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Bridging Doctrinal Divides: Analyzing Ecumenical Dialogue Between Catholics and Protestants in South Korea

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Abstract: The remarkable growth of Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea has garnered significant attention in the history of Asian missions. However, their relationship has predominantly been characterized by persistent conflicts and competition, with limited progress in ecumenical efforts. This study examines the ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Protestants in Korea, focusing on the doctrinal issues central to their divisions. The analysis reveals that many of these disputes stem from doctrinal controversies introduced by Western missionaries in the early 20th century. Through a detailed examination of dialogue documents, the study demonstrates that despite over two decades of concentrated ecumenical efforts since 2000—when serious discussions on doctrinal matters began—progress remains limited. This stagnation is attributed to the lack of rigorous academic inquiry, insufficient engagement with global ecumenical movements, and ineffective dialogue methodologies. Finally, the article provides suggestions for fostering the local adoption of global ecumenical initiatives and promoting greater unity among Christians.

Keywords: Catholics; Protestants; conflict; cooperation; doctrinal dispute; ecumenical dialogue in Korea



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1. Introduction

Catholicism and Protestantism, introduced to Korea roughly a century apart, share a distinctive feature: both traditions were embraced by Koreans through their engagement with the Bible and devotional literature before the arrival of missionaries. Despite their remarkable growth in the history of Christianity in East Asia,¹ their relationship has been predominantly characterized by conflicts and competition, with only limited success in ecumenical endeavors.²

These tensions are rooted in doctrinal misunderstandings, which perpetuate mutual prejudices and divisions. Theological disputes introduced by Western missionaries remain a significant obstacle to unity. Addressing these issues through ecumenical dialogue is not merely an academic endeavor but a necessary step toward fostering mutual understanding and collaboration between the two traditions.

Following the Second Vatican Council's call for Christian unity (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1), the Catholic Church initiated an ecumenical movement. Catholics and Protestants participated jointly in “prayers for Christian unity” and collaborated on political issues such as democratization, human rights, and reunification. Serious theological dialogue, however, did not begin until 2000, when efforts to address longstanding doctrinal misunderstandings gained momentum.

Despite its importance, research on Catholic–Protestant relations in Korea remains limited. Most studies focus on one tradition rather than examining their interactions. This

gap reflects the historical distance and lack of mutual interest between the two Confessions. Even ecumenical studies rarely analyze these relations; a notable exception is Shin Kwangchul's doctoral thesis, which covers the period from 1876 to the end of the Japanese occupation (Shin 1998). Post-liberation relations and ecumenical efforts led by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) after the Second Vatican Council remain largely unexplored.³ These two organizations have been central to the ecumenical movement in Korea.

This study seeks to address this research gap by analyzing three volumes of documents presented at the Ecumenical Forum and the Ecumenical Academy, jointly organized by the CBCK and the NCCCK.⁴ These three volumes, which represent key materials in the ecumenical dialogue between Korean Catholics and Protestants (specifically the eight Protestant denominations affiliated with the NCCCK that actively participate in ecumenical dialogue), document the outcomes of a dialogue initiated in 2000 with the goal of dispelling doctrinal misunderstandings and addressing theological conflicts. The necessity of this doctrinal focus has been emphasized by participants in the ecumenical dialogue; according to Young-min Song, "the greatest barrier to Church unity consists of misunderstandings and prejudices regarding each other's doctrines and beliefs" (Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2020, p. 142); ecumenical experts similarly stress the urgency of overcoming these divisions.

At this critical juncture, when it is essential to evaluate the achievements of ecumenical dialogue over the past 20 years, analyzing this collection of documents provides an opportunity to assess how effectively Catholics and Protestants have addressed the profound misunderstandings that have divided them for more than a century. Furthermore, it offers a foundation for proposing practical solutions to the challenges that remain. Moreover, by evaluating the outcomes of these dialogues in light of the materials produced by the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission in its efforts to address doctrinal disputes and divisions since 1927, the study will offer insights into the local reception of global ecumenical achievements. Before delving into the analysis of these documents, this study will briefly review the deeply rooted doctrinal disputes and the ecumenical movement prior to 2000, as this historical context is crucial for understanding the materials analyzed herein.

2. Historical Background

In any historiography, the timeline may vary among scholars. However, the widely accepted dates for the introduction of Catholicism and Protestantism to Korea are 1784 and 1884, respectively. Arriving a century apart, they encountered vastly different historical contexts. From its inception, Catholicism faced relentless persecution for nearly a century within a closed Confucian feudal society marked by social and political isolation. This hostility was especially severe due to its opposition to ancestral rites, as evidenced by the numerous martyrs (Dallet 1874). In contrast, Protestantism, introduced in the 1880s after Korea opened its doors under Western influence, experienced rapid and relatively smooth growth. It aligned with the nation's modernization needs by integrating the dissemination of Western civilization with evangelism, employing missionary strategies that included medical services and educational institutions.

The early years of encounters between Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Korea show a dynamic of cooperation and conflict. Protestant missionaries relied on the achievements of Catholic missionaries, such as using the Korean–French dictionary (*Hanbul chajŏn*) for studying the Korean language. In 1889, during a severe famine in Jeolla and Gyeongsangbuk-do, both denominations collaborated to organize a relief movement (*Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* (SMEP) (1890, p. 17)).

However, in the 1890s, with the rise in Protestant missionary activity, the rivalry between the two Confessions intensified. By 1907, Protestants surpassed Catholics, who had arrived a century earlier, increasing competition for the same territory and population (Cho 2013, p. 521). In 1923, according to a report by Catholic missionaries, the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres were managing schools and orphanages in Seoul, Jemulpo, and Daegu. At the same time, American Presbyterian missionaries operated four hospitals in the southern regions and seven in the north, including a leprosy hospital in Gwangju that housed 300 patients. Together with Methodists, they managed a total of 25 hospitals nationwide. Bishop Devred, concerned about Protestant dominance in education and healthcare, critically assessed their activities and accomplishments in his report, “Le péril protestant en Corée” (The Protestant Threat in Korea). He observed that prior to 1883, there were no Protestant pastors in Korea. However, following the signing of treaties with various nations, they began arriving in significant numbers. By 1923, denominations such as Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Seventh-day Adventists, the Salvation Army, Anglicans, and others were all well established. Devred attributed their rapid growth to substantial financial and human resources. Unlike Catholics, who struggled with limited means, Protestants had access to considerable budgets and employed numerous paid local pastors and catechists. He also noted that they specifically targeted the middle and upper classes, pursuing both educational and religious objectives. According to Devred, “The benefits go beyond religion and become political and economic. The pragmatic Anglo-Saxons understand this well” (Devred 1924, pp. 103–104). His report reflects a sense of caution and competition in response to the rapid growth of Protestantism. Against this historical backdrop, doctrinal disputes between the two Confessions erupted, particularly since 1907, when the number of Protestants began to surpass that of Catholics (Cho 2013, p. 521).

2.1. Doctrinal Disputes in the Early 20th Century: Roots of the Ongoing Conflicts

Starting in 1907, as the growth of Protestantism began to surpass that of Catholicism, an intense doctrinal debate emerged between the two Confessions, prominently reflected in books and the press. These controversies left a lasting imprint on Korean Christianity and offer an essential context for understanding the ecumenical documents analyzed later in the study. Tracing the roots of these misunderstandings is crucial for dispelling misconceptions that persist to this day. To examine these polemical exchanges, I will briefly analyze representative apologetic texts from each Confession: *Yesu chin'gyo sap'ae* (Han 1907) and *Yesu T'yŏnjyu ryanggyo pyŏnnon* (Ch'oe 1908). Additionally, I will consider documents debating interpretations of the Reformation, particularly *Nut'ŏ kaegyo kiryak* (Gale 1908) and “*Sin'gyo chigi-wŏn*” (Demange 1923). Finally, this section will address a series of articles written by a Protestant missionary that have profoundly shaped the Protestant perceptions of Catholicism, leaving a legacy that endures to the present day.

2.1.1. *Yesu chin'gyo sap'ae* (예수진교사패, 1907): A Defense of Catholic Orthodoxy

Yesu chin'gyo sap'ae (Four Signs of the True Religion of Jesus), is a classic of Catholic apologetics and a critique of Protestantism. It was reprinted in 1932 and widely read during the Japanese occupation. This book is a Korean translation of a Chinese text written by Henri Vacquerel (1850–1936),⁵ a missionary in China sent by the Missions étrangères de Paris. A Korean priest, Han Ki-geun (1868–1939), translated it under the supervision of Bishop Gustave Charles Marie Mutel (1854–1933). The book's aim is to demonstrate the “orthodoxy” of the Catholic Church through the four marks of the Church (unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity). The author critiques Protestantism as a “religion” that has broken away from the unity of the Church by dividing into several branches. He addresses 111 controversial subjects, such as the veneration of Mary, the Immaculate Conception

of Mary, the veneration of holy images, purgatory and the commemoration of the dead, Church Tradition, the inefficacy of faith without works, and the seven sacraments (Shin 1998, p. 120). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these issues in detail; however, it suffices to acknowledge that they remain points of contention between Catholicism and Protestantism to this day.

2.1.2. *Yesu t'yŏnjyū ryanggyo pyŏnnon* (예수턴쥬량교변론, 1908): A Defense of Protestant Orthodoxy

The Protestant response to the *Four Signs of the True Religion of Jesus* emerged in 1908 with the publication of *Yesu t'yŏnjyū ryanggyo pyŏnnon* (Doctrinal Controversy Between Catholics and Protestants), by Methodist pastor Rev. Ch'oe Pyŏnghŏn (1858–1927), a prominent Protestant theologian. This work is a translation of the Chinese Protestant catechism *Liang jiao he bian* (兩教合辨, 1885), written by F.H. James, and it underscores the distinctions between Protestantism (*Yesugyo*, “the religion of Jesus”) and Catholicism (*T'yŏnjyugyo*, “the religion of the Lord of Heaven”) by employing biblical passages as evidence. Ch'oe's work criticizes Catholicism for its alleged prohibition on Bible reading and for elevating tradition and ecclesiastical authority above Scripture. It also reproaches Catholicism for venerating idols and images, contrasting this practice with Protestantism's exclusive worship of God (pp. 2–3). Furthermore, Ch'oe critiques the Catholic use of Latin, advocating for the use of the vernacular in worship and Mass, asserting that “prayers should be said in the languages of the nations, so even children can understand.” He also challenges the Catholic view on the relationship between Scripture and tradition, arguing that the Catholic Church accords tradition equal authority with Scripture.

While some critiques, such as the alleged prohibition on Bible reading, were based on misunderstandings, other points, like the advocacy for indigenous languages in worship, warrant consideration. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has strongly encouraged the use of vernacular languages in worship.

2.1.3. *Nut'ŏ kaegyo kiryak* (누터개교긔략, 1908): A Protestant Perspective on the Reformation

James Scarth Gale (1863–1937) (Gale 1908), a Protestant missionary, authored *Nut'ŏ kaegyo kiryak*. In this work, Gale traces the origins of Luther's Reformation, primarily highlighting Luther's encounter with the Bible. He identifies the abuse of indulgences as the trigger for the Reformation and offers a sharp critique of Catholic ritualism, Roman centralism, and the doctrine of salvation based on works. Gale emphasizes salvation by grace alone and by faith alone, interpreting Luther's Reformation as a restoration of lost truths (Cf. Ahn 2017, pp. 7–35). He presents the distinction between salvation by works and salvation by faith as the key marker differentiating Catholicism from Protestantism. Gale's critique of Catholicism has had a significant impact on Protestant perceptions of Catholicism to this day.

2.1.4. “*Sin'gyo chigi-wŏn*” (新教之起源, 1923): A Catholic Critique of the Reformation

“*Sin'gyo chigi-wŏn*” written by Bishop Florian Demange (1875–1938), the first bishop of Daegu, aims to critique the Protestant conception of the Reformation in Korea. He seeks to reveal Catholic orthodoxy and correct Protestant errors, highlighting the need for a sovereign authority and the unchanging nature of the Church as an important Catholic tradition (p. 3). Demange argues that Catholicism “has never changed” and therefore did not require Luther's Reformation. The book focuses on Luther's life and work, emphasizing Protestant misunderstandings of the papacy. It explains that papal infallibility is often misunderstood by Protestants; it does not mean that the pope is infallible as an individual but rather only when making declarations on faith and morals *ex cathedra* (p. 7).

While the author acknowledges the need for political and personal reforms within the Catholic Church during the humanist period, he insists that ultimate authority lies with the Magisterium, portraying Luther's Reformation as a private act without legitimacy. Chapters 1, 2, 9, and 12 critically examine Luther's life and work, presenting Catholic scholars' critiques, which portray Luther in a very negative light.⁶ Chapter 4 refutes Protestant ideas about indulgences, explaining that they concern the remission of temporal punishment, not the forgiveness of sins. Chapters 10 and 11 focus on the errors and weaknesses of Protestantism and sharply criticize the divisions within Protestantism. While this book attempted to correct Protestant misconceptions about the papacy and indulgences, its impact was limited by its small circulation in Protestant circles.

2.1.5. Protestant Criticism of Catholicism in *Sinhak Chinam* (神學指南), a Protestant Theology Journal

Beyond the four books mentioned, the two Confessions engaged in press debates. Notable among them are the critical articles by C. F. Bernheisel (1874–1958), a missionary of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and professor at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 'P'yöngyang'. He published 11 articles criticizing the Catholic Church in the theological journal *Sinhak chinam* between 1936 and 1938. His views on Catholicism, which were typical of Protestant missionaries in Korea at the time, significantly shaped the negative perception of the Catholic Church among Korean Protestants—a perception that endures to this day.

In the article entitled "The Catholic View of the Church" (Bernheisel 1936a), Bernheisel criticizes Catholic soteriology, describing it as mechanical because, in his view, simple participation in church rituals guarantees salvation. He also criticizes the Catholic Church's emphasis on unity as a mechanical imposition and interprets the Lord's call for unity in the Gospel of John as "spiritual unity" rather than "unity of external institutions" (p. 46). According to Bernheisel, Protestant churches, despite their various denominations, form the true Church due to their spiritual unity amidst diversity. He criticizes the Catholic Church's ministry as centered on priestly absolutism, emphasizing that Christ is the sole mediator.

Bernheisel views the papacy as the height of the Catholic Church's priestly absolutism and centralism. He rejects the idea that the pope is the "foundation and head of the Church," affirming that only Christ fulfills this role (pp. 46, 49). He reinterprets Matthew 16:18, asserting that Jesus was referring to the truth confessed by Peter, not Peter himself. Bernheisel also criticizes Catholic worship as idolatrous, accusing the Church of venerating objects other than God, such as saints, angels, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. He claims the Catholic Church teaches that "Mary is our only refuge and savior. Our prayers are often answered more by addressing Mary than the Savior. Everything obeys the Virgin's commands. Even God obeys" ("The Worship of the Roman Catholic Church," (Bernheisel 1936b, p. 29)). He argues that the Catholic Church creates a Mariology that places Mary in the role of Jesus the Savior. However, he adds that Mary should still be honored: "Every believer must show the greatest respect and affection for Mary, the mother of the Lord, because she is a noble woman, deeply faithful, rich in Christian virtues, and greatly blessed before God" (p. 30). Bernheisel criticizes the Catholic sacraments, asserting that only baptism and the Eucharist are biblical, and he argues that Catholic insistence on seven sacraments is intended to control the laity's lives ("The Sacraments," (Bernheisel 1937, p. 24)).

Bernheisel's critique of Catholicism raises questions about whether it is genuinely based on an accurate understanding of the Catholic Church's orthodox doctrines. A detailed examination and critique of these issues lie beyond the scope of this paper. In particular, his depiction of the Catholic Church's Mariology seems significantly exaggerated. This has likely contributed to the persistent misunderstanding of Catholic Mariology within Korean Protes-

tantism to this day. It can also be assumed that such misconceptions have been perpetuated across generations through Protestant pastors shaped by his theological influence.

According to the doctrinal dispute documents briefly reviewed above, the controversies between Korean Catholicism and Protestantism are centered on the key themes of disputes between the two traditions in the West after the 16th-century Reformation: the papacy, Scripture and tradition, Mariology, and the sacraments.

2.2. The Ecumenical Movement Before 2000

Although relations between the Catholics and Protestants in Korea were long marked by doctrinal conflicts, little effort was made to overcome these mutual misunderstandings. However, starting in 1966, after the Second Vatican Council, the Korean Catholic Church initiated efforts to promote Christian unity by creating the “Reunification Commission” (재일치위원회).⁷ In 1968, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK) and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) jointly organized the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This Week of Prayer, held annually from January 18 to 25, was originally launched in 1908 by Father Paul Wattson. In 1968, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity officially joined this movement, preparing documents for the Week of Prayer together. From 1968, Korean Catholics and Protestants began organizing this Week of Prayer together.

In addition to ecumenical prayer meetings, they established a joint committee for Bible translation in January 1968, resulting in the publication of an ecumenical translation of the New Testament in 1971 and of the Old Testament at Easter in 1977. However, this translation was officially adopted only by the Catholic, the Anglican, and the Orthodox Church, and was not widely used among Protestant denominations, primarily due to disagreements over the translation of the divine name.⁸ In 1977, the Institute of Korea Theological University (Protestant) and the Institute of Theology at Sogang University (founded by Jesuits) published a translation of *Neues Glaubensbuch. Der gemeinsame christliche Glaube*,⁹ an ecumenical theological manual. This text, written by 19 prominent Catholic theologians and 17 Protestant theologians from Germany and published in 1973, aimed to present the results of scholarly dialogue for unity in Germany and to provide a basis for theological dialogue in Korea. However, this translation was not widely used as a teaching tool in Korean Churches.

The Korean ecumenical movement is not limited to intra-church matters; it stems from the desire to obey Christ’s call for unity and a shared witness (Raiser 1995, pp. 430–438). Korean Catholics and Protestants also cooperated in response to the political needs of Korean society. Since the Yushin dictatorship¹⁰ in 1972, progressive Catholic and Protestant groups have allied in the democratization movement, human rights movements, and the reunification movement. They also collaborated on environmental issues. These joint efforts and solidarity in social engagement vividly expressed “the union that already exists between them” and more fully illuminated the “face of Christ the Servant” (*Christi servi vultum*).¹¹

However, although Catholics and Protestants collaborated on social issues, the dialogue to overcome their doctrinal divisions was neglected during this time. When their joint efforts began to bear fruit in the social domain, the Korean ecumenical movement recognized the need to resolve these conflicts through theological and doctrinal dialogue.

3. Analysis of Ecumenical Dialogue Documents Since 2000: Focus on Doctrinal Issues

Since 2000, the ecumenical dialogue, which had stalled after the publication of a common Bible translation and an ecumenical theology manual, has gained renewed momentum. In January 2000, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK) and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) jointly organized an ecumenical forum based on a proposal

from the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in December 1998. This proposal aimed to organize an ecumenical forum for all churches confessing Christ as Lord (Korean Christian Ecumenical Movement Theologians Study Group 2010, pp. 9–20).

This initiative was actively adopted by the Korean Church and brought together Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic theologians, who decided to hold an annual theological forum starting in 2000 (Byun 2003, pp. 255–56). In 2014, the “Korean Commission on Faith and Order” was launched to invigorate the Korean ecumenical movement and deepen theological debates. Professor Shin Jae-sik, an active participant in the ecumenical dialogue in Korea, called the establishment of this organization “the most significant activity” of the Korean Christian ecumenical movement (Shin 2022, p. 149). Since its inception, the Commission has managed the Ecumenical Forum and the Ecumenical Academy. The three volumes examined in this analysis are collections of the presentations made at this Forum and Academy. Before analyzing these texts, a brief introduction to the “Faith and Order Commission of Korean Churches” is necessary.

3.1. History and Organization of the “Faith and Order Commission of Korean Churches”

The “Faith and Order Commission of Korean Churches” is modeled after the WCC’s “Faith and Order Commission.” Its primary goal is to promote the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ by studying the theological issues that divide churches (Lossky et al. 2002, p. 411). The term “Faith and Order” involves disagreements related to doctrine (“faith”) and the organization of church ministry (“order”), which prevent the unity of Christian churches (<https://www.oikoumene.org/fr/what-we-do/faith-and-order-commission>, accessed on 10 January 2025).

Ecumenical dialogue in Korea began to gain momentum with the establishment of the annual Ecumenical Forum in 2000. Nevertheless, in his presentation at the 11th Ecumenical Forum in 2011, Professor Byung-Jun Chung observed the following:

Ecumenical cooperation between Catholic and Protestant churches in Korea is still in its early stages. It is indeed shameful and unfortunate that conflicts persist between Protestant and Catholic churches due to misunderstandings and ignorance. These issues have become a great scandal for the Christian witness in Korean society. (Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2020, p. 18)

Professor Chung’s remarks underscore the limited progress in mutual understanding despite over a decade of ecumenical discussions. In 2014, at the 14th Ecumenical Forum, Catholic priest Yongmin Song, who had been appointed co-chair of the theological committee within the Korean Faith and Order Commission, addressed the forum, explaining that the commission was established in response to the enduring need for a renewed phase of the ecumenical movement in Korea.

Its inaugural general assembly was held on 22 May 2014. The commission is composed of theologians from the Catholic Church and the National Council of Churches in Korea, including the Korean Orthodox Church, and eight Protestant denominations: Presbyterian Church of Korea [예장통합], Korean Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church of Korea [기장], Salvation Army Korea, Anglican Church of Korea, Christian Church of God in Korea, Christian Gospel Church of Korea [기독교대한복음교회], and Korean Lutheran Church. It has two co-chairs and 18 committee members. At present, the co-chairs are a Catholic bishop and a Presbyterian pastor.

3.2. Analysis of Ecumenical Dialogue Documents Since 2000

The documents from the Ecumenical Forum, initiated in 2000, have been compiled into two volumes titled *Hana toege hasosŏ* (하나되게 하소서), meaning “That They May Be One.” The first volume, encompassing 530 pages, includes documents from the Forum’s presen-

tation between 2000 and 2009 and was published in 2010. The second volume, spanning 378 pages and covering the years 2010 to 2019, was published in 2020. Additionally, the proceedings of the Ecumenical Academy, established in 2015, were published in 2019 under the title *Kūrisūdoin ūi sinhaktaehwa* (그리스도인의 신학대화), meaning “Theological Dialogue of Christians,” commemorating the fifth anniversary of the formation of the Korean Commission on Faith and Order.

(1) Objectives of the Ecumenical Forum and the Ecumenical Academy

The Ecumenical Forum is primarily aimed at theologians and seminarians, while the Ecumenical Academy focuses on providing ecumenical education for the laity. At the 14th Ecumenical Forum, the catholic priest Yongmin Song explained the origin of the Ecumenical Academy:

The current state of the ecumenical movement in South Korea is primarily reflected in the perception of ecumenical unity among the laity. Most Catholics and Protestants do not have a sufficient awareness of the fact that they share the same faith in Christ, and some Protestant pastors and Catholic clergy are struggling to restore the unity of the church or to find a fraternal bond of unity in diversity because of their limited understanding of each other. In particular, the misunderstandings and prejudices of front-line priests and pastors have a profound impact on the consciousness of the laity, which is one of the greatest obstacles to the ecumenical movement. Long-standing mistrust, such as the perception of Catholics as “elders” and Protestants as “illegitimate children,” or the view that Catholicism is heretical, Mary-worshipping, or a remnant of the feudal institutional Church of the Roman Empire, highlights the importance of educating the faithful in the ecumenical movement ([Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2020](#), p. 146).

Youngmin Song, who presented the text extensively quoted above, emphasized that Korean Catholics and Protestants often fail to acknowledge their shared faith in Christ and highlighted that even clergy from both traditions harbor mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. He underscored the critical importance of education, a point that precisely illustrates the rationale and purpose behind the establishment of the Ecumenical Forum and the Ecumenical Academy. Accurately recognizing the problematic state described in this extended quote is the first step toward its resolution. Youngmin Song also emphasizes that Catholic conservatism and the exclusive conservatism of certain Protestant denominations, influenced by American Fundamentalism, have created many obstacles to ecumenical dialogue to this day.

(2) Themes Addressed in the Forum and the Academy

The Ecumenical Forum was held annually from 2000 to 2019, for a total of 19 sessions. Catholic presenters attended 18 of these sessions. Protestants were represented at all 19 sessions, with the following breakdown: Presbyterians of Jesus (10), Presbyterians of Christ (8), Methodists (13), Salvation Army (2), Lutherans (4), and Full Gospel Church (1). Orthodox participants attended five sessions.

Since its inception in 2015, the Ecumenical Academy has held 11 sessions. Participation by denomination was as follows: Catholics attended 10 times, Protestants attended 10 times (Presbyterians 5, Methodists 2, Salvation Army 1, Assemblies of God 2, with no other Protestant denominations present), and Orthodox representatives attended 3 times.

The Ecumenical Academy provides education to the faithful in collaboration with the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches. Each year, the program includes 10 lessons for a basic course and 4 lessons for an advanced course, the latter consisting of lectures and visits to churches of different denominations. The collection of documents of the Ecumenical Academy includes 11 sessions, one more than the 10 sessions planned for the basic course.

The topics of these 11 sessions are divided into three main areas: history (3 sessions), doctrine (4 sessions), and Christian life (4 sessions).

(3) Analysis of Doctrinal Issues Debated

A wide variety of topics have been addressed in the Forum and the Academy. This analysis focuses on doctrinal issues, which have been the primary obstacles in the ecumenical movement within the Korean Church. Five key doctrinal issues have been discussed in the Forum and the Academy:

- (i) Soteriology and Justification (3rd Forum session and 4th lesson of the Academy);
- (ii) Scripture and Tradition (5th lesson of the Academy);
- (iii) Eucharist (5th Forum session and 5th lesson of the Academy);
- (iv) Ministry (16th Forum session, 6th lesson of the Academy);
- (v) Mariology (7th lesson of the Academy).

Three of these issues—soteriology and justification, Eucharist, and ministry—were discussed in both the Forum and the Academy, while two—Scripture and tradition, and Mariology—were discussed only in the Academy. As noted above, these issues have been debated between Korean Catholics and Protestants since the early 20th century.

The debates, which began in the early 20th century, persist even a century later and reflect the historical discussions within global Christianity since the Reformation in the 16th century. In what follows, I will explore how the two traditions view these five issues and whether they have reached a mutual understanding or theological consensus.

(i) Soteriology and Justification

The third Ecumenical Forum ([Korean Christian Ecumenical Movement Theologians Study Group 2010](#), pp. 136–225) and fourth lesson of the Ecumenical Academy ([Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2019](#), pp. 141–76) addressed the issue of justification, a key point of division between Catholics and Lutherans during the Reformation. Since the early 20th century, Korean Protestants have maintained that justification and salvation are by faith alone, while Catholics believe that justifying faith must be accompanied by good works.

At the forum, the Catholic priest who presented Catholic soteriology avoided the topic of justification and instead discussed salvation as the kingdom of God and its salvific characteristics according to Jesus. In contrast, two Protestant professors presented the Protestant views of soteriology: one discussed Paul's doctrine of justification through biblical exegesis, and the other offered historical context on the development of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," engaging with debates among German theologians such as Jüngel and Sauter. A Catholic theologian commenting on this presentation expressed disappointment that the Protestant speaker did not address the issues of "justification by faith and grace" (para. 25–27 of the "Joint Declaration") or "good works of the justified person" (para. 37–39), which have often been controversial between Catholics and Protestants. He stressed the importance of respecting the progress already made in global ecumenical dialogue. This comment was apt and significant, as it emphasized the need for ecumenical dialogue in Korea to integrate developments from the global level. In addition, the Catholic theologian pointed out the Protestant theologian's use of the term "sale of indulgences," translated as "sale of forgiveness of sins," noting that this translation distorted the Catholic understanding of indulgences ([Korean Christian Ecumenical Movement Theologians Study Group 2010](#), p. 183). In fact, this translation issue was raised by Catholic theologians as early as the early 20th century, and it is striking that such a misunderstanding persists a century later, even among Protestant theologians.

(ii) Bible and Tradition

In the fifth lesson of the Ecumenical Academy, the Catholic professor Yongmin Song presented the Catholic understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Holy Tradition, together with the sacraments. His focus was on the common ground that the two confessions have reached through global ecumenical research, rather than on internal debates within the Korean church.

Song emphasized that “taking the Bible as the norm of faith is an important starting point for establishing a common foundation among Christians” ([Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2019](#), p. 180). He asserted that the Protestant perception of the Bible and Holy Tradition as opposing forces has been overcome through biblical studies (p. 182). Song presented the conceptual distinctions between “Tradition,” “tradition,” and “traditions” as proposed by the Fourth Faith and Order Commission in Montreal in 1963 in connection with Decree 9 of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, reflecting the Catholic Church’s post-Vatican II understanding of Scripture and Tradition.

The fourth World Conference on Faith and Order made the following distinctions: “Tradition” (with a capital “T”) refers to the Gospel itself, passed down from generation to generation in and through the Church; “tradition” (with a lowercase “t”) refers to the process of transmission; “traditions” refers to the various forms of expression and denominational traditions, such as Lutheran or Reformed. Song quoted the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: “Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture are closely connected and communicate with each other. For both of them, flowing from the same divine Source, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same goal...” ([Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2019](#), p. 186). The text cited by Song is from *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council. The subsequent passage offers insights highly conducive to fostering unity between the two Confessions: “However, the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 9). This final point—that the Church’s teaching office (Magisterium) is subordinate to the Word of God—has been a central tenet of Protestant theology. This principle underscores the supremacy of Scripture over ecclesiastical authority. Notably, the Catholic Church also acknowledges that the Magisterium is not above the Word of God but serves it. This convergence highlights a significant area of agreement between the two traditions.

Song’s presentation demonstrates that the misunderstandings and conflicts regarding the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, which have persisted in the Korean Church since the early 20th century, have largely been resolved through global ecumenical dialogue. However, he points out that this clarification has not yet been widely accepted within Korean Protestantism, especially among the general public, apart from ecumenical dialogue researchers and biblical scholars. This highlights the reality that the achievements of global ecumenical dialogue have not been fully embraced at the local church level.

(iii) The Eucharist

The Eucharist was the theme of both the fifth session of the Ecumenical Forum and the fifth lesson of the Ecumenical Academy. Professor Yongmin Song presented the Catholic theology of the Eucharist, first highlighting that the agreement reached in the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM), document from Lima (1982), represents a “remarkable achievement for ecumenical unity” ([Korean Christian Ecumenical Movement Theologians Study Group 2010](#), p. 258). He stated that mutual understanding between Korean Catholics and Protestants had improved, particularly in overcoming the Catholic rejection of Protestant Eucharistic practice as merely devotional, and the Protestant view of the Catholic Eucharist

as idolatry. However, he acknowledged that the controversy surrounding the Eucharist remains a major obstacle to Church unity.

Song addressed misconceptions on both sides: Catholics reduce Jesus' sacramental presence to the host,¹² while Protestants fear that the Church's sacrifices in the Mass detract from the one sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Notably, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), in Question 80, explicitly criticizes the Catholic Eucharist as "nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and an accursed idolatry."¹³ In response to this critique, Song explained that the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist is rooted in the belief that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is so perfect that it transcends the barriers of time and space. The Church's commemoration and sacramental representation of this sacrifice are neither a substitute nor a supplement, but rather a continuation of Christ's command (Korean Christian Ecumenical Movement Theologians Study Group 2010, p. 272).

The Protestant contribution to the fifth Forum session did not directly address interconfessional issues, but the commentators highlighted them. A Protestant commentator asked the Catholic presenter about the danger of absolutizing the church and the clergy as the mediators of grace, suggesting that the Eucharist might be unnecessary if God and humanity were in direct communion (ibid., p. 331). This question reflects an extreme position in the Reformation theology, which denied the necessity of the sacraments. A Catholic commentator, on the other hand, noted that the BEM document's concepts of thanksgiving, remembrance, the work of the Holy Spirit, *koinonia*, and sacrifice are shared by Protestant churches, and suggested that these could provide a basis for future ecumenical unity (ibid., p. 333). This remark, however, failed to recognize that the BEM document was a product of interconfessional collaboration in which Catholic theologians also participated.

(iv) Ministry

The theme of ministry was examined in depth during the 16th Ecumenical Forum session and the 6th lecture of the Academy. Anglican priest Tae-Sik Park provided an analysis of the origins of the Protestant term "pastor" (*moksa* 牧師) and the nature of ministry as depicted in the New Testament. Concurrently, Catholic priest Jung-Hoon Shin of the Catholic University of Seoul presented perspectives on ministry from biblical, medieval, and Second Vatican Council contexts. In the sixth Academy lecture, Shin emphasized the paradigm shift initiated by the Second Vatican Council, which reconceptualized the Church as a community of equals, wherein all the baptized members are considered equal members of the People of God, thereby moving away from a clergy-centered ecclesiology (Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2019, pp. 231–33). The Council further distinguishes between the ministerial priesthood and the universal priesthood, which is common to all believers. Professor Shin also underscored the similarity between this latter concept and Martin Luther's emphasis on the universal priesthood (Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2020, p. 246).

As a delegate from the Presbyterian Church, professor Eunsil Son responded to Shin's presentation by noting that the Lima document, the culmination of fifty years of efforts by the Faith and Order Commission, could serve as a foundational reference for this discussion. She highlighted the similarities between the Lima document and *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council, observing that both documents address the People of God before discussing ordained ministry and frame ministry fundamentally as a service. Furthermore, she emphasized that the mutual recognition of ministry necessitates a reexamination of the meaning of apostolic succession, which remains a crucial point of contention in the division over the Eucharist, as articulated in the Lima document. Additionally, she raised the issue of the non-recognition of women's ordination as a significant barrier to mutual recognition, citing relevant biblical teachings (Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2020, pp. 248–55).

The analysis of the presentations and commentaries indicates that the Ecumenical Dialogue panels on this topic are well informed about the developments in global ecumenical dialogue. However, effectively disseminating the outcomes of these discussions among Catholic and Protestant believers remains a significant challenge.

(v) Mariology

In Korea, Mariology continues to be one of the most contentious theological issues dividing Catholics and Protestants. However, this topic was not addressed in the Ecumenical Forum but was instead covered in the seventh session of the Ecumenical Academy. Sister Hyun Sook Lee of the Franciscan Sisters of the Assumption analyzed key elements of the Marian doctrine in her presentation, including the titles “Mother of God”, “Perpetual Virginity”, “Immaculate Conception”, and the “Assumption”. She highlighted the misunderstandings that exist between Protestants and Catholics regarding Marian devotion, noting that Protestants often erroneously perceive Catholicism as a Marian religion. Furthermore, she pointed out several problematic aspects of Marian devotion among Korean Catholics, including the pursuit of prosperity, the concept of Mary as a co-mediator with Jesus, and the misinterpretation of Mary as a goddess ([Commission on Faith and Order of Korean Churches 2019](#), pp. 244–8)

This presentation underscores the significant differences that persist between Catholic and Protestant perspectives on Mariology.

4. Analysis and Evaluation of the Themes and Methods Used in the Documents

While the preceding analysis concentrated primarily on doctrinal issues, this section examines the overarching themes and dialogue methods addressed thus far within the context of the Forum. This approach enables us to discern directions for the future advancement of ecumenical dialogue.

4.1. Analysis and Evaluation of Themes

The themes addressed during the 19 sessions of the Forum are quite varied and can be classified into four main categories:

- (1) Introduction to the History of the Global and Korean Ecumenical Movement and Presentation of Its Results (eight sessions: 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 17)

Here are some examples: The first session (2000) covers the history of ecumenical movements in various churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, and Orthodox). The second session (November 2000) presents the current state of the theological dialogue of the WCC, with contributions from Professor Hyung-Ki Lee and Orthodox Archbishop Ambrosios, as well as an analysis by Catholic priest Sung-Tae Kim on WCC documents.¹⁴

- (2) Doctrinal Issues (three sessions: 3, 5, and 16)

The examples have been analyzed above.

- (3) Christian Life and Spirituality (three sessions: 4, 7, and 13)

Here are some examples: The 8th session titled “Diversity in Christian Ecological Spirituality” (2008) discusses Christian spirituality related to ecological issues to rediscover the Christian vocation as stewards of creation in the face of the 21st-century ecological crisis.

- (4) Contemporary Social Issues (four sessions: 8, 12, 18, and 19)

Here are some examples: The 18th session addresses “The Church and Women” and presents the reality of women and the women’s movement in both the Catholic and Protestant churches. The history of the founding of the Federation of Korean Women’s Churches

in 1967 by various Protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Anglican) to “promote unity and cooperation among churches, jointly address current social issues, and contribute to the development of women and world peace” is presented. In the 19th session titled “Peace Together: The Task of Christians in Korea,” a Protestant presenter examines whether the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the peace process can be an alternative to U.S. domination in the international order and constitute a new context for Asia. The Catholic speaker highlights that the first indigenous bishop of Korea, Ki Nam No, referred to the Korean War in 1950 as a “holy war”. This designation is linked to the distrust and fear of the Catholic Church towards North Korea’s atheistic materialism and the persecution suffered by it. This forum examines the history of the direct and active involvement of Korean Catholics and Protestants in perpetuating the Cold War system after the liberation from Japanese occupation, drawing attention to the significant responsibility of the entire Korean Christian community in resolving the Cold War system and establishing a new path to peace on the Korean Peninsula.

This analysis shows that the orientation of the themes of ecumenical dialogue in the Korean Church aligns with that of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. The latter has primarily focused on doctrinal studies since its first Assembly in 1927, but at the fifth Assembly in Santiago, emphasis was placed on the task of human unity. In his article “Faith and Order, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” presented at a young theologians’ meeting in 1995, the year of the fifth congress, Orthodox theologian Zizioulas emphasized that the dichotomy between “Faith and Order” and “Life and Work” is problematic and insists that the tasks of the Faith and Order Commission are determined by the challenges of our time, and that Christianity must have “cultural relevance” and respond to these challenges if it does not want to be marginalized throughout history. Aligning with this orientation of the global ecumenical movement, the Korean Forum for Christian Unity also prioritizes Christian life and the unity of humanity, addressing doctrinal issues only three times during its 19 sessions. However, the Academy places relatively greater emphasis on doctrinal issues. This stems from a growing awareness of the ecumenical lag in the Korean Church and the recognition that the greatest obstacle to unity lies in unresolved misunderstandings and conflicts over doctrinal issues.

4.2. Analysis and Evaluation of Ecumenical Dialogue Methods

The orientation and trajectory of global ecumenical dialogue are clearly evident in the topics addressed within Korean ecumenical dialogue, yet this alignment does not extend to the methodologies employed. In global ecumenical dialogue, particularly in discussions centered on the doctrine of justification, emphasis has been placed on examining the historical and theological roots of disagreements between Catholic and Lutheran theologians. This approach represented a pivotal shift, prompted by the realization that mutual accusations persisted even after two decades of dialogue. Through collaborative biblical studies and historical research, these theologians succeeded in drafting the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which recognizes both points of agreement and areas of divergence.

In contrast, Korean ecumenical dialogue has not pursued an in-depth investigation into the historical roots of doctrinal conflicts. Since the early 20th century, Korean Catholics and Protestants have sharply criticized each other on several theological points without engaging in a systematic historical study of these issues. This approach stands in stark contrast to that of German theologians, who, prior to reaching the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, conducted thorough examinations of the historical controversies surrounding each doctrinal point of disagreement. Moreover, Korean dialogue lacks ongoing joint research and collaborative authorship, with contributions from the two traditions being conducted separately. This approach has led to a lack of productive debate and limited development of a shared understanding. Thus, despite the ecumenical forum having been convened an-

nually for over 20 years, it has not produced results that facilitate a common understanding, as noted by Jae-Sik Shin (Shin 2022, p. 146). While some doctrinal misunderstandings have been alleviated, participating theologians largely agree that significant misinterpretations persist. Unlike global ecumenical dialogue, which emphasizes joint research and collaborative authorship, ecumenical discussions in Korea have predominantly focused on identifying theological differences. For example, whereas discussions on the doctrine of justification in Korea have led merely to a recognition of differences, global dialogues have produced a “differentiated consensus”.

To examine this more closely, let us consider the example of the doctrine of justification. Misunderstandings and disagreements between Korean Catholics and Protestants regarding justification are profound and cannot be overcome through simple neglect or denial. An in-depth historical and doctrinal study is essential to achieving a common understanding of this doctrine (Cf. Lehmann and Pannenberg 1989). A notable example of the effectiveness of such a study can be found in the collaborative research conducted by German Protestant and Catholic theologians over four years, a process that culminated in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999. Catholic commentators from the Ecumenical Forum and the Korean Ecumenical Academy have highlighted three points of disagreement between Korean Catholics and Protestants regarding this doctrine. These three points are addressed in the Joint Declaration: (1) Luther’s formula “sola fide” (by faith alone), discussed in para. 25–27; (2) Luther’s concept of “simul iustus et peccator” (both justified and sinner), examined in para. 28–30; and (3) the concept of “merit”, covered in para. 37–39. Here, we shall consider only the second point.

At the second Ecumenical Forum in 2001, Sung Tae Kim explained that according to Catholic doctrine, a person is freed from all sin through baptism. Although concupiscence remains, it is not considered a sin in itself (Korean Christian Ecumenical Movement Theologians Study Group 2010, pp. 133–134). This understanding is at odds with the Lutheran view, which maintains that believers remain sinners. Paragraph 28 of the Joint Declaration presents the shared belief that, in baptism, the Holy Spirit unites the believer with Christ, justifying and renewing them, though the justified person must continually rely on God’s grace and seek daily forgiveness. Paragraph 29 articulates the Lutheran perspective that sin remains in believers even after justification. Paragraph 30, in turn, expresses the Catholic view that the grace of Jesus Christ removes sin “in its own sense,” though concupiscence remains, albeit without being a sin in itself. The core difference lies in the interpretation of concupiscence: Lutherans regard it as sinful, whereas Catholics view it as a non-sinful tendency in itself. Despite this divergence, both traditions agree that the tendency to turn away from God persists in the justified.

This example demonstrates that the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* represents significant progress, particularly through the method of “differentiated consensus,” which involves articulating differences after establishing a common confession of faith. Hervé Legrand has emphasized that this method accommodates legitimate differences “in language, in forms of thought (*Denkformen*), and in emphases” (Legrand 2002, pp. 30–56) without jeopardizing the overall agreement. André Birmelé also emphasizes that “consensus is not synonymous with uniformity. It not only tolerates but includes difference.”¹⁵

5. Suggestions for the Future Development of Dialogue

Over the past two decades, ecumenical dialogue between Korean Catholic and Protestant theologians has continued; however, the outcomes have not met expectations. Doctrinal issues rooted in the 16th-century Reformation remain unresolved, and insights from the global ecumenical movement have not been fully utilized. To foster more meaningful exchanges and deeper mutual understanding, a strategic approach is essential, one that draws

on global ecumenical achievements while addressing Korea's unique context. The following five measures outline a framework for advancing dialogue:

- (1) **Deep Engagement with Global Ecumenical Achievements**
The work of the Faith and Order Commission, which has actively promoted church unity since its inaugural assembly in 1927 (Gassmann 1993), must be more thoroughly integrated into Korean ecumenical discussions. While some efforts have been made to translate and disseminate global ecumenical outcomes, the underlying doctrinal agreements remain insufficiently studied. As a result, theological discussions in Korea often revert to historical controversies, limiting progress in resolving doctrinal conflicts.
- (2) **Adoption of Proven Methodologies**
Methodologies developed within the global ecumenical movement, such as “differentiated consensus” and Christological and biblical approaches, should be actively utilized. Collaborative biblical and historical studies are particularly effective in bridging long-standing doctrinal divides. A notable example is the German collaborative research group, composed of experts in theology, history, and church history. Over four years of rigorous study and discussions, this group successfully reconciled centuries-old conflicting perspectives on key theological topics such as justification, sacraments, and ministry.¹⁶ This approach provides a valuable model for Korean theologians.
- (3) **Enhancement of Expertise and Establishment of Working Groups**
The success of ecumenical dialogue depends on the involvement of the most competent and creative theologians from each tradition. In Korean ecumenical discussions, insufficient expertise among presenters and discussants has often compromised the depth and quality of dialogue. As John Zizioulas has emphasized, addressing the issues of faith and order requires entrusting such matters to the most qualified individuals. Establishing joint research groups dedicated to systematic theological studies is crucial. These groups should be equipped with sufficient human and financial resources, composed of experts suited to each topic, and committed to sustained and responsible research. The outcomes should be regularly reviewed, discussed, and disseminated through platforms such as ecumenical forums.
- (4) **Promotion of Collaborative Writing**
Collaborative writing processes, as exemplified by the Group of Dombes, can foster collective understanding and agreement. This method ensures that consensus is built through active cooperation and shared reflection, rather than individual contributions.
- (5) **Unification of Theological Terminology**
Unifying key theological terminology, starting with fundamental terms such as the name of God (cf. Son 2022, pp. 1–32), is a foundational step toward reducing misunderstandings and fostering a common language for dialogue.

By implementing these measures in a coordinated and sustained manner, Korean ecumenical dialogue can overcome its current limitations and contribute meaningfully to the global pursuit of Christian unity.

6. Conclusions: Implications of Korean Ecumenical Dialogue for Global Ecumenism and Mission

The relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Korea exhibits a complex dynamic characterized by both conflict and cooperation, with a significant gap in mutual understanding between the two traditions. This divide can be attributed to each denomination's focus on its own evangelization and church growth, which has fostered indifference and, at times, hostility toward one another.

Nevertheless, the ecumenical movement has not been absent from the Korean Church. Despite its relatively short history—240 years for Catholicism and 140 years for

Protestantism—the Korean Church has successfully translated and adopted key global ecumenical documents thanks to the dedicated efforts of a small number of scholars. Beyond merely adopting these resources, the Korean Church has demonstrated an openness to the directions of global ecumenical dialogue and has sought to contextualize these efforts within the Korean setting. Notably, initiatives promoting “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation” and social engagement inspired by the “face of the Servant Christ” stand out as achievements that deserve recognition.

However, significant limitations persist, particularly concerning doctrinal controversies, which remain the primary source of tension between Catholics and Protestants. Translated ecumenical dialogue documents have not been sufficiently utilized in educational or pastoral settings. The findings of this study reveal that even ecumenical dialogue participants often lack sufficient awareness of the achievements and insights of global ecumenical discussions and research. This has contributed to the perpetuation of negative perceptions and judgments between Catholics and Protestants and highlights the inherent challenges of integrating the outcomes of global ecumenical dialogue at the local church level. Even when global dialogues achieve a common understanding of doctrinal issues, if these agreements are not thoroughly understood and practically applied at the regional church level, the doctrinal disputes that have divided Catholics and Protestants since the 16th century are likely to persist.

The urgency to overcome these longstanding hostilities and misunderstandings has become even greater in light of Korean Protestantism’s global missionary activities, which now extend to 174 countries. In some cases, Korean missionaries are perpetuating the same doctrinal misunderstandings and divisions that Western missionaries once brought to Korea. In this regard, a statement made by a Chinese delegate at the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference offers an important lesson: “You have sent us missionaries who made us know Jesus Christ, for which we thank you. But you have also brought us your divisions... Deliver us from all the ‘isms’ that afflict your preaching of the Gospel among us” (Desseaux 1983, p. 54). Unless Korean Catholics and Protestants resolve their mutual misunderstandings and divisions, they risk encountering similar appeals from their own mission fields.

The study has confirmed that Catholics and Protestants in Korea have engaged in sustained ecumenical dialogue for more than two decades, seriously addressing issues of doctrinal division since 2000. However, an analysis of dialogue materials from this period reveals that progress has been constrained by several factors, including insufficient scholarly research, inadequate engagement with global ecumenical developments, and ineffective dialogue methodologies. Moving forward, it is imperative that dialogue participants recognize the underlying causes of this stagnation and adopt the effective approaches proposed in the study to advance their efforts. Doing so would enable the fruits of global ecumenical efforts to be more effectively embraced by the Korean Church, fostering greater unity among Christians and contributing to meaningful changes in mission fields worldwide.

Ultimately, ecumenical dialogue holds immense significance both domestically and globally. It fosters mutual understanding by addressing the doctrinal conflicts that hinder unity, and promotes social cohesion. In a globalized world where Korean missionaries play an increasingly active role, ecumenical dialogue is essential not only for the credibility of the Korean Church but also for its meaningful contribution to the global ecumenical movement.

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Notes

- ¹ The rapid growth of Protestantism has been the subject of numerous studies. For various analyses, see Sung-Deuk Oak (2016), “Protestantism Comes East: The Korean Case,” in *Protestantism after 500 Years*, ed. Mark K. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 228–257.
- ² Jaeshik Shin (2022), “A Critical Reflection on the Ecumenical Movement in Korean Churches,” *Religion and Culture* 42: 131–167; Kyo Seong Ahn (2024), “The Main Trends of the Ecumenical Movement in Korea: Focus on 5 Periods” (text presented at the 10th-anniversary ceremony of the Faith and Order Commission of Korea). These two articles summarize the key points of the history of the Christian movement in Korea and discuss the ecumenical movement among the various denominations of Korean Protestantism, which is not covered in this article.
- ³ The following study is noteworthy: Mina Kim (2020), “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),” *Religions* 11–6: 1–13.
- ⁴ The documents of the Ecumenical Forum, initiated in 2000, are compiled in two volumes titled *That They May Be One*. The first volume covers documents from 2000 to 2009 (published in 2010, 530 pages), and the second volume includes documents from 2010 to 2019, *That They May Be One II* (published in 2020, 378 pages). Additionally, the documents from the Ecumenical Academy, launched in 2015, are published under the title *The Theological Dialogue of Christians* (published in 2019, 424 pages).
- ⁵ For information on Henri Vacquerel, see the following source: *Catholic World* 145 (Paulist Fathers 1937), no. 865, p. 479.
- ⁶ Cf. Y. Congar (1983), *Martin Luther, sa foi, sa réforme*, 7. Congar describes how 19th- and 20th-century Catholic theologians disparaged Luther; he notes that the person and life of Luther were characterized as mediocre by Denifle, pathological by Grisar, and subjective by Maritain.
- ⁷ The term “reunification” reflects the Catholic understanding of the unity of the Church as found in the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (1928), which states that the unity of the Churches consists in the return of the separated to the Catholic Church. Today, the CBCK has replaced it with “unification”.
- ⁸ The translation of the name of the Christian God adopted by the Ecumenical Bible Translation Committee was *Hanūnim* (하느님), which combines “Heaven” with an honorific suffix and is a traditionally used divine name in Korea. At the time the Ecumenical Bible Translation project began, the Catholic Church used *Ch’ōnju* (천주, “Lord of Heaven”), while the Protestant Church used *Hananim* (하나님). The origin of this Protestant term can be traced back to John Ross’s translation. In the project for the first Korean translation of the New Testament, partially completed in 1882 and fully completed in 1887, John Ross chose the Korean term “*Hananim* (하나님)” as the translation for God. This term was originally derived from a northern dialect meaning “heaven”. However, during the publication of the ecumenical translations of the New Testament in 1971 and the Old Testament in 1977, the term *Hanūnim* (하느님) was adopted. Indeed, according to the Korean orthography at that time, *Hana* (하나) was used to mean the numeral “one”. Consequently, the ecumenical Bible translations opted for *Hanūnim* (하느님), which reflects the original meaning of “heaven” intended by Ross’s use of *Hananim* (하나님).
- ⁹ The original text was published in 1973, and the Korean translation was released under the title “*Hanain midūm*” (하나인 믿음) in 1979.
- ¹⁰ The Yushin dictatorship refers to the authoritarian regime of South Korean President Park Chung-hee, following the implementation of the Yushin Constitution in October 1972. The Yushin (meaning “revitalization” or “restoration”) Constitution granted Park virtually unlimited powers, allowing him to extend his presidency indefinitely, dissolve the National Assembly, and heavily suppress political opposition and civil liberties.
- ¹¹ *Unitatis Redintegratio* 12: “Comme de nos jours la collaboration dans le domaine social est largement pratiquée, tous les hommes sans exception sont appelés à l’action commune.[...] La collaboration de tous les chrétiens entre eux exprime de façon vivante l’union qui existe déjà entre eux, et fait paraître le visage du Christ Serviteur dans une lumière plus pleine.” See *Le Concile Vatican II. Édition intégrale définitive* (Winling 2003), p. 199.
- ¹² It is worth noting that there is a gap between balanced theology and the representation in the minds of the faithful.
- ¹³ *Le Catéchisme de Heidelberg. Au cœur de l’identité réformée* (Lécho 2013), Introduction de Pierre-Olivier Lécho, tr. P. Fraenkel, O. Fatio, M. Hoegger, P.-D. Nicole et C. Rapin (Geneva: Labor et fides), pp. 89–90: “Le Catéchisme de Heidelberg joua, jusqu’à très récemment, un rôle fondamental dans le devenir des Églises protestantes de France et de la Suisse francophone.” See also *Ibid.* p. 7. The preface of this book notes that the Heidelberg Catechism has played a fundamental role in the French Protestant and French-speaking Swiss Protestant communities up to recent times. The interpretation presented in this text, which views the Catholic Mass as a denial of the unique sacrifice of Jesus, remains widely accepted among Korean Protestants to this day.

- ¹⁴ Hyung-Ki Lee is a Protestant theologian who has significantly contributed to the study and teaching of ecumenical theology, presenting the current state of research and theological dialogue within the World Council of Churches (WCC). Meanwhile, Archbishop Ambrosios of the Korean Orthodox Church discusses the ecumenical movement from an Orthodox perspective, and Catholic priest Sung-Tae Kim outlines the history of the ecumenical movement in the Catholic Church. He also analyzes key WCC documents that have led to some consensus or differentiated consensus, such as the Lima Document and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.
- ¹⁵ A. Birmelé (1999), «Notre différence est désormais reconnue légitime», *La Croix*, 29 October, 1999, p. 12. Cited by Bernard Sesboüé (2009), *Sauvés par la grâce. Les débats sur la justification du XVI^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Editions Facultés Jésumites de Paris), p. 237.
- ¹⁶ The result of their research can be found in this book: *Les anathèmes du XVI^e siècle sont-ils encore actuels? Les condamnations doctrinales du concile de Trente et des Réformateurs justifient-elles encore la division de nos Églises ?* (Documents des Églises, Paris: Cerf, 1989).

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