

Urgent Issues Facing Modern Korean Catholicism and Their Subtext

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the features, causes, and consequences of issues that Korean Catholicism faced in and since the 1990s. Along with a rapid, continuous increase in the size of its congregation since the 1990s, the number of parish churches, priests, and religious also have grown rapidly. Even in the social welfare sector, Korean Catholicism has experienced the sharpest quantitative expansion among Korean religions. Catholicism's pronouncements and engagement in social issues, on the other hand, have decreased. Participation of Catholic-based civil organizations in social movements has also plunged. Due to the increasing number of priests, lay believer's participation in church activities has become relatively passive, which is indicated by ebbing religious commitments. Solidarity of the congregation has weakened and the number of tepid Catholics has grown. Church vitality has diminished markedly with the continuously declining number of the young generation and the sharp surging proportion of the aged. Moreover, with growing wealth as well as social and political influences, the Catholic Church is being criticized, from inside and outside, as a "religious power." Korean Catholicism has mounted reform drives to deal with such problems, but to no avail. As a consequence, the possibility has risen for Catholicism to accommodate the demands of the middle class congregation, whose degree of commitment is low, and to incur negative societal criticism in place of positive appraisal of the past.

Keywords: Korean Catholicism, congregation increase, religious conservatism, religious authority, Catholic social participation, Catholic reform

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Introduction

Korean Catholicism has experienced major internal changes from around the 1990s. The biggest one of them has been a shift of the center of the congregation from the lower middle class to the upper-middle class.¹ Social participation activities, regarded as a feature of Korean Catholicism, have also become passive. Indices of “religious commitment” in terms of sociology of religion, too, have begun to drop. Other new phenomena have started to emerge inside and outside Korean Catholicism as well.

Given such realities, it may appear to be proper for this paper to cover a period beginning in 1990. But this paper will focus on a period beginning in 2000, which the Roman Catholic Church celebrated as the Great Jubilee, to the present. This is because although most phenomena began to appear from around 1990,² Korean Catholicism began to make dynamic efforts in and around 2000, more so than in the 1990s, to explain the causes of such phenomena and ways of resolving them. Therefore, the period from 2000 to the present is more relevant to understanding the inner alterations Korean Catholicism

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1. A document that first mentioned the ascendancy of the faithful in the upper-middle class is a report of a survey that the *Catholic Times* conducted and published on the occasion of its 60th anniversary in 1987. According to the researchers in the preface to the report, “It is revealed that Catholics occupy a considerably higher social and economic stratum than the average Koreans in terms of educational level, qualitative structure of occupation, and economic class composition. This shows that Korean Catholicism is gradually changing into a religion centered on the middle class” (*Catholic Times* [1988] 2000, 11).
 2. Theological sociologist Choi Hyunjong observed that Korea’s social and economic stability achieved in the latter half of the 1980s brought about new value patterns and gave rise to a new religious landscape (Choi 2011, 71). Kang In-Cheol holds 1987 as the starting year. He notes that that year saw the signs of a shift to conservatism and an estrangement from politics within the church as well as strengthened control by the hierarchy of reformatory groups of the faithful. He also maintains that “a transition to democracy” began in Korean society that year, and that a critical civil society expanded markedly to boost its political and social influence. His study, however, is not confined to the year 1987 and also covers a period succeeding that year (I. Kang 2008, 12-13).

underwent. Accordingly, this article intends to probe urgent issues facing modern Korean Catholicism and their subtext during the period in discussion.

First, through statistical data, the trend of changes modern Korean Catholicism experienced during this period will be reviewed. Data used are from *Hanguk cheonju gyohoe tonggye* (Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea) published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK),³ sample surveys of Catholics conducted inside and outside of the church, and the outcomes of polls conducted outside of Catholicism. Second, the paper will discuss themes that Catholicism attempted to resolve within itself, taking up the issues which Catholic academic events or the press dealt with frequently. In an attempt to avoid a stance that upholds the faith in the evaluation of the issues, the views of researchers who take relatively a critical stand have been selected. Lastly, current issues in dispute within the Korean Catholic Church will be addressed, which I anticipate will affect its future directions.

Based on the above three materials, causes of the urgent issues Korean Catholicism faces, characteristics of the issues that ensued, and the outcome from these issues will be reviewed. Interpretation will be minimized as much as possible and a focus will be placed on a faithful accounting of the phenomena.

Problems Modern Korean Catholicism Faces and Its Efforts to Cope with Them

Since the 1990s, Korean Catholicism has experienced a continuous surge in its size of congregation. Along with the rise in the congregation, the number of parish churches, priests, and religious also recorded a sharp growth. In the social welfare field, too, it has expe-

3. CBCK announces the statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea on May 1 of each year after synthesizing the statistics the dioceses compile as of December 31 of the previous year.

rienced the biggest quantitative expansion of all Korean religious denominations.

On the other hand, the frequency of Catholicism's pronouncements to society and participation in it has plummeted. Activities of layperson organizations that used to participate actively in social movements have subsided markedly. An increase in the number of priests has resulted in passive participation of laymen in church activities. At the same time, with church wealth surging and the church's social and political influences expanding, Catholicism, too, has become critically labeled as a "religious power" from within and outside of the church.

In the realm of the congregation's faith life, signs of dwindled religious commitment in the sense of sociology of religion have become conspicuous. Unity among the faithful has weakened and the number of tepid Catholics continues to rise. Moreover, while the number of the younger generation has declined, that of the elderly has greatly expanded.

In this manner, Korean Catholicism has experienced quantitative and qualitative changes internally, along with the transformations that have taken place in the country. What follows is an assessment of what kinds of alterations have taken place as well as how and why they have occurred.

Sustained Increase in the Congregation Size and Its Two-Pronged Nature

An increase in the size of the congregation provided a momentum for strengthened social influence of Korean Catholicism, but at the same time, it caused various theological criticisms within the church.

The total number of Catholics rose from 4,071,560 in 2000 to 5,309,964 in 2011, or up by 1,238,404. It represents a 30.4 percentage point rise from 2000, and an average annual increase of 103,200. The number of Korean Catholics as of December 31, 2011, accounted for 10.3 percent of the population of South Korea. The increase ratio of Catholics, compared with the period before 2000, has declined but a

quantitative increase continues (CBCK 2011; 2012, 9).

The increased congregation size of Korean Catholicism is more noteworthy in the respect that it came about amid a small increase in that of Buddhism and a small decrease in that of Protestantism (Choi 2011, 47). According to a comparison of the 1995 and 2005 censuses, only Catholicism, among the country's three major religions, registered a two-digit increase in the congregation size in a decade. A similar increase in the size of the congregation of Catholicism was registered during the period covered by this paper as well.

The number of priests in Korea also rose from 2,868 in 2000 to 4,415 in 2011, or by 1,547, up 53.9 percentage point from 2000. This increase ratio is 1.77 times that of believers (CBCK 2011; 2012, 13). The number of students registered at the country's seminaries stood at 1,686 in 2011, down 201 from 1,887 in 2000. This ratio was a 10.7 percentage point decrease from 2000. Of the registered students, the number of friars and sisters rose from 243 in 2000 to 359 in 2011, while that of lay students dropped from 37 in 2000 to 23 in 2011. The number of male religious, including members of secular institutes and apostolic life societies with novices among them, rose from 1,280 in 2000 to 1,521, up 18.8 percentage point during the period. The number of female religious increased from 8,967 in 2000 to 10,146 in 2011, up 13.1 percentage point. The number of members of male and female religious congregations and parish priests continued to grow, but the growth rates have slowed compared to the years prior to 2000 (CBCK 2011, 7-28).

An analysis of why the congregation size of the Korean Catholic Church has grown has found that Catholicism is considered to better realize the values that the Korean public expects from religions, like "trustworthiness and integrity of clergymen," "consideration for the weak in society," "harmony between religions," and "faithfulness to proper religious missions" (Choi 2011, 68). Protestant theologian Cho Seong-Don confirmed such trends in his earlier research (Cho 2007). An identical evaluation emerged in a general public consciousness survey report filed by a research on "Catholicism and Changes in Social Issues in Modern and Contemporary Korea," in which the

author was involved (Kim, Park, and Park 2004).

Progressive Catholic theologians predicted in the latter half of the 1990s that the growth in the size of the Catholic congregation would not last long (Suh and Cheong 1998). They even warned that Korean Catholicism, unless it tries very hard to innovate itself, will encounter a risk of emptying churches, being left only with the elder believers, as is the case in Western Europe. With the sustained growth of Catholicism despite the fear, however, the continuing growth was taken as an accepted fact. Instead, the critical focus has shifted toward considering, from the theological perspective, the risks of this phenomenon. Father Kim Jung-Yong, one of the theologians representing this stance, issued the following warning on the dangers involved in the growth of the Catholic congregation that is not accompanied by spiritual maturity: “The church should be seriously concerned about whether the value of the Kingdom of God has not been overwhelmed by the increase in the number of believers who, though baptized, have failed to deeply root themselves in the spirit and value of the Gospel, and whether the values pursued by the church have not been compromised or reversed by the world order and wrong worldly values” (Kim Jung-Yong 2010, 146). These statements express a concern that the church growth is being achieved while internal problems of Catholicism are not being duly addressed. The church growth may have been made possible not by Catholicism’s internal efforts but by external causes like insufficient capabilities of its competing religions, Protestantism and Buddhism in particular, to cope with social changes.

Catholicism’s increased size in the congregation, in fact, expanded its capacity of mobilizing material and human resources. The grown congregation has increased resources to be put into social service, which has, in turn, contributed toward promoting Catholicism’s affirmative image. As Father Kim Jung-Yong pointed out, however, Catholicism encounters not a few theological problems caused by these changes. The first and most serious problem is that Catholicism’s social participation has dwindled as the upper-middle class have come to constitute the center of the congregation. The church culture centered on the upper middle class gives rise to an image that

Catholicism is a church of the privileged, not accessible by the socially weak.

Secondly, Catholicism's high social prestige, affirmative image accompanying it, and image of trust and transparency⁴ are sometimes used for profit-making purposes. For example, Seoul Archdiocese's Peace Dream is a business engaged in funeral services, pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and construction projects. This can be interpreted as an attempt to regard the believers as potential clients and not to allow church wealth to flow outside of the church.

Thirdly, Catholicism's affirmative image plays the role of blocking internal criticisms. Since the prestige was gained through a comparative advantage over other religions, without being backed up by inner substantiality, there has been an inclination to maintain the prestige by hiding inner problems, rather than making them public. In fact, critical public opinions are thoroughly controlled within the church, and no public forum exists within Korean Catholicism.

Lastly, the long-sustained affirmative image and the growth in the size of the congregation have given rise to an optimistic attitude that the trend will continue even without reforms.

Innovation Efforts of Church and Their Limits

It is not to say that the Korean Catholic Church was not aware of such dangers at all. Korean Catholicism has endeavored to resolve the challenges it faces in many dimensions during the past 20 years. One of the most prominent activities was the holding of diocesan synods.⁵

4. Choi (2011) described transparency as integrity. Priests' celibacy is taken as a condition that permits priests to be more aloof to money matters than married Protestant ministers.

5. According to Canon 463, a diocesan synod is "a group of selected priests and other members of the Christian faithful of a particular church who offer assistance to the diocesan bishop for the good of the whole diocesan community according to the norm of the following canons."

(1) Active Convening of Diocesan Synods

The biggest shift of Korean Catholicism prior to and following the year 2000 can be said to be the holding of diocesan synods. Diocesan synods were held at the advice of the late Pope John Paul II. Through his apostolic letter, “*Tertio Millenio Adveniente*” (The Coming of the Third Millennium), issued on November 10, 1994, the pope instructed that the year 2000 be observed as the Great Jubilee with each regional church making preparations for the occasion, reflecting on its past errors, and being born again through innovations. The Vatican, following the issuance of the apostolic letter, instructed that synods be convened in every continent and that regional churches fulfill instructions given in the apostolic letter, in addition to preparatory procedures.

In step with the world’s synod project, archdioceses of Daegu, Incheon, and Suwon held synods late in 1999. The Seoul Archdiocese completed its synod in 2003 and the Cheongju Diocese held a synod most recently between 2005 and 2008. The dioceses of Andong, Jeonju, Busan, and Gwangju held semi-synod events. Through synods, the dioceses endeavored to discover the needs of the congregation members, examine accumulated problems, and work out long-term solutions.

Active movements that emerged inside Korean Catholicism since 2000 mostly surfaced through synods or in the course of enforcing synod outcomes. Children topped the list of priority issues most dioceses raised in the wake of synods because the number of Catholic teenagers were smaller than their counterparts in other religions, and also because their participation in church activities was declining. The second concerned the education of the faithful, with life-long education of priests included. This priority aimed at resolving the problem of a delay in qualitative maturity, which was incongruent with the quantitative growth in the size of the congregation. The third was pastoral ministry for the aged in conjunction with the aging trend of Korean society. Lastly, Korean Catholicism tried to review its social services and seek ways of pastorally responding to them. These tasks were designed to supplement the weaknesses of modern Korean Catholicism and positively cope with future changes in the environ-

ment of its pastoral ministry.

These endeavors achieved little despite great expectations, however. The outcome was disappointing, it was evaluated, when taken into account the two to three years spent for synod preparations, the time and expenses church invested into synods, and the influence the synod results were expected to impose in the future.

There are a number of reasons for the disappointing outcome. First, although sustained attention and supporting structures were needed to effect real change, no preparations were made for them. Second, the synods failed to attract the interest of the faithful because attention was focused on a few issues selected at the last stage, rather than the problems raised and suggestions made during the preparatory stage. Third, the leadership lacked a will to enforce the results continuously. They concentrated on short-term objectives, instead of setting up goals needing a decade or longer to achieve, and dismissed projects that were unlikely to produce desired effects in the early stage. Lastly, the drive failed to solicit active participation from the faithful, partly because the will to change on the part of the faithful fell short.

The Korean Catholic Church poured, though heteronomously, manpower and financial resources on a national scale for a long period of time into the innovation project, yet failed to attain the expected results. Given that the Great Jubilee seldom comes around, it may be said that modern Korean Catholicism has lost an opportunity to resolve the problems and tasks it confronts.

(2) Short-Term Efforts to Cope with Changing Pastoral Ministry Environment

Soon after the year 2000, an active discussion took place on the possible effects to pastoral ministry of the five-day work week system that was to be introduced in 2003. The discussion was focused on how seriously the system would reduce the faithful's Sunday mass attendance or participation in church activities.

It was revealed, however, that the five-day work week system brought about little effect on the faithful. Church members continued

their weekend religious activities by adopting the Japanese-style leisure-use pattern of taking part in outdoor activities on Saturday and resting at home on Sunday. Affecting the faithful's Sunday religious activities more was the phenomenon that they, with their living standard raised, were seeking to pursue meaningful lives with outside-church activities rather than through the church.

A lot of events and educational activities also have taken place since 2003 against the so-called "new spiritual movement." The church media took the lead and the Bishops' Conference issued a guideline to support the drive. The new spiritual movement is the expansion of the "new religion" concept that Japanese theologian Shimazono Susumu used in his book, *Seishin sekai no yukue: gendai sekai to shin reisei undo* 精神世界のゆくえ: 現代世界と新靈性運動 (The Future of the Spiritual World: New Spirituality Movements in the Global Society) (Shimazono 1997, 275-281). New religions refer to the religions and pseudo-religions that emerged in Japan after World War II.

In Korean Catholicism, Ro Gil Mioung first used the term "new spiritual movement" by expanding Shimazono's concept (Ro 2001). Father Cha Dong-yeop helped to make the theme a major church interest by publishing over a year a series of articles in the *Catholic Times* and actively discussing it in lectures. The Bishops' Conference, triggered thereby, instructed the formation of a special research team to establish measures to cope with it. The research team that subsequently formed decided to replace "new religion" with "newly emerging religion" since "new" is liable to be understood as a positive alternative to something existing, whereas the phrase "newly emerging" carries a somewhat negative nuance as it was used to refer to religions and pseudo-religions that emerged in Korea and caused controversies in the wake of the Korean War.

Contrary to the concern of the church hierarchy, however, the newly emerging spiritual movement did not cause serious effects. In fact, the church's concern and guard against the movement was largely meant for prevention on the one hand, and stemmed from a worry about the believer's weak consciousness of religion on the other.

Church leaders were admitting that the Catholic adherents' religiosity was indeed that low.

A trend of emphasizing life ethics intensified in 2005 over the issue of stem cell replication. Since 1990, the Korean Catholic Church has more frequently criticized the government and NGOs supporting life issues like the "Mother and Child Healthcare Law" and euthanasia, all the while reducing its participation in the nation's social and economic issues (N. Kim 1997). The replication of stem cells runs counter to the stance of Catholicism, and its opposition was reinforced when it was revealed that the research results of Dr. Hwang Woo-suk, the central figure of the 2005 stem cell research controversy, were fabricated. With the incident serving as a momentum, Korean Catholicism endeavored to encourage the faithful's consciousness of life ethics by establishing the Graduate School of Life at the Catholic University of Korea and life committees in each diocese. But limitations became evident in sustaining Catholic influence in promoting life ethics, as its life ethics confined the scope of life to human beings and because little difference existed between Catholics and non-Catholics concerning life consciousness.

The year 2007 saw the publication of *Gatollik sinja-ui jonggyo uisik-gwa sinang saenghwal* (Catholics' Religious Consciousness and Faith Life), a report on a survey the *Catholic Times* conducted and published on the occasion of its 80th anniversary. The report showed that Catholicism achieved little in its proactive efforts to pastorally cope with the problems it faced on the occasion of the Great Jubilee. The report assessed that the increased size of the congregation had failed to lead to a qualitative growth and that the factors that had earned affirmative evaluation of Catholicism from society had been weakened. Also revealed were the faithful's dwindled religious commitments in terms of sociology of religion, reduced interest in social participation, and expanded plurality in religious consciousness. These findings represent a poor internal reality not matching the exterior splendor.

The small community drive, despite poor initial outcome, was pushed ahead as a continuing pastoral task. It was a long-term pro-

ject, aimed at shifting emphasis from the hierarchy and sacrament to communion. Most dioceses either suspended the project within a decade or merely maintained it minimally, however. Jeju and Uijeongbu are the only dioceses still maintaining the small community movement as a pastoral project while most dioceses have virtually discarded it.

Progressive lay apostolate organizations began to propagate the “religious power discourse” in 2008. The gist of the discourse had it that, with Catholicism having become a strong social power with vested interests, it inevitably has to improve itself. The church hierarchy, too, conducted a peril discourse based on enfeebled pastoral objectives. Both sides held that growth, continuing as it was, had become a poison due to too many negative consequences. Both proposed similar countermeasure directions, yet with different emphasis; the progressive lay Catholics placed emphasis on reinforcing social roles of the church, while the church hierarchy placed stress on reeducation of the faithful. The discourse failed to become central in the church, however. To begin with, the church media were reluctant to deal with the discourse out of concern that it may have a negative effect on the image of Catholicism. In addition, individuals and organizations pioneering the discourse had weak influence within the church and no media existed that could shift the discourse into another channel.

Social welfare functions of Korean Catholicism quantitatively expanded remarkably during the period under review. With the state’s social welfare activities expanded, in particular, Catholicism saw a boost in areas, scope, and quantity of social welfare activities in the form of official-private coordination. Since 2000, Catholic social welfare facilities have increased by 595 in direct management, 369 in commission, and 67 in others. The total number of Catholic facilities saw a rise of 117.5 percentage point from 2000 (SWC 2011, 16).

Korean Catholicism is entrusted with a half of the social welfare facilities commissioned by the state, provincial governments, and private bodies. This is an amazing achievement, given that the size of its congregation is smaller than that of Buddhism and Protestantism. Catholic social welfare facilities, however, rely on the state for 61 per-

cent of their financing, whereas self-financing is limited to 26.8 percent (You 2008, 21). Hence, autonomy in their management is insufficient.

In the disposition of people staffing social welfare facilities, too, Catholicism can hardly claim its peculiarity since those without religion and with other faith account for 30 percent of the total. With the management of social welfare facilities being specialized, conflicts between lay social workers and non-specialized management (priests and religious) are growing.

Catholic hospitals continued expansion during the period under review despite the fact that the country can now manage itself in terms of medical services even if all Catholic hospitals were to close. As a consequence, Catholic hospitals suffer from financial pinches and have also invited social criticism that their spirit of service, their original mission, has faded.

Major Issues within Catholicism

Catholics' Increasing Conservatization and the Church's Dwindled Participation in Society

A number of Catholic priests and religious were recently taken to the police at the naval base construction site in Gangjeong village on Jeju-do island. The incident occurred as an extension of the Catholic participation in the 2009 candlelight vigil against the import of American beef on account of mad cow disease, opposition to the dismantling of shantytown in Namil-dong, Yongsan-gu district, Seoul, and campaigns calling for suspending the Four Major Rivers Project.⁶

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea formally announced

6. On March 8, 2010, 1,100 priests took part in a statement urging suspension of the Four Major Rivers Project. "A Declaration of 5,005 Priests and Religious across the Country Urging a Suspension of the Four Major Rivers Project" was issued on May 10, 2010. The figure was composed of 1,580 parish priests, 282 members of the male religious congregation, and 3,143 members of the female religious congregation (*Catholic Times*, May 16, 2010).

“Our Opinion on Life Issues and the Four Major Rivers Project” at its regular spring general conference on March 12, 2010, expressing a formal concern about the Four Major Rivers Project. Bishop Peter Kang Woo-il, chairman of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, cautioned against the danger of nuclear power stations (W. Kang 2011) in a contribution titled “Wonjaryeok baljeon-e daehan geuriseudoin-ui seongchal” (Christians’ Introspection on Nuclear Power Generation), published in the July 2011 issue of the *Gyeonghyang japji* (Gyeonghyang Magazine). In March 2012, Bishop Kang contributed to the website of the CBCK an article titled “Hanmi FTA, gwayeon uri-ege doumi doel geosinga?” (Will the Free Trade Agreement with the United States Really Be of Help to Us?).⁷ Bishop Mathias Lee Yong-hoon, Chairman of the Justice and Peace Committee, CBCK, visited the naval base construction site in Gangjeong village, Jeju, on September 15, 2011, and issued a statement opposing the base construction. The Justice and Peace Committee is still engaged in the opposition campaign. In this manner, the CBCK has maintained a progressive stance on national issues, in which progressives and conservatives are sharply confronting each other, such as the Four Major Rivers Project, atomic power generation, the naval base construction in Gangjeong village, and the Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

The Korean Catholic Church’s participation in such social issues reminds us of its similar activities between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s. Various differences are observed between then and now, however. Informal church organizations like the Catholic Priest’s Association for Justice (hereafter, the Priest’s Association) and the Association of Catholic Social Action took the central role in social activism until the mid-1980s. Assuming the central role now, in contrast, are official church institutes such as the CBCK and its Justice and Peace Committee. Layperson organizations and individuals do participate in the campaigns, but their influence is minimal when compared with the past. Few statements and actions in support of the campaigns are

7. The article can be read at: http://www.cbck.or.kr/bbs/bbs_read.asp?board_id=K1300&bid=13008462&page=2&key=&keyword=&cat=.

seen among official church layperson organizations today. When looking from the morphology alone, only priests and religious seem to be taking part in Catholicism's social activities.

The faithful showed a favorable attitude toward the church's social participation until the mid-1980s. Even if they were opposed, they seldom expressed it. But now, church members often voice their opposition even toward utterances made by the Bishops' Conference. The number of Catholics who express opposing views has increased sharply, in particular, since the incumbent government came into power in 2008 and the church leadership began to articulate their official stance on controversial national issues that were contested between progressives and conservatives. Hence, the voice of opposition, which was inaudible in the past, has now become loud and frequent.

Such a phenomenon has been keenly felt since the latter 1980s, when the church began to discuss the ascendancy of the upper-middle-class members within the congregation. Progressive scholars then started to debate the causes of shrinking church participation in social affairs and reduced social critiques in relation to the ascendancy of the upper-middle-class believers. This ascendancy has deepened in recent years to the extent that Korean Catholicism is now judged to be the congregation of the upper-middle class.⁸ Is this really a fact? The only source of data available by which the classes of the Catholic congregation can be inferred is *Gatollik sinja-ui jonggyo uisik-gwa sinang saenghwal* (Catholics' Religious Consciousness and Faith Life), the outcome of a trend survey the Catholic Press conducts every ten years. What follows is an analysis of the survey report, the latest available published by the Catholic Press on the occasion of its 80th anniversary (RCIPM 2007), on the consciousness of the congregation.⁹

8. The December 2011 edition of the *Samok jeongbo* (Pastoral Ministry Information) journal featured the issue of the ascendancy of the upper-middle-class believers.

9. The survey was the third of its kind, the first having been done in 1987 and the second in 1998. It was carried out from September 5 to October 10, 2006. Proportional quota sampling over 1,500 samples was employed. Questionnaire format was employed based on structured questions and the sample error range was 3 percent plus and minus (RCIPM 2007).

According to the report, “the educational level of the Catholics, as revealed in the 2005 data of the Korea National Statistical Office, registered 8.9 percentage point above the formal schooling of ordinary citizens. . . . Catholics and Protestants showed a higher level when compared with the average schooling level of the entire population, while citizens who do not practice religion and followers of Buddhism and other religions showed a lower level” (RCIPM 2007, 27-28). As for residential and occupational distributions, “Catholics, in relative terms, have the conspicuous characteristic of living concentrated in the Seoul metropolitan region. In occupation structure, Catholics are engaged in occupations with relatively higher income than the general population. In income standards, too, the total income of Catholics far exceeds the national average” (RCIPM 2007, 31-35).

It can thus be concluded that since they are above the national average in terms of indices dividing classes, the proportion of the upper-middle-class Catholics can be said to be high. Accordingly, given that the middle class in Korean society has been conservative politically, the ascendancy of the upper-middle class within the congregation can be inferred to have partially affected Catholicism’s increasing political conservatism.

The second cause can be found in reduced social consciousness of the faithful. First, Table 1 presents a survey result of Catholics’ will-

Table 1. Willingness to Participate in Social Activism

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Active participation	48	3.3	3.5
Participation if possible	582	39.9	42.1
No participation	412	28.3	29.8
No interest	341	23.4	24.7
No response	74	5.1	
Total	1,457	100.0	

Source: RCIPM (2007, 154).

ingness to take part in social activism. Willingness to participate accounted for 45.6 percent, 3.5 percent opting for “active participation” and 42.1 percent for “participation if possible.” The opinion of “no interest in social participation,” on the other hand, accounted for 24.7 percent. In overall proportions, negative responses to social participation on the part of the Catholic congregation accounted for 54.5 percent, 8.9 percentage point greater than affirmative responses.

Second, views about the Church’s intervention or participation in social issues surveyed in 2006, along with those revealed in the second survey of 1998, are shown in Table 2. In the second survey of 1998, 80.3 percent of respondents consented to church intervention in social issues, giving rise to a prospect that Korean Catholicism would be characterized by sustained social interest and participation in the twenty-first century. In the third survey of 2007, however, 65.3 percent of respondents agreed with church participation in social issues, 15 percentage point down from the second survey of 1998. Activism had noticeably declined. This outcome sharply contrasts with the high degree of support, shown in the first survey of 1987, evincing that the Catholic faithful’s interest in society began to ebb in the 1990s.

Table 2. Church Participation in Social Issues

	1998		2006	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Totally agree	227	20.0	138	10.2
Relatively agree	714	62.8	813	59.9
Relatively opposed	178	15.7	349	25.7
Totally opposed	18	1.6	57	4.2
Total	1,137	100.0	1,357	100.0

Source: RCIPM (2007, 158).

Responses to major social issues are shown in Table 3. In an attempt to better reveal the church member’s consciousness, the questionnaire

only surveyed the issues on which the right and left are sharply divided. The outcome confirmed that the faithful were opposed to specific issues much more than what they indicated when they consented in general terms to church participation in societal affairs. Accordingly, responses to this questionnaire revealed the Catholic adherents' actual political consciousness.

Table 3. Catholics' Attitudes toward Major Social Issues

	Frequency	Average*	Standard deviation
Abolition of the National Security Law	1,152	2.28	.944
Troop dispatch to Iraq	1,212	2.09	.843
Campaigns by the Korean Teachers and Education Worker's Union and the Public Officials Union	1,205	1.93	.876
Revision of the Private Education Law	1,066	2.50	.963
The government's fertilizer and rice aid to North Korea	1,266	2.52	.897
Recovery of the wartime operational control	1,110	2.35	1.026
Resolution of the rising social inequality	1,176	3.21	.824

Source: RCIPM (2007, 165).

* Average is counted out of a full mark of 4 (1 = absolutely opposed, 2 = generally opposed, 3 = generally support, 4 = actively support).

A high degree of support bigger than 3 points out of a full mark of 4 points was given only to the "resolution of social polarization," where as the remaining issues all recorded lower than the median of 2 points. In general, this range of points results when support or opposition is equally divided or when opposition is bigger. Catholic adher-

ents' willingness to participate in social affairs, thus, differs depending on the issue in question.

On the issues where the political stance of the right and left differs markedly, supporting and opposing opinions are similar in numbers or opposition views prevail. Supporting opinions are higher on themes where both the right and left are very likely to agree with each other. Given this trend, the faithful are expected to oppose the church leadership's recent social announcements.

According to the outcome of the three surveys conducted in the past two decades, Catholics' willingness to participate in social affairs has continued to ebb, and they also revealed that political differences among Catholics parallel that of the larger Korean society's conservative and progressive divisions on specific controversial issues. This means that faith has little influence on the formation of political attitudes. It is accordingly presumed that the faithful choose their political views according to their standing in social class, irrespective of their religiosity.

Efforts to Strengthen the Adherent's Religiosity and the Future of Inclusivism

The second issue is whether Korean Catholics who have pursued inclusivism will opt for exclusivism due to the pastoral countermeasures the Korean Catholic Church has taken since 1990. Also at issue is whether the Catholics' pattern of passive religious life can be changed through the reeducation of the adherents and the small community movement now underway.

Korean Catholicism began in 1990 to pay more attention to internal pastoral matters because of, on the one hand, the shrinking role of the church in society due to the growth of civil society and, on the other hand, changed aspirations of the faithful that consequently raised interest in their reeducation. The need of the church hierarchy to elevate the qualitative growth of faith, which has failed to catch up with the high quantitative growth of society, also played a role. In an attempt to tackle these problems, the church decided to expand

opportunities for Bible study, introduce small communities within the congregation, and boost interest in spiritual movements. As a result, Catholics' interest in the Bible and lay spirituality increased sharply. Since then, organizations responsible for Holy Writ study (mostly centered on religious congregations) and the number of those who study the Holy Scriptures have increased. Thanks to active participation by a large number of new converts hailing from the middle class, revitalization efforts led by the Bishops' Conference, and the support of study manuals and program development, Catholics interested in the Great Book have markedly risen (Park 2010b, 54).

The basic ecclesial community movement, which may be called the biggest pastoral project of Korean Catholicism, was also introduced for the purpose of strengthening the weakened church solidarity and refashioning the hierarchical structure into that of a communion. Small communities did not succeed in bringing about a major change, but they did present to the followers a new church image.

Catholics' interest in lay spirituality was also boosted. With active religious congregations adopting it as a new pastoral area, the number of retreat houses along with the relevant programs surged. Moreover, related publications and the number of copies printed grew remarkably and the latest spirituality practices were introduced into Korea in real time (Park 2010b, 55-56). Opportunities for the followers to access theological studies also surged through the catechetical institutes and various faith lectures. Reeducation programs for the members at parish churches swelled as well.

Have the Catholic Church's pastoral endeavors, designed to elevate the faith consciousness of the believers and their sense of belonging and solidarity, effected a change in their attitude toward other religions from that of inclusivity to exclusivity? And have they shifted the Catholic's passive attitude toward faith life into an active one? No changes seem to have been effected in either aspect yet. For example, the typical images of Catholicism that it holds "an open attitude toward other religions" and that it "permits ancestral memorial rites, drinking, and smoking" remain intact (Choi 2011, 67). In addition, Koreans' attitude of being tolerant of and generous to other religions

seems to suppress Catholicism's retrogression to exclusivism.¹⁰ Accordingly, chances are deemed very small that Catholicism will opt for an exclusivist line.

Nothing much appears to have changed in the passive commitment of the faithful, either. No increase in mobilized resources, in terms of materials and time, has been verified. This indicates that Catholicism's endeavors to renovate itself have not been successful.

The Problem of Priests' Authority

Soon after the Bishops' Conference adopted a statement expressing concern about the Four Major Rivers Project at its spring general conference in 2010, Cardinal Nicholas Cheong Jin-suk of Seoul Archdiocese made public his opposition, on the premise that it was his personal view. Former senior members of the Priest's Association urged the cardinal to step down as the head of the Seoul Archdiocese. Although criticisms of the cardinal were often made in the past, it was the first time in the history of Korean Catholicism that his resignation was demanded.

Divided opinions on the incident raged within the church. Catholics supporting the decision of the Bishops' Conference and the act of the Priest's Association criticized Cardinal Nicholas Cheong's unilateral action and maintained that the criticism of his action was justified. Catholics holding traditional faith consciousness and those who were critical of the positions of the Bishops' Conference and the Priest's Association criticized the resignation demand as an act of insubordi-

10. Such Korean attitude is confirmed in the outcome of the following survey. The 2008 Korea General Social Survey (KGSS) data included the following question in a questionnaire: "To what degree do you agree or disagree with the view that all should respect all religions?" Respondents opting for "I agree" (very much or somewhat) accounted for 66.8%, "I oppose" (somewhat or very) 15.5%, and "I neither agree nor disagree" 16.6% (S. Kim et al. 2009, 171). In response to a question about "religious plurality," one more specific than the former, responses opting for "most religions contain truth they claim" accounted for 76.3%, "no religion contains special truth" 11.4%, "only one religion has truth" 9.9%, and "I cannot choose" 2.5% (S. Kim et al. 2009).

nation. Although no specific data can be offered, as the opposing stances were not made public in the media, the controversy was vibrant inside of the church. And many Catholics were opposed to the Bishops' Conference and the Priest's Association.

Setting aside the Four Major Rivers Project controversy, this problem draws attention in that some quarters of the church understood the act of the Priest's Association as a challenge to church authority. Making no issue of the cardinal's violation of the agreement reached by the Bishops' Conference, they asserted that the cardinal's act did not constitute a reason for demanding his resignation since he represented the opinion of some of the church members. Moreover, they maintained that even if the cardinal violated the accord reached by the Bishops' Conference, priests should not have demanded his resignation. Aside from whether the proponents and opponents are right or wrong, this incident is significant in the sense that Korean lay Catholics viewed it as an open challenge the priests made against the head authority of the archdiocese.

The Wise Lay Catholics, a group critical of the Bishops' Conference's announcements and the Priest's Association's interventions in state issues, also made its position public. A journalist who shares views with the Wise Lay Catholics wrote an editorial in a daily national newspaper, criticizing the Bishops' Conference. Though their acts followed a particular political stance, in particular the rightist one, their expressions were camouflaged as a concern that the bishops and priests seriously damaged the essence of Catholicism by abandoning the proper role of church and priests. This incident, although arising from a different motive, constituted a challenge to the priests by lay Catholics.

At parish churches, a considerable number of Catholics rejected or criticized their priests' sermons supporting the Bishops' Conference position. They expressed their opinions not from the viewpoint of lay apostolate, but according to their political interests. Nonetheless, their argument was based on a contention that the bishops and priests violated the so-called principle of separating church from state; they maintained that the church, being faithful to the principle of not inter-

fering with politics, should not interfere with state agenda. Whatever the reason may be, it appears that the authority of the priests has somewhat fallen ever since the middle class came to constitute the center of the congregation.

On the other hand, there are opinions that the authority of priests has rather been elevated since the church, with its societal activities diminished, has now concentrated on its internal affairs. The decline of priests' authority may appear in the Seoul metropolitan area and major provincial cities, but the authority of priests seems to remain intact in provincial dioceses. Moreover, it may be that the authority of priests has not been damaged because believers approving of the authority alone remains in churches, while those repulsed by the authority have become tepid or have chosen not to practice their faith at all.

The author views all the three phenomena as coexisting. The main current, however, seems to be flowing toward the weakening of priests' authority. Even believers who stress priests' authority recognize that the present state represents an improvement from the past. Since social changes proceed more rapidly than those taking place inside of the church, this lag between the two changes makes believers relatively less likely to feel the changes inside of the church.

Other Issues

Korean Catholicism is relatively free from the controversies that have troubled Western churches, such as priests' sexual abuse of children and female parishioners and homosexuality. It is difficult to ascertain whether these issues have not been exposed although they actually exist, or if they do not exist at all.

During the early 1990s, feminism was introduced into Korean Catholicism with the inauguration of the Catholic Female Community. Feminist theology was also introduced to female apostolate from the mid-1990s and female theologians with formal theological education began to emerge. They made active calls for ordaining female priests and elevating the ranks of females within the church, criticizing the

patriarchal system of priests. The Female Theologians Society came into being among female religious and lay believers. The extent of their influence was limited in spite of their efforts, however, because responses from the female faithful were not as positive as expected, and because the patriarchal system of the church was further reinforced with the increased number of priests and the decreased social role of the church. As a consequence, Catholic feminism now barely maintains its existence.

With the expansion of the middle-class congregation members, demand for overseas pilgrimages to the Holy Land surged. The two major Catholic journals, the *Catholic Times* and the *Peace Times*, are running their own tourist businesses and other tourist firms operated by Catholics are also prospering. Korea reportedly ranks second in the world in terms of the number of pilgrims to the Holy Land. Needless to say, Protestants occupy a considerable portion of the pilgrims.

The borderline is vague with respect to whether the pilgrimages to the Holy Land, which require considerable expenditures, are pilgrimages in the real sense or are mere tourist visits. What is clearly evident is the fact that, though there are many Catholics who can afford the expenses, there is a significant number of believers who cannot afford the costs, and therefore the pilgrimage boom fosters an atmosphere of disharmony within the church.

Conclusion

Among the issues Korean Catholicism faces today, those discussed in this article were chosen from discourses frequently dealt within the church media and among scholars. Focus was placed upon describing the features of the issues while restraining self-interpretation as much as possible. The author regarded that the issues generally began to emerge in or around 1990, which witnessed the beginnings of class structure shift among Catholics and the subsequent rise of more frequent and complex problems due to the altered class structure. Interestingly, Korea's three major religions all commonly confirmed these

changes. Accordingly, such phenomena may have been influenced more by the changes Korean society underwent at the time than those that occurred within Catholicism. If thus, it is more appropriate to see the period in question as a turning point.

In surveying the experiences of modern Korean Catholicism, in particular since the year 2000, the major alterations of the church that this author has identified include conservatism in its societal participation, delayed reform in spite of the increased size of the congregation, and the relativity of authority. The author attempted to reveal that although it outwardly appears to be as dynamic as ever and enjoy affirmative evaluation from Korean society, the future of modern Korean Catholicism is not necessarily bright.

On the part of the Catholic Church, it cannot unqualifiedly welcome a continued growth of the congregation if it deprives the church of its essence. Looking at it from the church history, such a path is a shortcut to becoming an object of social condemnation. It is, therefore, necessary to critically review the issues Korean Catholicism faces for the sake of its future as well as that of Korea.

The ascendancy of the upper-middle-class congregation members, the general weakening of religiosity, the slackened solidarity of the community, and the heightened plurality—all these issues that began to be discussed since the latter half of the 1980s, have been reinforced or maintained similar levels during the period under review. Catholicism, along with Protestantism, also experienced the process of stratification within the same religion.

As a result, Catholicism has become politically conservative and has displayed a trend of liberally interpreting and implementing church teachings on dogmas and ethics. Along with this trend, Catholic publics tend to enjoy services provided while evading religious commitment. Such attitudes are unintentionally interpreted by external publics as inclusiveness of neighboring religions that has paradoxically led to an increase in the size of the Catholic congregation; this appearance determines the image of Catholics.

Being aware of and concerned about this trend, Korean Catholicism has made positive efforts to effect changes, but to no avail.

Instead, chances are much higher for Catholicism to follow the wishes of its adherents, and, accordingly, the possibility has increased that the present sacrament-centered paradigm of Catholic Church will be reinforced. Therefore, there is an increased chance that the positive social evaluation that Korean Catholicism has enjoyed to date will give way to a negative one.

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