

Article

Seeking Solidarity between Protestant and Catholic Churches for Social Justice in Korea: The Case of the Korea Christian Action Organization for Urban Industrial Mission (*Saseon*) (1976–1989)

Minah Kim

Humanities Research Institute, Incheon National University, Incheon 22012, Korea; minahkim@inu.ac.kr

Received: 1 April 2020; Accepted: 4 June 2020; Published: 5 June 2020



Abstract: The Korea Christian Action Organization for Urban Industrial Mission (*Hanguk-gyohoe-sahoeseongyo-hyeubuihoe* (*Saseon*)) was an organization which devoted itself not only to the Korean democratization movement against the military dictatorship, but also to the movement for the improvement of the quality of life of laborers, farmers, and the urban poor from 1976 to 1989. *Saseon*, a joint organization of Protestants and Catholics, trained activists dedicated to democratization and the people's right to life movements. The Protestants and Catholics of *Saseon* believed that participation in social movements was missionary work building the Kingdom of God on Earth, and that they could set a good example of solidarity with a common goal of social justice and a mission for the poor which transcended their theological differences. This paper will illuminate the cooperation between Korean Protestant and Catholic churches toward the common goal of social justice, focusing on the case of *Saseon*.

Keywords: Korea Christian Action Organization for Urban Industrial Mission (*Saseon*); Korean Protestantism; Korean Catholicism; social justice; solidarity

1. Introduction

The Korea Christian Action Organization for Urban Industrial Mission (*Hanguk-gyohoe-sahoeseongyo-hyeubuihoe* (*Saseon*)) was an active organization from 1976 to 1989. During that period, it devoted itself not only to the Korean democratization movement against the military dictatorship, but also to the movement for the improvement of the quality of life of laborers, farmers, and the urban poor. *Saseon*, a joint organization between Protestants and Catholics, trained activists dedicated to democratization and the people's right to life movements. It was a leading force in Korean social movements at a time when radical non-religious social movements were suppressed by the military dictatorship.

The Protestants and Catholics of *Saseon* believed that participation in social movements was missionary work building the Kingdom of God on Earth. They strove to work together towards a common goal of social justice, which transcended their theological differences, aiming to build a partnership by strengthening their ties to each other, developing mutual empathy, and emphasizing their similarities through shared experiences. This paper will provide a detailed account of the powerful union between the Korean Protestant and Catholic churches, which united toward the common goal of social justice, focusing on the case of *Saseon*.

Saseon was established by Korean Protestant and Catholic activists in September 1971 in reaction to the death of activist Taeil Jeon, who had committed suicide by self-immolation in November 1970 in protest of poor working conditions. *Saseon*, known at that time as *Hanguk-Christian-sahoehaengdong-hyeobuiche* (*Haengdong*) in Korean, was the first coalition of Protestant

and Catholic groups participating in social movements jointly, rather than as individuals, in the history of Christianity in post-Liberation Korea. *Haengdong* (later *Saseon*) was comprised of four categories of organizations: urban missions for the poor, urban industrial missions, rural missions, and student missions (KCAO 1976, p. 1). *Haengdong* was formed by six Protestant organizations, including the Yeongdeungpo Urban Industrial Mission, the Korea Student Christian Federation (KSCF), the Christian Academy, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and four Catholic organizations, including the Korea Young Christian Workers (KYCW, or the *Jeunesse Ouvnere Chretienne* (JOC)), the Korea Senior Christian Workers, the Korean Catholic Student Assembly, and the Anyang Workers Center (KCAO 1986, p. 80). The purpose of *Haengdong* was to inspire Protestants and Catholics to think and act collaboratively to improve the lives of laborers, farmers, and the urban poor, and to train professional Christian activists. *Haengdong* believed that "the powerless and poor issues should be put in a social and political context" and that "the redemption of the powerless and poor could be achieved through redemption from oppression and economic exploitation," a departure from the traditional charitable ideology of the time (KCAO 1986, p. 6).

Haengdong was renamed *Ecumenical-hyeondaeseonggyo-hyeobuiche* in 1973, then *Hangukgyohoe-sahoeseonggyo-hyeobuiche* later in 1973, and reestablished as *Saseon* in 1976. Though the organization changed its Korean name frequently, its English name, The Korea Christian Action Organization for Urban Industrial Mission (KCAO), and its core group of dedicated members, remained largely unchanged. In 1976, the Protestant organizations belonging to *Saseon* were mainly urban industrial mission organizations, urban mission organizations for the poor, and Protestant student associations, while Catholic member organizations were Korean Catholic farmer organizations, Catholic student associations, and the National Catholic Labor Priests Association. Solidarity between Korean Protestant and Catholic churches in pursuit of social justice had consolidated since the establishment of *Saseon* in 1976, and promoted the formation of vigorous Christian social movements.

The main discussion will proceed with the following order. Section 2 will be a critical review of the existing researches on the Christian social movement in Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. First, prior studies of Protestant and Catholic social movements will be examined, and then studies of the ecumenical movement will be reviewed. Section 3 examines the historical relationship between Protestant and Catholic churches in Korea. While Catholicism and Protestantism have similarities, they differ on many prominent points, leading to conflict and competition. The historical context of Korean Catholicism and Protestantism must be understood in order to grasp the significance of the cooperation between the two churches in the 1970s and 1980s. Section 4 will outline the solidarity between the Protestant and Catholic churches and the activities of *Saseon*, and examine their efforts to collaborate. Specifically, the acts of the Korean Protestant and Catholic churches towards the common goal of social justice will be examined through the lens of language, the balanced deployment of leadership and utilization of religious sites, and the characteristics of their rituals. By examining these activities, this article seeks to suggest one possible model of dialogue and coexistence among religions. Section 5 performs a theoretical evaluation of the case of *Saseon*, which proposes a model in which religions can cooperate and coexist with each other in religious pluralism without trying to commonize their differences or insisting on their own ways. Section 6 offers a critical view of *Saseon* activities. Though all members of *Saseon* were devoted to the cause, they also suffered oppression based on their religion, which demonstrates that participation in the *Saseon* movement demanded great determination and fortitude, making their partnership unique in Korea.

This paper will analyze the purpose, specific activities, and religious and social significance of the solidarity movement between Protestant and Catholic churches in Korea by examining sourcebooks published by *Saseon*, newspaper accounts, and the testimonies of those involved.

2. Review of Existing Researches on Korean Christian Social Movements

Researches on Korean Christian social movements of the 1970s and 1980s have mainly focused on organizing historical events in chronological order, or were published in the form of autobiographies or biographies of key figures. Studies of the Christian social movements during the democratization movements in Korea have been actively conducted for a relative short time, and so research on the subject has not been abundant.

Studies on the history of Protestant social movements mainly deal with the following topics: the movements of particular organizations and activist groups, such as Protestant pastors and students (Kim 1993; Jo 2005); the contemporary significance of a particular field of movement, such as Protestant labor movements and human rights movements (Park and Lee 2015; Son 2017); and the change of the characteristics of Protestant social movements into conservation and diversification (Lee 2002; Kang 2012).

Studies on the history of Catholic social movements are not different from those of their Protestant counterpart. However, it can be pointed out that, due to the organizational characteristics of the Catholic Church, there are some studies that deal with the Catholic social movement in connection with the global Catholic Church. Research topics on the Catholic social movement are as follows: movements of particular organizations, such as the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique* (JOC) (Kim 2016); the movements of particular activist groups, such as Catholic lay persons (Shim 2006); particular movement fields, such as the urban poor movement (Park 2010); the justification of social movements through the analysis of Catholic social teaching methodology (Oh 2006); and the relationship between the social participation of Korean Catholicism and the Second Vatican Council (Kang 2008).

Such research rarely takes the case of *Saseon* seriously (Jo 2005; Kang 2008; Kim 2009; *The Society of the History of Christianity in Korea* SHCK; NCKC 2013, pp. 556–60). This article is significant in that it ferrets out the case of *Saseon*, which has not received much attention, and introduces it to scholars in Korea and around the world who are not familiar with it.

The literature on the South Korean ecumenical movement mainly organizes historical events around unity among Protestant denominations (*The Presbyterian Church of Korea Ecumenical Committee* PCKEC). *Saseon*'s activities, not the denominational unity movement in a strict sense, but a partnership toward a common goal, tend to be described separately in the history of either Protestantism or Catholicism, rather than being analyzed from the perspective of a coalition movement. Further, studies that recognize the activities of *Saseon* as Protestant and Catholic solidarity describe only the content of the activities themselves, without an analytical approach to academic implications of the coalition movement (*Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development* 1983, pp. 178–82; Son 2017). This failure to acknowledge the ecumenical significance of the *Saseon* movement is also found in the statements of participant activists. For instance, the memoirs of Rev. Kwon Hokyeong, who represented the Protestant social movement in the 1970s and 1980s, provides relatively detailed accounts of his experiences with the *Saseon* movement, but does not mention the religious significance of cooperation with Catholics (Kwon 2019, pp. 254–67).

In this regard, this article is also significant, in that it justly acknowledges the joint social movement of Korean Protestants and Catholics in the 1970s and 1980s as an ecumenical movement. *Saseon* was a joint movement to achieve common goals, despite theological differences, and set an example of interreligious dialogue and coexistence in the process. It is necessary to fairly evaluate the meaning of the *Saseon* movement, its activists not collaborating from time to time, but forming a single organization and launching a single movement.

3. The Historical Relationship of Protestantism and Catholicism in Korea

Catholics and Protestants have been at odds with each other in Korea ever since Protestant missionaries first arrived at the end of the 19th century, when Catholic missionaries had already been established. Missionaries from both religions vied for status within Joseon (later Korea). After the Joseon government opened its ports in the late 19th century, after having persecuted Catholics for

about a century, various denominations of the latecomer Protestants flooded into Joseon and began engaging in very active missionary work. The Protestant missionaries openly criticized characteristics of the Catholic faith, such as the celibacy of priests and icon reverence. Dismayed, Catholic missionaries described Protestant missionaries as “enemies who like to compete” and “people who are more enthusiastic about converting Catholics than converting those of other religions.” They also criticized Protestantism as being “threatening and pretentious” and “superstitious,” and derided it as “heresy” (Myeongdong Catholic Church 1987, pp. 51–52, 64; Lee 2018, pp. 43–44).

In response, Protestant missionaries accused Catholics of “discounting the Bible,” while emphasizing “holy things,” and of “drawing hundreds and thousands of the Koreans with the false in the semblance of the true” (Underwood 2005, p. 657; Lee 2018, pp. 63–64). Horace Grant Underwood, a Korean representative of missionaries from the Northern Presbyterian Church in the U.S., criticized Catholics for their “blindness” while criticizing heathens for their “darkness” (Underwood 2005, pp. 657–58). Some Joseon Dynasty Protestants condemned Catholicism as ‘Romanism,’ contending that the papal system was a representative product of Romanism with no biblical basis and ran counter to the traditions of the early churches. Protestants further dismissed Catholicism as “ritualism” focusing only on ritual or ritual practice. They were especially derisive of Catholics’ regard of the church as a sanctuary, worshiping the statue of Jesus by sanctifying it, and elevating the image of Mary to sainthood, an act of blatant idolatry. In short, Joseon Dynasty Protestants thought that Protestantism valued “internal faith,” while Catholicism valued “external form” (Lee 2018, pp. 62–69).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Korean Protestant and Catholic churches wanted to highlight their differences from each other, so when Catholicism became known as ‘Cheonju-gyo,’ Protestants chose to adopt the name ‘Yaso(Jesus)-gyo.’ Catholic churches accepted the name of God chosen by the Chinese Catholic churches, ‘Cheonju,’ (天主, The Lord of Heaven) while Protestant churches, in order to avoid ‘Cheonju,’ adopted ‘Haneunim’ following the translation of the *Protestantism Catechism* (*Yesusyeonggyo-Mundap*) published in 1881 by John Ross, a missionary from the Scottish Union Presbyterian Church (Lee 2018, pp. 76–79; Oak 2020, pp. 132–33, 135–36). Relations between the two Christian traditions were so contentious at that time that even marriage between Protestants and Catholics was banned. It is clear that, in the early days of Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea, their refusal to recognize each other’s validity created conflict and turmoil.

After Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule in the mid-20th century, the strained relations between Protestantism and Catholicism in Korea continued, exemplified by a conflict over the military chaplains’ quota¹ when Korea’s first president, Syngman Rhee, a Protestant elder, implemented the military chaplain system (Choi 1982, p. 733). During the 1960 presidential election, Protestants had sought to support Rhee’s ruling party by denouncing Catholicism when a Catholic candidate from the opposition ran for vice-president (Kang 2014, pp. 64–70). This further heightened tension between the Korean Protestant and Catholic churches.

Change finally came after the second Vatican Council, which ran from 1962 to 1965. One of the council’s agendas was inter-religious dialogue and the ecumenical movements of Catholicism and Protestantism. Both sides participated in the dialogue, but the conflict and tension between the two religions continued unabated, nevertheless.

¹ The military chaplain system in Korea has been originated and developed mainly by Korean Christian churches, imitating the military chaplain system of the United States. After the Korean War (1950–53), the military chaplain system was officially established. From the beginning, Catholic priests were also dispatched as military chaplain, but their activities were as prominent as Protestant pastors. The Protestant military system took an exclusive position during the Rhee Syngman regime, which was based on anti-Communism and involved a large number of Protestants. When Korean armies participated in Vietnamese War in the late 1960s, Buddhism began to send military monks after persistent demands. On the surface, the three religions seemed to cooperate, but in reality, there was a great religious conflict in securing the number of military chaplains, especially over the position of the chief of chaplains (Choi 1982, p. 733; Park 2013, pp. 233–35).

4. The Objectives and Activities of *Saseon*

The background of the cooperation between the Korean Protestant and Catholic churches for the purpose of promoting social justice through *Saseon* in the 1970s and the 1980s can be categorized as both international and national. First, the decision of the second Vatican Council to engender cooperation between Catholics and Protestants led to the Korean Catholic churches acknowledging the necessity of the ecumenical movement. They began actively pursuing cooperation based on ‘the decretal on the ecumenicalism’ declared in 1964. They sought to open a dialogue with their estranged Protestant brothers, by holding joint rallies, joint prayers, and social activities. They tried to strengthen the ecumenical movement within the churches themselves through self-reform and adaptation to the modern world (Choi 1982, p. 733). Meanwhile, Protestants—the majority of whom were affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, with others affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Korean Methodist Church—instigated a trend to participate in social movements through dialogues with other religions, based on the strengthened missionary concept of *Missio Dei* (Latin for the “mission of the God”) after the Willingen meeting of the International Mission Council in 1952 (Sonea 2017, p. 72).² In November of 1964, Protestants invited other religious leaders to a meeting on the theme of “a dialogue between Protestantism and other religions” at the dedication of Academy House, the headquarters of a prominent Christian Academy, which later became a member of *Saseon*. Korean Catholics and Protestants held their first joint prayer service during the week of ecumenism in January 1986 (Choi 1982, p. 734).

Soon, a movement sought to form the foundation for ecumenism, not only through prayer meetings, but also through writings. One of the most remarkable works produced during that era was the Common Translation Bible. In 1966, the Protestant World Bible Society and the Vatican Bible Committee agreed to co-translate the Bible. Accordingly, Korean Catholic churches and some active Protestant denominations in the ecumenical movement organized a joint translation committee, collaborated on translations together, and cooperated in publishing the Korean Common Translation Bible in 1968. The New Testament was published on Easter Day in 1971, and the Old Testament on Easter Day in 1977 (Choi 1982, pp. 735–36; Shin 2014, p. 27). This Korean Common Translation Bible was used during *Saseon*’s worship services.

Another issue uniting the two religions was the resistance to Korea’s dictatorship led by Chunghee Park. While religious movements encountered relatively little interference from the military dictatorship compared to non-religious social movements at that time, some Protestants and Catholics sought to unite against the dictatorship. Protestants and Catholics were better protected from reprisals than activists affiliated with non-religious institutions in South Korea’s domestic social and political spheres in the 1970s and 1980s (Cho 2010, p. 344), due to their close links to the world’s churches, such as the United Church of Canada, the United Methodist Church, the Uniting Church of Australia, *Das Evangelisches Missionswerk in Südwestdeutschland*, *Berliner Missionswerk*, and the World Council of Churches. Since Korea’s military dictatorship sought validation from the international community, it required cooperation and support from various countries around the world, and could not easily punish or suppress Catholic priests or Protestant pastors protected by long-established international networks. Although some pastors and priests endured suffering, oppression, and even martyrdom, their relative freedom from reprisals made them some of the first members of the resistance to the dictatorship (Oh 2009, pp. 155–56).

Under these circumstances, a small number of Protestants and Catholics had to join forces to participate in democratization and the people’s right to life movements. The Protestant and Catholic

² The content of the *Missio Dei* doctrine was clearly presented for the first time at the Willingen meeting of the IMC in 1952. *Missio Dei* held that the main purpose of the missionary activities of the church is not the establishment of churches, but service to God. The mission is independent from the church and strictly understood as God’s own activity (Sonea 2017, pp. 72–73). Joining *Missio Dei* means specifically, “raising a prophetic voice against social, economic and racial injustice” (Bassham 1980, p. 36).

populations in Korea were not very large in the 1970s and the 1980s. According to the 1971 census, 9.8 percent of the Korean population was Protestant and 2.4 percent was Catholic, among a total population of almost 33 million. In 1977, Catholics made up 3.0 percent of the total Korean population and Protestants 13.7 percent (Korea Research Institute for Religion and Society 1993, pp. 174, 188). In 1985, the Protestant population accounted for 16.0 percent of the total population, and the Catholic population 4.6 percent (Korean Statistical Information Service 1985). Although the numbers of Catholics and Protestants were small, they were able to join the anti-dictatorship *Saseon* movement, taking advantage of the religious sector's relative autonomy from the military dictatorship.

Saseon's objective was to fulfill God's mission by building a kingdom of God on this Earth by protecting people from all the evil forces of the world (KCAO Brochure n.d.). To achieve this purpose, *Saseon* brought together Catholic and Protestant social missionary groups until the mid-1970s. In the late 1970s, it became the leading force of democratization and inspired the people's right to life movement as the Chun Doo-hwan dictatorship neared its end. The trigger was the so-called 'YH Incident' of 1979, when a woman laborer fell from a building and died while police forcibly tried to disperse a group of female laborers staging a sit-in protest against the closure of YH, a wig export company. Reverend Kyeongseok Suh, the general secretary of *Saseon*, who was supporting the female laborers, was arrested along with them (Kim 2015, p. 207). After that, *Saseon* concentrated directly on organizing and leading democratization and the people's right to life movements.

On 18 March 1982, university students in Busan set fire to the Busan Center for American Studies in protest of U.S. support for the new dictator, Doohwan Chun. *Saseon* issued a statement supporting the attack, stating that "the arson at the Busan Center for American Studies is a concrete expression of anti-American sentiment among Koreans" (Kim 2015, p. 208). As a result, a number of Catholic and Protestant leaders were arrested and investigated. Many media outlets criticized *Saseon* for supporting the attack, but in doing so promoted the organization's widespread name recognition, as many Koreans learned of *Saseon* for the first time. After the 5.18 Kwangju Democratization Movement in 1980, only religious rallies were exempted from the military junta's ban on rallies, and so *Saseon's* summer retreat and year-end parties served as a gathering place for Korean social activists. Representatives from each sector of the movement, such as urban industrial mission organizations, urban mission organizations for the poor, Protestant student associations, Catholic student associations, and the Korea Catholic farmer organizations, studied, exchanged information, and discussed tactics in their struggle, beyond the reach of government vigilance (Kim 2015, pp. 210–11).

Saseon operated educational and training programs for professional Christian activists, preparing for urban and industrial missions, fighting for the improvement of laborers' and farmers' environments and rights, organizing activities to help the urban poor through the Seoul Metropolitan Community Organization (*Sudokkwon-dosiseongyo-wiwonhoe* or SMCO), addressing industrial sector pollution by organizing the Korea Pollution Problems Institute (*Hanguk-gonghaemunje-yeonguso*), the first environmental organization in South Korea, and caring for Korean democratization movement leaders in custody (KCAO Brochure n.d.; Kim 2015, pp. 209–10).

Saseon contributed significantly to the formation of the general labor movement, the peasant movement, and the urban poor movement in Korea in the late 1980s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the democratic labor union movement was powered by the Protestant industrial missionary movement and the Catholic Labor Youth movement. A group of Protestant and Catholic rural activists in *Saseon* also organized the National Farmers Missionary Council (*Jeonguk-nongminseongyo-hyeobuihoe*) (KCAO 1986, p. 81). In particular, the Catholic Farmers' Association (*Catholic-nongminhoe*), established in 1972, 'the only farmers' movement organization in the country' for 10 years after its inception, broke new ground in the Korean peasant movement by greatly contributing to the formation of the National Farmers' Association (*Jeonguk-nongminhoe*) (Kang 2008, p. 293; Cho 2010, pp. 341–44). The urban poor movement, organized by SMCO in the 1970s, was more specialized, with the launch of the Catholic Urban Poor's Community Association (*Cheondobin*) in 1984 and the Christian Urban Poor's Council (*Kibinhyeop*) in 1986. Although ties between Protestantism and Catholicism had weakened at that

point, with the separation of the two religions within the urban poor movement, their contributions remained notable (KCAO 1987, p. 8). The two organizations contributed to the formation of the Seoul City Association of the Evacuated Urban Poor (*Seocheolhyeop*) in July 1987.

As *Saseon*'s activities progressed, roles were divided naturally between Protestants and Catholics. Protestants focused on urban industrial missions and student movements in the Seoul metropolitan area, while Catholics focused on industrial missions and farmer movements in rural areas. In the 1980s, *Saseon* tended to support people directly involved with their own organization, shifting their emphasis from 'a movement for neighbors' to 'a movement with neighbors.' (Cho 2010, p. 344). Accordingly, the labor movement, the peasant movement and the urban poor movement decoupled from religion (Kang 2008, pp. 294–95). As a result, the Christianity movement's influence and initiative waned and it stopped leading the people's movement. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that *Saseon* made a significant contribution to the formation and development of Korean social movements for laborers, farmers, and the urban poor, and democratization movements in the 1970s and 1980s (Kwon 2019, pp. 260–61).

As well as engaging in social and political activities, *Saseon* also aimed to strengthen cooperation between the Protestant and Catholic faiths in Korea (KCAO 1986, p. 53). Korean Protestant and Catholic activists did so by recognizing their theological differences without trying to reconcile or eliminate them. They developed their social movement on the basis of similarities in several ways.

First, Protestants and Catholics identified problems facing Christianity in Korea and tried to solve them cooperatively. They sought common problems in Protestantism and Catholicism and then tried to address them through joint research on church affairs, such as the direction of church structure, sermons and missionary work, theological problems embracing the indigenization of theology and missionary work, research and development of Minjung theology, and questions of missionary methodology, including *Missio Dei* and popular missionary work (Korea Christian Action Organization n.d., p. 3).

They also avoided conflict by agreeing on which name would be used for God. In Korea, Protestants and Catholics use a different name for God; the Korean Standard Dictionary defines 'Hananim' and 'Haneunim,' as specialized terms used to refer to God by Protestants and Catholics, respectively. As previously mentioned, early Catholics used the term Cheonju, and Protestants used Haneunim. However, in the past, people in northwestern of Korea, including Pyeongan Province and northern Hwanghae Province, pronounced it Hananim, not Haneunim. Since they had accepted Protestantism faster than people from any other region, and their faith significantly influenced the Protestant characteristics of South Korea after liberation from Japanese colonial rule, many Korean Protestants accepted the dialectical pronunciation of Hananim (Yoon 2015, pp. 29–31). After much consideration, Protestant and Catholic biblical scholars participating in the publication of the Common Translation Bible in 1968 agreed to label God as Haneunim. Catholic churches, which referred to God as Cheonju until the 1960s, accepted the term Haneunim for the sake of ecumenism, and Protestant churches convinced their followers that it was correct according to Korean linguistics to refer to God as Haneunim. However, the mainstream Protestant churches refused to accept the Common Translation Bible, and continued to use the term Hananim. The dispute over God's name ended when Korean Catholics agreed to use Haneunim, while Hananim was used by Protestants. The debate over the Korean term for God did not arise from simple differences in translation or pronunciation, but rather from long-standing conflicts and inconsistencies between Protestantism and Catholicism (Shin 2013), but *Saseon* used both Haneunim and Hananim. Catholic-led masses and theological material referred to God as Haneunim, and in Protestant worship services and materials used Hananim.

In addition, both sides tried to be fair when determining meeting venues and number of participants. Venues alternated between Protestant and Catholic churches; for example, the special general assembly, a large meeting, was held at Dongdaemun Catholic Church in 1979 (KCAO 1979, p. 1), while the Prayer for the Nation, another noteworthy event, was held at the Seoul First Church, a Protestant church in Jung-gu in 1984 (KCAO 1984, p. 1). Activist trainers and trainees were chosen evenly between each religion. *Saseon* wanted to strengthen the practical solidarity movement of

Protestants and Catholics by operating a training program for activists for the movement for the poor through the association of the Catholic Urban Poor's Community Association and the Protestant Urban Poor's Council. Trainers' positions in the program were divided evenly between members of the Catholic Urban Poor's Community Association and the Protestant Urban Poor's Council, and trainees were chosen in equal numbers from the two organizations (KCAO 1988, pp. 1–2).

Finally, communal worship services, or masses, were conducted to emphasize the similarities of Protestantism and Catholicism and harmonize the differences. The Common Translation Bible was used in communal services, and both Protestant and Catholic hymns were sung, along with people's songs (*minjung gayo*). For example, during the opening service of the 1983 general assembly, the Catholic hymn number 127 "A Song of the Blessed" and the Protestant hymn number 212 "A Church Song" were sung along with popular songs such as "Peasant Song" and "We Will Win." (KCAO 1983, pp. 1–2). The Holy Communion was also an important issue, because the Eucharist was strictly reserved for devout Catholics, while the Protestant Sacrament was relatively accessible to non-believers. *Saseon's* communal worship service solved this problem by omitting the Holy Communion altogether. In this way, even if Protestant believers attended Catholic Mass, they did not feel much resistance, nor did Catholic believers. Rather, the worshipers identified the merits of the faith and reflected on their lack of religion, and wanted to reform their religion more actively (College Student Council of Saemoonan Church 2017, pp. 113–14).

Saseon's activists recognized their differences with each other, but still carried out joint activities by highlighting common values, such as dedication to social justice, the legitimacy of social movements based on the Christian faith, and recognition of the need for internal reform within Korean churches. Protestants and Catholics in *Saseon* performed social work cooperatively, transcending their theological differences in finding common ground, united by their passion for social justice.

5. The Implication of *Saseon* for Coexistence and Cooperation between Religions

The case of *Saseon* demonstrates the possibility of religions to coexist and cooperate in a pluralistic society, while acknowledging their differences. According to Alister E. McGrath, there are three Christian approaches to understanding the relation between Christianity and other religious traditions: particularism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The particularist approach is based on the premise that "only those who hear and respond to the Christian gospel" can be saved (McGrath 1998, p. 329), which can cause conflict among religions in modern pluralistic society, in that it fundamentally blocks inter-religious dialogue. The inclusivist approach argues that "salvation is possible for those who belong to other religious traditions." Karl Rahner, the most prominent advocate of this model, argued that "saving grace must be available outside the bounds of the church, and hence in other religious traditions" (McGrath 1998, pp. 329–31). Inclusivism suggests that non-Christian religious traditions include elements of truth (McGrath 1998, p. 331). This approach is problematic, in that it fails to set a standard for determining whether or not God will save a certain person. John Hick criticized it as granting "honorary status unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it" (McGrath 1998, p. 331).

The pluralist approach relates partly to the model of cooperation and coexistence presented by *Saseon*, suggesting that "all the religious traditions of humanity are equally valid paths to the same core of religious reality" (McGrath 1998, p. 329). The most significant exponent of this approach is Hick, who asserted that "a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that it is God who is at the centre" was required, and "all the religions of mankind serve and revolve around him" (Hick 1993, p. 131). Hick suggested that the characteristic of God's nature is his universal saving will; "God wishes everyone to be saved" (McGrath 1998, p. 332). Hick declared that, although the language, concepts, liturgical actions, and cultural ethos differ widely from one religion to another, human beings come together within the framework of an ancient and highly developed tradition "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:8)." (Hick 1996, p. 38). According to Hick, all religions led to the same God. McGrath pointed out that there was a problem

with Hick's suggestion, because the religious traditions of the world were clearly radically different in their beliefs and practices. For instance, Hick's suggestion cannot be applied to non-theistic religious traditions, such as Advaitin Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism, which have no place for the traditional notion of God (McGrath 1998, p. 332).

Saseon's activities can be one possible solution to the problem pointed out by McGrath. As in the case of *Saseon*, when the realization of social justice becomes a common goal, the difference between religious experience and doctrine is not much of a problem. Religions can coexist without great conflict when a common understanding of God's nature and meaning is shared, rather than a common approval of God's reality. In other words, this is to focus not on who has 'the universal saving will' Hick referred to but on how it can be realized. When the thesis on God's nature expands into realizing social justice in this world as a way of achieving God's salvation, atheistic religious traditions such as Advaitin Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism can collaborate with theistic religious traditions such as Christianity.

The ecumenical movement in South Korea can be divided into two aspects: the inter-denominational unity or the reunion of Protestantism and Catholicism and the emphasis on the social responsibility of the church and cooperative activity towards it. The Human Rights Mission of the National Council of Churches in Korea also explained the unity movement and social participation of the Korean church separately (The National Council of Christian Churches in Korea 2005, pp. 40–54). *Saseon's* activities can be considered as being focused on the latter. The *Saseon* movement in Korea proposes a model in which religions recognize each other's differences and collaborate for the common goal of social justice, rather than excluding or including other religions.

6. Mainline Churches' Criticism on *Saseon*

Korean mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches were often critical of *Saseon*, specifically because their activities were creating uncomfortable relations with the state by resisting the military regime, while seeking cooperation with other religions. In the late 1970s and 1980s, high-ranking members of the Catholic church tried to weaken the Catholic social movement and promote close cooperation with the government (Kang 2008, pp. 350–52). The Bishops' Conference of 1978 decided to abolish many Catholic social movement organizations, including the Catholic Farmers' Association, the Catholic Labor Youth Association, and the Catholic University Student Association. Later, the Bishops' Conference of March 1987 decided not to allow Catholic members of *Saseon* to officially designate themselves as Catholics. The Korean Catholic church was concerned that the Catholic social movement would become a general social movement, with more emphasis on social than religious aspects. The Bishops' Conference also criticized the alliance and cooperation with non-Catholics, arguing that laypersons' apostolic organizations should consist only of Catholics (Kang 2008, pp. 327–34, 355–56; Oh 2015, p. 115).

The Korean Protestant churches also criticized the Protestant activists of *Saseon*. In particular, the group was denounced by various media outlets after the YH incident as one of the most ideologically "impure" forces in South Korean society. The Korean Protestant community openly labeled them as communists even in the books "What are Urban Industrial Missions for?" and "This is 'Urban Industrial Missions'" in 1977 and 1978, respectively.³ These books criticized the Protestant social movement as "not only a non-evangelical and impure movement, but also part of the world's communist bypass strategy," and described it as an anti-Christian movement based on atheist Marxism (Hong 1977; Hong 1978; The National Council of Christian Churches in Korea 2005, p. 140).

³ Little is known about the author of these books, Jiyeong Hong. The author, who was a lecturer at Korea National Defense University and Myongji University, wrote books mainly criticizing communism, political theology, and the labor movement, as well as dealing with national security issues. The above-mentioned books were published with the support of Protestant magazine *The Current Thoughts*, which took the position of the military dictatorship at the time. Conservative media outlets criticized *Saseon's* activists as communist, quoting the books (Hong 1977; Hong 1978; KCAO 1978).

Mainstream Protestant and Catholic criticism of *Saseon* was not directed at their ecumenism, but at their anti-government alignment, because *Saseon*'s activities at the time highlighted democratization and the people's right to life movement against the dictatorship, rather than ecumenical activities. The activists of *Saseon* did not set a common goal of social justice for ecumenism, but accepted the strategy of ecumenism for the realization of social justice.

Nevertheless, the animosity of mainline Korean Protestants and Catholics toward ecumenism was clear in the 1970s and the 1980s. They were especially critical of the Common Translation Bible. Catholics criticized the Common Translation Bible for being too Protestant, while Protestants criticized it for being more Catholic. As soon as the Common Translation Bible was released, conservative Protestants denounced it from a doctrinal and interpretative perspective, arguing that it was unacceptable because Catholics and Protestants were inherently different in the doctrinal aspect. There was a consensus within Catholic churches that the term 'apocrypha' should be amended to 'second scripture', because it constituted a theological error (Choi 1982, pp. 735–36).

In the 1970s and 1980s, when *Saseon* was active, most Catholics and Protestants tended to be either negative or indifferent to each other. A survey of the relative degree of intimacy between Protestants and other religions in 1982 indicated a conflict between Catholics and Protestants, with 45.5 percent of Protestants expressing discomfort, and 33.8 percent expressing familiarity with Catholicism. According to a 1985 social survey report by the Laypersons Council on the 200th anniversary of the Korean Catholic Church, 34.5 percent of Catholics responded that they had a great affinity with Buddhists, while only 14 percent of Catholics reported a connection with Protestants. According to a 1988 survey on religious consciousness and the lives of Catholics, 36.6 percent of Korean Catholics supported Buddhist doctrines and ideas and 28.5 percent opposed them, while 19.6 percent were in favor of Protestantism and 43.8 percent opposed to it. These statistical results can be interpreted as showing that relations between Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea were not amicable (Shin 2014, pp. 25–26).

Saseon activists were not only checked by the dictatorship, but also criticized by mainstream Protestants and Catholics. The activities of *Saseon* cannot represent the political and social attitude of all of Korean Christianity in the 1970s and 1980s. It is clear that *Saseon* activists were absolutely a minority within the Korean church. However, even a minority can have a substantial significance. *Saseon* has a great significance, in that it was the first coalition of Protestant and Catholic groups. Furthermore, in South Korea, where mainstream Protestants and Catholics were hostile toward each other and did not support the movement against the dictatorship, the collaboration for social justice by *Saseon* activists can be said to demonstrate prominently the degree of their will, determination, and conviction of the inter-religious activities of the social justice movement.

7. Conclusions

Saseon devoted itself not only to the Korean democratization movement against the military dictatorship, but also to the movement for the improvement of the quality of life of laborers, farmers, and the urban poor from 1976 to 1989. The Protestants and Catholics of *Saseon* recognized the social movement as missionary work for building the Kingdom of God on Earth, and actively carried out a social movement based on Christian faith.

Catholicism and Protestantism have a long history of conflict, miscommunication, and tension, which continues to this day. At many times throughout history, Catholics and Protestants have only been able to concentrate on their differences, rather than their similarities. However, thanks to the second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church during the 1970s, which supported inter-faith dialogue, a foundation for cooperation was built. Within Protestantism, there was also a trend to strengthen a dialogue with other religions to carry out God's mission (*Missio Dei*). The situation in Korea, where religious movements encountered relatively little interference from the military dictatorship compared to non-religious social movements, was another factor that created solidarity between Protestant and Catholic churches. Although only a few Protestants and Catholics sought to collaborate in resistance to Korea's dictatorship, they were able to lead social democratization and

the people's right to life movement during a time when non-religious movements were suppressed. The activities of *Saseon* contributed greatly to the formation of the general labor movement, the peasant movement and the urban poor movement in Korea in the late 1980s.

Despite the long conflict and tension, *Saseon* activists worked for the cause of social justice. To promote cooperation between the two religions, Korean Protestant and Catholic activists did not focus on their theological differences, but tried to look for ways to coexist. They recognized their theological differences, but chose not to focus on them, while developing a social movement on the basis of their similarities.

The solidarity between the Protestant and Catholic churches through *Saseon* has a particular significance in Korea, where many Protestants and Catholics were hostile toward each other. Even today, the ecumenical movement of Korean Protestants and Catholics is not as active or noteworthy as it was in the past, which is why it is important to remember the great work of this group. On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, many Christians had the chance to reflect on the past and prepare for the future together, yet failed to attempt to bring together Protestantism and Catholicism. In this regard, *Saseon* set an example of solidarity that can be emulated, even now.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Bascham, Rodger C. 1980. *Mission Theology, 1948–1975: Years of Worldwide Creative Tension—Ecumenical, Evangelical and Roman Catholic*. Pasadena: William Carey Library Pub., ISBN 0878083308.
- Cho, Kwang. 2010. *A Study on the History of Modern Catholicism in Korea*. Seoul: Kyeonginmunhwasa, ISBN 9788949907208.
- Choi, Seokwoo. 1982. A Dialogue between Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea. *Theological Thought* 39: 720–40.
- Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development (CISJD). 1983. *Democratization Movement and Protestantism in 1970s*. Seoul: CISJD.
- College Student Council of Saemoonan Church (CSCSC). 2017. *The History of College Student Council of Saemoonan Church*. Seoul: Communication Books, ISBN 979-11-288-0438-0.
- Hick, John. 1993. *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford, Chatham and New York: Oneworld, ISBN 1-85168-071-3. First published 1973.
- Hick, John. 1996. A Pluralist View. In *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Edited by Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, pp. 29–59. ISBN 0-310-21276-6.
- Hong, Jiyeong. 1977. *What are Urban Industrial Missions for?* Seoul: Keumran.
- Hong, Jiyeong. 1978. *This is 'Urban Industrial Missions'*. Seoul: Kidokgyosajosa.
- Jo, Byeongho. 2005. *A History of the Christian Student Movements in Korea*. Seoul: Ttangesseusin-geulssi, ISBN 89-85738-36-4.
- Kang, Incheol. 2008. *Religious Power and the Korean Catholic Church*. Osan: Hansin University Press, ISBN 9788978061032.
- Kang, Incheol. 2012. *Democratization and Religion*. Osan: Hansin University Press, ISBN 9788978061582.
- Kang, Sungho. 2014. The Conflict between Syngman Rhee Government with the Protestant and the Catholic Church in the Middle Stage of 1950s. Master's thesis, Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, Korea.
- KCAO. 1976. On the Reorganization of KCAO. October 18. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00445331> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- KCAO. 1978. First Report on Jiyeong Hong's Issues. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00327215> (accessed on 28 May 2020).
- KCAO. 1979. KCAO Extraordinary General Assembly. August 15. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00359257> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- KCAO. 1983. KCAO General Assembly. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00885606> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- KCAO. 1984. September 1st Prayer for the Nation. August 25. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00215373> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- KCAO. 1986. *Fifteen Years: History and Activities*. Seoul: KCAO.

- KCAO. 1987. KCAO Urban Poor Committee Policy Consultation Meeting for the First Half of 1987. September 8. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00043990> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- KCAO. 1988. KCAO Urban Poor Missionary Training Plan. September 13. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00043353> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- KCAO Brochure. n.d. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00102876> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- Korea Christian Action Organization (KCAO). n.d. KCAO Activity Strategy. Available online: <https://archives.kdemo.or.kr/isad/view/00443024> (accessed on 30 August 2019).
- Kim, Yeongcheol. 1993. *The History of Korean Christian Youth and Student Movement*. Seoul: IVP, ISBN 8932830061.
- Kim, Myeongbae. 2009. *The History of Protestant Social Movement in Korea*. Seoul: Book Korea, ISBN 978-89-6324-029-9.
- Kim, Kyeongnam. 2015. *I Was Happy to Have You: Returning Thanks For Favors Received*. Seoul: Dongyeon, ISBN 9788964472897-03040.
- Kim, Maria. 2016. Establishment and Early Activities of J.O.C. (Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique) of Korea. Master's thesis, Inha University, Incheon, Korea.
- Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS). 1985. Religious Population by Administrative District, Age, and Gender. 1985 Census. Available online: http://kosis.kr/statisticsList/statisticsListIndex.do?menuId=M_01_01&vwcd=MT_ZTITLE&parmTabId=M_01_01#SelectStatsBoxDiv (accessed on 7 September 2019).
- Korea Research Institute for Religion and Society (KRIRS). 1993. *The Yearbook of Korean Religions*. Seoul: Halimwon, 1 vol.
- Kwon, Hokyong. 2019. *Hokyong Kwon's Memoirs: The Flow of History towards Human Beings*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, ISBN 978-89-511-1989-1.
- Lee, Suin. 2002. Changes in Korean Civil Society and the Political and Social Attitudes of Protestantism since 1987. *Economy and Society* 56: 264–91.
- Lee, Jingu. 2018. *The Recognition of Others of Protestantism in Korea*. Seoul: Mosineun-saramdeul, ISBN 9791188765058.
- McGrath, Alister E. 1998. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, ISBN 0-631-20844-5.
- Myeongdong Catholic Church. 1987. *The Seoul Diocese Annals II*. Seoul: Myeongdong Catholic Church.
- The National Council of Christian Churches in Korea (NCCCK). 2005. *30 Years of the Korean Church's Human Rights Movement*. Seoul: NCCCK.
- NCCCK. 2013. *Protestantism in Korea*. Seoul: NCCCK.
- Oak, Sung-Deuk. 2020. *The Making of Korean Christianity*. Seoul: Holywaveplus, ISBN 979-11-6129-142-0. First published 2013.
- Oh, Kyeonghwan. 2006. Catholic Social Teaching and Civic Movement. *The Journal of the Korean Catholic Academy of Social Science* 18: 111–26.
- Oh, Kyeonghwan. 2009. Nation and Korean Catholic Church. *Journal of Buddhist Professors in Korea* 15: 129–63.
- Oh, Seil. 2015. Korean Catholic Church's Social Engagement: A Reflexive Modernization Based on Second Vatican Council. *Korean Journal of Sociology* 49: 93–123. [CrossRef]
- Park, Boyoung. 2010. The Emergence and Development of the Catholic Poor People's Movements: A Case Study on the Catholic Organization Urban Poor. *Journal of Critical Social Welfare* 29: 125–62.
- Park, Edward Ungkyu. 2013. Military Chaplain System and Christianity in Korea. *Bible & Theology* 66: 227–60.
- Park, Chul, and Chongkoo Lee. 2015. Minjung Church and Labor Movement of Guro Area in 1980s: A Study about the Shaping Process and Role of Minjung Church's. *Korean Journal of Labor Studies* 21: 305–41. [CrossRef]
- The Presbyterian Church of Korea Ecumenical Committee (PCKEC). 2008. *Ecumenical Movement of Korean Churches in the 21st Century*. Seoul: The Cristian Literature Society, ISBN 978-89-511-1033-7.
- The Society of the History of Christianity in Korea (SHCK). 2009. *A History of Christianity in Korea*. Seoul: The Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea, 3 vols. ISBN 978-89-85628-64-8.
- Shim, Hyunju. 2006. Activating Lay Civic Social Movement. *The Journal of the Korean Catholic Academy of Social Science* 18: 137–39.
- Shin, Hanyeol. 2013. Haneunim or Hananim. *Catholic News Now and Here*. November 26. Available online: <http://www.catholicnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=11208> (accessed on 9 September 2019).

- Shin, Kwangcheol. 2014. Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea: Encounter, Coexistence and Future. *Christian Thought* 10: 23–29.
- Son, Seungho. 2017. *Yushin Regime and Human Rights Movement of Korean Protestantism*. Seoul: The Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea, ISBN 978-89-85628-90-7.
- Sonea, Cristian. 2017. *Missio Dei*—The Contemporary Missionary Paradigm and Its Reception in the Eastern Orthodox Missionary Theology. *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 9: 70–91. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Underwood, Horace Grant. 2005. *Horace Grant Underwood Papers II*. Edited by Manyeol Lee and Sungdeuk Oak. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, ISBN 897141636X. First published 1893.
- Yoon, Jeongran. 2015. *The Korean War and Protestantism*. Seoul: Hanulmplus, ISBN 9788946058422.



© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).