

Article

Korean Messiahs: Victory Altar and the Koreanization of Protestantism

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard

Department of North-American Studies and Religious Studies, The University of Bordeaux Montaigne, 33607 Pessac, France; brcellard@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper analyses the indigenization or Koreanization of Protestantism in South Korea in the late 20th century through a study of an original messianic and millenarian movement, Victory Altar. The group was founded in 1981 by Cho Hee-Seung in the biblical tradition, with references to Korean spiritual traditions as well. Its most salient feature is the self-consecration of Cho Hee-Seung as “Victor Christ and God”, the unique universal Messiah. In order to show the correlation between this spiritual movement, Protestantism, and Korean culture, I survey the recent history of South Korea and its staunch nationalism largely spurred by Protestant missionaries at the turn of the 20th century. I then present the core teachings of Cho the Messiah: the biological immortality of neohumans, the Hebrew genealogy of the Koreans thanks to the saga of the Lost Tribe of Dan from Israel to Korea, and his major vows to protect South Korea. An assessment of the heritage of Protestantism in this movement is then offered through the perspective of post-colonialism since Victory Altar sees itself and its Messiah/God as far superior to the God and Messiah of the Western powers that brought Christianity to Korea without really understanding it.

Keywords: South Korea; Christianity; Protestantism; nationalism; messianism and millennialism; Korean messiahs; post-colonialism



Citation: Rigal-Cellard, Bernadette. 2024. Korean Messiahs: Victory Altar and the Koreanization of Protestantism. *Religions* 15: 1438. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121438>

Academic Editors: Kaspars Klavins and Ildze Šķestere

Received: 28 October 2024

Revised: 22 November 2024

Accepted: 22 November 2024

Published: 27 November 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Korea has staged two of the most intriguing episodes of the expansion of Christianity outside the West and its colonies: first in the 18th century, the hapax of the first conversions of Korean scholars to Catholicism without local evangelization,¹ and later in the 19th century, the rapid success of Protestant missionaries thanks to their social actions (schools, hospitals) and to their special links to the Joseon royal family (Dae 2013). These experiences made the religion so attractive that in South Korea today, Christianity, with a large Protestant majority, has as many believers as Buddhism, that is some 25% of the total population,² a unique case in Asia, excluding the Philippines (where, introduced by Spanish colonization, Catholicism has remained the major creed). Architecturally overshadowing all other religious institutions in cityscapes and rural areas, Methodists, Presbyterians, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals reign supreme. Outpacing their American genitors, many of the largest Evangelical churches in the world are Korean, the most famous one being Yoido Full Gospel Church, its large circular building proudly standing in the vicinity of the National Assembly in South West Seoul.

Even if those groups have somehow adapted or indigenized their discourse, they have, for the most part, retained the doctrines and practices characteristic of North American mainstream Protestants who, should they visit their Korean counterparts, would somehow feel at home. This is not so with another major grouping of Korean religions also deriving from North American Protestantism that have transformed it in a most idiosyncratic manner. These groups were founded by new prophets who strategically built their movements on the attractiveness of Christianity and twisted it almost beyond recognition to fit their fellow citizens' expectations: they first borrowed the biblical narrative in fundamentalist mode, then digested and Koreanized it in order to assuage profound spiritual, cultural, and political anxieties.

The spiritual entrepreneurs of the 20th century instinctively set in motion the revitalization of religions following major civilizational crises, as theorized by anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace (1956).³ He identified several models: some groups will prioritize traditional religious and cultural elements to protect and reinforce national identity when it is threatened in wartime, colonial or near colonial situations; on the other hand, some will offer a radical shift in orientation by adopting the new imports in their quasi-totality because it is felt that they will help modernize and survive. Another model will borrow only parts of the new imports and syncretize them with traditional spiritual and cultural elements so that the members will not lose their bearings completely. This is a less traumatic experiment.

One perfect example of the latter model is the sizeable yet little-studied group founded in 1981 by Cho Hee-Seung, Yeongsaeng-gyo or SeungNiJeDann, or Victory Altar, which I first encountered in 2017 when I was invited to visit its headquarters in Bucheon, West of Seoul, and attended one of its morning services.⁴ Every year since then, I have met several of its members in Korea and at international conferences.

After a survey of recent Korean history and of the impact of Protestantism during the Japanese occupation, this study will focus on some of the major features of Victory Altar: its integration within the Protestant family and, at the same time, its superseding traditional Protestantism through the affirmation that its Korean interpretation is the only valid one because it shows correspondences with Buddhism and science, and perhaps also with shamanism. Logically, then the construction of the millennialism and messianism of the group derives from the Bible adapted to Korean culture. This has led to the self-proclamation of Cho Hee-Seung as “Victor Christ and God”, the unique universal Messiah, specifically with a Korean passport, demonstrating thereby the incarnation in his own flesh of the divine election of his country and its people. The core teachings of Cho will be explained next: the biological immortality of neohumans, the Hebrew genealogy of Koreans thanks to the saga of the Lost Tribe of Dan from Israel to Korea, and his vows to protect South Korea. The conclusion will assess the heritage of Protestantism in this movement through the perspective of post-colonialism, since Victory Altar sees itself and its Messiah/God as far superior to the God and Messiah of the Western powers that brought Christianity to Korea but obviously did not understand it properly themselves.

1. Recent Korean History

To contextualize the current religions of South Korea, one needs to recall the trials experienced by the country at least since the mid-19th century when severe political and climatic conditions aggravated the poverty of the people. Some leaders attributed the dire situation to the influence of the Westerners who were then expanding their evangelization campaigns in the region. Towards the end of the century, an important movement of social and political rebellion named *Donghak*, or “teaching of the East”, broke out, intended to repel such intrusion. Much as in many other countries at that time, the Koreans then developed a sense of their own uniqueness and of their own nationalism that was to grow under Japanese occupation. When China faced its own problems, its age-old sway over Korea waned, which led Japan, on the path to international recognition, to fill the void. It invaded the country at the end of the century, annexed it as a protectorate in 1905, and ruled it as a fully fledged colony from 1910 to 1945.

What is most interesting for our purpose here is to see that, during those decades, though it only represented a tiny fraction of the population, newly introduced Protestantism, in its Evangelical form, acted as the major force inspiring and supporting those Koreans who fought against Japanese rule. A fair number of major independentists converted and met regularly with Protestant circles. Among them, in particular, was Syngman Rhee (1875–1965), who was to be the first president of the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) from 1948 to 1960. It seems that since this religion was understood as having paved the way in the West for democracy and the independence of nations, it was viewed as both an inspiration and an ally. This was notably because of the backing of

the USA, the country that had exported Protestantism and that was gaining clout in East Asia (for an example of such interactions, see Richard Kim 2006) in what has been termed Korean Self-Reconstruction Nationalism.⁵ “Self-reconstruction” primarily implies restoring the pride of the people, who had suffered decades of domestic troubles and colonial duress, through the rehabilitation of Korean heritage, as captured by Korean sociologist of religions Lee Gyungwon (Lee 2016, p. 89).

As is well known, immediately following the victory over Japan, Korea was divided along the 38th parallel North between its liberators (the USSR and the USA), and soon became a major issue in the Cold War. The Korean War broke out on 25 June 1950; the cease-fire on 27 July 1953 put an end to the fighting between the two Koreas (that had caused millions of casualties, i.e., killed, missing, wounded, and displaced people) but not to the war that is still ongoing. South Korean nationalism became synonymous with anti-communism, which has remained a major defining feature of the country (even if the communism of the Northern brother and of neighboring China has evolved considerably), with ebbs and flows according to the succession of official policies favoring either rapprochement with the North (as with the previous president, Moon Jae-in [2017–2022]) or firm antagonism (as with his successor, Yoon Suk Yeol). We will see how Cho, the founder of Victory Altar, catered to the anti-communism of the nation, which was still strong when he built his doctrine.

2. Korean Messianism and Millennialism

A few words of explanation are needed on messianism and millennialism, on which Victory Altar enthusiastically thrives: these are two of the favorite constructs derived from the Bible as taught by Protestants (not particularly prominent in Catholic theology, though they do have a place there). In Christianity, messianism (from the Aramaean term *meshchikhâ*, the one who is anointed) designates the expectation of the return at the end of time of Christ, the Messiah, who will establish his kingdom, reward the saints, and punish the sinners.

The term messianism can also be applied to the conviction of a people or of a nation that it is endowed with a specific mission, possibly a universal one. The fervent nationalism of South Koreans can be seen within this frame: the fact that their small country triumphed over aggression and colonization could only be due to it being imbued with unique salvific power. The concept is linked to millennialism. The term derives from “millennium”, a period of one thousand years (Revelation 20: 2–7), during which evil, Satan, will be bound so that paradise can reign on earth until Satan is unbound and unleashes a series of catastrophes to which the Messiah will put a definite end. Millennialism implies the triumph of the meek and the promise of better days, either on earth or in heaven.

Millennialism exists in many world traditions, in particular in Pure Land Buddhism through the figure of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future. In his chapter on “Korean Millennial Movements” for *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* edited by Catherine Wessinger (Flaherty 2011), Robert Pearson Flaherty explains that the concept existed in Korea well before the introduction of the Bible: “...millennialism in the Korean context has not been primarily a reflection of Christian eschatology...” (Flaherty 2011, p. 327), as it was already present in the culture within Buddhism and ancient Korean beliefs. Typically, blending Korean and Protestant terminologies, Cho, the prophet of Victory Altar, is either named Maitreya or Christ the Messiah.

In Korea, these two concepts were among the most salient taught by Protestant missionaries. Wells quotes historian Spencer Palmer, who estimates that these two specific elements were predominant among missionaries in Korea: “‘indifference to the social application of Christian theology’ was a ‘feature of the Korean mission program’ ...this was due to the fundamentalism and pre-millennialism of the early missionaries” (Wells 1990, p. 41; Palmer 1967, p. 26). Flaherty confirms this information: “a pre-Tribulation Rapture and belief on Christ’s Second Coming were central to the teachings of Pastor Kill Seon-ju, regarded by many as the Father of Korean Christianity...” (Flaherty 2011, p. 327).

Because the Messiah is expected to free the oppressed, the script of messianism has comforted many colonized peoples who have identified with the narrative of the Hebrews triumphing over the Egyptians and reaching the Promised Land thanks to their own efforts under God's guidance. It is again telling that the devotees of Victory Altar hold their founder to be the new Moses ([Han 2017](#)). They thus remain perfectly in line with their fellow Korean Evangelicals who, as Wells stated, to this day strongly identify with the biblical Israel ([Wells 1990](#), p. 176).

3. Messiah Is Korean

At the headquarters in Bucheon, one is greeted by a large portrait of Cho Hee-Seung with the English caption in bold font, "Messiah is Korean", and in much smaller print, the same caption in Hangul. The founder of Victory Altar, Cho, born on 12 August 1931, stands as a classical actor of his time, profoundly distressed by the fighting raging in his region (war in the Pacific, the Korean war) and in search of spiritual answers (for his precise biography and the history of the movement, see [Introvigne 2017](#)). He was miraculously healed of an ear problem by Park Taeson (1917–1990), the founder in 1956 of the Olive Tree, a movement that at its climax numbered one and a half million members. Park evolved from Presbyterianism to Pentecostal revivalism and thaumatology, then toward self-divinization and the exit from canonical Christianity (see [Baker and Kim 2020](#)). Cho operated as Park's missionary in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1980, he led a retreat with a lady of the group, Hong Eup-Bin, in a so-called "secret chamber", in which one might surmise that spiritual initiation implied sexual and/or shamanic relations, though this is denied by his devotees.⁶ On 15 October 1980, Hong Eup-Bin declared Cho was "Victor Christ and God". When, in the same year, Park decreed that 98% of the Bible was pure lies and that he was the only true immortal god, Cho left him and, on 18 August 1981, founded Victory Altar in Bucheon. Several branches were later opened in Japan and in the USA.

In 1994, Cho was accused of having ordered the murder of six opponents, and in 2004, he was sentenced to the death penalty but acquitted on appeal. However, the district attorney appealed to the Supreme Court, which ordered a new trial that would definitely have sentenced him to death. He happened to die the very day before the trial opened, on 19 June 2004. Since he had built all his teachings on his own immortality and on its being accessible to all believers, a lot of them lost faith in him. The movement went from 400,000 members to some 100,000 by the end of the 2000s ([Introvigne 2017](#)).

From the very founding of his group, following in Park's footsteps, Cho proclaimed he was the true immortal Messiah. Since, in the monotheist perspective of Victory Altar, there cannot be two Messiahs at the same time, logically, Cho had to discard the original one (Jesus Christ) so as to impose himself as the sole valid one. One of the major books of the movement, *The Science of Immortality*, published by Kwon Hee-Soon ([Kwon 1992](#)), transcribes the teachings of Cho in his own voice. The narrator quotes several verses of the Gospels to demonstrate what should have been obvious long ago: Jesus was an idiot, an imbecile. According to Cho, this is particularly visible in Matthew 24: 36, when Jesus says that nobody can tell when the end will come since only the Father knows. But then, how can he be the son of God if he does not even know this ([Kwon 1992](#), pp. 35–37)? Further, Jesus is called ignorant: he did not know what salvation was and thus could not offer it through his own blood ([Kwon 1992](#), p. 49). A summary of the biblical generations confirms that, though Jesus did descend from Solomon, he was not begotten of the Holy Spirit, for this is biologically impossible: in fact, he had a human father, the Roman soldier Panthela, who raped Mary. Jesus is consequently a pseudo-Christ, a bastard with "a dirty pedigree" ([Kwon 1992](#), pp. 94–95).

The reference to Panthela is interesting since it shows how Christianity has exported in its wake some of the most ancient anti-Christian exposés that are still used today to attack what is seen as a colonial version of Christianity. The claim that Jesus was begotten from his mother's sleeping with a Roman soldier or a Jew enrolled in the Roman army, Ben Pantera (one of the spellings), was a popular story in early Jewish circles, and it had

circulated in the West at least since the anti-Christian polemicist Celsus (2nd century).⁷ Kwon borrows from *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (the book that would inspire *The Da Vinci Code*) proofs of the “disorderly private life of Jesus”, notably his marriage to Mary Magdalene (Kwon 1992, p. 100).⁸

The biblical God is no more powerful than Jesus and is no longer omnipotent since Satan vanquished him 6000 years ago (Kwon 1992, pp. 39–40). The only true God could only be Korean, anyhow: “At last God has come to Korea and has become the Victor” (Kwon 1992, p. 33). “The true God is Victor Christ for he is the last Adam, Christ who gives life (1 Corinthians 15:45), the re-creator, God, who is to construct a new Heaven and Earth” (Kwon 1992, p. 44).

In yet another association of Western and Korean lore, one of the major spokespersons of Victory Altar, Han Gang-Hyen, has explained how the famous Korean Prophecy of Namsago, thought to have been written by the Joseon scholar Nam Sago (1509–1571), corresponded point by point to the occult prophecies formulated in the same period (1555), though at the other end of the world, by the French astrologer and seer Nostradamus (1503–1566). Han explained how both seers predicted with great precision the advent of Cho/Victor Christ (Han 2024).

It is interesting to note that when Park, the founder of The Olive Tree movement, declared he was God himself, many devotees left him (Cho included), probably because they were disappointed that he was not respecting the canonical Christian contract to which they had signed up. We can see the evolution of the expectations of the devotees of those groups: if they left Victory Altar *en masse* when Cho died, it was not because he had not respected Christian norms when he decreed that he was God but because of his immoderate hubris. He breached the contract, since he had declared that he was immortal but then died rapidly, thus terminating their own hopes of biological immortality.

However, echoing many other episodes of the metaphorization of the eternal presence of the charismatic leader once he or she has physically disappeared (one thinks, of course, of the beginning of Christianity), those members of Victory Altar who remained faithful to their master affirm that he did not actually die but only pretended to do so in order to escape his persecutors (the court) and that he continues to communicate with them through his Holy Dew or Hidden Manna whenever they gather. Many photos show Cho partly hidden by a large streak of light or white fog that materializes his divine presence.

One slide of the PowerPoint presentation shown to visitors states that the Holy Dew Spirit of the Victor is announced in Hosea 14:5: “I (God) will be like dew to Israel (the Victor), he will blossom like lilies”. The following slide adds more sacred sources for the dew: “The scriptures such as the Bible, the Buddhist scriptures, and Gyeokamyourok prophesied about the Holy Dew Spirit as an immortal spiritual food, when it goes into the pores of people, it kills the spirit of death, they become immortal Gods (Buddha).”

In Buddhism, it is called the Dew of Immortality, an elixir, and it has a specific iconography, sweet dew paintings: “The presence of an assemblage of Buddhas in the Sweet-Dew painting... perspicuously manifests its functional link to the *modus operandi* of salvation via the consumption of a mystically transformed salvific substance, the “sweet dew” (Kr. kamno 甘露; Skt. amṛta)” (Pak 2020).⁹

It is consequently not a mist like the one that Cho radiates. He borrowed it from the Olive Tree movement of Park Taeson, who seized Hosea’s verse to define the dew as produced by the Celestial Father in order to save humans. In “Salvation Reimagined: Sweet Dew Paintings in Wartime Colonial Korea” (Lee 2023), Lee Seunghye explains that these paintings appeared in the 16th century to serve as altarpieces “for the low ritual altars where ceremonies for the disembodied were conducted in the three-altar configuration of the Korean Buddhist liturgy”. The paintings taught that “all souls suffering from the misfortune and wrongdoings of previous lives could be saved through the salvific power of the divine and thus attain a better rebirth in their next life.”¹⁰ Interestingly, Lee notes that if these “uniquely Korean” paintings flourished in the Chosŏn period, they were considerably revived “in the late 1930s to early 1940s” (Lee 2023, abstract). This happens to be

at a time when Park (born in 1917) could clearly have come in contact with them and may have joined the Buddhist meaning of the dew to the Biblical one.

The conviction of followers that their Messiah is still alive was powerfully exhibited during the prayer meeting that I attended in Bucheon in 2017. On what could have been an altar stood a screen on which a video of Cho was broadcast. He gave a sermon, and all those present reacted to his words exactly as if he were actually present in the room: they answered him, agreed to what he said in real dialogue, clapped their hands, and laughed very loudly at his jokes.¹¹

One must add here that the constant interweaving of Christian and idiosyncratic motifs in the theology of Victory Altar is also displayed in its ceremonial calendar that lists five major festivals to celebrate the Messiah. Though some dates or names sound familiar to non-members, their meanings have been adapted.

1. January 1st: The Holy Dew Spiritual Day celebrates the advent of the Holy Dew Spirit.
2. May 8th (not the end of WW2 in Europe) celebrates The Parent Day, in particular the Spiritual Mother. It is not clear whether the Mother, often referred to in the literature, is a separate entity or if she is the feminine incarnation of Cho, who is thus both Father and Mother. In one of his hymns, for example, we hear, “The Savior God, the mother of all humans/Came to the world in a human form...” (see [Victory Altar Hymn 2018](#)).
3. Christmas falls on August 12th, which is the birthday of Cho Hee Sung.
4. October 15th: The Victory Day celebrates the day in 1980 when Cho defeated his ego and was reborn as the Holy Spirit, the Maitreya Buddha after the Victor.
5. December 25th: The Messiah Day, to celebrate the advent of the Messiah Victor Christ.

4. Cho’s Five-Point Theological and Political Program

Cho Hee-Seung summarized his agenda in “Five Great Pledges”, which are displayed at the entrance of Victory Altar’s headquarters in Bucheon and in all the literature. They are also termed “The Five Covenants of a Prophet Like Moses”.

“I shall sweep away communism from the surface of this earth,

I will prevent typhoons, which blow about 20 times a year, from advancing toward Korea,

I will stop rain in the rainy season, from the 15th of July every year.

I will make Korea have an abundant harvest annually.

I will root out the potential threat of war from Korea forever, and I will also reunify Korea”. ([Kwon 1992](#), p. 91; and [Victory Altar’s Official Website 2021](#))

Devotees affirm that all these pledges have been operating until today. To prove the impact of Cho on the weather, for example, every year, the website of the group publishes the “daily weather over the summer monsoon period” to show that during the past year, temperatures remained correct and typhoons bypassed the Korean peninsula (see [Victory Altar Monsoon 2021](#)).

Clearly, these pledges address what Cho sensed to be the major anxieties of Koreans, South Koreans in particular: fertility of the land to nourish people and an end to all wars. In promising to do these things, Cho identifies with traditional Korean gods of fertility and gods of war and peace. By eradicating communism, he will realize the reunification of the two Koreas. Since this goal is inscribed in the South Korean constitution, we can see how he propounded a consensual national agenda that inextricably combines spiritual material and political well-being. Reverend Moon (1920–2012), the most famous Korean Messiah, built a similar program, and it was his vocal anti-communism that opened doors for him in the United States during the Cold War.

Various texts (in books or on the Internet) explain that Cho has played a positive role against communism, with the recurring example of his being instrumental in the downfall of the USSR thanks to his protection of Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022) during the 19 August 1991 coup fomented to reinstall the Communist party in Moscow. Through his

own spiritual force and bilocation capacity, he prevented the assassination of Gorbachev, thereby allowing the implosion of Soviet communism:

On the second day of incarceration, when tanks occupied the Kremlin Square, the atmosphere for the failure of the reforms was heightened. The victorious savior said from the podium, “Gorbachev will soon be released.”

On the third day of detention, the moment the three leaders of the coup d’état were about to kill Gorbachev, the victorious savior appeared on the scene with a big body, gave a command, and disappeared. The leaders of the coup were terrified and fled.

Gorbachev, who was alone in the room, opened the door and was released from confinement without anyone else’s saving efforts.

At this time, in the Kremlin Square, the citizens were destroying the forces of the coup by bringing out the tank pilots. (Victory Altar Gorbachev 2021)

Now, the fact that Cho’s movement is still active some 20 years after his physical disappearance proves that his moral contract continues to make sense for his devotees, who define themselves as “neo-humans”. The following sections present his teachings most closely linked to messianism: the quest for immortality and the divine genealogy of Koreans.

5. The Immortality of Neo-Humans

The Science of Immortality teaches how any individual can dominate the spirits of darkness and mutate into a neo-human.¹² The explanations rest on scientific concepts, such as blood types and genetics, to prove they are pragmatic and rational. The book lists syllogisms that must strike the reader with their indisputable logic. The very first sentences of the book give an inkling of how the literature of the movement operates: each topic is presented through the recourse to various spiritual traditions (here at least the Bible, Buddhism, folk spirituality...), whose adequation demonstrates the truthfulness of the initial proposition. The Bible, the major visible source of validation, is quoted in typical Protestant mode: a predilection for the Old Testament, with a succession of quotes with chapter and verse references given as evidence of truthfulness. Here is an example of the teaching dealing with the Dew that we have seen above.

The Dew is the symbol of Victor, who has overcome Ego, the Spirit of Death, Satan, and opened the gate to immortality.

It proclaims the Advent of Israel (the Messiah), for the Bible has it that “I will be the dew of Israel” (Hosea 14:5). And it is the very Hidden Manna and the Sweet Dew of Buddhism and the Mysterious Herb of mount Samshin of the Chinese Legend.

Now, here at Victory Altar, the Dew Spirit has been pouring out for 11 years¹³ from Victor Christ. Dew Spirit has various forms: fire, blood, and the columns of smoke (Joel 2: 30). (Kwon 1992, p. viii)

The preface explains that if until now no one has found the path to eternal life, it is enough to open this book for life to take on meaning: when the road of our ancestors and of our contemporaries leads to death, here light flashes out (Kwon 1992, p. xviii). In order to reach salvation, immortality, and terrestrial paradise, one must suppress the ego, the “I”, or nothing will be accessible. One could see here the mark of Buddhism, but since it seems that ego is associated with sin against God, the connection may rather be better understood as combining several spiritual conceptions coming from Christianity, Buddhism, Daoism, and possibly other sources.

Cho chose immortality as a base for his whole theological system (as was noted above), yet he did not interpret it as the prospect for eternal life after physical death (as taught in mainline Christianity) but definitely as a this-worldly possibility, an understanding

shared by several ancient and more recent religions on the fringes of traditional Christianity. Though the Daoist prospect of becoming immortal thanks to personal cultivation probably also inspired Cho's proposition of biological immortality, he constantly shifts the explanation back to biblical parlance, in part to agree with it, and in part to criticize it sarcastically. For him, immortality derives from our proper understanding of our blood heritage that links us to our ancestors and right back to Adam and Eve. To him, mankind forms only one body:

and the law of heredity is that of blood. Therefore, the dog begets a dog, the bull a bull, the monkey a monkey, and the rabbit a rabbit. Similarly, God bears God. As the Bible has it, we have our being from God and are His offspring (Acts 17: 28–29). Therefore, the human being is God. If there is anyone who insists that the human being is not God, then he is just like the one who insists that the puppy is not a dog. As we have seen above, however, a puppy is a dog too, because the offspring of a dog is a dog. Similarly, the child of God is God. Therefore, all mankind is God. We, humans, are not animals. (Kwon 1992, pp. 3–4)

Demonstrative equations follow: (1) blood = cells = body; (2) life = heart = spirit; (3) blood = life = heart; (4) body = blood = heart; ... (5) God = man (Kwon 1992, pp. 4–13).

Texts uttered by Victor Christ, who is called “This Man who is I” (Kwon 1992, p. 35), follow those equations in order to demonstrate how the Bible errs, how Jesus was an impostor, and how Christians are stupid. Not without logic, This Man reasons that if the Creator God of Genesis was really God, why would he have created Adam and Eve knowing that they would disobey him and die from eating the forbidden fruit? Why would he have created mortal beings? He could only be an evil God. It is also inconceivable that Adam and Eve should be mere creatures for, in reality, they are the ones who form the Trinity with God. The latter statement is meant to demonstrate how This Man does not negate all of the Bible but only its inner contradictions. Indeed, pragmatically, he uses it as a fabulous tool kit to support his teachings on the superiority of the Korean people as a separate race.

6. The Genealogy of the Chosen Nation

Koreans are said to take great pride in “being a consanguine race”, and to believe that they form the most “tightly knit community in the world”, according to Lee Gyungwon, the specialist in new Korean religions, who develops this idea further: “Such strong national consciousness resulted in fostering a strong sense of the chosen people.” This is combined with a strong sense of mission to “deliver people suffering from their trials... in order to ultimately bring about a paradise on earth in the future”, a goal that several new Korean religions undertook to carry out, not just for Korea but for the whole world (Lee 2016, p. 90). Without any doubt, this is one of the tasks that Victory Altar entrusted itself with.

What is most interesting is that in order to support his teaching of racial purity, founder Cho situated the origin of the Korean race in the Bible itself, through a *pro bono* exploitation of the Lost Tribe mythology, inscribing his scenario within the historical Israel, that, as noted above, Evangelical Koreans imagine they have been duplicating through their own national odyssey. For Cho, Koreans are not restoring the connection metaphorically but genetically through the bloodline: Koreans are the authentic biological descendants of the Tribe of Dan, son of Jacob (Genesis 49: 16–18), who are supposed to have left Canaan around the year 1200 BCE.¹⁴ If the tribe is no longer mentioned in the Bible, it is because it fled to the Far East to escape Satan and protect the real Messiah that it was missioned to beget: “Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Hitler also massacred more than six million Jews. Therefore, God could not but hide the Danites, from whom Messiah would come, lest the Danites should be destroyed totally in the world of Satan. On this account, the Danites became the stone which the builders of the Bible rejected (Matthew 21: 42)” (Kwon 1992, p. 79).

Every time they present their religion, the members of Victory Altar display the map of the exodus of their progenitors that historical and anthropological research is supposed to have uncovered: from Canaan to Persia, then north to the Altai region, Mongolia (thus skirting China), and finally down to Korea. This route proves that Koreans derive from a Nordic lineage and not a Chinese one, as some would have it, in order to belittle them as mere offshoots of the Chinese. The Korean language is consequently held by Cho to belong to the Altaic linguistic family with Hebrew roots, as the resemblance of many Hebrew and Korean terms is believed to demonstrate (Kwon 1992, pp. 78–88).

The incarnate proof of this linguistic genealogy is the figure of Dangun (or Tangun or Tan'gun), whose name clearly identifies him with the Danites. Dangun is the famous progenitor of Korea whose importance was reinforced at the turn of the 20th century, at the time of the construction of Korean nationalism, to consolidate the anteriority of the Koreans and replace Kija, the Chinese founding hero revered until then. Dangun is believed to have founded the first Korean State in the North of the peninsula in the year 2333 BCE.¹⁵ This national birth was officially proclaimed when the year 1948 was decreed Dangun Year One in South Korea.¹⁶

For Victory Altar, the itinerary of the Danite tribe to Korea was divinely ordained to allow for the incarnation of the true Son of God in the most extreme eastern part of Eurasia. Devotees display a map of Korea and Manchuria with the caption, "The Country and Region of Victor Christ", followed by the biblical verse announcing the destination, "I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you (Isaiah 41: 9)."

It is exactly there that Paradise will soon be opened: the volume *The Era of Post Corona & Neohumans Culture: The Secret of K-Religion & Its Visions for Earthly Paradise* (2022) analyses the prophecies of Victor Christ on mysterious plagues and confirms that in our post-Covid time, Pure Land paradise is drawing near. Han Gang-Hyen explains that the soon-to-come Paradise is different from the one offered by Christianity and even Buddhism in that it will not come after death but right now on earth, and it will not be exclusive but opened to the members of all new religions:

The earthly paradise in Korean new religions refers to the new world of Hwocheon (Post-World) that has been recreated. This world aims to build a realistic paradise where humanity... lives in abundance and peace... in harmony with a highly developed scientific material civilization and a culture of moral and spiritual enlightenment.... It is predicted that the Earthly Paradise... will unfold centering on Korea.... In connection with the Spirit of the Chosen People, each denomination chooses the place where the headquarters temple is located as the holy place of Earthly Paradise... for about 300 new religions.... Korea itself is the holy place where the Chosen people live, and it is not long before it becomes a world-class pilgrimage site. (Han 2022, pp. 36–37)

Such generous inclusiveness must be underlined because most religions, old or new, tend to promise paradise first, if not exclusively, to their own devotees. The universalism defined here may derive from the very openness of the representatives of Victory Altar, in particular that of Han Gang-Hyen, who regularly participates in international gatherings of scholars of New Religions and members of those communities. In any case, his declaration confirms the central role of his own country in opening the earthly paradise, which, though international (unless the 300 new religions alluded to here are to be Korean themselves), will be located in South Korea.

Before concluding this study, I wish to offer not so much a possible explanation for the peculiarities of Victory Altar within the scope of Protestantism as another example of such "deviation" from the point of view of orthodoxy. As a scholar of Mormonism, I have found many striking similarities between Victory Altar and Mormonism, the early 19th century pioneer of the radical Americanization of Christianity that stands as a model for the indigenization of Protestantism, or in the present case its Koreanization.

7. Mormonism as a Model of the Indigenization of Protestantism

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been present in Korea since the 1940s and mostly after 1953. Though I have not been able to find a reference to a possible encounter between Cho (and/or his entourage) and Mormons, he might have had some knowledge of their teachings since he was close to American soldiers who were the major agents of the expansion of Mormonism wherever they deployed, and in particular in South Korea.¹⁷

Both religions are fascinated by:

- National messianism. Both sacralize to the utmost the major social, historical, and political features of their country of birth and declare it to be The Chosen Nation. If they are not the only religion to teach this, they have a common manner of affirming that the true Messiah has come to their own land. Though Mormons do not replace the biblical Jesus with an American one, they have him come to America after his Ascension to duplicate his evangelizing mission in his second Zion, to which he will return at the end of time.
- Self-divinization and immortality. Both tenets are taught in the two groups as a consequence of living in the Chosen Land and of living a disciplined spiritual and material life. In Mormonism, God was a Man who perfected himself so that every man could become God. Victory Altar teaches this, too.
- The Lost Tribes. In Mormonism, it is the Hebrew tribe of Lehi, a descendant of Joseph of Egypt who (around 600 BC) guided his people through the oceans to the Promised Land, very much like the Danites of Victory Altar trekking through Asia to Korea, their trekking heralding (or echoing) that of the Mormons traveling across the American continent on foot to build Zion in Utah (19th century).
- Blood and genealogy. In Mormonism, there are many allusions to blood, both as biological fluid and metaphorical genealogy. To be initiated, one must declare to which tribe of Israel, in the sense also of bloodline, one belongs, and we know the commitment of Mormons to genealogical research to find one's ancestors' bloodlines in order to perform rituals for them. The texts of Victory Altar constantly speak about blood as fluid and genealogy, that of the Danites, going back to Adam and Eve and the tribes of Israel.
- Rationality and science. Another most intriguing similarity (that led me to suspect an influence of Mormonism) rests in the choice of extremely matter-of-fact demonstrations for divine realities that remain as mysteries in mainline Christianity. For instance, in both religions, as seen above, God is a man, so man can be God, and the proof is that man is created in the image of God, which must not be understood metaphorically at all. Mary was not a virgin, because she could not beget a child otherwise. In Mormonism, she actually had sex with God, who was a man (or Adam according to ancient versions), to beget Jesus. We saw that, in Victory Altar, she was raped because a virgin birth is biologically impossible.
- The occult. Both groups revel in esotericism and far-fetched theories about past generations, such as similarly complex visions of Adam and Eve, with Adam being equated at times with Jesus and/or God, and in Victory Altar with Adam Victor Christ, stories that may derive from Kabbala and the Freemasons' interpretations of Adam Kadmon.

8. Conclusions

The success of Cho Hee-Seung came from his capacity to formulate teachings that emanated from Christianity, which he saw as open to duplicating in Korea the recipes for success it had tested in the West and which he claimed to have improved thanks to his own divine powers. His uninhibited extrapolations from the mere matrix of Protestantism were perfectly geared to the expectations of his fellow citizens concerning their most pressing issues in the final decades of the 20th century: social and economic problems such as poverty, almost forced labor in factories or in the fields, a harsh climate, and political issues, with the communist threat still strong at the time of the foundation of the religion.

Promoting the Protestant insistence on individual responsibility and resilience, Cho promised Koreans that they could solve these problems by themselves thanks to rigorous spiritual and moral discipline (fighting the ego, loving one's neighbor...) and thanks to his own power that he conveyed to them during his services and still now beyond his death (deemed to have been illusory). They can behold the earthly paradise he has been preparing for them in the prosperity and prominence of their nation economically and culturally: truly, their nation is now highly regarded internationally.

Cho's messianism and millennialism are much of a piece with those of oppressed or previously colonized peoples throughout the world. As we saw, such beliefs allow those who adhere to them to imagine an exit from a situation of inferiority since their construction implies a complete reversal of the painful order of things. Many peoples who were colonized and evangelized by Christians have drawn from the Bible and the stories of missionaries the good news of the Second Coming of the Messiah and have elaborated syncretic spiritual systems similar to that promoted by Victory Altar. The script is Christian, but the contents are Indigenous: they announce victory over the oppressors, their destruction or their expulsion from the motherland, and the return of the ancestral world, necessarily paradise-like (one of the best books on the topic is [Lanternari 1950](#)).

The originality of Victory Altar, and of some other religions of similar syncretic construction in the region, lies in the fact that their messianism and millennialism extend far beyond the, strictly speaking, ethnic frame of victory to affirm the infinite superiority of their own nation over the others and to imagine the conquest of the world, culturally and spiritually.

In order to achieve this, the first stage consists of negating the superiority, or even the mere validity, of Christianity as understood in the West while at the same time borrowing most of the doctrines of the new movement from it. The most important step is to demonstrate the weakness or imposture of Jesus, a failed or fake Messiah, to prepare for the second step, the self-proclamation of the founder of the new religion, that he or she is the sole true universal Messiah. Reverend Moon claimed that he was the new Messiah who would carry out Jesus' mission that had been aborted because Jesus had failed to get married and have a lot of children; Park Taeson of The Olive Tree called Jesus the son of Satan, and Cho the Messiah of Victory Altar mocks him as an idiot, a bastard with a dirty pedigree.

By belittling the God of the foreign powers, what these Korean Messiahs want to prove is that their until-now-inferior nation is taking its revenge by demonstrating its true superiority. At the same time, they retain those features of the Christian belief system that can be of use to them, such as the Chosen Nation concept and that of monotheism, because it is instrumental in sustaining their personal authority. In a post-colonial deviance strategy, a form of symbolical kidnapping, they take hold of the Bible, the Master Book in a large part of the world, affirm they make better use of it, and turn it to their advantage, making fun of those Westerners who did not understand it correctly. This is one more proof of the conformity of Victory Altar to a sort of general Evangelical "mood" in Korea. Wells concludes his study of *New God, New Nation* on Korean messianism and nationalism: Protestant Koreans see themselves as the truly moral nation who can teach "the decadent, and spiritually enervated Western nations. They are the New Israel, the nation God will use to spread renewal throughout the world" ([Wells 1990](#), p. 176). We can add that it is this impetus that has propelled hundreds of Korean missionaries to the West in the past decades, notably in post-1989 Eastern Europe.

This universal missionary goal sets Victory Altar and its fellow Protestant citizens apart from many other messianic peoples. For example, in a region like North America that was far more aggressively colonized and evangelized than Korea (that, furthermore, was never colonized by Christian countries and where evangelization was not forced at all upon the people), many syncretic religions were founded, but to the best of my knowledge, whenever the founder declared himself to be a prophet or Messiah, he did not decry the biblical Jesus but simply announced he was his incarnation for the Second Coming, or a

new incarnation altogether. One does not see in their agenda, either, the desire to reign beyond the confines of their ethnic group. Korean Messiahs are thus of a specific kind.

Since I started this analysis by referring to the role of Protestantism in the construction of Korean nationalism and of its echo in Victory Altar, I need to return to this proposition. If at least the three Korean Messiahs I mentioned (but there are more of them)¹⁸ built their belief system on the Protestant branch of Christianity and not at all on the Catholic branch, even though it was the first one to penetrate Korea and in recent decades has exerted strong political clout in the country, this is not just happenstance. One reason might be that, unlike in Catholicism, in Protestantism, there is no superstructure constraining power-hungry individuals to remain obedient to the top rung of the ladder, since the movement started in rebellion against such a structure. In Catholicism (with possible exceptions that I am not aware of), the most charisma individuals can display will be exerted either through intimate mystic unions with God and/or the Virgin Mary, and/or they may start a new religious congregation that will either remain within the confine of the Roman Church or outside of it while retaining major Catholic dogmas, or through the self-proclamation of their being the authentic Roman Pope, declaring that the one actually sitting in the Vatican is a fake Pope. In Protestantism, on the contrary, any individual can start a totally autonomous movement based on the biblical narrative. For those who feel like subverting the traditional understanding of the Bible, the exit through the top is possible (declaring oneself as the True Messiah and God) and will not lead to any form of excommunication since no higher moral body exists to judge the firebrand. Moreover, as was said earlier, particularly in its North American version that has traveled to East Asia, Protestantism focuses overwhelmingly on messianism and millennialism, two major channels facilitating the divinization of power seekers.

We could imagine that since Buddhism, Daoism, or even Confucianism offer similar possibilities to start new schools and lineages, individuals who wish to become Korean Messiahs would prefer to operate within such familiar traditions (that have indeed given rise to many new religious movements in Korea). Yet, and in the application of Wallace's revitalization theory summarized in the introduction, these spiritual systems may have been construed by those individuals as not corresponding enough to the new social and political situation, whereas Protestantism revealed from the start how it could be a major agent of modernization and self-aggrandizement with far more universal breadth than, say, Buddhism (in which presidents of orders may exert some political influence nationally but are not all-powerful), thanks to its close association with the United States, the most reliable ally first against the Japanese during WW2 and later against North Korea.

In a most original but not unique strategy, Cho adopted Protestantism because, enriched with local creeds and his constructs, it offered him the perfect vessel to advance his personal messianism as God Victor Christ. In the process, he convinced his disciples that they were the authentic immortal Chosen People ready to enjoy the Pure Land of the earthly paradise. The efficacy of such a religious message is proved by the fact that Victory Altar still sustains today the well-being of thousands of active members.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ This history is famously narrated by Father Dallet ([Dallet 1874](#)), a missionary of the Société des Missions-Étrangères in Paris, which specialized in the evangelization of Asia. For a more recent analysis of the arrival of Catholicism in Korea, see ([Roux 2016](#); for the 19th century: [Roux 2012](#)).

² Exact figures are hard to establish, but the generally accepted percentages in South Korea today revolve around some 50% of the total population being engaged in what we understand as religious practice on the Western model, with some 23–25% Buddhists and about the same for Christians, among whom three quarters are Protestant and one quarter Catholic. Many minority religions

(belonging to the Three Harmonies—Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism—Christianity, or syncretizing several of these currents and Shamanism) account for several more million people as well. Within the Korean diaspora in the United States, percentages of Christians are very high, even if the rate is declining: “59% of Korean Americans are Christian, mostly Protestant—including 34% who identify as born-again or evangelical Protestants”. Some 3% report being Buddhists (Pew Report 2023). For a study of religious practice in South Korea, see (Buswell 2007; Baker 2003, 2008, 2016).

I explained this theory and applied it to Daesoon Jinrihoe, one of the major NRM in South Korea (Rigal-Cellard 2021).

I thank President Bongsoo Yun for his hospitality on October 20, 2017, and his explanations of various doctrinal tenets in the International Academy of Neo-Humans Culture, 175-2 Yokgok-3dong, Sosa-gu, Bucheon, Kyonggi-do. I also thank Gang Hien Han for his help on that day and at many conferences. I thank Massimo Introvigne without whom this article would not exist since he is the one who took Gordon Melton, Holly Folk and myself to Bucheon.

Several historians have analyzed the impact of Protestantism on Korean politics and State formation, in particular Kenneth M. Wells (1990). Timothy S. Lee (2011) also shows that Evangelicalism succeeded in a unique way because of its connection to Korean issues.

This chamber was on the first floor (the single floor above ground level) of a very ordinary suburban house that had more or less fallen into dereliction when I visited it with Gordon Melton, Jason Greenberger, and Massimo Introvigne, who had asked the authorities of the group to take us there. The latter did not seem to care very much about this place, in spite of it having a major sacred function in the history of the group. Clearly, the house was not maintained, either because the movement did not have enough money to take care of it or because it belonged to a more or less active branch. It is visible in Introvigne’s 2017 entry.

Zeichman’s article (Zeichmann 2020) explains the historical grounding of the story and its polemical use: “There is ample evidence that anti-Christian polemicists asserted that Jesus’ true father was neither God nor Joseph, but a Roman soldier named Pantera. This was long dismissed as ahistorical, but for the past century, some interlocutors have argued that there may be credibility to the polemic, with some going so far as to identify Pantera with a certain Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera, a Roman archer. The present article addresses various misconceptions of Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera by those both asserting his parentage of Jesus and those arguing against it. The article concludes that the possibility that the soldier under question was Jesus’ father is remote” (Abstract).

Kwon gives the reference to *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (Dell 1983). As *The Science of Immortality* was published in 1992, those polemics may have percolated into Korea only in the previous decade following the fascination for Baigent *et al.*’s fantasy, or they may have reached the country earlier.

I owe the reference to the sacred dew paintings to Holy Folk who, immediately after our visit to Victory Altar’s headquarters, wrote to us that she saw reproductions of the “Gamnodo” or Sweet Dew paintings in a museum in Incheon airport.

Several Gamno-do paintings are visible on: <https://koreantempleguide.com/gamno-do-the-sweet-dew-mural-%EA%B0%90%EB%A1%9C%EB%8F%84/> (accessed on 20 October 2024).

The prayer meeting took place at 9 a.m. in Bucheon. The attendees were older people. We were told younger people came to the middle-of-the-night or early-morning services, as is the habit in South Korea, where people work long hours and cannot afford to be late for work. The prayer hall was a medium size room on two levels. People knelt on square cushions, Korean style. The most original ritual is the clapping of their hands extremely loudly. They hold their arms up and stretch them to the sides in order to clap as strongly as possible, singing while doing so. The noise is staggering for the foreign observer but probably not so for Koreans themselves since, to some extent, these arm movements resemble those of North Koreans during official celebrations (at least as far as I could see on several videos of such public celebrations). It seems that this type of hand clapping was practiced in the Olive Tree movement. I wondered whether the noise thus produced was meant to replicate the clapping produced by the wooden bak used in Korean court and ritual music to mark the beginning of a musical line. This rapid and strong clapping is also heard in Korean Buddhist services. The exertion Victory Altar devotees must perform with their arms makes up for their immobility on the cushions and corresponds to the need in rituals to engage the body of the practitioner in a fairly painful way, both to offer that pain to the Master and to practice some demanding physical activity in order to remain in good health, one important function of physically elaborate religious rituals. On the Internet, one can watch many videos of Cho’s sermons.

Similar explanations are offered by Lee, Dong Chul, in his *Bright Star...* (Lee 2000).

These 11 years are those separating the founding of the group in 1981 and the publication of the book.

I must say that the first time I was told about this ascendancy, I found it very hard to situate it within the cosmology I was discovering. Yet, once I placed it within the construct of Korean nationalism and messianism, it most clearly appeared “logical”.

The chronological inconsistency between this date and that of the supposed biblical exodus of the Danites is overlooked by Victory Altar.

This founding myth was resurrected by several religious leaders and by historians. In the religious field, it seems that it was Hongam Na, a contemporary of Choe Jewu (the founder of Donghak) who, in order to better implement their general project, decided to restore the Tan’gun myth. This was accomplished in 1909 by one of his successors who founded the nationalist religion Dangunyo (the teachings of Dangun/Tan’gun), whose name became Daejonggyo (Teaching of Great God) in 1910. The other major actors of the revival of Tan’gun were the historians Sin Ch’aeho (1880–1936) and Ch’oe Namson (1890–1957), who wrote *Tan’gunmon*, a historical treatise on Tan’gun, in 1926. Those historians wanted to prove the originality and superiority of

Korean culture over that of its eternally aggressive neighbors, China and Japan. According to Chizuko T. Allen, *Tan'gunnon* "succeeded in bringing attention to the shamanistic tradition hidden in ancient Korean mythology and consequently helped establish Tan'gun as a supreme symbol of Korea's cultural and historical heritage" (Allen 1990, pp. 788–96). Kim Soo-ja concludes his 2014 study of the modern Korean Nation and Tan'gun thus: "The making of the Korean national consciousness was closely related to the process and the way of remembering Tan'gun" (Kim 2014, p. 236).

- 17 The website of the Church gives the 2023 membership in South Korea as 88,607 (for comparison, in France there are only about 36,000 Mormons) and explains: "Beginning in the 1940s, Latter-day Saints serving in the United States military began holding meetings in South Korea, but little preaching was done among the Korean people. In 1951 Kim Ho Jik, who had been baptized in the United States, returned to Korea and began working with servicemen to preach the gospel to those in his country. Even as the Korean War raged, many were baptized. A year after the war ended in 1953, a Korean-speaking Sunday School was organized. By the mid-1960s, thousands had accepted the restored gospel and were working to build the Church in their homeland, and the Book of Mormon had been published in Korean. In 1973 the Seoul Korea Stake, the first stake in mainland Asia, was organized... In December 1985 the Seoul Korea Temple was dedicated" (Church of Jesus Christ 2023). A stake is a Mormon term for a group of congregations.
- 18 There are similar movements in neighboring countries as well, notably in China, where the Church of Almighty God is also built on Protestantism and has produced its own scripture, *The Word Appears in the Flesh*, to replace the Bible that is now passé, since the Second Coming did take place with the incarnation of Almighty God in China, in the body of a woman (see Introvigne 2020).

References

- Allen, Chizuko T. 1990. Northeast Asia Centered Around Korea: Ch'oe Namson's View of History. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 49: 787–806. [CrossRef]
- Baker, Don, and Yuri Kim. 2020. Entry "The Olive Tree Movement". Available online: <https://wrlldrels.org/2020/03/31/olive-tree-movement/> (accessed on 10 March 2023).
- Baker, Donald L. 2003. Modernization and Monotheism: How Urbanization and Westernization Have Transformed the Religious Landscape of Korea. In *Pathways into Korean Language and Culture: Essays in Honor of Young-key Kim-Renaud*. Edited by Sang-Oak Lee and Gregory K. Iverson. Seoul: Pajigong Press, pp. 471–507.
- Baker, Donald L. 2008. *Korean Spirituality*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Baker, Donald L. 2016. The Impact of Christianity on Modern Korea: An Overview. *Acta Koreana* 19: 45–67. [CrossRef]
- Buswell, Robert E., Jr., ed. 2007. *Religions of Korea in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Church of Jesus Christ. 2023. Available online: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics/country/south-korea> (accessed on 17 December 2023).
- Dae, Young Ryu. 2013. Religion meets politics: The Korean Royal Family and American Protestant missionaries in late Joseon Korea. *Journal of Church and State* 55: 113–33.
- Dallet, Charles Claude. 1874. *Histoire de l'Église de Corée*. Précédée d'une Introduction sur l'histoire, les institutions, la langue, les mœurs et coutumes coréennes avec carte et planches. Tome Premier. Paris: Librairie Victor Palmé, éditeur, rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain.
- Flaherty, Robert Pearson. 2011. Korean Millennial Movements. In *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*. Edited by Catherine Wessinger. New York: Oxford UP, pp. 326–47, Chapter 17.
- Han, Gang Hyen. 2017. A Prophet Like Moses in Korea? The Rise and Future of a Korean New Religious Movement (Victory Altar). Presented at the 2017 International CESNUR Conference, Jerusalem, Israel, July 2–6.
- Han, Gang-Hyen. 2022. The 5 characteristics of NRMs in Korea and the Secret of Prophecies. *Journal of Neohumans Culture* 10: 27–76.
- Han, Gang-Hyen. 2024. The Social Role and Secret Code of Prophecy: Focusing on Nostradamus and the Prophecy of Namsago. Presented at the 2024 International CESNUR, Bordeaux, France, June 14.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2017. Entry "Victory Altar". Available online: <https://wrlldrels.org/2017/10/29/victory-altar/> (accessed on 10 March 2023).
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2020. *Inside The Church of Almighty God: The Most Persecuted Religious Movement in China*. New York: OUP USA.
- Kim, Soo-ja. 2014. The Modern Korean Nation, Tan'gun, and Historical Memory in Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century Korea. *International Journal of Korean History* 19: 213–40. [CrossRef]
- Kim, Richard S. 2006. Inaugurating the American Century: The 1919 Philadelphia Korean Congress, Korean Diasporic Nationalism, and American Protestant Missionaries. *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26: 50–76. [CrossRef]
- Kwon, Hee-Soon. 1992. *The Science of Immortality*. Seoul, Tokyo, Washington, New York: Hae In publishing.
- Lanternari, Vittorio. 1950. *The Religion of the Oppressed. A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*. Translated by Lisa Sergio from 1st edition: *Movimenti religiosi di liberta ed i salvezza dei populi oppressi*. Milano: Feltrini. New York: Knopf, 1963.
- Lee, Seunghye. 2023. Salvation Reimagined: Sweet Dew Paintings in Wartime Colonial Korea. *Acta Koreana* 26: 23–54. [CrossRef]
- Lee, Dong Chul. 2000. *Bright Star: If You Want to Live Everlasting Life, First of All Read this Spiritual Book*. Seoul: Haein Publishing Co.
- Lee, Gyungwon. 2016. *An Introduction to New Korean Religions*. Translated by Key Ray Chong. Seoul: Moonsachul Publishing.
- Lee, Timothy S. 2011. A Crucial Factor in Evangelicalism's Success in (South) Korea: Coalescence with Nationalism and Anticommunism. *Religion Compass* 5: 646–55. [CrossRef]

- Pak, Taylor. 2020. Picturing the Divine Agents of Food Bestowal: The Seven Buddhas in the Sweet-Dew Painting of the Chosŏn Period, 1392–1910. *Korean Journal of Art History* 307: 5–33. [CrossRef]
- Palmer, Spencer J. 1967. *Korea and Christianity*. Seoul: Hollym Corporation.
- Pew Report. 2023. October 11. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/10/11/religion-among-asian-americans/> (accessed on 17 December 2023).
- Rigal-Cellard, Bernadette. 2021. Daesoon Jinrihoe analyzed in light of Anthony F. C. Wallace's revitalization theory. In *Religiski-Filozofiski Raksti*. Riga: Latvijas Universitāte, Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, vol. XXX, pp. 134–62. [CrossRef]
- Roux, Pierre-Emmanuel. 2012. *La croix, la baleine et le canon: La France face à la Corée au milieu du XIX^e siècle*. Paris: Le Cerf.
- Roux, Pierre-Emmanuel. 2016. The Catholic Experience of Chosŏn Envoys in Beijing: A Contact Zone and the Circulation of Religious Knowledge in the Eighteenth Century. *Acta Koreana* 19: 9–44. [CrossRef]
- Victory Altar Gorbachev. 2021. Available online: <https://www.victoryaltar.org/victor-christ-saved-gorbachev-just-before-he-was-shot/> (accessed on 10 September 2023).
- Victory Altar Hymn. 2018. Available online: <https://www.victoryaltar.org/hymn-come-to-the-light-of-the-holy-spirit/> (accessed on 13 November 2023).
- Victory Altar Monsoon. 2021. Available online: <https://www.victoryaltar.org/daily-weather-over-summer-monsoon-period-in-korea/> (accessed on 17 December 2023).
- Victory Altar's Official Website. 2021. Available online: <https://www.victoryaltar.org/category/5-great-pledges/> (accessed on 22 June 2023).
- Wallace, Anthony F. C. 1956. Revitalization Movements. *American Anthropology* 58: 264–81. [CrossRef]
- Wells, Kenneth M. 1990. *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea*. North Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Zeichmann, Christopher B. 2020. Jesus 'ben Pantera': An Epigraphic and Military-Historical Note. *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 18: 141–55. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.