

# Faith Healing in Korean Christianity

## *The Christian Church in Korea and Shamanism*

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### **The Rapid Growth of Korean Christianity An Ailing Populace and a Growing Church**

From the 1970s Christianity in Korea has been an object of both wonder and concern to religious circles throughout the world. It is no exaggeration to say that there is at present a surplus of churches in Korea. In 1981 the number of church buildings in Seoul was 4492,<sup>1</sup> exceeding even the number of coffeeshops and drugstores.<sup>2</sup> Signs saying "Church" hang over tiny apartments in back-alley tenements and basement rooms in large buildings; three doors down the street another church can be found. The crosses raised over each church like so many television antennas make the narrow skies of Seoul seem even more congested. It is said that there is at present no cave in all of Korea without a church in it. There are church buildings towering over the remotest islands in the farthest seas. Even in the Ha-hoe folk village, designated as an important cultural treasure and protected area, the local village folk go to a church built away from the tourists' eyes. As darkness falls, crosses outlined in bright-red neon light turn on, one after the other, giving a gaudy, eerie brightness to the black night sky.

Let me cite a few examples of the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea since the 1970s. Church C, which began with five members twenty-three years ago, has swollen to a mammoth church of 100,000 members. Church K, which started out just a few years ago as a small

<sup>1</sup> Cultural Information Division, *Present State of Religious Groups* (in Korean).

<sup>2</sup> Whenever Koreans list the three most common things in Korea, they always say: "Churches, coffeeshops, and drugstores."

pioneering congregation, has now become a large church of several thousand faithful. The church that this study will focus on, the Yoido Full Gospel Central Church, had in 1981 more than 200,000 members, making it the world's largest single church in terms of parishioners.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon of explosive growth has centered on the Seoul area: one-fourth of the church buildings in all of Korea, and one-third of all Christians in Korea, are concentrated in this city.<sup>4</sup> There is no question that this explosive growth — or wild proliferation — is related to the precipitous concentration of population in Seoul from the early 1970s on. The more immediate cause, however, is the healing activity of Korea's Christian ministers, healing activity that incorporates indigenous shamanistic practices and is based on the exorcism of malevolent spirits.

This study will attempt to explain the phenomenon and structure of faith healing<sup>5</sup> practised in churches by ministers, focusing on the healing practices of Reverend C. of the above-mentioned Yoido Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, and of Reverend K. of Church S, also in Seoul.

## **The Idea of Sickness and Cure in Korean Christianity**

### **1. THE CONCEPT OF SICKNESS**

Considering the importance of healing activity in the rapid growth of the Korean churches, I think it would be useful to consider the view of sickness that underlies that activity before we turn to the faith healing itself.

Stated simply, the view prevalent among Korean Christians is that the cause of every illness is a malevolent spirit,<sup>6</sup> a malevolent spirit being the spirit of someone who died without knowing of or believing in Jesus. Such spirits enter other people and cause illness in order to give vent to their resentment. If a blind malevolent spirit enters a person, that person will end up blind; if a deaf and dumb malevolent spirit enters a person, that person will become deaf and dumb. Since all sick-

<sup>3</sup> *History of the Assemblies of God Churches*, 1989. (In Korean)

<sup>4</sup> *Religion Weekly*, 24 June 1981. (In Korean)

<sup>5</sup> In Korea it is referred to as "faith sickness-curing," but I shall use the generally accepted term.

<sup>6</sup> In Korean, a malevolent spirit is a *kwi-sin*. In Korean folk religion, these are the much-dreaded spirits of people who, because of untimely or accidental deaths, departed from this world bearing some resentment, and who take possession of and haunt living persons and bring on them different kinds of afflictions and troubles.

ness is due to the activities of malevolent spirits, to cure sickness the malevolent spirit causing the problem must be driven out of the sufferer's body — medical treatment is of no use. The faith healing practised in Korean Christianity is a curing of sickness through the exorcism of malevolent spirits by the power of Jesus Christ, without resort to medicine or medical skill, or, in more general terms, any of a variety of healing activities conducted within a church.

## 2. TYPES OF FAITH-HEALING METHODS

The methods of healing in the Korean Christian churches are manifold, and the fact that several different methods are often used together makes any generalized description difficult. Still, it is possible to classify them on the basis of where the greatest emphasis is laid during the healing exercise. The principal types are divine-healing methods, exorcism methods, hand-contact methods, and fasting methods.

### DIVINE-HEALING METHODS

These are methods of healing sickness through the blessings of Jesus, and are conducted in the form of *bu-heung-hoe* (復興會), or “revival meetings.”<sup>7</sup> Typical examples of this are the mass meetings held in the Yoido Full Gospel Church, at which hundreds, sometimes thousands, of seriously afflicted people gather at “assemblies for blessing and divine healing” carried on in a mass-hysteria atmosphere. In these assemblies the power of suggestion is at work in the constant repetition of the words “The demon of ill health has departed through the blessings of Jesus.” The methods of laying on of hands and manipulation are limited to lightly hitting the head, back, or chest with the palm of the hand, or to laying a hand on the afflicted person's head while saying a simple prayer or making a “Shhh!” sound. At this time, if the person feels a shiver or experiences a hot sensation in the chest or back, if there is a sudden increase in breath rate, or if a strange sensation is felt in some part of the body, these are all taken as proof that healing has occurred. These divine-healing methods are sometimes used in conjunction with exorcism methods, and are probably the most widely used of the various methods employed by the Christian healing groups.

<sup>7</sup> These are shamanistic religious services peculiar to the Korean Christian churches, held for the purpose of physically experiencing the direct workings of the Holy Spirit and the grace (*une*) of God.

## EXORCISM METHODS

These are methods in which sickness is healed through the forcible expulsion of malevolent spirits from the sufferers' bodies. They are employed by a wide range of groups that stress the role of malevolent spirits in causing sickness. Their use is accompanied by manifold variations. Sometimes they are introduced during mass healing sessions, sometimes they take the form of exorcistic prayers that cannot be distinguished from the chants or oracles of shamans (*mu-dang*).<sup>8</sup> The most typical of these methods is that used in Church S in Seoul by Reverend K. for one-on-one confrontations with the malevolent spirits possessing those suffering from illness.

## FASTING METHODS

Most of the churches in Korea have prayer-hall annexes in which prayer meetings and *bu-heung-hoe*, whether large or small, can be held. Most of these prayer halls are located in wooded hilly country away from the main church buildings in the confines of Seoul, but occasionally they are located in quiet parts of the city, such as a room in a luxury apartment building or the basement floor of an office building.

A mountain to the north of Seoul, Samgak (also called Seoul Kye-ryong Mountain), is a sacred mountain for all religions in Korea.<sup>9</sup> There, practitioners of all faiths seclude themselves to carry out religious exercises, and monasteries, nunneries, and other centers associated with the various religions—shamanism (*mu-sok*), Buddhism, Christianity, the New Religions, etc.—can be found in close proximity. Most of the Korean Christian churches have prayer-hall facilities on this mountain, and trolley buses ply back and forth between the city churches and the prayer halls, transporting church members who want to pray there. Some of the “prayer halls” jostling for space on the crowded mountain are “special prayer halls” consisting of no more than a cross chiseled into the exposed rock, a treeless mound on which a cross has been drawn in red paint, or a tent; the voices of individuals engaged in prayer and fasting in these privately erected “special prayer halls” echo and reecho throughout Samgak Mountain.

The Full Gospel Church also has a prayer hall, in a mountainous area about one-hour's bus ride from Yoido in Seoul. A bus leaves the

<sup>8</sup> The names given to shamans and their functions vary from region to region. The deity-possessed shamans of the Seoul region are generally known as *mu-dang*.

<sup>9</sup> Located in Ch'ung Ch'ong Namdo, it is the Mecca of the New Religions.

church every hour, bound for the prayer hall with faithful intending to fast and pray. Prayer-and-fasting exercises are held at the prayer hall with a view to healing sicknesses; those sufferers who visit the hall are encouraged to fast. After the completion of prayers prior to setting off for the prayer hall, a tape recording is played during the bus ride in which the right attitude toward fasting and prayer is explained, and in which hymns such as "Let us go to meet Jesus," set to buoyant "Christian rock" music, are played in an effort to put the faithful into the right mood.

The use of fasting methods for healing is justified on the basis of two explanations. The first explanation holds that only prayer and fasting can overcome the power of the demons of ill health, and that by overcoming these demons one can arrive at a deep faith. The second explanation is based on the pseudoscientific view that all sicknesses is produced by eating too much unhealthy food; hence, when one fasts the harmful elements in food leave the body and illnesses are cured.

Though fasting methods are aimed at getting rid of malevolent spirits, the atmosphere that pervades the fasting and prayer hall is a festive one.

#### HAND-CONTACT METHODS

These are the most widely used methods of healing, and can be employed without much fuss at any time, in any place. One can place one hand on the person's head, for example, and, while tapping the person's back or chest with the other hand, say a simple prayer or gibberish invocation.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes the afflicted person is told that the illness is the result of sin or weak faith; the suggestion is strongly put across that the illness has been cured by the power of Jesus, or that the illness has been cured because the malevolent spirit has been driven out. If a large number of afflicted people are ministered to at one time, a simple prayer service is also conducted. In the case of Church S, the minister puts a hand on the afflicted person's head and yells "Dirty spirit! I command you by the blood of Jesus, depart at once!" This is followed by the muttering of a gibberish incantation.<sup>11</sup> As in the case

<sup>10</sup> See note 11.

<sup>11</sup> This is like the "speaking in tongues" that the apostles spoke in New Testament times after Pentecost Sunday, in which they amazed people from other lands when they spoke languages they themselves did not understand, or like the unintelligible words spoken in a trance state by people under the influence of a divine spirit.

of mass hand-contact sessions, one can tell that healing has taken place if the body trembles or a strange sensation runs through the body.

Though I have described four general types of faith-healing methods used in Korean Christian churches, in actual practice it is common to employ a mixture of these four types, with the driving out of malevolent spirits comprising the common denominator.

### **Healing Activities and Their Structure in Korean Christian Churches**

While it remains true that the essence of faith healing in the Korean Christian churches lies in exorcism, when one looks carefully at the structure of the healing activities one finds there are two types. The first is the divine-healing model of healing activity as carried out by Reverend C. of the Full Gospel Church, in which several hundreds or thousands of people afflicted by malevolent spirits gather in the large hall of the church and are healed together in a mass-hysteria type of atmosphere. The second is the exorcism model of healing activity as carried out by Reverend K. of Church S in Seoul, in which the minister confronts and expels the spirits during one-on-one meetings with the afflicted persons.

#### **1. MASS HEALING: THE FULL GOSPEL CHURCH**

The Full Gospel Church stands in Yoido Square in Seoul. Belonging to the Pentecostal branch of the Assemblies of God,<sup>12</sup> it became the church with the largest number of parishioners in the world in 1981, when membership passed the 200,000 mark. At present it is a supermammoth church with 650,000 members.

It had its beginnings in 1958 when five people, including Reverend C. and Catechist C. (Reverend C.'s future mother-in-law, and fondly called "Auntie Hallelujah" by the faithful before her death), established a "Tabernacle Church" in part of a common cemetery on what was formerly Mu-dang-san (Shaman Mountain), west of Seoul. Reverend C.'s first undertaking was the expulsion of the malevolent spirits that had taken possession of the many sick people on Mu-dang-

<sup>12</sup> "Hananim," or "God" in Korean, is the god of heaven in traditional Korean folk belief. In Korean Christian prayers Jesus Christ is a double image of Hananim, and it is common for "Hananim" to be substituted for "Jesus Christ."

san and the burning of the shamanist instruments<sup>13</sup> in which it was believed the malevolent spirits dwelt. Reverend C., who received mighty powers after prayer and fasting in the “Tabernacle Church” (a raggedy tent over which was raised a simple cross made of two pieces of wood nailed together), drove out malevolent spirits and cured people’s illnesses through the power of Jesus Christ. A person who had been bedridden for seven years with paralysis rose up and walked; another, ruined by alcoholism, miraculously changed his ways and became a new man.

Within three years of the church’s establishment on Mu-dang-san, the mountain became “Gospelized”<sup>14</sup> and “the word from Heaven,” *Hallelujah*, rang throughout the mountainside. Beginning with five people in 1958, the Full Gospel Church numbered 800 in 1962, 2,000 in 1964, 5,000 in 1968, 15,000 in 1971, 18,000 in 1973, 100,000 in 1979, 200,000 in 1981, 300,000 in 1983, 400,000 in 1984, and 500,000 in 1985—an astounding rate of growth! Now numbering in excess of 600,000, the Full Gospel Church has become famous as “the missionary miracle of the Korean churches.” The Full Gospel Church’s know-how on church growth, religious services, propagation strategies, etc., have become models for all of the Korean churches, and the faith healing that is carried out during the healing sessions by Reverend C. has become representative of the divine-healing model of faith healing.

#### PUBLIC HEALING ACTIVITIES

The divine-healing sessions, called either “great divine-healing/revival holy assemblies” or “divine-healing/blessing assemblies,” are healing sessions conducted along the lines of the *bu-heung-hoe* revival meetings; sometimes these sessions are held on a regular basis on certain fixed days of the week, sometimes they are held on several consecutive days, and sometimes they are held “on tour” in different parts of the country.

These sessions are always preceded by posters and handbills advertising the event, as well as by word-of-mouth invitations from church members. “All of you who are ill! Come and be cured by the divine healing of Reverend . . . .” “Come, all ye who have incurable sicknesses! Have your sicknesses cured!” “Experience firsthand the miraculous cure of your incurable illness through the driving out of ma-

<sup>13</sup> Fans, pictures, and other objects associated with the mountain god, Harabeoji, that the shamans worshipped.

<sup>14</sup> That is, people became members of the Full Gospel Church.

levolent spirits by Reverend . . . , world-renowned authority on demonology." Posters with these and similarly sensational messages are pasted everywhere. There is even an office for publishing collections of testimonials of ailments cured miraculously, as well as a monthly magazine with similar contents. The moment a sick person and his/her family see such a poster or read the magazine, their curiosity and expectations rise; if someone hears from a friend, "So-and-so, who's a high government official, had his cancer of the liver completely cured after a laying on of hands and prayer—if you go and let them pray over you, your illness is sure to be cured," the friend's strong recommendation will induce the sick person and his/her family to place their hopes on the healing service.

Thus even before the healing session takes place people have received strong suggestions that their sicknesses will be cured. Hearing such a gospel is sure to raise some expectation and a decision to "go and see what happens," particularly among those who are suffering from intractable chronic sicknesses or terminal illnesses like cancer, or who cannot afford medical treatment and can only await death, and whose situation is therefore desperate. Thus it is that the sick are drawn to the healing sessions, which range in size from a few dozen people to thousands, or even tens of thousands.

#### THE ATMOSPHERE AT A DIVINE-HEALING SERVICE: GRACE AND EMOTION

The atmosphere during the religious service at a divine-healing session is vastly different from that of an ordinary church service. The curing of illness at a divine-healing session proceeds along the pattern of a *bu-heung-hoe* revival meeting, a shamanistic religious service peculiar to the Korean Christian churches that has as its objective direct contact with the Holy Spirit and the experience of Hananim's grace (*une*). Those in attendance are in a state of agitation; they are caught up in a whirlpool of, to borrow their own words, "grace and emotion."

The major portion of the divine-healing service consists of constant repetition of enthusiastically sung hymns, "Hallelujah-robics,"<sup>15</sup> and "shouted prayer."<sup>16</sup> As soon as the minister has finished his short

<sup>15</sup> A form of dancing done to the sound of hymns given a Christian rock beat, performed in order to lift people's spirits in readiness for the battle against the malevolent spirits. There is a fixed choreography for each composition, and the dancing is led by dancing teams from the Student Division and the Youth Division of the Full Gospel Church.

<sup>16</sup> A form of prayer in which the people shout "Aboji Hananim" (Our Father who art in



prayer announcing the start of the divine-healing session, the congregation plunges into the enthusiastic singing of a medley of hymns. Beside the speaker's podium are an electric organ, drums, accordions, and other musical instruments used for pop concerts, and these instruments are used for playing loud renditions of hymns arranged in pop song melodies. Several "demon-driving songs" are played, one after the other, with titles such as "Let's go to meet Jesus!" and "Let's get those demons in Jesus' name!" The hymns sung by the faithful are lively and gay, rather than solemn. Participants are egged on by the minister to sing the hymns with their whole souls and whole bodies, to gladden their souls with the "Hallelujah-robics," to raise their spirits and fill themselves with the energy to defeat the malevolent spirits that possess their bodies. In the beginning they sing slowly, in tune with the beat of the drums; then gradually the beat gets faster, and in the end it is so fast that the people cannot sing the words of the hymns. Everybody, both those leading the service and the congregation, wave their arms about and move their bodies non-stop, up and down, left to right, to and fro; on their faces commingle indiscriminately expressions of ecstasy, deep emotion, resentment, anger. Some of them rise to their feet and shriek, and those leading the service sometimes hop around the stage in a dance. Sometimes they sing songs that consist merely in saying over and over again, to the melodies of the hymns, single phrases such as "O Lord!" "Hallelujah!" or "the Spirit fills." As a song picks up to a rapid tempo sometimes in the end there is only a jumble of wailing and screaming. Sometimes people use the speaker's podium as a drum and pound out the rhythm as they sing; some people beat their heads, knees, or other parts of their bodies as they sing the hymns. Some weep, some laugh.

When the hymns end, the leader of the service shouts in an earth-shaking voice, "O Lord!" and the congregation repeats this several dozen times. Then, with a heaven-rending scream, they shout "Abeoji Hananim!!" and, as if in a trance and possessed by the divine spirit, they become rapt in "shouted prayer." At the height of their excitement, they start saying prayers in which are mingled strange words whose meaning is unclear and whose derivation is uncertain. The

Heaven) with heaven-splitting gusto and fall into ecstatic states of deity possession. As they reach the heights of excitement, they begin praying in unintelligible language, in which are mingled strange words of no known derivation. This exercise is included several times within the religious service.

prayer of the minister leading the service is unique. It consists in the repetition, hundreds of times, of such simple expressions as "O Lord!" "Hallelujah!" "Amen!" "the Spirit fills!" in unison with the voices of the congregation. Intermingled with gibberish, these are repeated endlessly. About this time women all over the hall start having hysterical convulsions from the high pitch of excitement. For all of them the expressions used in the world of shamanism seem suitable: the god has appeared, the god has moved in.

The sermons of the minister are also simple and repetitious in content, and are often in the form of a dialogue with the congregation.

Minister: The Lord Jesus has just this minute healed a sick person who had been sentenced to death. He healed her. He healed her. Do you believe?

Faithful: Amen! Hallelujah! (repeated over and over to the waving of arms)

Minister: The Lord Jesus has healed the sick. Those who believe this, raise your right hands. All those who have raised their right hands have been healed of their sicknesses. Do you believe? Those who feel their chests hot, raise your right hands. Through the blessing of the Lord Jesus your sickness has been cured. Do you believe?

Faithful: (raising their hands) Amen!

Leader of the service: (interrupting the sermon) Evil spirit, get out of here! Shhh!

Faithful: Hallelujah!

Minister: In this hour all your illnesses have been cured. They have been cured. They have been cured. Hallelujah!

"Within the time of the service my illness will certainly be cured. Or it has already been cured." This suggestion has been thoroughly instilled into each participant.

Afterwards the hymns and "shouted prayer" continue, along with the repetition of gibberish and simple words and the singing of fast-tempoed songs. The minister sometimes goes walking through the congregation, pressing or occasionally striking the palm of his hand against the head, the back, or chest of individuals, uttering as he does some gibberish and sharp "Shhh!" commands. During this time someone may grab the microphone and, sitting down, say the words "O Lord!" several thousand times in rapid-fire succession, or mutter some

gibberish mixed with shouts of "O Lord!" Someone else may lie down on the stage, then jump up and start dancing. Such activities continue until the laying on of hands service ends. Sometimes the people pass in front of the podium in single file and receive the laying on of hands, in which they each receive a clap on the head, chest, back, and knees. As he does this, the one laying on hands announces to the person, "Believe! The demons of ill health have all already fled!" When the minister walks around among the people in the hall, he presses with his palm and says "Demon of ill health, get out! Shhh!" Sometimes he will address the malevolent spirit angrily, shouting: "Take this! Away with you!"

#### SUGGESTION AND MASS HYPNOTISM

The most prominent principles evident in the divine-healing model of cure are suggestion and mass hypnotism. During the sessions people are told persuasively, "Believe! Believe unconditionally! If you believe you will be cured." "So-and-so was dying from cancer, and she was cured by the laying on of hands," they are told, and then they hear the testimonies of people known to have really recovered. The loud shouts of "Hallelujah!" that arise at the time from all around serve to reinforce the factuality of what they hear. The announcement, accompanied by speaking in tongues, prayer, and hymns repeated over and over, is forcefully made: "You have had your illness cured. Give thanks for that." And they are told over and over, "Illness is caused by the malevolent spirits, but we have driven those malevolent spirits out, so your illness is cured."

In the divine-healing sessions the idea that "the sickness has been cured" is presented as the literal truth from before the sessions start until they end; this satisfies the ardent hopes of recovery held by those reduced to despair by their illnesses, and it gives the sessions enough power of suggestion to enkindle the conviction that those hopes will be fulfilled. Though what they are told may not be objectively true, the sick people are nevertheless greatly encouraged, and the result is a strong impulse towards belief.

These sessions manifest many effects of mass hypnotism. Mass hypnotism is aroused during the worship service in various ways, the most common being the continual repetition of simple movements, simple rhythms, and simple words. Through such repetition the faithful fall into self-induced hypnotic states. They go on and on, shouting gibber-

ish, in which simple sounds are repeated, or mere animals sounds, or one word or phrase like "O Lord!" or "Hallelujah!" They beat drums or tables, repeating the same simple sound again and again, or turn hymns into the mere repetition of simple words such as "O Lord!" "Hallelujah!" "Amen!" "Blessings!" or "The Spirit fills!" Their bodily movements also become repetitious.

Those leading the service hop up and down and sideways about the stage as they repeat a shaman-like dance to the fast tempo of drum music, and the congregation in their seats likewise sway to and fro, sideways, up and down. Sometimes they roll only their heads, sometimes they also raise their arms and wave them around; at times they clap their hands, at times they beat their heads or slap their knees. At first these movements are repeated slowly, but gradually the tempo picks up, until finally they are being repeated at rapid speed. One middle-aged woman was sitting by herself quietly praying, then before she knew it was moving her body forwards and backwards, then her arms, and finally both her body and her arms, for a total of over forty minutes. Slowly at first, then gradually picking up speed, she kept shouting "O Lord!" In the end she became disoriented and fell into a swoon, her whole body moving in involuntary spasms. She said that the Holy Spirit of Jesus had entered into her.

The curtains come down on the divine-healing session amid an atmosphere of excitement and frenzy, and the "previously ill" whose illnesses have been cured by the grace (*une*) of Jesus surge towards the exits of the hall and, pushing their way through the mob, head for home. Even after the session has ended, however, there remain, scattered throughout the dark hall, people still unable to leave their seats, who still continue to shout unintelligible, incantation-like prayers, their bodies rigid and quivering.

## **2. THE EXORCISM ACTIVITIES OF REVEREND K. OF CHURCH S**

Church S in Seoul's Y Ward is representative of the churches that carry on the exorcism model of healing that is the other leading method of faith healing used in Korean Christian churches. The largest Baptist church in Korea, it was established in 1969. It leapt into fame with Reverend K.'s healing of sicknesses through the exorcism method. As of 1991 it numbered approximately 50,000 members. By Korean standards it is medium in scale, yet this type of sickness-healing Christian church, in which exorcistic cures are effected by manipulation or the

laying on of hands, has become one of the classic patterns in Korean Christianity. At present this type of church is gradually becoming more organized, with plans for creating a network of overseas missions.

The turning point in Reverend K.'s life was the faith experience of raising a woman from the dead when he was 21 years of age. From 1961, at the age of 23, as an ordinary layman, he made the rounds of three or four churches, holding meetings and driving out malevolent spirits. In 1963, at age 25 he took up a post at Church P, where he started pastoral meetings as a preaching missionary. In 1966 he received the laying on of hands at Church T in Seoul, and in 1969, at the age of 31, he established S Baptist Church, the forerunner of the present S Church. During the intervening years, he has a proven track record of healing: "From 1961 to the present day, on 781 occasions, I have cured 120,000 people through the exorcism method: the crippled, the blind, the deaf and dumb, all sorts of cancer victims, and people possessed by malevolent spirits. During this time I have restored life to ten dead people, and three in particular I raised to life before their burial." Revival meetings for the purpose of healing illness are also held in S Church, but the church's biggest drawing card is the exorcism-healing carried out by Reverend K. in one-on-one encounters with people possessed by malevolent spirits. In most cases Reverend K.'s exorcistic healing is carried out with him dealing with possessed victims individually during the progress of the exorcism service.

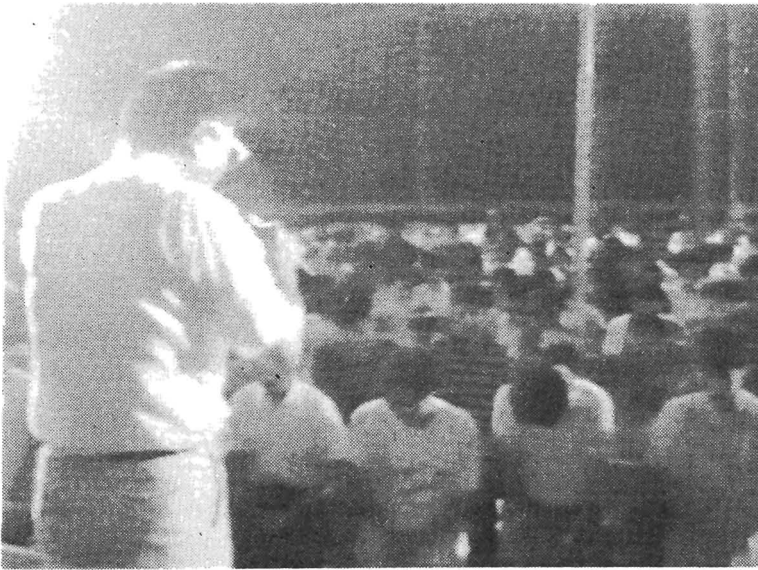
#### THE EXORCISM CEREMONY: EXCITEMENT AND FEAR

While faith healing in S Church is also referred to as a divine-healing session, the healing proceeds for the first half along the lines of the "revival meeting" type, in which people have contact with the Holy Spirit and receive the graces of Hananim in the midst of a pure evangelical church frenzy, but as the second half approaches it switches to a more overtly exorcistic ceremony.

In the ceremony conducted by Reverend K. and his assistants, a religious atmosphere is present, but there is an added mood of slight but ostentatious terror. According to one of Reverend K.'s writings, "The Theory of the Existence of Malevolent Spirits," this world is subject to the mischief of evil and malevolent spirits, and Jesus appeared in order to do battle with them. In the end Jesus will win, but until that time comes this world is a fierce battleground requiring combat on the part of the faithful. Those who do not believe this are threatened with

the idea that they will be cursed and fall into the hands of the evil spirits; those who reject Reverend K.'s theory of malevolent spirits are even threatened with divine punishment and instant death. Early on in the worship service the congregation is made to feel fearful, and they begin to worry that some malevolent spirit or other is in possession of them, so that even during the worship service they start shouting, "Malevolent spirit! Get away from me!"

During the worship service a lecture is given to prepare people for Reverend K.'s healing of sickness. They are told that illness is caused by the entry of a malevolent spirit into a person's body. Therefore curing a sickness involves driving out the malevolent spirit. Malevolent spirits are the souls of people who died without faith in Jesus Christ.



*Preparatory lecture about healing*

To cure an illness the first thing one has to do is recognize the fact that where there is sickness or trouble in a family, it is due to the mischief of a malevolent spirit. To prevent malevolent spirits from taking up residence in people's souls, once one's heart is properly prepared one says with steadfast purpose "Get out!" and a cure is effected. The malevolent spirits are evil beings, so when you abuse and oppose them, they will be unable to endure this and will leave.

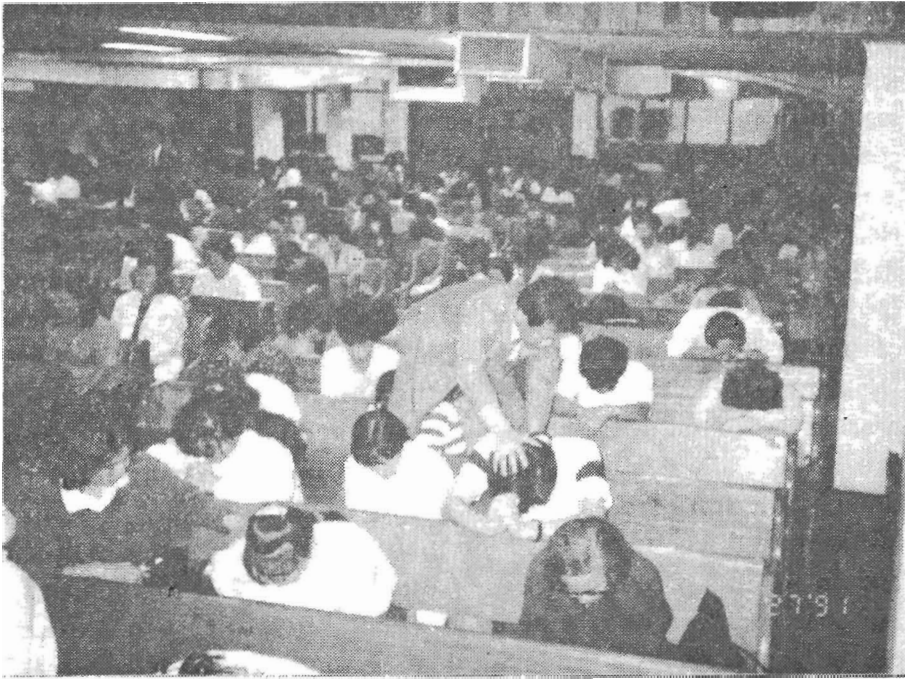
Reverend K. then commands those assembled to recite the prayer

in which they abuse the malevolent spirits that have entered them and order them to get out. The faithful lower their heads and for several minutes pray fervently. From all sections of the hall are heard the sounds of malevolent spirits being rubbed out, and of voices abusing the malevolent spirits with cries of "You damn spirit!"

Suddenly Reverend K. screams towards the assembled congregation: "Hallelujah!" At signals from him, the whole congregation chants three times in unison: "O Jesus!" "O Jesus!" "O Jesus!" and plunges into the "shouted prayer" described earlier. The hall becomes a scene of tumult; Reverend K., like a man gone berserk, shouts over and over: "Your prayer has to be perfect! Say the prayer perfectly!" Background music fills the hall with the hymn "Jesus shed his blood on the cross." When those of the faithful possessed of evil spirits are beginning to be filled by the spirit God as a result of the "shouted prayer," S Church's ministers and several of their assistants make an appearance in the hall and go around, pressing with the palms of their hands on the heads of the possessed—by now brought to a state of trance by the "shouted prayer"—and reciting the laying-on-of-hands prayer for driving out malevolent spirits.

When the laying on of hands is finished and the prayer ended, Reverend K. shouts "Everyone stand!" and makes all of the possessed rise to their feet. Pointing at one of those standing, he shouts: "Malevolent spirit! Go! Go back, wretch, to where you came from! Vanish from our presence!" and the person falls backward. He goes on repeating this to one individual at a time, all of whom fall backward when his shouted commands to the malevolent spirit are finished. One old woman who falls over backward is led forward, and she is exorcised in front of the whole assembly.

When the worship service is over, from 50 to 100 people who wish to be exorcised gather in front of the stage. (The reason they want to be exorcised is, in fact, that they are terrified from what they were told in the sermon earlier that they might die on the spot if they do not undergo exorcism.) Forming a line in front of Reverend K., they await their turn to be exorcised. The exorcism is conducted in full view of the whole congregation. The aspirant goes up onto the stage and stands facing Reverend K., who has already instructed them: "Come forward one at a time and I will recite the laying-on-of-hands prayer. The first thing I will do is revile and abuse the malevolent spirit; I want to make it perfectly clear that I am not directing this abuse at you per-



*The laying on of hands*

sonally, but at the malevolent spirit that is within you; please get that straight. When I press down on your head with my hands and tell the spirit to get out, it will go out and you will fall backwards.” And so the possessed ones step before Reverend K. one at a time. In a shout that is almost throat-splitting, he threatens the malevolent spirit possessing the person, and showers them with one question after another. The spirit speaks through the mouth of the possessed one to answer the Reverend’s questions. In the midst of excitement and fear, the exorcism unfolds in a verbal exchange between Reverend K. and the spirit possessing the individual.

Rev. K.: Malevolent spirit, are you woman, or man?

Spirit: Woman.

Rev. K.: Who are you?

Spirit: I won’t tell you.

Rev. K.: How many years have you possessed this woman?

Spirit: Five years have passed.

Rev. K.: How old were you when you died?



Spirit: Thirty.

Rev. K.: Your name?

Spirit: (gives a specific woman's name)

Rev. K.: What is your connection with this woman here?

Spirit: We are relatives.

Rev. K.: Do you know of anyone who died even though they believed in Jesus?

Spirit: I don't know of anyone who believed in Jesus yet died. I know of many who did not believe in Jesus and died.

Rev. K.: What sickness have you brought?

Spirit: I brought neuralgia. I wanted to fix her, but good. I tried to do her in. And then I was driven out.

Rev. K.: From what sickness did you die?

Spirit: I died of epilepsy. I guess it can't be helped. I'll have to leave. I just thought I might get a free meal; how do I go about getting a free meal at the church? Damn it all. I can't win against you. I can't win against the force of clear truth.

Rev. K.: Filthy spirit! Are you going, or not?

Spirit: I'm going, I'm going.

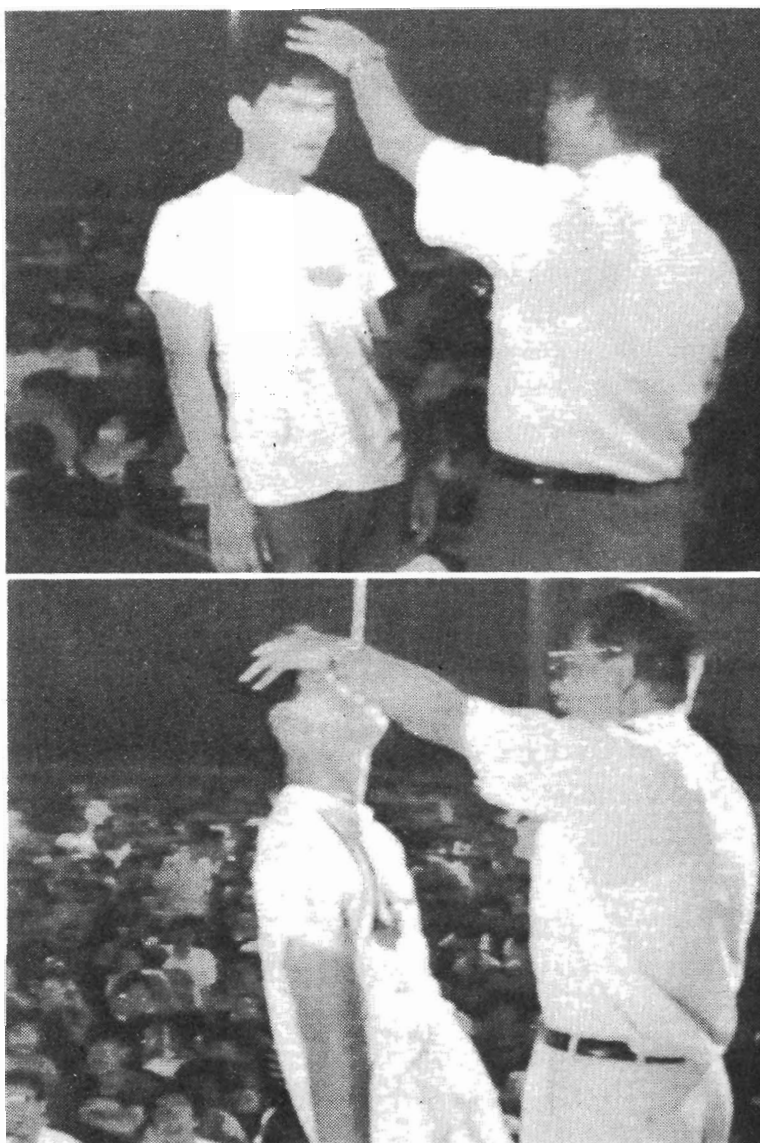
Rev. K.: Are you going to come back, or not?

Spirit: I'm going for good.

Rev. K.: (placing his hand on the head of the possessed person)  
I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen!

Threatening the malevolent spirit in a barking voice as he showers it with questions, Reverend K. drives it out through the power of Jesus Christ. Some of the spirits are so afraid of him they have difficulty answering his questions. Reverend K. attempts to intimidate the spirit by shouting, and to make the possessed person fall backwards; if the person doesn't fall Reverend K. grabs his or her head in both hands and shakes it, believing the malevolent spirit gone when the person finally does fall backward. Finally, Reverend K. places his hand on the head of the person as he/she lies on his/her back and recites a set prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, and the exorcism is over. When the exorcism is successfully completed, the faithful in the congregation clap in applause.

After a while other ministers of the church spread out in several places in the hall and begin to perform exorcism. In S Church this is

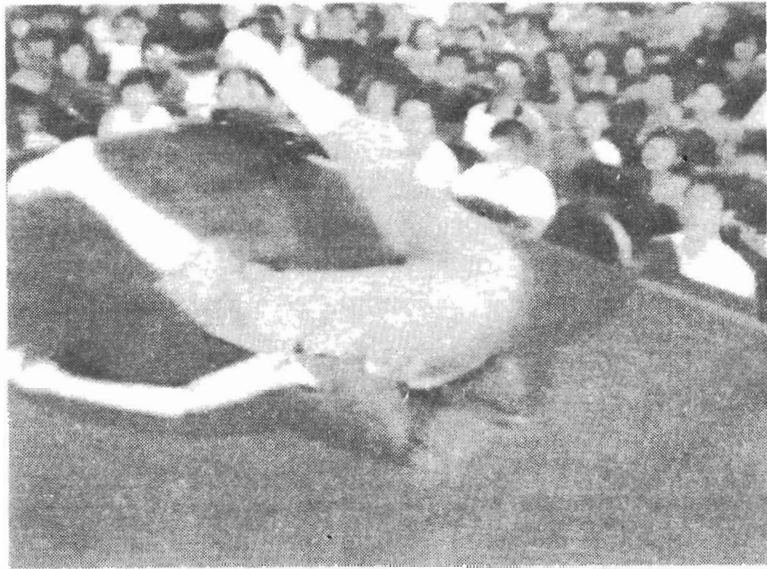


*Rev. K. drives out the malevolent spirit*

called “mass exorcism.” The exorcisms of the young ministers who are studying under Reverend K. have laying on of hands as part of the routine.

#### *Exorcism case study 1*

A male who looks like a university student comes to receive the exorcism prayer. When the young minister speaks in a loud voice to the ma-



*Falling backwards indicates that the spirit has departed*

levolent spirit, there issues from the student's mouth what sound like irregular, low heart beats. It's a "pig spirit." After emitting pig sounds and shaking the head for a while, it left the person and went away. The man adjusted his necktie and walked away expressionless.

#### *Exorcism case study 2*

There was a large number of people wanting to be exorcised, and as 5:00 p.m. approached, two or three young ministers appeared and began to exorcise. A youngish minister was confronting a woman, perhaps in her mid-thirties, who looked like an ordinary housewife. At his loud shout of "Who are you? I suppose you can't come out?" the woman started whimpering loudly. "Get out of her!" "I won't." As the battle of words went on, she kept weeping and screaming. When she was given the laying on of hands, she toppled backwards, then almost immediately stood up again, and with a smile on her face she left the hall, dancing and shouting in a happy voice, "Hallelujah. Thank you."

In almost all cases, when the minister performed an exorcism like that above, the believer would faint, then slowly get to her/his feet again and walk out of the hall as if nothing had happened. Once under the influence of the ministers' hands, the malevolent spirits, who until that point had been terrifying beings tormenting the ones they pos-

sessed, would suddenly turn into cowards and (in view of the distress they had caused the persons till then) leave their victims with surprisingly little fuss. One never saw the minister acting as a mediator to bring about a reconciliation between the malevolent spirit and the possessed victim; the impression was that the malevolent spirits left the persons just because they were afraid of the minister. One received the impression that the exorcism by the minister was unexpectedly over all too soon, and something that would be required only on that one occasion.

#### THE MALEVOLENT SPIRITS IN FAITH HEALING

One can ask the question, “What sort of beings do the malevolent spirits represent in the exorcisms carried out by Reverend K. in the religious services and exorcism-healing sessions?” I propose, then, to examine the malevolent spirits in the faith healing of the Korean Christian churches, while studying the process of exorcism and the contents of the exchanges between the ministers and the spirits.

##### *The process of exorcism*

The exorcism carried out by Reverend K. proceeds via a give-and-take exchange between him and the possessing spirit. In this exchange there is a very determinate process, and there is a very determinate pattern in the questions posed by Reverend K. during that process. Let us begin by looking at the exorcism process.

- *Confrontation with the malevolent spirit:* calling forth the malevolent spirit
- *The exchange with the malevolent spirit:*
  - Who is the malevolent spirit? – the minister asks the name, sex, age at death, time of death, place of death, cause of death;
  - Relationship with the possessed – the minister asks when possession took place, how many years have passed since possession, reason or purpose for taking possession, relationship with the possessed, and what sicknesses were brought in at the time of possession;
  - The malevolent spirit’s attitude – the minister asks if the spirit is acting out of spite or hostility, and if there was someone who died in spite of being a believer in Jesus.

- *Appeal by the malevolent spirit:* the spirit shouts its vexation and, lamenting, makes an appeal.
- *The expulsion of the malevolent spirit:*
  - The minister asks if the spirit will go or not, and if it will come back or not;
  - The minister yells at it and drives it from the victim;
  - The malevolent spirit explains why it is leaving.

It is along these lines that the exorcism of Reverend K. proceeds. The exchange between the minister and the malevolent spirit always takes the form of the minister asking questions, and the spirit answering.

## 2) *Attributes of the malevolent spirits*

A study of the responses given by the malevolent spirits at various exorcism sessions reveals the following attributes.

- *The types of spirits:* Among the spirits identifying themselves were shaman spirits; beggar spirits; widow spirits; older brother spirits; spirits giving the specific names of dead people; the spirit of a squad commander who lost all his men and was the sole survivor; a Buddhist clairvoyant's spirit; a general's spirit; the spirit of someone who died of starvation; the spirit of a maiden who never married; and a mother-in-law spirit.
- *The sex of the spirits:* Most were female spirits.
- *The age at time of death:* Most were between 10 and 30 years of age, with the great majority being people who died young.
- *The cause of death:* All cases involved sickness, traffic accident, suicide, murder, and other types of accidental or unhappy death.
- *The length of possession:* Most commonly under 5 years, but occasionally up to 10 years; sometimes a spirit had been in possession less than one year.
- *The sicknesses brought by the malevolent spirits:* Most were internal afflictions that were hard to treat, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, lung ailments, and stomach problems.
- *The purpose for taking possession:* In most cases possession was done for the sake of giving vent to grudges, with the idea of causing the person suffering or killing the person; a few spirits resorted to possession as a means to destroy the family, or to create obstacles to the person's life as a believer.

- *The time when possession took place:* The most common time given was when the person did not believe in Jesus. Or, if the person did believe in Jesus, it was when he or she violated the commandments, was negligent in spreading information about the Gospel, was disobedient to a preacher, or was negligent in making contributions – in other words, when the person was not leading an upright life as a Christian. To the question, “Did you see any people who died even though they believed in Jesus?” the malevolent spirits all answered, “I’ve never seen any”; but to the question, “Did you see any people who did not believe in Jesus and who died?” the answer was always, “I saw many.” Reverend K., in “The Theory of the Existence of Malevolent Spirits,” states that it is only the Holy Spirit who is able to reside within people’s souls, and that it is those who worship this Spirit of Jesus who are believers. Malevolent spirits cannot reside within people’s souls but can only enter into their consciousness, and so those who worship the Holy Spirit within their hearts will never be possessed by malevolent spirits. Hence, he says, it is absolutely impossible for someone who has died with faith in Jesus to be possessed by a malevolent spirit. As a result, sometimes the malevolent spirits regret that they died without belief in Jesus, and sometimes as they leave a victim they implore the person to “believe in Jesus and live in good health.”
- *The relationship between the malevolent spirit and the possessed person:* They are always closely related members of the same family, or near relatives, or close friends. Malevolent spirits take possession particularly of those members of the family with whom they never got on well during life, and whom they hold a grudge against and want to cause illness and suffering to. The most frequent cases are possession of brides: the older brother’s bride, the younger brother’s bride. Cases of possession of a complete stranger are so rare as to be practically nonexistent. Also, I noted no case in which a distant ancestor took possession of a descendant. Even though possession would be of blood relatives, it would not be of remote kin, it seems, but of near relatives, with whom discord *during the person’s lifetime could not be avoided.*
- *The reasons why the malevolent spirits leave:* They leave because, when Reverend K. shouts at them, they become afraid. The way of driving out spirits by shouting at them that is found in the Synoptic

Gospels is applied here without any change. Another part of the exorcism is the ringing of a small bell; this is probably done because the shamans use bells in their rituals, the idea being that the sound of a bell is what evil spirits dislike most.

The above portrait of malevolent spirits gives us some idea of the relationship between the theory of illness in Korean society and an aspect of a type of religious complex: the way shamanism, which has come down from the distant past, and Christianity, which has come from other lands, are interwoven in a Korean society in which Confucian patrilineage and ancestor worship are deeply rooted.

Next, I would like to consider faith healing in the Korean Christian churches in terms of syncretism with a different religion.

### **Faith Healing in Korean Christian Churches and the “Indigenization” of Christianity**

We have obtained a picture of the faith healing in Korean Christian churches by focusing on the Full Gospel Church and the faith healing activities at S Church. The Catholic Church has been in Korea for two hundred years, and 1984 marked the hundredth anniversary of Protestant evangelization there.<sup>17</sup> The rapid growth in the Korean Christian churches that has taken place in the last twenty years is therefore often said to represent the “indigenization” of Christianity in Korea. What is the place of faith healing in the Korean Christian churches within this “indigenization” process?

### **THE PRESENCE OF SHAMANISM IN FAITH HEALING**

It is obvious that shamanism, the faith that underlies—unconsciously, perhaps—the religious beliefs of Koreans, has been brought into the faith healing taking place in Korean Christian churches. At the faith healing sessions the complicated procedures adopted in shamanist rituals are omitted, but the general attitude and concepts pervading the healing sessions are the same. Among the many features that Korean Christian faith healing shares with shamanism are: the names of the malevolent spirits that are given through the mouths of the possessed persons; the fact that the spirits have concrete human personalities,

<sup>17</sup> Yu Dong-Sik 1987.

and are of people who died bearing grudges; and the cry, "The evil spirit has left!" when someone's sickness is cured.

Recall the healing activities in both of the cases we have taken up above. In the divine-healing sessions of Reverend C. of the Full Gospel Church, when the sickness is a serious one we find the healing method used by shamans is introduced, in which the shaman performs the *yu-hwan kut* (sickness-healing rite), saying the exorcism prayer and performing a dance in front of the afflicted person, after which the spirit flees and a full cure is effected. In the exorcism-healing by Reverend K. in S Church, the method used to drive out the spirits is that of "scare tactics," according to which the minister creates terror in the malevolent spirits by frightening and browbeating them, drives them out, and keeps them from approaching or entering the persons again.<sup>18</sup> In the faith healing of the Korean Christian churches and in shamanism we find a common attitude, common concepts, common exorcistic methods. This is where we find the grounds for the opinion that the faith healing of the Korean Christian churches is a sign of the syncretism between Christianity and shamanism consequent to Christianity's "indigenization" in Korea.

### **Conclusion: The Religiosity of a Shamanist Society**

How do we explain the unparalleled "Christianization" that has occurred in an originally non-Christian East Asian nation? Why has there been such a continuous increase in the number of churches in Korea in recent years?

This, to be quite plain, is without doubt due to the linking of social conditions in Korea since the 1970s and the country's native shamanistic religiosity. The 1970s, in which Christianity started its rapid expansion in Korea, were years of sudden population growth in Seoul, with one-fourth of the total population, or 10,000,000 people, flowing into the capital. They were also a time when, as a result of the superstition-eradication measures (*saemaeul*) taken under the modernization policies enforced by the Park government, *mu-sok*, the shamanism that is the underlying folk religion of Korea, was systematically and thoroughly held up to ridicule and subjected to persecution. Shaman

<sup>18</sup> See MURAYAMA 1929 for a record of Korean shamanism during the imperial Japanese times.



shrines everywhere were destroyed, their ritual objects were confiscated and the shamans were chased away from public life in society. It cannot be denied that, even though these were conditions created by the political system, the contempt for shamanism had the effect of exerting a tremendous influence on people's religious lives and their religious activities.

In recent years, however, with the rise of a new nationalism in the late 1980s, there have been steps such as the setting up of institutions for human cultural assets. Shamanism, looked upon till recently as socially contemptible, is being reappraised as traditional Korean culture, and there is even a movement to place it at the source of the national identity of the Korean people. The contempt for shamanism still runs deep in the consciousness of people, however, and without the aura of cultural asset protection, scientific research, or nationalism, people still find it difficult to have anything to do with shamans. The Christian ministers, on the other hand, are members of a popular profession in Korea, complete with the systematic education and status of representatives of a world religion; if in addition they are the star performers in huge churches where they use their preaching skills to move vast numbers of believers as they will, they hold in their grasp the chance to come into contact with all the wealth and power there is in present-day Korean society. Those people who gave wide berth to shamans though possessing themselves a shamanistic mentality have been drawn to the shaman-like ministers, who offer a religious life that even educated people with high social position can participate in. In the form of such a dependence on actual circumstances, there has no doubt been a consistent process of adoption to the shamanistic mentality of the people. In recent years the newest pastoral churches in Korea have been described as disguised "new strains of *kut*"<sup>19</sup> in which reason-paralyzing zombie-like states, a belief in prayers for blessings based on an insatiable pursuit of this-worldly benefits, and a limitless worship of mammon are in control. The churches have become places in which "Seoul Jesus" reigns supreme.

The "indigenization" of Christianity in Korea was thus made pos-

<sup>19</sup> In the shaman ritual, or *kut*, the deity that comes down into the shaman with the shaman's song and dance never ceases to demand money, and there is a belief that the more money given in response to that demand the more abundant are the blessings received. The ceaseless demands for contributions made of the faithful in the recent churches is here likened to the scenes in *kut* in which the shaman importunes the people for money.

sible by the existing base of shamanism, the underlying popular religion going back to ancient times in Korea. The churches that have experienced rapid growth and won large numbers of converts during these last twenty-some years have been those churches that have shaman-like ministers who heal sicknesses through the expulsion of malevolent spirits and hold shamanistic “revival meetings” whose purpose is intimate contact with the Holy Spirit and the personal experience of God’s blessings. In the history of the development of the Full Gospel Church from a mere five members in the common cemetery on Mudang-san to the largest church in the world with over 650,000 members, there has been an intensification of discord and syncretistic troubles between Christianity and shamanism over exorcism. Even today, when the major trend in Korean Christian churches is toward unchecked growth and when it appears that Christianity will end up the national religion of Korea, there are examples of women who are baptized Christians suddenly becoming possessed by a deity and becoming shamans, and of third-generation shamans being filled with the Holy Spirit and receiving the grace of Hananim and converting to Christianity, so it is expected that the strained relations between the two will continue.

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*translated by Edmund Skrzypczak*