“Locating Traditioning”
Intercultural religious traditioning within the Korean context and a theological evaluation inspired by Orlando Espín

Abstract

South Korea is noted globally as an example of successful Christian mission, especially considering the rapid development of Christian communities in the 20th century. At the same time, Korean society has gone through tremendous change within a short time, transforming from a feudal Confucian to a post-modern industrial society in about 100 years – overcoming foreign occupation, the aftermath of a disastrous war and the poverty line within this time.

The paper aims first to present and systemize the various findings of scholars on how religious traditions are passed on in contemporary Korean Christianity. When examining this process, the paper argues that when defining him- or herself as a ‘Christian’ and speaking about his or her ‘Christian’ tradition, we are in fact confronted with an interesting amalgam of Confucian and Christian traditions, in which the culture of the pre-modern Korea partly lives on despite the rapid religious and social transformation described above.

Building upon this finding of hybridity within contemporary Korean Christianity, the paper then engages in a dialogue with the understanding of tradition put forward by Orlando Espín (University of San Diego, USA) in his book “Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope” (Orbis Books, 2014). It will be evaluated whether his model of religious traditioning as a process shaped by human culture and life – in contrast to a mere passing on of absolute, but also abstract truths – is suitable to deepen our understanding of religious traditions within Korean Christianity and how we can reflect on his understanding of Christian hope as subversive hope in Korea nowadays.

In a final step, the paper will discuss the necessity for a reflection on tradition in the context of mission and conversion in a multi-religious, globalized world.

About the author

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