

## Understanding Contemplative Prayer in the Korean Protestant Context

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### Abstract

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In the early 20th century, Korean Protestant Christians began two forms of prayer, Tongsung Kido and Dawn Prayer. The two prayers have been loved and performed by Korean Protestants for over 100 years. Speaking in tongues was introduced in the 1950s and became one of the most popular prayers along with Tongsung Kido and dawn prayer. Korean Protestant churches started Bible meditation in the 1970s through journals like the Daily Bible of the Scripture Union Korea. Now contemplative prayer appears as an unfamiliar and strange style of prayer, given the history of prayer so far in Korean churches. Protestant scholars and pastors have made this into a controversy; contemplative prayer is the first non-protestant prayer that has become controversial. The controversy is mainly about biblical origin, theological relevance, and historical and traditional conformity. This study asks and answers why this controversy is important for Korean Protestant churches. This study introduces the controversy and explores why one group accepts the prayer and others do not. Then, this study recounts the history of Korean Protestant prayers and shows the meanings of the encounter of Korean Protestant prayers and contemplative prayer. This study argues that Korean Protestant Christians, through the controversy, can learn that Korean Protestant churches have the potential to create a new prayer culture and tradition and need spiritual discipline through silence.

〈 **Keywords** 〉

Korean Protestant Church, Contemplative Prayer, Contemplation, Meditation, Silence

## I. Introduction

Contemplative prayer was introduced to Korean Protestants in the early 2000s, a controversy about the prayer among Protestant theologians and church ministers has simmered for over 20 years. The main issues about this form of prayer are its biblical origin, theological relevance, and historical and traditional conformity. On these issues, there are two groups of Korean Protestants: the anti-contemplative and the pro-contemplative. They analyze and evaluate contemplative prayer from different viewpoints according to their interpretation of the Bible, theological conviction, and historical and traditional understanding. Therefore, the controversy about contemplative prayer is formed around these issues. This controversy shows how Korean Protestants understand contemplative prayer. This controversy is significant because contemplative prayer is the first non-Protestant prayer that provoked a controversy related to prayer. Most studies on contemplative prayer focus on why contemplative prayer is appropriate or inappropriate for Korean Protestant Christians. This study, instead, asks why the controversy is important in the Korean Protestant context.

This study introduces the controversy and sees why the two groups accept or refuse the prayer. This study also recounts the history of Korean Protestant prayers. The history of Korean Protestant prayers is shorter than that of the other Christian

denominations and communities, for the history of Korean Protestant churches is only 140 years. Korean Protestant prayers have a unique history and culture. This study, therefore, tries to see the controversy about contemplative prayer in this distinctive history of Korean Protestant prayers. Contemplative prayer is a new and unfamiliar form of prayer for Korean Protestant Christians, and it challenges the long-standing culture of Korean Protestant prayer. This study shows the meanings of the encounter of Korean Protestant prayers and contemplative prayer. In conclusion, this study suggests a spiritual discipline that Korean Christians may be able to follow to create a new culture of prayer.

## II. Understanding of Contemplative Prayer

### 1. Biblical Basis and Theological Relevance

There are two groups in the Korean Protestant church on the issue of the biblical basis and theological relevance of contemplative prayer. The first group denies the biblical basis of contemplative prayer, and the other accepts it. The first group thinks that contemplative prayer is based on the mysticism of Christianity or other religious traditions, and the other believes that contemplative prayer is based on relevant Christian theology.

E. S. Lee(2009) sees contemplative prayer as a non-biblical type of prayer and writes “They pursue, through contemplative prayer, a union with God, but do not emphasize reading the scripture.” He neither articulates further the biblical ground of contemplative prayer nor criticizes other scholars who accept

the biblical basis for the prayer. Lee(2009) explains that contemplative prayer is a medieval Catholic prayer that has been re-introduced to contemporary Christians under different names, such as centering prayer and silent prayer. He says that these types of prayers are being used to reach union with God, which is not a relevant goal of Protestant theology. Lee(2009) believes that humans should not go beyond the teachings of the Bible. It means to him that a mystical effort like contemplative prayer is not biblical, and so is dangerous.

M. H. Won(2010) criticizes so-called the contemplative prayer movement in the Korean Protestant churches. He asserts that there is no biblical passage or prayer model for contemplative prayer. Won(2010, 534) considers contemplative prayer as casting spells and deceptive philosophy as in Deuteronomy 18:11 and Colossians 2:8. He also points out that the term 'contemplative prayer' is not found in the Bible. Won writes that contemplative prayer does not reflect the Protestant theology of prayer. For him, thoughtless and speechless prayer is not a Protestant prayer. Union with God is also not a goal of Protestant prayer. Won understands contemplative prayer as occult, mystic, and non-biblical. For Won, prayer is basically a petition or a request to God.

S. G. Lee(2011) claims that the biblical passages to support contemplative prayer should not be interpreted as the biblical evidence for contemplative prayer. Like Lee(2009) and Won(2010), he asserts that contemplative prayer is not biblical and is not found in the Bible. He says that contemplative prayer is semi-Pelagian; and therefore not evangelical. For him, fellowship with God, instead of union with God, is a biblical and orthodox goal of prayer.

One of the most recent books that criticizes contemplative

prayer was published in 2021. The main content of the book is an analysis of academic articles and books about contemplative prayer, just like Won's book published in 2010. The author of the book, T. H. Jung(2021, 60-61; 141-145), writes that the imaginative method of contemplative prayer is a spiritual method used by the New Age and is pantheistic and non-biblical. Jung(2021), like Won(2010), mentions various theologians and church ministers, who are sympathetic to contemplative prayer, and negatively evaluates their theology to show the theological irrelevance of contemplative prayer. Other theologians and pastors like N. J. Kim(2011), S. Y. Park(2011), and M. B. Yoo(2014), also think that contemplative prayer is a non-biblical, non-Christian, and unorthodox ceremony, like mantra or spells that lead to an evil spirit.

Protestant scholars and pastors in the second group do not claim that contemplative prayer is directly found in the Bible. Some of them state that contemplative prayer is biblical because it is God-centered, Jesus-centered, Bible-centered, and Holy Spirit-led prayer. G. M. Lee(1999), in her article on holistic prayer, writes that contemplative prayer is a prayer by God, of Grace, and in Jesus. D. S. Eom(2002) in one of the earliest academic articles on contemplative prayer in the Korean Protestant traditions says that a Christian who prays should overcome the sinful nature of his or her flesh as Galatians 5:17 says. He believes that the prayer of petition in Korean Protestant churches encourages human desires. For him, prayer is not done by oneself, but by the Holy Spirit as written in Romans 8:26-27 (Eom, 2002, 31-34).

M. S. Kwon(2004), one of the first theologians who introduced contemplative prayer to Korean Protestants, explains that contemplative prayer is indeed biblical as evidenced by

passages in Psalms, Matthew, and Romans. He writes that all true prayer is based on the works of the Holy Spirit, as Paul writes in Romans. Kwon(2004) believes that contemplative prayer is the very prayer of the Spirit. Kwon(2008) thinks that prayer has two dimensions. One is a petition and the other is a conversation, a listening, and a rest in God. Kwon claims that Korean Protestants lack the second dimension of Christian prayer, and he emphasizes harmony between the two dimensions of Christian prayer.

B. S. Oh(2007) states that even though we could not find the specific term contemplative prayer in the Bible, there is ample biblical material related to contemplative prayer. He especially sees John chapter 14 to 17 as a strong description of contemplative prayer. Furthermore, Oh(2007) explains that terms like דָּאַחַד(da'ath) in the Old Testament and γνῶσις(gnōsis) in the New Testament contain an implicative concept or image of contemplative prayer. He understands the union with God, a goal of contemplative prayer, in love between God and humans as in 1 John chapter 4 to 8 (Oh, 2007, 278). Oh(2010) spends two pages accounting for a theological and biblical grounding of contemplative prayer in another article.

S. C. Kim(2016, 2021) also argues that contemplative prayer is biblical, focusing on Song of Songs, Mark, and Luke. He suggests Korean Protestant churches adopt Lectio Divina, the Jesus Prayer, and other contemplative or silent prayers to make a balance with the prayer traditions of Korean Protestant churches, such as vocal prayer(Tongsong-Kido), Protestant meditative prayer, and praise worship.

C. G. Choi(2010) and H. S. Chae(2016) analyze the biblical and theological basis of specific contemplative prayers like Lectio Divina and the Jesus Prayer. The former affirms that each

step of *Lectio Divina*, which is *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*, is biblical in that this prayer helps Christians form their spiritual reality and life according to God and the Bible (Choi, 2010, 146-147). The latter finds the relevance of the Jesus Prayer in various Christian practical and academic fields such as the Bible, systematic theology, practical theology, Christian education, and so on. The Jesus Prayer, for him, represents the Trinitarian faith.

The scholars and Protestant ministers on both sides have their own reasons for the relevance or irrelevance of contemplative prayer regarding the Bible and theology. They read and interpret the Bible from different perspectives, so they have different concepts of Christian prayer and spiritual practices. Their theological stances on contemplative prayer differ from each other because each group stands on different theological traditions. The group, closed to contemplative prayer, tries to keep their biblical and theological viewpoints in coherence. The other group is open to the varied interpretation of the Bible and the contemplative way of prayer initiated by past Christians of the East and the West. From the research conducted in this chapter, one could say that there is already a great gap between the two groups. Others could blame a group for their ignorance or naiveté. This study does not aim to persuade a group of people to change their positions. Rather, this study focuses on why the controversy between the two groups is significant to Korean Protestant churches. In the next chapter, this study addresses the historical and traditional conformity of contemplative prayer in each group. The research in the next chapter should lead readers to the essence of the debate on contemplative prayer in the Korean Protestant context.

## 2. Historical and Traditional Conformity

When considering the history and tradition of contemplative prayer, the first group focuses on Greek philosophy, the mysticism of Hinduism and Buddhism, and Christian mysticism and monasticism(Jung, 2021, 152-177; Yoo, 2018, 95-98; Ra, 2012, 31-37; Kim, 2011, 15-18; Lee, 2011, 145-149; Lee, 2009, 83-87). As this study shows above, this group negates the relationship between the Bible and contemplative prayer and connect philosophy and mysticism to contemplative prayer. For the first group, philosophy and mysticism represent pagan or heretical thoughts and ceremonies that they cannot follow. The second group also acknowledges that Greek philosophy and Christian mysticism and monasticism are important factors and basis of contemplative prayer (Kim, 2016, 127-138, Kim, 2012, 36-37; Hong, 2012, 51-69; Lee, 2010, 104-105; Kim, 2007, 17-27; Nam, 2007, 97-104). They accept and respect historic figures in Christian monasticism and mysticism.

Each group evaluates the relations of philosophy and mysticism to contemplative prayer from opposite standpoints. The first group understands that the word and meaning of 'contemplation' in contemplative prayer is originated from Greek philosopher Plato(Ra, 2012, 17-24; Kim, 2011, 12-13; Won, 2010, 26; Lee, 2009, 73-106). Then, Plotinus developed 'theoria' to a more sophisticated theory. Theoria refers to seeing the one, knowing the truth, and eventually union with the one (Ra, 2012, 11-16). Early church fathers like Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa adopted theoria to explain what contemplation is in Christianity. The first group concludes that contemplation is a neo-Platonic concept of knowledge and practice about God that they can-



not accept as a valid spiritual method.

The second group states that Greek philosophy influenced Christian understanding of contemplative prayer, but this does not mean Christian contemplation is the same as that of Greek philosophy(Oh, 2010, 11; Kim, 2021, 234-237). Kim(2021) mentions five differences between Plato and Origen. First, Origen believed the human soul is corrupted and sinful, while Plato's concept of the soul focused on immortality and the divine nature of the human soul. Second, Plato had a negative view on the human body, but Origen believed that the human person consists of body, soul, and spirit, as Paul wrote in Thessalonians 5 and that flesh is for the training of the soul. Third, Plato did not have any mediator or helper for the ascension of the soul, but Origen emphasized the Son as the sole reason for the ascension of the human soul. Fourth, Origen explained purification, illumination, and union through the wisdom literature in the Old Testament(Proverbs for purification, Ecclesiastes for illumination, and Song of Songs for the union). Fifth, while Plato described love as a craving for truth, Origen highlighted the personal relationship and love between God and humans.

The first group does not consider Christian monks, nuns, ascetics, or mystics who are related to contemplative prayer as orthodox figures. Julian of Norwich, for Lee(2011), is a Catholic and a mystic who valued experience more than the Bible. Lee explains in a critical tone that Teresa of Avila, venerated as a Catholic Saint and a Doctor of the Church, is a mystic who often had mystical experiences like ecstasy, levitation, and fantasy while praying. Here Lee quotes an article from Wikipedia for examples of the mystical experiences of Teresa of Avila: the section of the Wikipedia article describes the lev-

itation as ‘embarrassment of rapture.’ This section draws on the writings of Marcella Biro-Barton(1982), a historian, and Javier Alvarez-Rodriguez(2007), a medical researcher. In their writings, they never devalued the experiences of the mystics. They explain:

She was a perceptive woman who transcended the ordinary understanding of mankind’s relationship to the divine. Her contemplation and love of God seemed to interlock with physical changes in her body, producing a unique spirituality (Barton, 1982, 598).

Many of man’s best artistic, religious and scientific achievements would, therefore, have their starting point in extraordinary experiences of an epileptic nature, that is, of a pathological character, something that would not appear to stand up to logic. Why then continue to consider these experiences, whose origin is a neuronal hypersynchrony, as something pathological? Why not consider them physiological? (Alvarez-Rodriguez, 2007, 74).

If Lee had read Alvarez-Rodriguez’s article, he would have been disappointed and not used the Wikipedia text because Alvarez-Rodriguez includes Apostle Paul and Augustine of Hippo in his list as examples of the mystics who had epilepsy. Lee(2011) provides similar descriptions of other spiritual figures like John of the Cross and Francis of Assisi.

The first group rejects Christian mystics or monastics not only because of mystical experiences and contemplative prayer, but also due to their Catholic background. They consider the mystics and monastics, regarded as important figures and studied in the history of Christian spirituality, as non-Christian; therefore, they also reject most spiritual teachings and practices of the figures. Won(2010, 535) writes “Catholic is not Christian.”

The Catholic church, for Won, is Babylon and the Antichrist. Won refuses Catholic tradition, prayer, theology, doctrine, saints, history, and church. J. S. Ahn(2010, 169-182) deals with the Catholic spiritual tradition together with other religions in the same section, warning Korean Protestants not to do the spiritual exercises of other religions. Lee(2011) says that contemplative prayer is based on semi-Pelagian Catholic thoughts.

The second group respects early Christians, the Church Fathers, mystics, saints, activists, and anonymous writers like the author of *Cloud of Unknowing*. The second group tries to learn from Christian monks, nuns, mystics, hermits, activists, and leaders of all times and regions. They read and learn from Anthony the Great, Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, John Climacus, Hildegard of Bingen, John of the Cross, and many others. Some scholars of the group say that Korean Protestant churches should find a proper understanding of contemplative prayer for Korean Protestants and create harmony between contemplative prayer and Korean Protestants spiritual practices (Kim, 2021, 246-248; Hong, 2012, 170-211; Lee, 2010, 209-240).

The first group criticizes leading figures in contemplative prayer, such as Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating, for being syncretic(Ra, 2012, 24-32; Lee, 2011, 140-152). These figures' openness to the spiritual practices and the teachings of other religions is questioned by the first group. Quoting Merton's remarks, Lee(2011) believes it is religious pluralism and mysticism and points to passages such as this:"I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can." This is excerpted from an article written by David Steindl-Rast(1969) before Merton went to Bangkok where he died in 1968. However, Lee does not quote

another remark on the same page: "I belong entirely to Christ. There is no self to justify" (Steindl-Rast, 1969, 10). Ra(2012) quotes the same remarks of Merton from Steindl-Rast.

Keating is, for Ra(2012), a religious pluralist. Ra borrows Keating's words from 「Open Mind, Open Heart」. Ra writes that Keating mentions the Diamond Sutra of Buddhism when Keating talks about a thoughtless mind. Ra continues that the thoughtless mind includes visions, ecstasies, locutions, spiritual communications, and psychic gifts. The original text, however, reads like the following.

Centering prayer is an exercise in letting go. That is all it is. It lays aside every thought. One touch of divine love enables you to take all the pleasure of the world and throw them in the wastebasket. Reflection on spiritual communications diminishes them. The Diamond Sutra says it all: "Try to develop a mind that does not cling to anything." That includes visions, ecstasies, locutions, spiritual communications, psychic gifts. These are not as valuable as pure consciousness (Keating, 1999, 74).

Ra might misread the original text or the translated text. The translated text by Eom(1997, 106) delivers the original text of Keating without misunderstanding. Regardless of the meanings of the sentences or the whole texts above, the first group has many other remarks and examples to consider any spiritual activists or seekers, who teach contemplative prayer, as syncretic.

In the writings of the second group, it is hard to find any criticism of Merton or Keating. Many scholars in this group take words from Merton and Keating without criticism. It seems, on the contrary, that they hardly mention the spiritual practices of other religions as Merton and Keating did. They do not

usually discuss the similarities between Christian contemplative prayer and other religious prayers. They do not show why Merton and Keating taught 'an unfamiliar prayer' and tried conversations with other religions in their time. Instead, the second group gives attention to the teachings of Merton and Keating about contemplative prayer, especially how biblical, orthodox, and traditional contemplative prayer is.

As this study saw in the previous chapter and this chapter, historical and traditional interpretation of contemplative prayer is a central issue along with the biblical and theological matters. For a group of Protestant scholars and pastors, contemplative prayer is not a Christian prayer in any aspect of the Bible, theology, history, and tradition. For another group, contemplative prayer is Christian prayer based on the Bible, theology, history, and tradition. It is mainly because the first group refuses to include the Catholic Church in their understanding of Christianity. Although most Protestants in the first group talk about the Bible, theology, history, and tradition, a focal point, for them, is the Catholic background of the prayer. Before the debate on contemplative prayer began, the first group and many other Protestants already had a biblical, theological, historical, and traditional wariness or even hostility towards the Catholic Church. The debate seems to stand on academic ground, but it stands on a long-lasting problem of Protestant churches in Korea. In the next chapter, this study will explore the history of Korean Protestant prayers and its relation to contemplative prayer. Through this attempt, the meaning of the controversy on contemplative prayer will be discussed centered on the history of Korean Protestant prayers.

### III. Korean Protestant Prayers and Contemplative Prayer

For the research in this chapter, readers need to know the history and tradition of prayer in Korean Protestant churches. Korean Protestant churches have a unique history and tradition, as do other Christian communities around the world. The history of Korean Protestant churches began about 140 years ago. Protestant missionaries from the U. S. A, Canada, and Europe educated Korean and helped them build Protestant churches and denominations. Korean Protestant churches soon reached a high level of independence in most parts of the church's works, such as worship service, pastoral care, administration, spiritual life, and education. Korean Protestants started *Tongsung Kido* and dawn prayer under their political, social, and spiritual context (Kwon, 2021, 309-321). Korean Protestants generally agree that these two prayers are traditional Korean prayers. *Tongsung*[in unison] *Kido*[prayer] is a type of prayer similar to a pentecostal style prayer through which participants pray together with a loud voice. Dawn prayer is a prayer meeting that begins between 4:30 am and 5:30 am. Korean Protestants call these prayers Korean Protestant prayers because most of the Korean Protestant churches accept these prayer traditions and have done these prayers since the early 20th century.

It is not theology, education, or tradition that stimulated the birth of these prayer traditions. In the early stages of their mission, foreign missionaries did not teach Korean Christians to pray aloud or to come together early in the morning for a prayer meeting. These prayers are often considered a result of political, social, and religious situations in which Koreans of

the time tried to survive and change (Cho, 2020, 271-272). Korean Protestant churches have used these prayer traditions for their growth in number. After the Korean War, many Korean Protestants had known to glossolalia or speaking in tongues through Pentecostal evangelists and conventions, and a large number of Protestant churches took this prayer as a spiritual gift from God. These three prayers are the symbol of the growth of Korean Protestant churches. The main contents of these prayers are a petition or request, confession of sins, and thanksgiving.

Meditative practices like a meditation on the Bible and meditative prayer began around the 1970s (Choi, 2014, 174-175). However, this Protestant meditation is not the same meditation one finds in the history of Christian churches in the East and the West. This meditation is reading the Bible and praying and applying the messages of God into one's life. Contemplative prayer comes later in the prayer tradition of Korean Protestant churches. If one divides the history of the prayer tradition of Korean Protestant churches for clarity, one would observe three distinct periods. Tongsung Kido and dawn prayer come first, followed by glossolalia, and then meditative or contemplative prayer. This distinction should not be misunderstood in that the first two periods have never ceased.

Scholars and pastors under conservative Christian congregations normally accept Tongsung Kido and dawn prayer as traditional prayers in the Korean context. They believe that these prayers have origins in the Bible and orthodox theology. They do not generally think glossolalia is still valid for contemporary churches. The conservative group regards reading the Bible as an essential spiritual practice, and they believe the combination of reading, reasoning or interpreting, and

praying is meditation. They have a negative attitude toward imaginative meditation and self-emptying meditation. However, each scholar or pastor does or does not practice these prayers according to their conviction or pastoral context. The evangelical and progressive Protestants embrace Tongsung Kido and early morning prayer, but some of them do not recognize glossolalia as a proper way to pray. The progressive group generally practices various kinds of meditative prayers including reading and thinking on the Bible. Some in the evangelical and progressive group do not practice contemplative prayer for the same reason as that of the conservative group. Each does or does not practice these prayers according to their conviction or pastoral context.

While Tongsung Kido, dawn prayer, and glossolalia have widely been accepted and practiced by Korean Protestants, the prayers have been topics of debates in Korean Protestant churches. H. H. Ok, a deceased pastor who founded one of the biggest mega-churches in Korea and a widely revered Presbyterian pastor by most Korean Protestants, said in his biographical writing that the Korean-style “one-sided shouting” prayer is not a biblical prayer. He continued that obeying one word of the Bible, even if one prays for just 10 minutes, is a healthier life of faith than crying all night and living freely in the world (Ok, 1998. 276-277). Seo(2003) criticizes that Tongsung Kido has been the one and only prayer of Korean Protestant churches. He thinks that the birth of Tongsung Kido was affected by American revivalism and led Korean Protestants to a misconception of prayer. Dawn prayer is considered to be born under the influence of the Korean shamanistic culture and religion because the early morning, between 3 a.m. to 5 a.m. was the time Koreans usually prayed in shamanistic or



Buddhist way (Lee, 2005, 50-54). Lee(2014, 444-446) shows other examples of Protestant prayers, such as prayer for healing or prophesy, prayer on a mountain, and paying for pastor's prayer, possibly affected by Korean shamanism. Glossolalia has been criticized from the 1960s that it is found in Greek, Roman, and other primitive religions and that Korean Protestant glossolalia is not the same as the that of the Pentecost in Acts (Moon, 1968, 92; Editorial, 1963, 1-3).

Although meditative reading began in the 1970s, meditation is also a problematic concept to Korean Protestant Christians. Meditation in the Korean Protestant context is translated to 묵상[muksang]. In Korean dictionary, 묵상 is defined as "closing eyes and thinking quietly in mind" (Standard Korean Language Dictionary, 묵상) In Korean-English dictionary, 묵상 is translated to both contemplation and meditation. However, Korean Protestant Christians think that reading the Bible, praying, and interpreting the Bible is 묵상. Here praying is mostly a vocal prayer. The last stage of Korean Christian meditation includes an application of the Bible message to one's life.

묵상(meditation) in the Korean Protestant context is not a meditation one understands in the western Christian culture. It seems that Korean Protestant Christians consider lectio and oratio as meditatio when they do meditation. Korean Protestant meditation is not similar to the meditation of Orthodox traditions. Korean Protestant meditation does not denote any mental or contemplative aspect of meditation. They created a unique meaning of 묵상 that a dictionary does not contain. Even though scholars like Lee(1999), Oh(2007), and Kang(2008) provide a clear history or meaning of mediation, Korean Protestant Christians generally do not distinguish reading and praying from 묵상(meditation) when they do 묵상(meditation). In gen-

eral, they recognize that reading or praying is not 묵상(meditation). 성경 묵상(Bible Meditation), a workbook published by the Scripture Union Korea, defines 묵상 like the following.

Bible Meditation(성경 묵상) is a different concept from what is commonly referred to as meditation(명상). Meditation(명상) is a pantheistic concept that refers to emptying oneself and consciousness in order to become one with the universe. However, God wants us to fill our hearts with the Word and apply it to all areas of our lives. The original word for meditation(묵상) in the Bible means to chew the cud like a cow. The Bible Meditation is a process in which we meditate and remember the Word of God and focus on it. (Scripture Union Korea, 2015, 12)

The Scripture Union Korea is a publisher of the Daily Bible (매일성경), the best-selling journal for Bible Meditation in Korea. In the definition of 묵상 above, one can see two specific terms, 성경 묵상(Bible Meditation) and 명상(meditation). 묵상 is translated to meditation and contemplation; 명상 is also translated to meditation and contemplation. 묵상, for Korean Protestant Christians, sounds more like a Protestant meditation. 명상 implies meditation that belongs to other religions. For Korean Protestant Christians, 묵상 is primarily about reading the Bible. Thus, the Scripture Union Korea calls 묵상(meditation) as 성경 묵상(Bible Meditation). The Scripture Union Korea or Korean Protestant Christians often call 묵상 a Quiet Time(QT).

Korean Protestant Christians have learned meditation before they encountered contemplation, and the concept of meditation might include reading, repeating, praying, reasoning, interpreting, and applying. In a strict sense, most elements in Korean Protestant meditation do not technically correspond with the elements of other forms of Christian meditation. In

the Korean Protestant context, reading the Bible has never been considered as a pathway to a prayer of heart or mind. A Korean Protestant Christian may experience the removal of one's desire, passion, or distraction through Bible reading, but it does not mean, for the Christian, that this state of mind or heart necessarily is for prayer. It could mean a spiritual exercise through the Bible reading for a pure heart itself or for knowing God's will. Repeating Bible passages does not go for over three or four repetitions – which is enough to adequately reflect on the meanings of the passages – or else it is considered a mantra type meditation which is unacceptable. Praying is primarily vocal and petitionary. Reasoning and interpreting are generally for application to one's life. Considering the varied forms of meditation in many religious and Christian traditions, Korean Protestant meditation is not a wrong or inappropriate model of meditation. It is similar to the meditation one can find in other protestant communities in that it emphasizes reading and thinking. Though Korean Protestant meditation connotes various spiritual methods, the meaning of the concept is rather blurred due to this fact.

Today the debate about prayers includes contemplative prayer. As this study has shown above, contemplative prayer is an important topic among Korean Protestant theologians and pastors. The dispute on contemplative prayer have continued in pastoral contexts and certain congregational realms. Scholars and pastors like Dr. M. S. Kwon, Rev. N. Y. Park, B. S. Oh, and H. R. Yoo have taught contemplative prayer since the early 2000s. Between 2000 and 2001, D. W. Lee, pastor of Global Mission Church, learned contemplative prayer from Salem Institute for Spiritual Formation and taught Korean Protestants. He stopped his teaching in 2009 due to criticism

of his seminar on contemplative prayer. In 2007, Korean Protestant pastors and Catholic clergy gathered together at Methodist Theological University in Seoul to learn prayer from each other; the Protestants for silence and the Catholics for Tongsung Kido.

In 2010, the Council of Presbyterian Churches in Korea invited scholars and pastors to discuss the topic, "Contemplative Prayer from Presbyterian Perspectives." A pastor at the meeting said that contemplative prayer is nothing more than self-hypnosis or self-assurance (CCN, 2010). In 2011, there were general meetings and assemblies of some Presbyterian Reformed churches that condemned contemplative prayer as semi-Pelagian, Catholic, and Renovaré. Hapdong(the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in Korea) and Hapshin(the Korean Presbyterian Church) decided not to have any interaction with the so-called contemplative prayer movement. Since 2010, the Korean Methodist Church has provided the 5-Day Spiritual Formation Academy adopted from the Upper Room. It seems that the controversy is already over on one side. On the other side, seminars continue regardless of controversy.

The history of Korean Protestant prayers shows that most prayers have not originated and developed in an organic connection with other Christian prayer traditions of other Christian cultures. Crying and shouting types of Korean Protestant prayer have never been considered an essential daily prayer in the history of Christianity. However, this type of prayer is the most universal and essential form of prayer in the Korean Protestant context. Speaking in tongues has only occasionally appeared in some communities in Christian history. It is, before and now, for many Korean Protestant churches, considered to be a gift from God. Glossolalia in

Korean Protestant churches was planted and popularized by Pentecostal evangelists. Yonggi David Cho, the late pastor of the biggest church in Korea, was a catalyst who spread glossolalia. Meditation is a universal and essential spiritual method for Christians of all ages. But Korean Protestants have a confusing concept of meditation that does not conform to any other types of Christian meditation of other Protestants or any other Christian traditions. It is also worth noting that there is hardly any space for silence in Korean Protestant meditation.

Korean Protestant prayers are, in short, vocal, collective, impromptu, and indigenous prayers that have been developed by Korean Protestants and intuitive prayers found in many other religions. Korean Protestants have not had enough opportunity to learn other types of prayers, and are hesitant to learn unfamiliar forms of prayers. It means that Korean Protestants have not learned and enjoyed various prayer methods and traditions of the whole Christian context over the world. It also means that Korean Protestant Christians do not have an orthodox prayer. Despite this discouraging situation, each church, denomination, group, pastor, and Christian prays through the prayers that they think are orthodox and right.

Contemplative prayer is a prayer that Korean Protestant Christians have never had before. They do not even have a serious tradition of silence or spiritual practices related to silence. Even a prayer meeting in the early morning is filled with Tongsung Kido and glossolalia. Their concept of meditation is complicated and combined with other spiritual practices, but silence is not a significant element of Korean Protestant meditation. This is a situation that scholars and pastors who are sympathetic to contemplative prayer should recognize before they encourage Korean Protestant Christian to practice

prayers related to silence. In this situation, a controversy over prayers is freezing the attempt to create another tradition of prayer.

This study observed that Korean Protestants created their own prayer traditions partially or completely apart from other Christian traditions of the Protestant, the Catholic, or Orthodox. Korean Protestant churches have the potential to create and rediscover valuable Christian spiritual methods from their contexts and the history of Christian ancestors. If Korean Protestants can create *Tongsung Kido*, dawn prayer, glossolalia, and Korean Protestant meditation Korean traditional spiritual methods, they can adopt any other spiritual practices to be Korean traditional spiritual means. If contemplative prayer is not acceptable, one can find, create, or discover other forms of prayer that is appropriate for Korean Protestants. What is demanding of us is a Christian tradition of silence and silent prayer. One group could find a reason for silence for prayers, and others could find proper ways to practice silence and silent prayers of various kinds. If they are willing, it is a much easier task than the case of *Tongsung Kido* or glossolalia. It is because silence is a biblical, traditional, orthodox, and Christian way of prayer and exercise.

#### IV. Conclusion

The controversy over contemplative prayer demonstrates a closed posture of Korean Protestant pastors and churches. It is because we, Korean Protestant Christians, lost humility, solitude, and thoughtfulness in dealing with spiritual matters. We also forgot people in their context in which they are not al-

lowed to access other prayer traditions. The controversy over Korean Protestant prayers as a whole, however, points to an open future. The controversy encourages us to see the history of prayers and tells that we have the potential to make changes in the prayer tradition of Korean Protestant churches.

One of the first teachings of Jesus is that the pure in heart are blessed for they will see God. Prayer, for Jesus Christ, was a means to love as he said “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” In this passage, prayer is synonymous with love(Matthew 5). Solitude is a desirable element for prayer. In the next chapter of Matthew, Jesus taught a prayer that begins with Our Father. He said to go into your room and close door. Before Jesus taught about prayer, he went to the desert and stayed forty days and forty nights. There he cast away human desire. The Bible does not say that he was with anyone else. Prayer is also a means to be humble. Jesus told a parable in Luke 18 about when a pharisee and a tax collector prayed. Then, Jesus said that the tax collector was justified because he prayed with a humble mind and attitude. When prayer is a petition, it could be a means to be thoughtful. In Matthew 18, Jesus said that “if two of you on earth agree about you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”

There are more teachings of Jesus about prayer, but all of Jesus’ teaching on prayer cannot even fill an introduction of a book that teaches Christians about prayer. If Jesus’ teaching is short, we may add Paul’s teachings. However, we still do not have enough content to fill the introduction. It indicates that our understanding of prayer is already a result of our plentiful interpretations of the Bible and Christian traditions. We have thousands of books about prayer even though we have clear

and direct teachings of Jesus. Jesus did not teach the forms and types of prayers we now have in our contemporary Christian culture. The early Christians prayed with the Lord's Prayer, Psalms, and the prayers of respected Christians. The desert Christians or monks and nuns created distinctive culture and tradition of prayer that they believed trinitarian, biblical, and orthodox. Later the Church published prayer books and the Divine Office and invented prayer systems for worship service and pastoral care.

Protestant reformers emphasized the Bible-centered prayer and taught prayers that were consistent with their doctrine. Doctrine produces experiences that are consistent with doctrine. In other words, doctrine limits spiritual methods and disallows people from interpreting their experiences from wrong doctrinal viewpoints. If a person saw an image of a book during a private devotion, the person, if Christian, would say that the book was the Bible. If the person is a Buddhist, the book could be one of the teachings of Buddha. In the Protestant realm of experience, Mary, the mother of Christ Jesus, cannot play an inspiring role in Protestant Christians' prayers. Protestant experience, for Protestant Christians, should be mainly about God the Trinity, the Bible, and justification and salvation by faith. Since then, many Protestant Christians in the 21st century do not find a way out from the understanding that prayer is a matter of doctrine.

Prayer may be a matter of doctrine when a Christian prays to other gods, with other religions' sacred words, through self-destructive practices, and for curses. Similarities of forms and theories among prayers are inevitable matters, for other religions like Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Confucianism have a longer history of prayer than Christianity. Prayer is al-



so a matter of human life, death, mind, emotion, reason, and experience. If there is something in common between Christian prayer and that of other religions, it is that prayer is a common phenomenon of mankind rather than because of an impure intention. Any Christian who prays to God with the Bible is a sincere Christian, not Jewish, Buddhist, or Hindu.

Sometimes silence is a proper means of praying. As Jesus might pray in the desert and in a remote place, as Jesus taught us to go to a closed room, and as Proverbs, Psalms, and other passages teach, silence is discipline, wisdom, discernment, listening, obedience, humility, and patience. Contemplative prayer collides with the prayer culture of Korean Protestantism, represented by vocal prayer, dawn prayer, and speaking in tongues, in terms of the presence or absence of voice, individuality or collectiveness, and the method and purpose of prayer. If Korean Protestant Christians cannot accept the contemplative tradition for history, tradition, doctrine, or overall contextual matters, silence must be learned. Silence is the teaching of the Bible.

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국문 요약

한국적 상황에서 관상기도 이해

권진구(목원대학교/ 조교수)

20세기 초 한국 개신교인들은 통성기도와 새벽기도를 시작했다. 이 두 기도는 이후 100년 동안 한국 개신교인들에게 사랑받고 널리 행해졌다. 방언은 1950년대에 도입되기 시작해 통성기도 및 새벽기도와 함께 가장 대중적인 기도가 되었다. 이후 한국 개신교회는 1970년대 매일 성경과 같은 묵상집을 통해 성경 묵상을 시작했다. 그리고 한국 개신교 기도 역사에서 가장 최근에 관상기도라는 생소한 기도가 등장하게 되었다. 관상기도는 곧 개신교 학자와 목회자에게 논쟁의 주제가 되었고 이러한 논쟁은 관상기도가 2000년대를 즈음해 등장한 후로 줄곧 지속하고 있다. 관상기도는 개신교계에서 기도에 대한 논쟁을 불러일으킨 최초의 비(非) 개신교 기도라는 점에서 의미가 있다. 관상기도 논쟁은 주로 성경적 기원, 신학적 적합성, 역사와 전통에 대한 일치성에 관련되어있다. 이전의 연구들이 관상기도의 적합성에 대해 논했다면 본 연구는 관상기도 논쟁이 왜 중요한지 묻고 답한다. 이 연구는 관상기도에 대해 찬반을 논하는 학자들의 연구를 소개하고 양측의 관점을 분석한다. 그리고 한국 개신교 기도와 관상기도의 만남이 의미하는 바가 무엇인지 논한다. 관상기도는 통성기도, 새벽기도, 방언 등으로 대표되는 한국 개신교의 기도 문화와 음성의 유무, 개별성과 집합성, 기도의 방법과 목적 등의 차원에서 충돌하고 있다. 본 논문은 한국 개신교에서 관상기도 논쟁이 한국교회가 새로운 기도 문화와 전통을 창조할 잠재력이 있다는 점을 보여주고 침묵을 통한 영적 훈련을 할 필요가 있다는 점을 주장한다.

〈 주제어 〉

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