

# AN ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS FORMS OF *JUCHE* IDEOLOGY IN COMPARISON WITH CHRISTIANITY

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It has become nowadays persuasive that North Korean society uniformed by *juche* ideology and worship for the Great Leader Kim Il Sung, contains sort of religious nature. It has developed *juche* ideology into a sort of world or personal view of life, and designated the birthplace of Kim Il Sung as sacred precincts. North Korean Workers' Party formulated the phrase of propaganda, "The great leader comrade Kim Il Sung shall be with us forever," so that it attempts to carve him an immortal being based upon *juche* theory of socio-political organism. Kim Il Sung has now been praised not only as a historical hero and national leader, but as an object of godly worship. The sacred worship for *juche* ideology and Kim Il Sung is expressed in various forms of behavior and rituals in North Korea. It was in post-socialism era that the religious characteristics became salient in North Korea. North Korea suffered from serious economic and military crisis at the times of the collapse of socialist countries in the early 1990s. In the mid-1990s, North Korea suffered an extreme food crisis followed by mass starvation. Nevertheless, people's discontent did not bring about any revolt in an extremely difficult situation, rather they were led to overcome the crisis by launching what so called "Arduous March." From

all of these phenomena, many think that North Korean society has now without doubt evolved into a sort of religious sect. In particular, visitors to North Korea or North Korean defectors often have often pointed out that the life style and values of North Korean people are very similar to those of Christianity. However, no systematic study has been performed regarding the issues of religious property or Christian similarities of North Korean society. In this sense, this study explores to compare *juche* ideology with Christian religious forms, and tries to examine religious characteristics soaked in North Korean society.

## I. Opening Remarks

It is a uniformly credible idea nowadays that the ideology of *juche* and worship for the Great Leader Kim Il Sung, by which North Korea is run, contain a sort of religious nature. North Korea has developed *juche* ideology into a sort of worldview or personal view of life, and designated the birthplace of Kim Il Sung as sacred grounds. On the third anniversary of Kim Il Sung's death North Korea proclaimed the so-called "*Juche* Era" which counts the year of 1912, the birth year of Kim Il Sung, as the first year, and enacted April 15, the birth day of Kim Il Sung, as the Day of the Sun. The North Korean Workers' Party formulated the following propaganda, "The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung shall be with us forever," attempting to carve him into an immortal being based upon the *juche* theory of socio-political organism. Kim Il Sung has now been praised not only as a historical hero and national leader, but as an object of godly worship.

Worship of the *juche* ideology and Kim Il Sung as sacred is expressed in various forms of behavior and rituals in North Korea. All the people in North Korea hang portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-

il in the best room in their houses and clean these photos every day. The people take good care of each portrait and statue related to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il. Many people pay homage to the statue of Kim Il Sung in the early morning every day. They usually decorate with flowers and make a ceremonial bow to the portraits on the birthday of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il. They do the same rituals on New Year's Day.

It was in the post-socialism era that the religious characteristics became salient in North Korea. North Korea suffered from serious economic and military crises at the times of the collapse of the socialist countries in the early 1990s. In the mid-1990s, North Korea suffered an extreme food crisis followed by mass starvation. Nevertheless, people's discontent did not bring about any revolt even in such an extremely difficult situation. Rather they were led to overcome the crisis by launching the so-called "Arduous March." The former secretary of the North Korean Workers Party, Whang Jang Yup, pointed out correctly in his press conference in 1997 that "North Korea is currently suffering an economic crisis, but there is no danger for North Korea to collapse because it is well solidified politically." Through these phenomena, many think that North Korean society has now without doubt evolved into a sort of religious sect.

Most North Korean defectors realized North Korea had strong religious characteristics only after they did leave their society. It is very common for North Korean defectors in South Korea to feel uncomfortable when they say the name of Kim Il Sung without the lording word, "great leader" for many years. Some of them say, "Kim Il Sung shall not be forgotten forever in my heart," or "I shall not be completely free from Kim Il Sung until I die." It usually takes one to two years at the shortest to come out of the feeling of Kim Il Sung's godly authority even for the defectors who have converted to liberal democracy by deserting the North Korean system. One defector confessed from his experience that it is not possible for North Korean defectors to

overcome “Kim Il Sung” in their truest heart. This implies that Kim Il Sung is carved as an absolute god to the people in North Korea.

In particular, visitors to North Korea or North Korean defectors often have pointed out that the lifestyle and values of North Korean people are very similar to those of Christianity. Kim Hyun-hee, who was arrested for the terrorist act of blowing up a KAL airplane, confessed that she worshiped Kim Il Sung as God in North Korea, and that her life would be meaningless if the existence of Kim Il Sung were taken from her life, in the same way that Christians would be without God. She says that it is not an exaggeration to compare the relationship between Kim Il Sung and the people of North Korea to that of ‘God and men.’ When she read the bible she was surprised, saying “The bible is just like *juche* ideology. *Juche* ideology can be understood much faster after studying the bible. It is possible to put the name ‘Kim Il Sung’ instead of Jesus in the Bible.”<sup>1</sup> She mentioned that she was forced to memorize ten principles which are similar to the Ten Commandments; she performed weekly life-summation sessions just like Sunday worship service; and she learned the concept of unity of the Party, people, and the Great Leader, similar to the idea of trinity.

However, no systematic study has been performed regarding the issues of the religious properties of *Juche* or similarities with Christianity in North Korean society. In this sense, this study attempts to compare *juche* ideology with Christianity in its religious forms, and tries to examine religious characteristics saturated within North Korean society.

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1 Kap-jae Cho and Ho-seung Chung, *The God of Kim Hyun-hee* (Seoul: Kosikae, 1990), pp. 71, 103.

## II. Religious Phenomena in Socialist Society and Religionization of *Juche* Ideology

A religion has at least three general characteristics; a worship for “the sacred,” performance of religious rituals, and maintenance of social community.<sup>2</sup> In other words, religious experience is always revealed through thought and ideology; it expresses itself through rituals and ceremonies well-framed with words and behaviors; and it takes the form of an organization or community in which acceptance of membership, occupancy of status, and division of roles are mandated.<sup>3</sup> Despite differentiation in the degree of complexity and institutionalization of the three forms in each religion, it has to have all the three forms, that is, dogma which is a theory form, ritual which is a practical form, and community which is a social form, if it is to be called as religion.

In this sense, it is not a recent phenomenon to regard socialism itself as a kind of religion. Socialists and communists expelled religion in socialist society by accusing it to be the ‘opium of the people.’ Ironically, however, ideologies of socialism and communism occupied the same place instead where a religion once resided. Karl Marx himself believed that the positive values realized in a religion could be a guiding idea to reform human destiny.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, socialism, which is a positive self-awareness of mankind, functions as a religion. The ideology contains religious characteristics in that it demands commitment to a political leader or ideology or any membership group.

*Juche* ideology has also consolidated its religious nature over time. It

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2 Joachim Bach, “Universal elements of religion,” Seung-hae Kim, ed., *Understanding of the Study on Religion* (Seoul: Boondo Press, 1986), pp. 115-141.

3 Kyung-whan Oh, *Sociology of Religion* (Seoul: Seokwangsa, 1990), p. 49.

4 Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 93.

developed from the principles of independence and a revolutionary mass line in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Since 1967, when a personality cult campaign for Kim Il Sung was carried out nationwide, *juche* developed into a political discourse of a 'monolithic ideological system' to rationalize a theoretical system of dominant political leadership. This brought about "Kimilsungism" and a revolutionary attitude toward the great leader, emphasized beginning in the early 1970s. From the mid-1970s, socialist collective values and norms in social relations began to be stressed by the launching of 'the human remolding project,' which was aimed at revolutionary comradeship and obligation, collectivism and heroism. After the philosophical dimension of *juche* ideology was theorized in 1982, the man-centered *juche* philosophy was furthermore underlined. Then, in 1986, it developed into a socio-political organism theory coupled with the theory of the great leader and a collective social organization. Since the post-Cold War era, it emphasizes the concept of 'nation' and '*Chosun* nationalism,' so that it theorizes the supremacy of 'our style of socialism' as different from other socialist system.

*Juche* ideology has been developing from a simple ideology to a religious belief. The religious dimension in *juche* ideology began to form with the advent of the theory of the great leader, and further intensified with advancement in its philosophical study.<sup>5</sup> The crucial moment when *juche* ideology was transformed into a religious faith was, however, the time when the socio-political organism theory had been completed. The fact that socio-political life was separated from the physical aspect of human life decisively contributed to the evolution of *juche* ideology into a religion. The advent of spirit has become very important in the process of religious evolution because it transformed divided souls into a collective object which can be owned and

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5 Myung-sae Kim, "An Evaluation from Christian Perspective on Human Remolding Theory of Juche Ideology," Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Theology, Baptist Theological University, 1996, pp. 32-36.

worshiped in turn by individuals.<sup>6</sup> As it changed to the theory of the great leader, philosophy, and socio-political organism, *juche* ideology evolved into a religious belief.

### III. Dogma and Belief System

Christian dogma and its belief system are outlined in systematic theology which includes theories of God, Man, Christology, Church, Salvation and eschatology.<sup>7</sup> *Juche* ideology can be also explained by dividing it in the same way as mentioned above. First of all, *juche* ideology rejects the abstract concept of God transcending the realm of human experience because it is based upon the values of Materialism and the theory of evolution. Instead, the belief and confidence in the coming of the ultimate communism replaces the metaphysical God. Moreover, Kim Il Sung is regarded both as a mediator who realizes the absolute value, communism, on this earth as the Supreme Being, just as in Christianity metaphysical God is incarnated into a human being, Jesus. Kim Il Sung is not recognized exactly the same as God is in Christianity so far, but the possibility cannot be ruled out that in the future Kim Il Sung, who is now 'invisible' since his death, will secure a divine status like God in Christianity, if the theological aspect of *juche* ideology is further developed. After the 1980s it has been especially emphasized that Kim Jong-il possesses legitimacy and a divine nature as the 'son of the father.' Just as Jesus secured divinity to succeed and achieve the covenant between God and man in the Old Testament, Kim Jong-il is endowed with a divine authority to succeed and realize the great task achieved by his father.

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6 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: The classic sociological study of primitive religion* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 309-333.

7 Louis Berkhof, translated by Soo-kyung Kwon and Sang-won Lee, *Systematic Theology* (Seoul: Christian Digest, 1998).

The monolithic ideological system and 'the great ten principles' in North Korea have something in common with Christian monotheism, demanding that believers serve only God, and this has even been stipulated in the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, which are indisputably accepted as God's words, provide the basic laws for all Christians to obey. Likewise, it is 'The Ten Great Principles to Consolidate the Monolithic Ideological System' that regulate and judge every word and action of the people in North Korea. In this context, it is understandable that the *juche* ideology exists in the sub-form of Kimilsungism stipulated as 'The Revolutionary Ideas of Comrade Kim Il Sung.' *Juche* ideology cannot be separated from Kim Il Sung and/or Kim Jong-il himself, who maintains an absolute divine position commanding stricter codes of behavior than Christianity.

Second, the nature of man is likely to be the most similar area that can be compared between *juche* ideology and Christianity. When Christianity focuses on man, leaving alone the theory of God, the Christian theory of man in the views of man and human life has marked common features with *juche* ideology. *Juche* ideology does not regard man as a sheer biological being, nor a unique characteristic according to the way individuals are organized, but as a special being which has a consciousness.<sup>8</sup> It does not analyze man into a physical body and consciousness - rather it grasps him as a whole entity which retains the two simultaneously. However, the post-materialistic view of man has been theorized recently, so this view seems to be not shared by most of the ordinary people in North Korea, particular those of the older generation.

Third, the role of suryong, the great leader, is imperative to the dogma of *juche* ideology, just as the being of Jesus is indispensable in Christianity. It is said that it is necessary to have a suryong in *juche*

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8 Kim Jong-il, "On the Need to Maintain Proper Perspective and Correct Understanding on *Juche* Philosophy," *Selective Works of Kim Jong-il*, Vol. 10 (Pyongyang: North Korean Worker's Party Press, 1997), pp. 296-304.



ideology who leads people and unites popular strength in order to achieve socialist revolution and construction.<sup>9</sup> It espouses that the ordinary popular masses, including the working class, can succeed in revolution and construction only when they serve suryong and fight under his tested leadership. The necessity of suryong is said to be the revolutionary truth, which is the objective characteristics of revolutionary struggle and construction of a working class and is verified by the hundred year-long international communist movement. *Juche* ideology can be understood as the religion of suryong in the sense that suryong occupies the absolute position like God in Christianity.

Fourth, the notions of salvation and everlasting life in Christian belief can also be found in *juche* ideology. North Korea has kept a sort of myth that the suryong Kim Il Sung liberated and delivered their people from Japanese colonial rule. It is said that he delivered, through the anti-Japanese military struggle, the people of 'our nation Chosun' who were suffering under Japanese colonial oppression. *Juche* ideology endows people with not only a past deliverance, but also a future salvation, that is an everlasting life. It divides human life between the physical and the socio-political, and maintains the eternity of the socio-political life. The theory of a socio-political organism is the driving force in transforming the political ideology into a religious belief and a life-view in the sense that it deals with the life and death of individuals, something that had not been touched upon by Marxism-Leninism.<sup>10</sup>

Fifth, the collectivist principle of "one for all and all for one" in North Korea is consistent with the communitarian doctrines of Christian church. In the doctrines of Christianity the church, comprised of Christian believers, is expressed as 'the body of Jesus Christ,' so that man can exist only within the Christ's body, that is, within the body of

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9 Social Science Publishing House, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Pyongyang: Social Science Publishing House, 1985), p. 376.

10 Yong-kon Park and Wha-hyo Kim, *Introduction to Juche Ideology* (Tokyo: Koowe-olseobang, 1989), p. 257.

God's people. According to the theory of socio-political organism, the *suryong* Kim Il Sung is the brain of the body, the party is the blood vessels, and the people are individual parts of that body. *Suryong*, the party, and the people compose a trinity, a unified and indivisible whole. The theory of socio-political organism is identical with the well-known theory of body and parts stated by the apostle Paul.

Sixth, the Christian belief maintains that the present world is to be terminated and it will come to an end with a great calamity when Jesus' second coming happens: with the second coming of Jesus the entire resurrection takes places; it brings with it the Last Judgment; and 'the kingdom of God' is completed. Likewise, *juche* ideology espouses the ultimate victory of socialism and communism and the realization of a communist paradise on earth. These eschatological ideas helps endure the current suffering while it gives us a hope for the coming of paradise some day and makes us anticipate the final triumph of the belief. North Korea teaches their people to overcome their current ordeals by anticipating the realization of communist society. In this regard *juche* ideology emphasizes the building of 'the strong and prosperous nation' which suggests the communist paradise, so that people should be patient during the present hardship. At the same time, it stresses that paradise has 'already' been realized on this earth, just the full-realization of the communist paradise is delayed. And also, just as Christianity stresses the fighting against the power of sin and Satan, *juche* ideology encourages a combat spirit to overthrow Satan's power, which is identified with capitalism and imperial power.

#### IV. Religious Rituals and Behavioral Norms

North Korea performs worship services of meeting and study in, what they call, 'Rooms for the Study of the Revolutionary Ideology of

Kim Il Sung,' which is like a church building in Christianity. It is said that the Study Room for the Revolutionary Ideology of Kim Il Sung is the place to learn the revolutionary ideology, *juche* ideology, and the high morality of Kim Il Sung, and that is established in all areas of people's lives such as the "Party, state departments, factories, enterprises, cooperative farms, education, culture and science departments, People's Army and security forces in North Korea."<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that there are about 450 thousand Study Rooms for the Revolutionary Ideology, including those held by administrative and industrial units and armies nationwide.<sup>12</sup> Various swearing-in ceremonies, meetings to delivery the letter of loyalty, and so forth, as well as study activities are held in the Study Room. The place is regarded as solemn and sacred location distinguished from ordinary or profane locations because the place is believed to be deeply related to Kim Il Sung.

Just as Christians hold weekly services and meetings such as Sunday service, Wednesday worship, early-morning prayer, Friday District meeting, quiet time meditation, and family worship, North Korea performs various weekly meetings and study sessions including weekly lifestyle summation review, Wednesday Lecture Meeting, Morning Reading Session, Monday study session, neighborhood units study session, all-night work, and early-morning worship. Through these systematic study sessions and meetings North Korea maintains faith in *juche* ideology. Among them, the lifestyle summation review which meet in every company and organization on Saturday, is the most important religious ritual in that it fulfills a sort of reflective religious ceremonial function.<sup>13</sup>

Lifestyle summation review is performed in every unit of the Juve-

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11 Social Science Publishing House, *Dictionary of Politics* (Pyongyang: Social Science Publishing House, 1973), p. 156.

12 An interview with a defector, September 29, 2000.

13 Philo Kim, *Religious Nature of North Korean Society* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2000), pp. 113-124.

nile Corps, Youth League, Trade Union, Union of Farmers, Women's League, and the Party in all departments and organizations nationwide including factories, government, companies, schools, and the army. The lifestyle summation review is basically held in units of primary organizations. Usually, in the case of ordinary workers, it is held by work teams in companies or workshops. The summation is classified by period into daily, weekly, monthly, half-year, and yearly reviews. In summation review, the way it proceeds is like a church worship in that people first quote the words of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il, followed by self-criticism on the basis of the words. It is similar to a church sermon where a pastor first reads the words of Jesus from the Bible before he gives lessons about the people's daily lives based upon the words. Self-criticism is comparable to prayer to God with repentance and resolution, which is the root to maintain the religious nature in North Korean society, distinguishable from other socialist systems.

Just as Christians cherish the Bible, that is the words of Jesus, and try to find every direction of behavior from the Bible, North Koreans have the scripture of *juche* ideology, that is, the directions of Kim Il Sung and the words of Kim Jong-il, so that they think and behave based upon their directions and words. As a hymn is an important means to powerfully motivate Christian faith, praise songs for Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il are mobilized in formal and informal events in North Korea. Like in Christianity, where words of the Bible are quoted in daily conversation and academic literature, in North Korea it is the same. Words like 'consent' and 'proclamation,' which are requirements for religious rituals, are used; such religious words as 'grace,' 'love,' 'faith,' 'atonement,' 'salvation,' 'eternity,' and so forth are frequently used<sup>14</sup>; and buttons of Kim Il Sung's portraits are worn like a cross for Christians. All these phenomena reveal the religiosity contained in

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14 Richard Tait, "*Hidden Christian Doctrinal Concepts in North Korean Ruling Techniques*," Master's Thesis, Graduate School of Public Policy, Sogang University, July 1994, pp. 47-57.

*juche* ideology. And both Christianity and *juche* ideology have set kinds of formal and public procedures to admit new members.

## V. Ethics and Organization of Community

Religion exists in the form of a community in which members have shared values, feelings of attachment, and social solidarity. *Juche* ideology devised norms of behavior, so-called 'guiding principles' which are suggested as practical guidelines. The fact that *juche* ideology attaches great importance to such practical values as morals and ethics shows a strong religious nature. It also has common points with Christianity in that both evaluate the moral traits of man by the standard of goodness and evilness. *Juche* ideology calls for various practical activities such as 'good-conduct campaigns' and 'movements for "modeling after"' and an emphasis on a practical movement which composes a crucial part of communist moral education, and is an important aspect of the religious inclination of *juche* ideology.<sup>15</sup> Collectivism in North Korea is emphasized as a "mass line" in the area of political economy, and it gives full play to 'communist laudable customs' in social life. The practice of asceticism and abandoning material greed is a very similar religious ethic to Christianity. Christianity in North Korea, in fact, underlines the ethical and practical aspects of Christian belief rather than the theological dimension, revealing that religion is recognized as a moral community in North Korea.

Religious community varies depending upon how fervent is the faith to the absolute being or how strongly the social relation in the community is oriented to collectivism. The degree of religiosity of *juche*

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15 Myung-sae Kim, "An Evaluation from Christian Perspective on Human Remolding Theory of *Juche* Ideology," p. 36.

believers varies by individuals, and sub-contents of *juche* ideology are also recognized differently in intensity by individuals. The community of *juche* believers can be classified into four categories according to the strength of their faith; a fanatic who “puts the demand of *juche* into practice,” those who have both faith and doubt, “sham” believers who are not able to speak a word without inserting words of “textbook” *juche* ideology; and the unbelievers who do not accept it at all. It is estimated that each category is composed of 25 percent of entire population.<sup>16</sup> The *juche* community differs in the degree of faithfulness by class, strata, and generation.

It is the Organization and Guidance Department and Propaganda and Agitation Departments of the Korea Workers Party that correspond to the brain of society and control and manage the organizational life of *juche* community in North Korea. As the organization of priests and church community guide systematically the tasks of recruitment of priests, education of believers and mission, the Organization and Guidance Department and Propaganda and Agitation Department in the Party are in charge of education of *juche* ideology so as to manage study activities and indoctrination of the people through formal and informal channels. “*Juche*” in early childhood education and school education are systematically practiced in North Korea just as ‘Sunday School’ for children is an important part in Christian education. Adult education by organization and social status is stressed and the study materials for them are renewed every year. The Central Committee of the KWP runs special colleges to train expert cadres like seminaries in Christian religion. All of these organizational activities contribute to maintaining of identity of the *juche* community.

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16 Philo Kim, *Religious Nature of North Korean Society*, pp. 157-161.

## VI. Background of Facilitating Christian Religious Forms in *Juche* Ideology

Where does the Christian influence embedded in North Korean society come from? Many people speculate that it is because of the Christian family background of Kim Il Sung. It is very interesting that Kim Il Sung was born of and raised in a sincere Christian family. In this respect, it would be mostly likely that it is from Kim Il Sung's Christian background that *juche* ideology retains Christian traits. Both his father Kim Hyung-jik and mother Kang Ban-suk were sincere Christian, and Kim Il Sung used to attend Sunday school regularly with his mother.<sup>17</sup> In his middle school days, Kim Il Sung was actively involved in church activities when he was taken care of by Reverend Son Jong-do, and even led a students' choir in Rev. Son's church.<sup>18</sup> From his father's experience of Christian belief, Kim Il Sung received a great influence that is closely connected with the Anti-Japanese independence movement. From his mother he received religious influence strongly because he was raised with his mother's family members like Kang Don-uk and Kang Yang-uk, both of whom were well-known Christians in Korea. Although Kim Il Sung did not have Christian faith, he surely had a far more profound knowledge about the content of the Bible and church activities compared to contemporary Koreans.

Kim Il Sung had a harsh and intense experience about Christianity when he was faced with systematic opposition from Christians in the process of power building after liberation. He appeared to have developed a negative attitude toward Christianity, in particular, in the process of the 'Boycott of the Sunday Election' and the Land Reform.<sup>19</sup>

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17 Kim Il Sung, *With the Century*, Vol. 1 (Pyongyang: North Korean Worker's Party Press, 1992), p. 104.

18 Kim Il Sung, *With the Century*, Vol. 2 (Pyongyang: North Korean Worker's Party Press, 1992), p. 16.

19 Kim Il Sung, *Collective Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 2 (Pyongyang: North Korean

While Kim Jong-il is well known for what he had done for religionization of *juche* ideology in the 1970s, few things are known about his experience in Christianity. However, it is a wild speculation that since he lost his mother in his young age, he was raised by relatives who probably had Christian a background. Although Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il are not Christian, they had personally experienced Christianity and so they received a stronger influence from it than ordinary Koreans. The ideas and values that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il had were formed through their Christian family background, such as nationalism, priority in ideology and belief, the mission of 'evangelization', and the building of paradise that Kim Il Sung had, and priority in consciousness and morality that Kim Jong-il placed.

Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il had opportunities to contact the doctrines, admonitions, and way of life of Christianity quite frequently through their Christian family background, meetings with Christians and experiences of challenges by Christian churches. Based upon his Christian experience in his early days, Kim Il Sung was likely to utilize Christian ways intentionally while he was in his power. Although it was not intentional, their contact with Christianity would have powerfully influenced them in ruling and organizing North Korean society. Therefore, it is not difficult to draw the supposition that although they denied religion as being the "opium of the people" officially, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il could learn ways of life, organizational principles and core dogma and lessons from their Christian experiences, and they then adapted these to their society. However, it is not easy to verify empirically how their Christian experience influenced and what concrete processes it was manifested in. It is furthermore difficult to prove whether the manifestation was intentional or unintentional.

It is not reasonable to conclude that the similarities with Christianity

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Worker's Party, 1979), pp. 513-524; *Selective Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 1 (Pyongyang: North Korean Worker's Party, 1967), pp. 249-250.



that *juche* ideology holds through its religious forms is solely derived from the Christian background of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il. The similarities with Christianity that *juche* ideology seems to have are also have some sort of affinity to other Korean traditional religions like Confucianism, or to social changes like the Korean War. In particular, the nature of the religious state of North Korea could spread in a chaotic social environment such as the Korean War was. North Korea continued to maintain its authoritarian military culture by stimulating war experiences and crisis consciousness about war in its people. It is highly likely that the strong religious nature of North Korean society could have been expedited by critical social conditions like war in the same way that Christian religious forms seem to be interrelated with circumstances of drastic social change like war and revolution. It also helps to understand the similarity of *juche* ideology with Christianity in seeing that the theory of communism itself is more similar with the Christian religion than with any other. Kim Il Sung, who had learned the Bible and received a Christian education in Sunday school in his early years could easily theorize through an analogy to Exodus the 'liberation myth' that the fatherland was liberated and delivered from the oppression of Japanese colonial rule, and he could naturally utilize the Christian ideas of equality and paradise toward the building of an ideal communist society.

## VII. Conclusion

*Juche* ideology is changing into a religion through continued and repeated religious activities in North Korea. Considering the importance of being and the role of suryong in it, *juche* ideology can be called the 'religion of suryong.' Since the religion of suryong has not yet been fully developed into a world religion like Christianity, however, it is still questionable whether it should be called as a religion or not. This is

especially because the religion of suryong fundamentally differs from other world religion in the object and nature of worship. Nonetheless, the religion of suryong is strengthening in its religious color as it intensifies idolization and deification of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il. In this regard, *juche* ideology is no more a mere political ideology of state, but it occupies a position beyond political ideology, that is, the religion of suryong to worship unconditionally and deify Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il.

It is highly probable that the religious characteristics of *juche* ideology in North Korea may bring about severe social conflict and psychological depression in the process of unification. Considering that worship of Kim Il Sung by North Korean people is just like that of Christians to God, North Korean people shall suffer psychological emptiness when they would be brought to live in a world without Kim Il Sung. These people, who think to live without Kim Il Sung is like a life without purpose, will surely need a religious faith to give meaning to their lives. In this process, therefore, we need to prepare to overcome this social conflict through utilizing various fields of medical science such as mental therapy, psychology, sociology, and counseling.

What is important here is how we can separate from *juche* ideology the worship of Kim Il Sung which has become the root of the religion of suryong while maintaining and developing communitarian life. During times when North Korea makes endeavors for the coexistence of the suryong worship and world religion, South Korea needs to make a realistic evaluation of Kim Il Sung and to develop a theological theory to countermeasure the suryong faith. We need to make great efforts in separating *juche* ideas from Kimilsungism in preparing rational critiques to advocate national liberation theory based on liberation theology while restraining the deification of Kim Il Sung. Moreover, the religious world should attempt ideological and cultural exploration all the more including intensive study of *juche* ideology in order to prepare for the era of unification.