

News and Current Events :: South Korean Christians Increasingly Disillusioned with Church

South Korean Christians Increasingly Disillusioned with Church - posted by tbsounde2 (), on: 2014/7/12 17:49

by Harald Olsen on Monday, May 13, 2013

An increasing number of South Korean Christians are becoming disillusioned with organised religion and are leaving their churches, a recently published report says.

Greed, unthinking obedience, and hypocrisy among church leaders in recent years has led to a new phenomenon of "unchurched Christians", the report says, who believe in the religion but avoid joining a congregation.

In a country famous for its zealous subway preachers and the largest church congregation in the world, the idea that you can be spiritual without being religious is novel.

From the Chosun Ilbo:

"I don't go to church, but I'm still a Christian"

Forty-five-year-old Mr. Park used to be called by the nickname, "The Missionary". Park had attended church ever since he was a child and did not let a drop of alcohol pass his lips, even when he was studying abroad. After a lifetime of regularly attending church, Park saw that same church consumed by a financial scandal. "They fought over transfer of power, embezzled funds, and covered up scandalous behavior. I just didn't want to be a member of such a church." In his mid-thirties, after trying out a few other churches, Park decided to stop attending. And yet Park says, "I am still a Christian."

The dictionary definition of Protestants (Note: Korean tends to use the terms "Protestants" or "Catholics" rather than the general term "Christians") states, "someone who believes in Protestantism", the term typically implies that someone has faith in the religion and regularly attends church.

The number of people who have attended church for a long time but who have stopped attending is rising. These individuals are called "Canaan Congregants". The term plays off the name for the land promised to the Hebrews in the Old Testament and the term "I do not attend". In the West, there is increasing study into the phenomenon of "believing without belonging" and "unchurched Christians". However, there is still a shortage of data about the phenomenon in Korea.

Churches offer no hope, my faith hit a wall

Why have Canaan Congregants been leaving their churches? The Center for the Study of Ministry and Society recently published a report based on extensive interviews with Congregants, finding that while the reasons vary widely, the primary issue was disappointment with the behavior of the pastor and the congregation. "I didn't like the way the congregation just did the same thing over and over again, getting swept up in emotion and sobbing out loud," said one thirty-year-old office-worker. Another respondent said, "it was hard to endure the sermons filled with allegories that didn't make any sense in our lives." Other interview subjects criticised the naked pursuit of material benefits within the church. "If you talk about how it is better for the church to make more money, to have a bigger building and fancy facilities, then what is the difference between a church and a business?" said one fifty-year-old doctor. There was also strong resistance to the forceful messages and discipline demanded by their church, "I believe in God, but why do Protestants have to say that every other religion is wrong?"

The Typical "Canaan Congregant"

43.2% have attended church for between five and fifteen years

52.6% have not attended church for at least the past ten years

30.3% left their church because they wanted a less rigid religious experience

53.3% would like to return to a church at some point in the future

Source: Survey of 316 "Canaan Congregants" by the Center for the Study of Ministry and Society

“Without reform, more will leave the church”

So then can Canaan Congregants still be called Christians? According to Kwan Oh-seong of the Global Diaconia Center, “If you emphasise the communal aspect of Christianity, then you could say that these Congregants aren’t Protestants, but if you emphasise personal expressions of faith, then they are still Protestants” the more fundamental issue that should be addressed here is how this trend highlights distrust and dissatisfaction with churches. Cho Sang-don, director of the Center for the Study of Ministry and Society, said “It saddens me to see the similarity between the situation here and shrinking churches in the West.”

To read more:

<http://www.koreabang.com/2013/stories/south-korean-christians-increasingly-disillusioned-with-church.html>

Re: South Korean Christians Increasingly Disillusioned with Church - posted by DEADn (), on: 2014/7/14 10:02

Fascinating. Even reading the comments to this article, within the article, is fascinating. Has America exported this to Korea or is there something else going on?

Re: - posted by DEADn (), on: 2014/7/17 9:53

I sent this article to a Korean contact I have (that a fellow poster sent me) and asked him what he thought about this. Here is his response.

Quote:

I read the article. There's a lot of truth to it. The Church is shrinking. Secular society is losing/has lost respect for the Protestant Church particularly. The Roman Catholic Church is more highly regarded in general, I believe. It is a situation that concerns us deeply. We pray earnestly and constantly for a new revival and conviction upon the Church--its leadership and ordinary people.
