seen as the driving force of history, and thus, the future. However, these narratives play off of a broader technological progressivism in order to suggest that technology's progress is never achieved without Christianity. While some people might imagine technology without Christianity, Korean Christians argue that they are two aspects of God's larger design. They help to form the Church incarnate into the cyborg Body of Christ.

At other moments, we see how technologies are so imbricated into Christian practice that technological objects take on their own theological roles and meanings. The opacity of technological systems facilitates Christian humility and the exercise of faith. Screens transmit the Holy Spirit and coordinate Christian community, enabling the multisite church to be imagined and embodied as one. Church architecture brings building materials and Christian bodies into coordination as "holy infrastructures" for the transmission of the Holy Spirit. Yet under the most ideal conditions, technologies are so intrinsic to the church that they go completely unnoticed. In this way, the congregation's obliviousness to technologies confirm their moral and material congruence with God's will.

The Korean Christians I came to know offer that what we must seek in order to do good is not greater knowledge or understanding of objects and systems in themselves, but a different orientation toward oneself and toward the people and things around us. This is why I have chosen not to offer expanded histories of the technological objects and systems—it is not that those histories are not important or useful. Rather, in this writing I have sought to dwell with these systems and objects as they appear in use, to the users I have worked with. This perspective is limited in scope, but it is no more limited than an engineer's perspective or any other. Technological systems and objects may seem increasingly opaque to most users, but we should not move too quickly past what this opacity capacitates. As John Durham Peters muses, "Clouds that vanish yield some of our most beautiful paintings, and clouds that obscure give us some of our most precious meteorological knowledge" (Peters 2015: 11).

My research resolved some questions that had brought me to Korean multisite churches, but it is possible that I am left with more questions than when I had begun. This research revealed that uncertainty is deeply entrenched in the way so many people think about and use the things we call technology. It leaves me with the sense that I, too, in my analysis will need to muddle through, try to strike a balance, to act in faith in relation to that which I may never know

with certainty. Our learning has its virtues, but no matter how much we learn, we are surrounded by what we don't know. As I learned as a student of the IT Mission School, perhaps that is okay.

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