

Korean Protestantism as Seen by Netizens:
A Focus on Recent Activities of Anti-Christian Site

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A recent online anti-Christianity campaign in Korea has been taking place against the backdrop of the rapid spread of Internet culture, a boost in “anti” culture, and Protestant fundamentalists’ aggressive missionary activity. The anti-Christianity campaign criticizes the Korean Protestant Church for its intolerance of different value systems (religious solipsism), depreciation of human reason and intelligence (God-centrism), and an attitude of blindly following Jewish tradition, to the neglect of Korean traditions and belief systems (religious toadyism). However, ~~that~~ Protestants have not yet actively responded to this criticism. More noteworthy is the fact that ~~it cannot be found the~~ productive, intellectual dialogue cannot be found between the two camps. A ~~deeply-rooted~~deeply rooted factor that prevents ~~a~~ sincere dialogue between netizens engaged in anti-Christian drives and the fundamentalist camp of the Protestant Church is the attitudes of both sides toward religious language. While the Protestant fundamentalists take a literal approach to religion, ~~while~~ the anti-Christianity campaign positively approaches to religion [The second part of this sentence is unclear. Do you mean they take an interpretive or relaxed approach?].

Keywords: anti-Christianity, Protestant fundamentalism, freedom of conscience, cultural nationalism, God-centrism, secular humanism, religious toadyism, cultural pluralism, netizen

Preface

Owing to the rapid proliferation of Internet access, Korean society has recently been witness to an abrupt change in the landscape of established social culture, as cyberspace enables varied forms of social and cultural activities that could not be imagined even in the recent past.

The widespread prevalence of Internet culture greatly influences established religious circles. Religious groups, while being wary of potential dangers from expanded cyber culture, put the enormous power of the Internet to positive use as a

missionary tool, since they believe that great quantities of information can be available in real time even while transcending the boundaries of time and space. Religious groups accordingly compete with each other in spreading their religions online and spur on missionary activities using cyberspace as a staging ground.

Protestantism, one of the most influential religious groups in Korea today, is also active in propagating itself through the Internet.¹ Almost all Protestant churches produce and operate web sites and conduct various missionary activities through cyberspace. Christians and Christian organizations, enthusiastic about evangelism in particular, are engaged in “new” missionary activities such as the posting of missionary literature on online bulletin boards, a step beyond the traditional method of handing out missionary booklets.

Amid such active missionary activities by Protestantism, anti-Christian sites have emerged to pose considerable challenges and threats to those activities. Under the banner of anti-Christianity, anti-Christian sites produce anti-Christian discourses and images and disseminate them widely and rapidly. Such anti-Christian discourses, representations, and images offer an important route to grasping the existing mode and nature of current Korean Protestantism. It is because the shadow of Korean Protestantism, the object of the anti-Christian movement, is always reflected, one way or another, in the anti-movement's views and gestures.

This article reviews against what background the anti-Christian movement emerged, how the movement is conducted, as well as its main logic. It also attempts to examine the significance the anti-Christian movement casts on Korean Protestantism today.

The Emergence of Anti-Christian Movement

It is only in recent years that the online anti-Christian movement has exploded, with cyberspace serving as its main stage. Prior to that time, one could not have imagined such a movement to be feasible. Proliferation of the Internet has made the movement possible. Accordingly, a unique feature of the anti-Christian movement is found in it being a drive spearheaded by netizens. Secondly, the anti-Christian movement is part of an “anti-movement” or anti-culture that exists within a larger thread of connection. Finally, the current anti-Christian movement was, in particular, provoked by fundamentalist Protestantism. Let us review the background behind the emergence of the present anti-Christian movement that is centered on those three features.

What is first worth noting is the fact that anti-Christianity pioneers preceded the present anti-Christian drive. It is well known that Korea, unlike many other countries, accommodated Protestantism without undergoing major social or political resistance.² Because Protestantism, rather than being an object of national resistance, was utilized as a main route to urge social reform and the nationalist movement, and was thus positively welcomed by intellectuals and the masses. Under Japanese colonial rule,

¹ For research on various activities of Korean Protestantism through the Internet, see Jeon (2003, 93-120).

² According to historian Park Chung-shin, because Protestantism's overseas propagation closely coincided with imperialist invasions, anti-Christian drives took place in most regions, which regarded Protestantism as a vanguard of imperialism. But no anti-Christian movements took place in Korea because it was not Western Christian countries but non-Christian Japan that invaded Korea. Park (2003).

Protestantism solidified itself as an institutional religion; however, it drew sharp criticism from intellectuals. Yi Gwang-su, one of the most prominent enlightened intellectuals during the Japanese colonial period, recognized the progressive spirit of and social contribution made by Protestantism initially, but criticized Korean Protestantism for losing its original vigor and playing a negative role in society only a generation after its introduction.³ But Yi Gwang-su's criticism of Christianity was merely well-intentioned "advice" in nature, far removed from the viewpoint of the current anti-Christian movement.

It was socialist intellectuals of that time who conducted an earnest anti-Protestant movement. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, major anti-Christian campaigns took place in China, accompanied by violence that caused much death and destruction of property.⁴ But in Korea, the drive consisted mainly of theoretical criticism through newspapers and magazines, rather than physical confrontation. And because socialists at the time embraced an anti-religious view, they targeted other religions as well, though Protestantism was still the center of their criticism.

The Socialists' anti-Christian drive during the Japanese colonial rule was based on Karl Marx's criticism of religion, focused on the criticism of the "substance of religion" as well as the "social functions of religion." According to the well-known Marxist view of religion, "religious consciousness" amounts to nothing more than a "perverted consciousness" of the real contradictions in society, with religion playing the role of a "dominant ideology" that serves the interests of the ruling class. Accordingly, based on such criticism of religion, socialist intellectuals put forth epistemological criticisms that defined Christianity as the "opium of the masses," "a visionary ideology," and "false consciousness," coupled with "sociological criticism" that defined Christianity as a tool of imperialism and capitalism.⁵

The Protestant mainstream at the time reacted coolly to these criticisms raised by socialist intellectuals. The conservative Protestant camp did not regard socialistic intellectuals as partner in dialogue, defining socialism as a non-religious worldview based on materialism and atheism. Meanwhile, some progressive Protestant intellectuals accommodated socialists' criticism of Protestantism on their own and urged self-reflection in Protestant circles. Contending that the other-worldly and fortune-seeking faith of Protestantism invites the socialists' critiques, they suggested that Protestantism participate in real reform and social campaigns more actively. Some Protestant intellectuals sought to create a "Christian socialism"⁶ that emphasized the commonness between socialism and Protestantism; this idea, however, was insignificant and short-lived.

The recent anti-Christian movement has no direct roots in the socialist anti-Christian drive of the past because socialist ideologies and forces were subsumed by the anti-Communist Cold-War ideologies that dominated South Korean society following liberation.⁷ Following the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, Marxism influenced

³ The defects of Korean Protestantism mentioned by Yi Gwang-su included hierarchical order, church-centrism, ignorance on the part of religious workers, and lack of social concern. Yi (1917, 76). For a more detailed discussion, see Sin (2002, 91-107).

⁴ For more about anti-Christian drives in China, see Li Shiyue et. Al (1992).

⁵ For details, see Kim (1992).

⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Jang (2001).

⁷ Netizens conducting the anti-Christian movement, it is said, were surprised to belatedly learn about the socialists' anti-Christian drive, and called the socialists as "pioneer seniors" of their movement.

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activist intellectuals and workers considerably, but anti-religion or anti-Christianity drives could hardly take place, as their immediate target was to overthrow the military dictatorship.

What is more, the current anti-Christian movement, unlike the anti-Christian drive under the Japanese rule, has the characteristic of being a campaign spearheaded by netizens with cyberspace serving as the stage. The rapid proliferation of the Internet, while playing the role of the catalyst to Protestantism's missionary activities, was decisive in helping the anti-Christian movement emerge and energize. It is not coincidental that the time of Internet proliferation coincided with the emergence of the anti-Christian movement. As is widely known, Korea is a society in which almost all citizens conduct their everyday lives by accessing the Internet. The netizens' anti-Christian movement emerged amid such a rapid spread.

Examined more broadly, the recent anti-Christian movement exists as part of a greater "anti-movement" or "anti-culture." Timed with the proliferation of the Internet, an anti-movement rapidly emerged on cyberspace, a drive of "minority groups" composed mainly of the weak and social victims. This is a cyberspace movement staged by citizens who are victimized by oppression from capital, powerful corporations, and media organizations. Because individual citizens are unable to confront violence from conglomerates and the press by themselves, they utilize cyberspace in order to inform large numbers of anonymous masses of instances of unfairness and victimization they have sustained. Anti-Samsung and anti-Hyundai sites, which rail against particular products made by the country's two biggest corporations, and an anti-Chosun Ilbo site, which is against the conservative right-wing daily newspaper with the nation's largest circulation, are not only widely known, but are effective in some respects. But this is not all. Click "anti" in portal sites, and you can find countless examples. We have witnessed so many varieties of anti sites active in cyberspace, as to suggest that Korean society has entered into a Renaissance of "anti."

The anti-Christian movement emerged as part of such anti-movement or anti-culture. Accordingly, they share basic attributes. The anti-Christian movement, like other anti-drives, is a cyberspace movement spearheaded by netizens, and an anti-drive that is fundamentally against the influential religious organization of Christianity, like anti-drives against major conglomerates or media. In other words, the anti-Christian movement is a minor-group movement staged online by citizens who think they have been victimized by Christianity, a gigantic religion.

If Internet proliferation has thus offered a physical foundation to the anti-Christian movement and if the spread of the anti-culture has thus encouraged the emergence of the anti-Christian movement, what directly provoked the anti-Christian movement? The answer to this question is nothing other than Protestantism's aggressive missionary activities. In the past several years, some enthusiastic Protestants committed a series of acts of violence, such as destroying statues of Dangun, who is regarded as the founding father of the Korean nation, Buddhist images and symbols, and the totem poles at village gates, once considered to be guardians of village communities. Such aggressive activities accompanied by physical violence, not only aroused public rejection of Protestantism, but also worked as a major factor spreading anti-Christian sentiment. Several moral and financial Protestant scandals, exposed in succession by media organizations in recent years, also helped spread anti-Christian feeling.

Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 270-271).

What provoked the anti-Christian movement more directly were the Internet missionary activities of some enthusiastic Protestant evangelists. They did not hesitate to resort to extreme acts such as visiting all sorts of online bulletins and unilaterally papering them with biblical clauses or catchwords. Some examples of what anti-Christian activists have to say about the matter follow here:

It can be said that our anti-Christian activities in the Internet began during the early days of the Internet. But we did not by any means initiate the activities. What prompted them were those Christians who performed missionary activities by continuously and recklessly posting missionary phrases on ordinary online bulletins like Chollian, Freechal, Yahoo, and Daum, as well as on various fraternity bulletins, and other places that were all unrelated to religion. Sensible bulletin participants advised these inconsiderate people to stop their actions and reported the appropriate sites. They, like the idiots there are, nevertheless, continued their reckless evangelizing activities to result in the current situation.⁸

Thus the anti-Christian movement emerged when netizens who thought they sustained psychological and mental harm from enthusiastic Protestants' aggressive missionary activities began to express their views. In short, the recent anti-Christian movement is a netizens' drive, based on the proliferation of Internet culture and anti-culture, and prompted by fundamental Protestants' aggressive missionary activities.

Protestantism As Seen by Netizens and the Logic of Anti-Christianity

No accurate statistical figures are available on the exact number of anti-Christian sites active in cyberspace at present, but a considerable number of such sites do exist.⁹ According to what the author has surveyed, representative sites are Anti-Christian Club (<http://cafe.daum.net/clubanti>), Anti-Christian (<http://cafe.daum.net/antidei>), Anti-Christians' Meeting (<http://cafe.daum.net/Rucifer>), Criticism of Christianity (<http://cafe.daum.net/IscaIiot>), Ecstasy (<http://daum.net/ecxtasy>), Condemnation of Christianity (<http://cafe.daum.net/IscaIiot>), Anti-Jesus (<http://www.antiyesu.org>), Anti-Christian Movement (<http://www.acm.wo.to>) and Anti-Bible (<http://cafe.daum.net/antidogma>).¹⁰

⁸ Anti-Christian Club (2003, 7-8).

⁹ There are other sites as well, the nature of which are similar to but different from the anti-Christian movement. One group represents campaigns not against Christianity itself, but against organizations regarded as "heretical" by mainstream Christianity. A typical example is Exodus, a site engaged in an anti-drive against Christian Gospel Mission, dubbed JMS (Jesus Morning Star). Another group represents Christian NGOs advocating church reform campaigns. They appear to be similar to the anti-Christian movement in that they mainly criticize churches, but are different in that their eventual goal is not the "dissolution" or "destruction" of Christianity, but rather, the "restoration of the essence" of churches. Representative examples are the Christian Ethics Movement of Korea (<http://kr.cemk.org>), the Christian Alliance for Church Reform (<http://protest2002.org>), and NewsnJoy (<http://www.newsnjoy.co.kr>).

¹⁰ In addition to those clubs and cafes, there are individual homepages engaged in the anti-Christian movement, such as Geomeun Sipjaga (Black Cross, <http://www.ecxtasy.wo.to>), Sipjabulkeo (Turn-off-the-Cross, <http://turnoffthecross.wo.to>), and the Korean Christian Bible Forum (<http://xxbible.com.ne.kr>), Anti Gaedoksin (<http://gadoksin.isterrible.tv/>), and Myeonse Gaejang

Most of the anti-Christian sites are no more than four or five years old, with memberships ranging from a few hundred to several thousand. As shown in their site addresses, most of them are cafes of portal sites. Most active among them is the Anti-Christian Club. With a membership of over 8,000 at present, this cafe operates its independent homepage called Citizens' Coalition for Anti-Christian Movement (<http://www.antichrist.or.kr>). Memberships of the Anti-Christian Club and the Citizens' Coalition for the Anti-Christian Movement in effect overlap with one another. Assuming that most netizens of other anti-Christ sites are also affiliated with the Anti-Christian Club and the Citizens' Coalition for the Anti-Christian Movement, netizens engaged in the cyberspace anti-Christian movement are estimated to number about 8,000.

The structure of the Anti-Christian Club, inaugurated in June 2000, is similar to that of ordinary communities and cafes operating on the Internet. The site has public notices, frequently asked questions (FAQ), a member discussion room, an open bulletin board, a data room, a listing of overseas branches, as well as recommended sites; it implements a graded membership system under which members are given different rights according to their membership qualifications. But its menus are mainly those that criticize Christianity, such as through Christian-related news focusing on the degradation and corruption of Christian circles, criticism pointing to errors and contradictions in the Bible, and narratives of the experiences members underwent with respect to faith and suffering, consultations on faith, anti-Christian literature, cartoons, and music.

Examining this data, one can find that most netizens leading or actively participating in the anti-Christian movement have a Christian background. Though they conduct anti-Christian activities at present, they used to attend church. They confess that they have deserted churches because of "painful memories" or "deep wounds." Accordingly, they know relatively well how and under what circumstances churches are run, and are knowledgeable about the Bible and Christianity in general. Nevertheless, they are not, of course, professional theologians. Most of them are merely just casually engaged in the anti-Christianity movement in the course of their everyday lives. Most of them are presumed to be netizens in their 20s and 30s, who are accustomed to Internet culture, with some netizens in their early 40s seeming to play a leading role in the anti-Christian movement.¹¹

The site offers lists of books considered useful for attacking the foundations of Christianity. Introduced are books describing Jesus Christ as a "fictitious person" or as a "buddhist disciple," and many others that enumerate errors and contradictions in the Bible. Included as recommended books are a considerable number of books related to mythology and religious studies. The reason for this may lie in the belief that knowledge of comparative mythology and comparative religious studies is useful in neutralizing the absolutism of Christianity.

Many cartoons satirical of corruption and the irregularities of churches are

(<http://www.freewebs.com/gaejang>).

¹¹ Philosopher Ph.D. Yi Sang-bong and Mr. Yi Gye-seok are currently regular contributors to the Anti-Christian Club, both of whom are said to be over 60 years old and reside in the United States. Given that their articles are often quoted, they seem to wield no small degree of influence. They conduct anti-Christian campaigns through the publication of their books, too. Yi Gye-seok's book "The Story of God and Stories of Man," Gukjo, 1999 is widely read by anti-Christians. <http://cafe.daum.net/clubanti>.

available on the site. In many instances, they describe the core symbols of Christianity such as the cross, Gospel, Christ and churches in a very insulting manner. Likewise they deride Christianity and pastors, using derogatory terms. In the meantime, a considerable number of pieces of music belonging to the new age lineage, classified as anti-Christian music, occupy a bulletin board, like an anti-Christian music room.

The Anti-Christian Club engaged in so many anti-Christian activities that they published a book, entitled *Wae uri-neun gidokgyo-reul bandae haneun-ga* (Why Do We Oppose Christianity?),¹² out of articles used in their online anti-Christian activities. They also hold anti-Christian meetings on streets in an effort to directly inform citizens of the harm done by Christianity.

Then, what are the core contents of the anti-Christian discourse posted on such anti-Christian sites? In other words, what aspects of Christianity do anti-Christians criticize mainly? They are very diverse and wide, but only three points considered to be most important will be discussed in this article, which are Christianity's exclusivism, God-centrism and toadyism.

Religious Solipsism and Cultural Pluralism

The single-most common characteristic of anti-Christian sites is their unanimous criticism of Christians' "peculiar attitude toward faith." Christianity, irrespective of denominations, allegedly demands "strong faith" in particular things. And it has a "strange concept" that other faiths that even slightly deviate from what Christianity teaches are evil and therefore have to be rejected. In short, Christianity, they contend, is a religion of "exclusivism" to a level much more severe than in other established religions.

Such an exclusive attitude of refusing to accommodate even one iota of "difference" derives from us-them dichotomy. Such a strict dichotomy tends to invite conflicts with others. The likelihood of conflicts heightens when many religions coexist. According to the anti-Christian sites, the following examples of social conflicts taking place in Korean society in recent years are the products of such an exclusive dichotomy.

- 1) Vandalism of Dangun statues and campaigns against the erection of them, 2) temple arson, Buddhist vandalism or Buddhist temple property damage, 3) mass boycott campaigns of MBC and legal suits filed against MBC in protest of its programs reporting irregularities on the part of mammoth churches, 4) group acts against Kim Yong-ok's TV lecture on the Analects of Confucius including a gag order signature campaign, 5) loud preaching in public places, lecturing, "Reject Jesus Christ, you'll go to hell; Accept Jesus Christ, you'll go to heaven," 6) numerous criminal offenses like pastors and other Christian leaders raping followers and defrauding them of money and property, 7) slander and defamation of the theory of evolution and the founding of the Korean Association for Creation Research to refute it, 8) the peculiar phenomenon of covering the entire country with churches and crosses, 9) negation of the traditional Korean culture, 10) groundless slander and rejection of other religions and ideas, 11) quarreling among family members and relatives over whether to hold traditional ancestor memorial rituals commonly practiced in Korea, 12) group protests hampering the establishment of a "wooden guardian post" park and another park commemorating the site where Buddhism first entered the country during the Baekje Kingdom, 13) group actions

¹² This book is unavailable in bookstores. According to the Anti Christian Club, they adopted an informal circulation format for the book from the outset out of a fear that the Christian circle might stage an aggressive campaign against the sale of the book at bookstores. Accordingly, anyone wishing to purchase the book has to contact the site operator through the Internet or other means.

sponsored by a Protestant church designed to expel the Ilhwa football team based in Seongnam, Gyeonggi-do province, 14) a demonstration calling for changing the title of the "Red Devils"--the title of the country's football cheer group during the 2002 World Cup Final--and obstructing "Red Devils" cheering by forming a counter cheer group called "White Angels," 15) demonstrations demanding the abolition of Buddhist monk rooms in police stations, 16) forming a committee demanding changes in portraits of the country's notes and launching a petition to that end, and 17) mischaracterizing pop and new age music as sinister plots of demons or Satan.¹³

As is clear from the instances listed above, the Protestant Church of Korea has an exclusive attitude of unconditionally criticizing and attacking whatever runs counter to its doctrines, be it other religions, traditional cultures, modern science, mass culture, or press reports. Anti-Christians do not identify the causes of such "evil conduct" as mere mistakes made by some indiscreet Christians or fanatics. Indeed, they assert that such "evil conducts" arise not from immature believers in Christianity or ethical deviators, but from believers who are faithful to the basic teachings of Christianity. They allegedly arise from the "essence" of Christianity itself. From the perspective of anti-Christians, it is rather progressive Christians who criticize the belief of fundamentalists that are further deviated from the "essence" of Christianity. For them, progressive Protestants and Catholics who are open-minded to and embrace other religions are "pseudo-Christians," and religious pluralists who advocate a dialogue between Christianity and other religions are "hypocritical Christians."

Why would they think this way? Because, as anti-Christians see it, the Bible and teachings of Jesus Christ, the base of Christian faith and doctrines, contain no tolerance for other religions. The Bible and Christ's teachings, it is alleged, are so full of thorough exclusivism that it is impossible to find in them tolerance of others and an attitude of religious pluralism. In short, they are claiming that Christ's teachings are incompatible with religious pluralism. Accordingly, for progressive Christians to advocate religious pluralism is nothing but a highly-developed survival strategy designed to sustain the "life" of Christianity and violates the "essence" of Christianity, anti-Christians argue.

Anti-Christians thus employ a strategy of defining Christian exclusivism against other religions as not a secondary attribute but the "essence" of Christianity, and making a searching inquiry into the Gospel and Christ's teachings. In other words, anti-Christians attempt to make various criticisms of and attacks against the Bible and the strongest theoretical weapon anti-Christians employ in criticizing the exclusivism of Christianity is the "freedom of conscience." They emphasize how the freedom of conscience is an important virtue in modern society as follows:

To select a particular one out of many ethical values and believe it to be right and going a step further to express it is the freedom and right... of a person involved. Let's call this the freedom of conscience. Whether the freedom of conscience exists or not, we think, it is a yardstick determining how much democracy has progressed in a society; the freedom of conscience accords with the principles of democracy and peaceful coexistence. In this sense, we hope

¹³ <http://www.antichrist.or.kr/?doc=bbs/gunboard.php&bo.table=1&wr.id=4>; Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 26-27).

the freedom of conscience will become a universal belief for all.¹⁴

Thus the freedom of conscience is a social norm recognizing and respecting not only one's own belief systems but those of others as well, they contend. This way of thinking asserting plurality of belief systems and their peaceful coexistence can be regarded as "cultural pluralism." Anti-Christians assert such cultural pluralism in the name of the freedom of conscience.

But Christianity is a religion that does not recognize the freedom of conscience, they argue. To put it more precisely, they maintain, Christianity insists on the freedom of one's own conscience, but does not recognize that of others'. This, they continue, arises from a self-righteous way of thinking that one's own conscience is right and those of others wrong, which engenders an exclusive and aggressive attitude toward others. Anti-Christians thus find the exclusivism of the Protestant Church to be a "religious solipsism," a way of thinking that does not recognize "difference," and find the logic of criticism in a "cultural pluralism" based on "freedom of conscience."

God Centrism and Secular Humanism

A second odious characteristic of Christianity cited by anti-Christians is that of God-centrism. There is a tendency, however, for most Christians to define God-centrism as a unique point of Christianity that separates it from other religions. The God-centrism used by Christians, of course, contains a very affirmative meaning of confronting humanism. From the perspective of Christians, God centrism represents a way of life that completely observes God's will, while humanism is a world view based on a man's selfish desires and secular values. Christians, accordingly, assert always that a man should return to God centrism, and free themselves from the threat of humanism.

But anti-Christians use the term God centrism in a completely different way. From their perspective, God centrism is the main culprit ruining humanity, because God centrism emphasizes the absolute power and authority of God on the one hand and suppresses the autonomy and freedom of individual men on the other. Consequently, places dominated by God-centrism allegedly cannot produce types of men who think and behave based on an autonomous sense of judgment and moral responsibility. Anti-Christians contend that such places work to produce a "slavish personality" obeying only the authority of God unconditionally.

From the perspective of anti-Christians, under God centrism, human reason and intellect are also the objects of distrust, because they regard reason and intellect as human attributes that could challenge God's authority and give rise to doubt. Because such God centrism tends to paralyze man's intellect in the name of God's authority, they contend, anti-intellectual activities prevail in places dominated by God centrism. Anti-Christians take as their examples the activities of the Korea Association for Creation Research and Research Institute for Creation History:

Organizations called the Korea Association for Creation Research and the Research Institute for Creation History, under the pretext of certifying mythologies and miracles chronicled in the Old Testament, have negated positive science as a trash and downgraded history to a science certifying mythologies. A

¹⁴ Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 18).

pastor organization, disguised as an academic institute, has brazenly listed doing away with intellectualism as one of the objectives of its establishment. These bastards, who advise others not to verify the Bible with reason, while borrowing the names of pseudo-sciences are openly and shamelessly engaged in lamentable attempts to prove the Bible in terms of genuine science and history.¹⁵

In short, “pseudo-science” and “pseudo-history,” like the Korea Association of Creation Research and Research Institute for Christian History, anti-Christians contend, mock positive science and history. Anti-Christians, accordingly, regard God-centrism as a sort of “superstition” that paralyzes reason and intellect. Though Christianity was “misunderstood” as a religion conducive to modernization and rationalization in the course of Korea's modern and contemporary history, the anti-Christians say that a Christianity based on God centrism is nothing more than an "imported superstition" that replaces that of the traditional “national superstition.”¹⁶ They assert that God centrism stressing unconditional belief in and submission to God can even distort the universal virtue of “love.”

The love of Christianity calls for a man to love God in return for the love God bestows on the individual. The love God gives a man and the love a man extends to God constitute the substance of Christianity. It is a religion of God in which only man's submission and God's salvation exist. Humanism, which represents mutual respect and love between men, does not exist there. Humanism is boldly discarded because it is an obstacle harmful to God centrism. This is the 2000-year-old root of Christianity and its substance, which is so evident in the gruesome, inhumane history of Christian countries and the realities of our country's Christians today.¹⁷

In short, anti-Christians maintain that Christianity's God-centrism ignores love between men because it stresses only love toward God in return for God's love. In the tradition of God centrism, as a result, sacrificing others' lives in a bid to fulfill God's orders can be justified with ease. The religious inquisition, witch-hunts, and religious wars that caused deaths of numerous people throughout the history of mankind is nothing but an outcome of such faith in God centrism, according to anti-Christians. Accordingly, Christianity, based on God centrism, is not a "religion of love and peace" as often claimed, but a "religion of war and hatred," they say.

Anti-Christians employ humanism as a weapon for repulsing such God centrism. This is clearly expressed in the platform of anti-Christian cafes:

Cafe Ecstasy is an open gathering of Korean netizens who, armed with humanism, scientific spirit, and reason, conduct anti-Christian activities. Cafe Ecstasy, engaged in a struggle of eradicating Christianity, shall construct a just civil society, in which human rights are accepted as commonsense, by destroying huge, rich and hereditary churches and liberating stupid and ignorant believers. Cafe Ecstasy, that hates falsehood and safeguards truth, shall protect the traditional culture that is unique to the nation and the scientific legacy of the entire mankind from Christianity, a bastard imported loose religion.¹⁸

¹⁵ Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 10).

¹⁶ Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 13)

¹⁷ Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 9)

¹⁸ General Principles of Cafe Ecstasy, <http://myhome.hanafos.com/-ecstasy/lcr.html>.

A worldview that places weight on scientific reasoning and –human rights can be called "secular humanism," which has a long tradition in the West. Originated in ancient Greek philosophy, secular humanism blossomed in the Age of Enlightenment.

Such secular humanism is used as a major weapon in confronting God centrism because it cherishes the reason and happiness of a man as a supreme value, while not recognizing a supernatural world and the existence of a transcendental deity. It is Bertrand Russell who plays the role of “patron saint” for such secular humanism in current anti-Christian sites. Russell published a host of articles criticizing Christian dogmas from the perspective of reasonable rationalism, and explaining how much illiberal dogma hampered the happiness of a man. As a result, anti-Christian sites post lots of his writings that are critical of Christianity; his book titled “Why I Am Not a Christian,” in particular, is regarded as "the Bible" of anti-Christians.¹⁹

In addition to Russell’s writings, anti-Christian sites often quote from other great thinkers who taught the spirit of "doubt" and "suspicion" instead of blind faith, such as David Hume, Francis-Marie Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. **In addition, anti-Christian sites have provided access to foreign Internet sites, like Free Thoughts, Atheists, and Infidels, by including links on local anti-Christian sites.**²⁰ They do so because they think that such sites, most of them adopting anti-religious and anti-Christian secular humanism, can become backup forces to the domestic anti-Christian movement.

Anti-Christians thus consider God-centrism to be an inherent part of Christianity that not only suppresses the freedom and dignity of the individual, but also stifles the precious reason and intellect, forming criticisms that use secular humanism as a weapon.

Religious Toadyism and Cultural Nationalism

The third characteristic of Christianity as defined by the anti-Christian movement is the anti-national nature of Christianity. If exclusivism and God-centrism, discussed above are the general rationales for attacking Christianity, criticism about its being an anti-national religion is squarely aimed at Christianity in Korea. In other words, anti-Christians level the criticism that Korean Christianity, holding to the history and scripture of a foreign nation only, harbors no interest whatsoever in the history and tradition of the Korean nation.

They thoroughly reject the history of the Korean nation and particularly its ancient history. The sole reason is a childish one, in that our history allegedly does not jibe with Jewish history and Genesis in the Old Testament. Obsessed with the notion that the acknowledgement of our history may result in abandoning Genesis, they ultimately maintain that our nation is also the descendants of the Arab Semitic race, and that our language is derived from Semitic. In their sermons, the brave heroes are Joshua and Gideon, not Yi Sun-sin nor Ulji Mundeok. They even hold Rahab, a mistress entertainer who betrayed her race, in higher esteem than Non-gae (a Korean female entertainer who reputedly drowned herself with a Japanese general during the Hideyoshi invasion of Korea (1592-1598). Having gone to this extreme, who would

¹⁹ <http://cafe.daum.net/antidogma>.

²⁰ Most typical are <http://www.infidels.org/infidels/index.shtml> and <http://www.positiveatheism.org>.

be Jewish if not they?²¹

Korean Christianity is thus alleged to be an anti-national religious organization that looks for the origin of our nation and language in the Semitic race and language, and that has a great regard for Jewish people emerging in the Bible as our ancestors, while disregarding distinguished heroes of the so-called Korean "race."²² Consequently, they shamelessly use with pride Jewish names such as Moses and David as their own.

In short, Korean Christianity is a slave of "religious toadyism," anti-Christians allege. In a bid to show how anti-national Korean Christianity is, anti-Christians cite as examples Jeoldusan graveyard, a Catholic cemetery for many martyrs who were beheaded by Joseon leaders about 150 years ago, and the Full Gospel Church of Korea, in the Yeoido islet of the Hangang river.

The existence of the Jeoldusan graveyard along the Hangang river is indeed lamentable in that it glorifies the evil conduct of convicts of high treason, who were beheaded for having violated the solemn law of the state, by calling them saints. This negates the fact that our nation was rooted in the precious Han River. Why does the villainous Full Gospel Church of Korea stand in the Yeoido islet, trampling down our beautiful morals and manners, while profaning the noble spirits of our ancestors? Are the wails worshipping the wicked evil Jewish spirit of Jesus Christ acceptable?²³

Anti-Christians maintain that those buried in the Jeoldusan graveyard are not "saints," but merely high treason convicts of the nation, and that the Full Gospel Church, which has the largest congregation in the world and is also located along the Hangang river, is nothing less than a church housing an anti-national religion that tramples our good morals and customs, such as the practice of traditional Korean ancestral rituals.

Of course, what is regarded as the most quintessential examples of such "religious toadyism" is the campaign opposing the construction of Dangun statues, as well as advocating for the destruction of existing ones. From the perspective of anti-Christians, Protestants' refusal to recognize the "historical existence" of Dangun, the founding father of the Korean race and their denouncement of Dangun statues as objects of idol worship to be destroyed are typical examples of religious toadyism. Accordingly, anti-Christians thoroughly denounce those Christians who highly regard Yahweh, who is to them the tribal god of the Jewish race, while denying the existence of Dangun, as constituting an anti-national religion. Acts destroying carved village guardians are also regarded as an example of "religious toadyism" that ignores national tradition and culture.

To challenge such "religious toadyism" on the part of Protestants, anti-Christian activities employ a strategy of enhancing the identity of the nation. Out of such a strategy, anti-Christians urged their fellow members to participate in a "rally calling for making Hangeul (Korean alphabet) Day a national holiday" sponsored by civic organizations,²⁴ and conducted anti-Christian activities on National Foundation

²¹ Anti-Christian Cyber Club (2003, 11-12).

²² <http://www.antiyesu.org/display.asp?tn=bboard&id=40&page=12&s=&sf=>

²³ <http://café.daum.net/clbuanti>.

²⁴ The Federation of Korean Trade Unions is said to sponsor a rally calling for designating Hangeul Day as a national holiday The restoration of Hangeul Day as a national holiday was an agenda we

Day, falling on October 3. On the occasion of National Foundation Day in 2003, the Anti Christian Club held an initiation ceremony on the riverside of the Hangang river under the banners of "Exterminate Christianity" and "Exterminate Jesus Christ." They chose that day because they regarded National Foundation Day as a "sacred day on which in the year of B.C. 2457 the gate of heaven opened for the first time and our nation's founding father established our nation, proclaiming the principles: a great enterprise represented by the greatest service for the benefit of humanity and the wisest teaching for the people of the world."²⁵

Netizens conducting the anti-Christian movement, however, are wary of such nationalism being defined as "religious nationalism." They are categorically against national religion adherents, including worshipping Dangun or conducting an anti-Christ campaign in an attempt to expand their membership. This indicates that most anti-Christian sites side not with religious nationalism but with "cultural nationalism."

As discussed thus far, netizens' anti-Christian discourses prevailing in cyberspace consist largely of three categories. One defines the essence of Christianity as exclusivism and criticizes it based on the freedom of conscience. Contained in such critical discourse is an attack of religious solipsism based on cultural pluralism. Another points out that Christian faith has an attribute of suppressing men's freedom and paralyzing reason and finds its causes in God-centrism. The weapon they use in criticizing God-centrism is secular humanism. Still another is a criticism that the Christian church in Korea is an anti-national religion, ignoring Korean traditional culture and depriving citizens of national identity. Underlying this critical discourse is an attack of religious toadyism based on cultural nationalism.

It is necessary to note here that not all anti-Christian netizens' perceptions of Christianity necessarily agree with each other. There are possibilities of clash particularly between cultural pluralism and secular humanism that offers core logic to the anti-Christian movement and cultural nationalism. If ones accesses anti-Christian sites, a very wide spectrum of anti-Christianity, ranging from "advices" to Christians to "extermination" of Christianity, are easy to find. Even the book "Why Do We Oppose Christianity?" edited with extreme care by the Anti Christian Club, the biggest of its kind, contains some positions that call for simply "opposing" Christianity and others for "exterminating" Christianity. Nonetheless, neither noticeable internal struggles nor conflicts are seen among netizens involved in anti-Christian campaigns. This may well be a phenomenon arising from the fact that anti-Christian sites are engaged in a "minority group" campaign by forming a "coalition front" facing the giant "common enemy" that is Christianity.

Conclusion

How does the Protestant Church react to the anti-Christian movement, which is actively staged in cyberspace? It is hard to find an organized reaction by the Protestant Church.

attempted to promote in our last regular general meeting. Let's also take part in their rally, carrying the placards we prepared last time. Stickers symbolizing Dangun and the Great King Sejong will be distributed. Anti members who can spare time, please participate. . . . Time: 13:30. October 7 (Tuesday), 2003. Venue: Across the street in front of the National Assembly Hall, Yeoido and in front of the rear gate of Korean Broadcasting System (KBS).

<http://www.antichrist.or.kr/?doc=bbs/gnuboard.php&bo-table=notice&page=1&wr-id=15>.

²⁵ <http://cafe.daum.net/clubanti>.

Only a small number of enthusiastic Protestants personally visit anti-Christian sites in an attempt to "counterattack" or remove "misunderstandings." Another group of a small number of progressive and open-minded Protestants, who pay attention to the voices of anti-Christians, gesture to make them a source of self-reflection.

But most conservative Protestant leadership and fundamentalists have been quite indifferent to the voices of anti-Christians, turning a deaf ear to them. There is a justifiable reason for this. It is the fact that the anti-Christian language circulated in anti-Christian sites is riddled with excessively emotional and crude words and phrases. There is a deeply-rooted factor, however, that prevents a sincere dialogue between netizens engaged in anti-Christian drives and the fundamentalist camp of the Protestant Church. That arises from the attitudes of both sides toward religious language. As is well known, fundamentalist Protestants have a strong tendency to interpret religious language like the Bible to the letter. They are inclined to seek the literal meaning of religious language and disregard its compound and in-depth meanings. On the other hand, many adherents of secular humanism, who play a major role in the anti-Christian movement, embrace scientific positivism. Because scientific positivism evaluates themes based on the "principle of verifiableness," while religious language defies verification, anti-Christians junk most religious language as completely meaningless.

All in all, while Protestant fundamentalists, because of their literal approach, scale down the abundant meaning of religious language, secular humanism, due to its positivist approach, is incapable of reading the inherent meaning of religious language. In other words, both sides read religious language not as "symbols," but as "signs." Unless Protestant fundamentalism and secular humanism attempt to read religious language as "symbols" and not as "signs," no meaningful dialogue can take place between anti-Christians and Protestant true believers.

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