

Some Questions about Conversion to Christianity in South Korea

— Theology of Mission and Interreligious Issues —

According to the statistics of the Korean Roman Catholic Church, roughly 70% of the Koreans that have been baptized hardly ever take part in religious life. Meanwhile, a number of former Catholics regularly take part in the activities of Buddhist temples. Indeed, as a Roman Catholic priest specialized in Buddhist studies and practicing Buddhist meditation very regularly since 1996 with the Korean Seon¹ Way Association, I meet a significant number of such people each time that I take part in a Buddhist event. Moreover, among the remaining 30% of practicing Catholics, some say that they have questions about the soteriological value of Buddhism, to which they cannot find answers within Catholicism. Indeed, the mere fact of displaying interest in Buddhism is often considered by other believers as suspicious, if not heretic. But judging from the number of Protestant pastors who come to the Religious Studies Department of Sogang University, complaining that they have to conceal their interest in Buddhism, a similar problem appears to be shared by Protestantism as well. This paper will explain how a Korean incorporated non-profit religious association, named the Way's End Stone Field Community, concretely attempts to deal with such an issue by creating an alternative space within which Christians from all denomination and Buddhists can interact freely and peacefully.

The paper will be based on **three kinds of data**, mostly in Korean language. **Firstly**, statistics coming from Christian churches, the Korean government, and Gallup Korea (2015). **Secondly**, articles and books on why Koreans move from a church to the other or from a religion to the other. **Finally**, data based on more than twenty-five years of academic and pastoral experience in South Korea, at the crossroads of the Buddhist and Christian traditions. The last paper of the bibliography, published in the *Journal of Korean Religions* (Spring 2014), is an excellent introduction to that data.

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¹ The Korean word for « Zen ».