



CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH ORIENTATION

1.1 CHOSEN FIELD OF RESEARCH

In this study, I would like to focus on the Christian life narratives of young adults who have non-Christian family members or who live in an otherwise non-Christian family in the Republic of Korea. In particular, I would like to focus on stories of keeping faith by means of the narrative approach.

Various religions coexist in Korean society. Historically, Shamanism, Confucianism and Buddhism have affected Korean cultural traditions. Christianity has been practised in Korea for over 100 years and is considered an integral part of Korean cultural traditions. Several new religions¹ have also emerged in Korea. Against this background of numerous religions, people enjoy the freedom to adopt any religion, without any restrictions being imposed by the state². Choi (1996: 177) refers to this multireligious situation as ‘A Religion Mall’. He draws the analogy of a market where Korean people select a religion from a variety of available options without any oppression from the state. The present author agrees with his interpretation with regards to the particular situation of Korea and will consider this in further detail below. Eun (2001:132) insists that it seems to be difficult to adopt a religion that is

¹ New religions are called *Shinhŭng chonggyo* which means, literally, newly emerged religions in Korea, such as *Chŭngsan*, *T’ongil-gyo*, *Wŏn pulgyo* (Grayson 2002:203-212).

² The Constitution of the Republic of Korea. Chapter 1. General provisions Article 20. (1) All citizens shall enjoy freedom of religion. (2) No state religion shall be recognised, and church and state shall be separated. (Amended on Oct. 29, 1987.)



different from the religious background of one's own family. When a person chooses a religion, s/he tends to consider his/her own family religion and/or the effect on his/her family members. Eun refers to this as the 'Religious identity of the family' (2001:131). In terms of this religious identity, the family is connected to the unique phenomenon of 'Korean familism', where Korean people regard the family, rather than the individual, as the basic unit of society. Thus, the personality of each individual tends to be ignored within the family, while identity and family values are viewed as being more important than the individual member. Furthermore, the value of the family can be extended to the larger society. Within this social mechanism, Koreans tend to consider the religious identity of their own family when choosing and/or converting to a religion even though they enjoy freedom of choice.

In fact, the religious homogeneity within the Korean family is high³, which is understandable within the context of Korean familism. Within marriage, Koreans want to control and/or maintain their own religious identity in the family. Usually they tend to select a spouse with the same religion as themselves and/or their parents. Because of this process, the religious homogeneity within the family may be preserved to some degree.

Against this background, to pursue a religion different from one's family would result in serious trouble and/or conflict within the family. The main cause of dissension stems from 'conversion' to another religious belief. People can control and maintain the religious identity of the family through marriage to some degree,

³ Eun (2001:141) cited the report of the Korean Gallup (1998) that 72% of couples hold to the same religion, or irreligion.



but conversion of the spouse and children after marriage can be troublesome to the family. In particular, conversion to Christianity is contrary to the Confucian tradition of Korea, no matter what the religious identity of the family. A large number of Koreans still tend to consider Christianity an imported and alien religion in actuality, most Christians in Korea, thus, experience difficulties with various Confucian traditions in the family⁴. In Korea, Confucianism has existed as a major cultural tradition since ancient times. Thus, conversion to Christianity can result in greater disagreement in the family than a conversion to any of the other religions.

Within this study, I would like to listen to the stories of young adult believers who are in conflict with their parents, brothers and sisters in this respect. These young adults will be unmarried people; thus, they have not yet become independent from their parents. They are fully grown adults physically, yet still dependent on their parents materially and emotionally with regards to the influence of Confucian traditions and of Korean familism. Parents continue to strictly interfere in the lives of unmarried young adult children with regards to the religious identity of the family, while this interference may also extend to other aspects of the young adult's life. At the same time, the young adult believers might feel some kind of guilt towards their own family members because of their different religious affiliation and the difficulty this causes in their family.

Furthermore, I would also like to concentrate on the church life stories of young

⁴In the study of 'Modes of Cultural Adaptation in Family Relations of Religious Converts: Focusing on contemporary Korean Protestants' by Moon, she explains that the most common difficulties of Korean Christians with non-Christian family members occur with respect to the ancestral rites (2002:58).



adult believers with non-Christian families. Because of their specific faith background, they sometimes feel as though they are being marginalised by other Christians in the church.

1.2 MY CURIOSITY IN TERMS OF THIS CONTEXT

At present, I lead a number of small bible study groups in my church⁵, in which I sometimes meet people who experience similar difficulties in their faith life. They experience tension and/or conflict with a husband and/or their parents in their attempt to maintain their Christian faith. These difficulties could occur in the form of arguments regarding religion, emotional pressures and/or physical punishment. I also endured similar experiences and by means of interviews with those who struggle in this regard, I found that the religious problem in the family not only causes tension or conflict but is one of ‘maintaining faith’. In times of trouble with the family, some people reject their faith, while others continue to struggle with their family in order to maintain their faith while others succeed in evangelising their entire family.

Moreover, after selecting this context for my thesis, I communicated my research theme to certain congregations of my church as well as certain colleagues who are interested in my study. Interestingly, I encountered some common responses from them. Most of the people who have a Christian family found it difficult to understand the theme of this study. However, once I explained the background and necessity of this theme, they understood the purpose of the research. On the contrary, most people

⁵ The church is Pungsunghan Presbyterian Church in Gwang ju si, Republic of Korea.



with a non-Christian family expressed great interest in my topic and wanted to volunteer to be a co-researcher in this research conversation. This indicates that the stories of such situations are marginalised in our faith life and therefore need to be studied.

Through the present research, I would like to draw the stories of Christians who have non-Christian family members into our present life journey. I hope that such people will find meanings in their difficult faith life stories, which could help to open up a number of possibilities for the future, which I expect could lead them to a more satisfied faith life. Furthermore, I anticipate that their marginalised stories will be heard through this research work. I would like to empower these stories to be heard, so to speak. When they have a voice in our society, their discourses will be more evident and this could stimulate new possibilities for deconstructing and reconstructing the latter. This could become a starting point to discover alternative stories which might offer us different view points for understanding the stories of Christians who are struggling with their non-Christian family.

1.3 MY STORY

1.3.1 Becoming a Christian

I started going to church when I was eight years old. Strangely my mother allowed me to do so even though my parents were Buddhists although not enthusiastic followers. Sometimes, my mother went to the Buddhist temple with her children for peace of mind and the sake of the family.



One day, my mother heard about the ‘Sunday school’ which was held at the church closest to our house and decided to send her children there to spend Sundays. Sunday school was just a great idea to keep her children busy on boring Sundays with fun programmes and she trusted that the Sunday school teacher would teach good social ethics to the children. Because of this simple reason, my sister, brother and I could attend ‘Sunday school’ where I spent joyful times learning about so many interesting things, such as, God made the whole world and me; Jesus loves me; Jesus is always with me and protects me. This was attractive news for me and I enjoyed going to church. Unfortunately, my younger sister and brother were not interested in the church and soon stopped attending.

When I was about ten years old, I became a close friend of Jesus. In the meanwhile, our family sometimes went to the Buddhist temple and carried out sacrifices in front of the huge Buddhist statue. Moreover, once or twice a year we attended the ancestral rites which were conducted at the house of the eldest brother of my father. During the ancestral rites, we were required to bow down to several huge tables which were set with various foods for the ancestors of our family. During those times, I felt some guilt with respect to Jesus, but I could not refuse those formalities. I was too young and therefore had no power to refuse ...

1.3.2 ‘I want to go to the church!’

Korean people are very passionate about education. From grade 7, students prepare for matriculation and university and they work hard from early morning until late



evening. My parents were also highly passionate about education. They even moved to another house for the sake of a better education, so that I could enter a famous, highly reputable high school that offered a good education. My parents held high expectations for me while I attended high school, so that they controlled much of my life with regards to my study. During this period, I really enjoyed a good relationship with God and loved Jesus very much. I wanted to know far more about Jesus and I wanted to worship him as often as possible. But my parents thought that a waste of time and they prohibited me from going to church.

Until then, I had been really obedient and a good daughter in my family. I had followed all my parents' directions without any difficulties. They were always proud of me. Unfortunately, I was really enthusiastic about Christianity, which was not just a religion that could make me feel comfortable and good, but rather, encompassed my entire life. I could not reject my faith merely because of the demands of my parents and my studies. Thus, I began to resist the demands of my parents and tried to explain my faith. My parents were shocked by my unexpected behaviour and they seemed to think that the church had spoiled the daughter of which they were proud.

Around that time, the company which my father owned experienced major difficulties. I could not understand the entire situation but some bad things happened in his business and in my family. In particular, my mother believed that those negative events that occurred in our family were the result of the existence of different religions in one family. She often said that to practise different religions in one family was harmful; therefore, I should stop attending church. In fact, she was not Buddhist at the time but nevertheless seemed to think that Christianity was a



different religion and not suitable for our family. She attributed all the difficulties in our family to Christianity.

My parents imposed strict supervision. They physically prevented me from going to church, and applied intellectual and emotional pressure on me to give up my Christian faith. They sometimes prohibited me from going out anywhere on a Sunday. If they discovered any clue that I had attended a church service, I was punished for going. My parents also forced me to attend ancestral rites. I could not own a Bible or have it in my room nor could I go to church for worship. There was nobody to support or understand me in my home, not even in my church. I had to keep my faith to myself. The pain of this situation has remained inside me as an emotional wound in my faith life.

1.3.3 ‘You cannot understand me.’

Sometimes I pretended to go to the library in order to attend worship at the church and read the Bible at school. It was quite difficult and painful to cheat my family.

One day, my church planned to conduct field worship in the park and the pastor asked church members to take a lunch box for the special day. What an impossible task for me! I was hiding from my parents the fact that I attended church, thus, to ask for a lunch box for Sunday might be a very doubtful proposition. Hence, I could not attend the special worship day and was really disappointed. On the Sunday, I just played with my friends. However, my friends in the church misunderstood me. They simply thought that my absence was intentional so that I could play with my other



friends. Actually, I could not explain the reason for this absence to my friends at the church because I thought that most friends in a Christian family could not understand my situation and nor would they want to take my story seriously.

At the age of 19 years old, I could enjoy some freedom of religion because I was a university student. My parents consented to my following a different religion but they still did not allow extra activities in the church such as Bible study and outreach. In fact, they only allowed me to participate in one social activity. They always kept an eye on me and worried about me lest I became a religious fanatic. They believed that the church is needed only for basic social activity. Thus, my church activities were rather limited. In spite of their attitude regarding the church, I was really happy about the limited freedom allowed.

In the church, a friend (23 years old.) with a similar religious background in her family also experienced difficulty maintaining her faith. She was always required to adhere to strict return times when she attended church on Sundays. Sometimes, we noticed that her parents tried to take their daughter home from the church, even during the worship time. They were really upset about their daughter who wanted to be at church for the service. The parents held a really negative attitude towards the church and Christianity. Most of her friends at the church worried about her and felt pity for her. The girl was really embarrassed about the behaviour of her parents, and did not want to comment about the incident at all. Most church friends also felt uncomfortable about her parents, and only mentioned them, out of necessity, with regards to evangelistic work for the non-Christian family.



Similarly, I also could not talk about my difficulties with my parents. Sometimes I could not participate in the worship nor attend the Bible study. Sometimes, I could not attend the outreach or some of the camps organised by the church. Whenever I missed those activities of the church, I could not explain the reason for my absence to the people of the church. In fact, I tried, but most people of the church seemed to have a poor understanding of my specific faith background and thought that I was just pious. Moreover, they generally tried to emphasise my duty to spread the gospel to non-Christian family members. I really did not like that kind of approach for my specific faith situation. I just wanted to share my pain.

1.3.4 The purpose of sharing my story

My story is similar to those young believers interviewed in the current undertaking. I also have non-Christian family members and have endured similar experiences of struggling with family members because of Christianity. I have sometimes shared my stories with the young adults in our research conversations. In doing so, the co-researchers were able to feel some kind of fellowship with me. This helped them to talk about their own stories more actively. I think that the sharing of my story could offer a safe environment in which co-researchers can tell theirs.

Müller, Van Deventer and Human (2001:78) insist: "...the narrative researcher has subjective integrity in mind and strives for participatory interaction". Narrative research does not constitute analysing or generating the subject matter but rather, listening to the stories of these subjects and encouraging them to be heard. In narrative research work, the researcher should therefore be a passionate participant in



order to collaborate with the co-researchers. Through remembering and telling my story, I can better understand the context of this research as well as retain my curiosity during the current study.

Moreover, my story could offer a basic source for the understanding of the stories of my co-researchers and the context of the present research. I will describe the context in detail before relating the subjective stories. Before so doing, I hope that my story will stimulate some measure of curiosity regarding this context as well as provide a basic source for the reader in order to understand the context.

Additionally, I am aware of some difficulties that may occur during my research as a result of sharing my story, mostly connected with the relationship between researcher and co-researchers. Thus, I would like to refer to these difficulties in terms of the relationship between researcher and co-researchers in the next section.

1.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONTEXT AND ME

As mentioned above, the researcher should be an enthusiastic participant in order to collaborate with the co-researchers, the relationship with whom is important. The researcher may influence the unfolding story simply by his or her existence and by listening to the story. Thus, the relationship that develops during the interview situation should be borne in mind (Gilbert 2002:229).

Nevertheless, to judge the stories of the participants on the basis of my personal experience and to have any intention to analyse the stories and/or to generate any



theory as an expert in conducting this research would inhibit or distort our quest to understand our stories more fully and to open up possibilities for the future. “To allow the stories of people and communities to be fully told, the researcher that works from a narrative perspective has to be in a ‘not-knowing’ position” (Müller *et al.* 2001:81). The ‘not-knowing’ position implies the attitude that we can accept and understand the stories of people without any judgement or prior intentions. Sometimes my similar experience within the context might lead me to judge people’s stories and/or interfere in theirs with certain intentions by which I could lead our stories according to my way of thinking concerning the present research. Thus, by adopting a ‘not-knowing’ position, I could maintain my position in the research conversation, while even writing up the study; hence, already, I am not a knower but a prepared participant who is curious to listen to the stories of the co-researchers.

At the beginning of our research conversations, the participants expressed great concern about my story and thus felt satisfied to tell theirs. In such a situation, to ascribe the same value to the stories told by the researcher and the co-researchers is important. In order to prevent a hierarchical position during our conversations, I did not tell mine in advance. Because of my position as a researcher in these conversations, my story could have influenced those of the co-researchers, which would not yet have been told. Furthermore, they might prejudge their stories, be selective and/or think about our stories according to my way of thinking, through listening to mine in advance. Thus, I, tried to reflect on the stories of the co-researchers without any judgement based on my own experience and then to tell my story only to provide a voice in the research conversation as one of the participants.



Moreover, this undertaking is not an objective study that has to be analysed and/or generated by me. I will draw on stories that were told in research conversation by co-researchers and myself and reflect on those at an interdisciplinary level in order to reconstruct them so as to discover their alternative meanings. I will also discuss those alternative findings with the co-researchers, and once again reflect in order to determine future possibilities. I will maintain my position while conducting this research, not as an observer or analyst, but as an enthusiastic participant who collaborates with the stories of the co-researchers and context.

1.5 RESEARCH GAP WITHIN EXISTENT RESEARCH

In our present church life, the stories of these young adult Christians have not been taken seriously. The church tends to concentrate on our individual faith lives, encouraging the Christian family to live their faith more fruitfully and be enriched. Therefore, the voices of the young believers with a non-Christian family may be marginalised in our present church life as well as in their faith life.

In this situation, it was somewhat difficult to find existing studies related to the intended research context. I did come across certain comments on a number of websites and several religious books for Christians with non-Christian family members. Usually they focus on spreading the gospel to non-Christian family members and a non-Christian neighbourhood. One can find a few suggestions for being a good model as a Christian in a non-Christian family on several Christian websites and books. Furthermore, these sources suggest some practical guidelines to engage non-Christian family members in the Christian faith life. For instance, one of

those websites, 'Hanulsungyohye' at <<http://café.daum.net/forheaven2000>>, offers some advice for people with a non-Christian family and organises prayer meetings for the salvation of non-Christian family members. Kim (2004) attempts to relate the painful stories of those with non-Christian family members, but his book focuses on encouraging Christian readers to spread the gospel to their non-Christian family members. Most of these kinds of sources focus on offering guidelines regarding some practical techniques to live together with, and to spread the gospel to, non-Christian family members.

I also found a few research works covering a similar subject to that of mine. In her D. Min thesis, Lee (1998) attempts to improve self-confidence amongst Christian wives and to encourage the mission of communicating the gospel to their non-Christian husbands through Bible study. Eun (2001) analyses the report of the Korean Gallup (1997) in order to explain the religious homogeneity between parents and adult children. He insists that although the religious homogeneity of the parents in a family is quite high, that between the parents and adult children is weak (Eun 2001:161). This indicates the possibility of difficulties in the relationship between parents and their adult children as a result of the different religion which the latter may follow. Moon (2002:83, 84) studied family troubles and modes of cultural adaptation in the family relations of people who convert to Christianity. She conducted a case study with a particular focus on parents and married children. She insisted that the religious tensions among the family members are affected by the Confucian, patriarchal family system of Korea. Thus, when a wife or a married son converts to Christianity, the possibilities of greater tensions can occur in the family.



The above studies take the very first step in researching religious difficulties and/or tensions within the family in the specific background of Korea. Thus many more possibilities for further research exist. In the present study, I would like to focus particularly on religious difficulties between parents and unmarried adult children by using the narrative approach. I will also concentrate on their church life stories in which they feel marginalised because of their specific faith background. In the said research, I do not have any intention to encourage Christians to spread the gospel to their non-Christian family members but I shall attempt to concentrate on their own faith life stories in which they have experienced difficulties in their home and in their church every day because of Christianity.

1.6 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

1.6.1 Multi-religious Society

Korea exhibits unique religious characteristics in comparison with other countries. One of the most noteworthy such characteristic is that a number of religions coexist. If asked to define the major religion of Korea, nobody can answer confidently. Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have influenced the philosophy of Korean society since ancient times, and continue to do so even today. Christianity was also introduced into Korea at the end of the 19th century, owing to the government's open-door policy towards foreign cultures (Institute of Korean Church History Studies 1989:127). As a result, several new religions also coexist with those that are ancient.



In the multi-religious situation of Korea, no one religion takes precedence over another (C S Kim 2002:154). Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity have all influenced Korean culture similarly. According to the '2005 Population and Housing Census Report', 53.1% of the population follow some form of religion in Korea. Within the religious population, the result of the report indicates that 43% follow Buddhism, 34.5%, Christianity, 20.6% Catholic, 0.4% Confucianism, 0.5% Won-Buddhism and 0.1% other forms of religion (Korean National Statistical Office 2005). A common guess would be that Confucianism and/or Buddhism are the dominant religions of Korea, but Christianity, Catholicism and other religions have influenced Korean society to a considerable degree.

Furthermore, 46.5% of the population present themselves as being irreligious (Korean National Statistical Office 2005). When we understand the religious structures and influence within this society, the irreligious people should also be considered, since they have also made a meaningful contribution to Korea.

In the light of this background, it can be said that both the coexistence of religious harmony and of discord among the various religions are evident in Korean society. A number of religions coexist without any restrictions laid down by the government; people can choose any religion for themselves; and religious organizations compete and develop without restraint. These facts suggest religious harmony in Korean society. On the other hand, an uneasy tension exists among the religions. For instance, the Korean government is extremely careful to respect any religious propensity. The birthdays of Jesus and Buddha are both public holidays in the Korean calendar and the government organises religious performances on these days. Certain Korean



politicians attempt to utilise any religious propensity for political gain. Within these religious activities, much can be gained, and likewise, much can be lost. They may enjoy political benefits, but may face major protestations from other religions and those who are irreligious. Thus, the Korean government makes every endeavour to maintain religious neutrality. In the light of the aforesaid, religious discord within the Korean society is possible and indeed evident.

1.6.2 Folk religions of Korea

Shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, the folk religions, have influenced Korean cultural traditions, philosophy and spirituality since ancient times. Over many years, these religions have developed individually and influenced each other. C S Kim (2002:156) points out that one of the characteristics of Korean spirituality is the harmony between various forms of belief. He provides an example of the tradition of harmony between Buddhism and shamanism. For instance, we normally find shamans employing the Buddhist emblem (卍) in their temples. To distinguish between these religious traditions completely in Korean society is rather difficult. For many years, these religions have influenced and considered each other in Korean culture. Therefore, in order to understand the religious background of Korea it is necessary to first understand the characteristics of those Korean folk religions and their influences upon Korean cultural traditions, philosophy and spirituality.

In this chapter, I do not wish to discuss the origin and history of such religions. In order to better understand the Korean religious background, I would rather concentrate on the characteristics of Korean folk religion in comparison to those of

other countries and their influences upon modern Korean cultural traditions and philosophy.

1.6.2.1 Korean Shamanism (*Musok*)

Shamanism refers to a traditional belief and practice concerned with communication with the spiritual world. It includes admiring aspects of nature such as the heavens, animals, rivers, rain and so on. This shamanistic belief can be summarised in terms of three principal religious concerns that comprise the offering of prayers for the prosperity of the land, the curing of disease, and the propitiation of and the sending-off of the soul of the deceased to the next world. Until recently, these functions were performed by the shaman and have remained as diagnostic characteristics of the Korean religious experience (Grayson 2002:21). This shamanic belief and its traditions have altered and developed uniquely in Korea, being known as *Musok*.

The representative practitioners of *Musok* are shamans, of whom there are two kinds in Korea, female shamans called *mudang*, and male shamans called *paksu* (Grayson 2002:218). The female shaman, *mudang*, plays a major role in the shamanic practice, *gut*, when shamans try to communicate with the spiritual world in order to solve the abovementioned three principal concerns of the shamanic belief.

Musok is one of the most wide-spread religions in Korea even to the present day. One typical example of the performance of *Musok*, which is practised by modern Korean society, is that of *Whangsŭ-Megi* for the prevention of fire and water disasters during the forthcoming year in the month of January, the new beginning of the spring season.



The name of the shamanic performance varies from province to province. In some places it is called *Pudakguli*, which means ‘to throw away’ (Lee 1973:272). This kind of seasonal shamanic performance has been practised since antiquity.

In ancient times, *Musok* was one of the methods which could strengthen solidarity and loyalty: thus *Musok* belief and performance was usually practised by rural communities. In modern society, *Musok* has become an individual practice to provide answers to the general problems of life (Lee 2006: 8). People visit shamans to seek answers for the unsolved problems in their lives, to be given a propitious date for a wedding, for relocating, and even for giving birth. Occasionally, the religious performance of *gut* is practised in order to supplicate the deity for tranquillity and happiness in an individual’s life, his/her family and the nation. In this manner, Korean *Musok* has been weakened and has disappeared in certain regions, but the traditions have successfully been retained in modern society (Lee 2006:10). Nowadays, therefore, *Musok* tends to be regarded as one of the cultural traditions of Korea rather than a religion. People believe that the shamanic performance and the practice of the shaman should be retained and carried over to the next generations as a unique cultural inheritance.

1.6.2.2 Confucianism

Most of all, Confucianism has been regarded as a principal foundation of East Asian peoples as regards moral and social values. There have been many opinions which explain Confucianism as a religion or philosophy. In the modern society of Korea, Confucianism has played an important role as a social philosophy rather than a



religion. People rarely represent their religion as Confucian and Confucianism is not listed as an item in the general religious census of Korea (Eun 2001:131). In spite of this fact, it is pivotal to understand Confucianism in order to comprehend the relationships among people, the moral values, and philosophy of modern Korean society.

Park (1992:175) generally defines Confucianism as “... a Chinese way of thought which teaches that one should be loyal to one’s family, friends, and rulers, and treat others as one would like to be treated”. Confucianism focuses on shaping the moral system, the way of life, social relations between husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger, king and subject. Within these social relationships, previous positions always take priority over later ones and possess a respectable moral value. Confucianism formed the foundational system of philosophy in the *Chosŏn* dynasty (1392-1920) and was responsible for its prosperity. Confucianism constituted an important political philosophy of this dynasty in its rule over the country and people. Through this philosophy, the *Chosŏn* dynasty developed royal authority and adopted Confucianism as a basic philosophy so as to maintain public order among the populace.

In modern Korean society, Confucian tradition continues to influence family relationships, political attitudes, approaches to problem-solving and many other aspects of Korean life (Yi & Douglas 1967:43). Its influence is quite widespread, while it is difficult to accurately detect its peculiar characteristics in Korean life. Park (1992:181) mentions that “The most important observance under the strong influence of Confucianism has been ancestor-memorial services ...” in modern Korean society.



This is known as *chesa* in Korea, whether the ancestral rites are performed in the traditional or modern fashion, to welcome the spirits, share prepared food offerings, escort away the spirits at the conclusion of the rites, and/or for those present to consume the food (Grayson 2002:181). It is not simply a memorial service with regard to the ancestors but communication with them as well as an expression of respect towards them at the same time. Some elements of Confucianism are observed as a religion in which people try to communicate with the spiritual world in order to supplicate the spirits for the well-being of the family within *chesa*, but currently, the ceremony of *chesa* is considered more of a necessary moral value.

1.6.2.3 Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced into China from India during the first century A.D. and to Korea officially via China in A.D. 372. It became the state religion between 550 and 664 A.D., and represented the height of prosperity in that the Buddhist monks periodically dominated the rulers. Kings, princes and princesses often became bonzes and a number of temples and statues were built during that period (Conze 1980: 94).

The main teachings of Buddhism concern reincarnation and *karma*. The concept of rebirth is that all unenlightened beings are reincarnated whether they want to be or not. A person can even be reincarnated as an animal, ghost, and another person in a different relationship in the next life. For instance, a person may dislike someone in the present life, but may enjoy a very close relationship with his/her previous enemy, such as becoming the son of this enemy in the reincarnated life. After all, reincarnation emphasises loving-kindness towards all beings (Harvey 1990:38). At



the same time, Buddhism focuses on the present life, which might be different in the next.

The Buddhist teaching of reincarnation is based on *karma*. Park (1992:174) explains that each person must carry his/her own burden of sin and must go alone to the retribution for sin in the concept of *karma*. In particular, the teaching of *karma* was accepted by the royal houses in order to attain a privileged position for the aristocracy (Park 1992:174). Therefore, before the *Chosŏn* dynasty, Buddhism was encouraged as a major political philosophy which could provide a firm support to the social structure. Within these teachings, the goal of Buddhism was to attain a high standard of morality and find one's real ego, which is close to the image of Buddha. In order to overcome the above limitations, the human being needs to be fully enlightened, like Buddha. He knew all that was required to attain final peace, in which he could be an infallible guide regarding spiritual matters (Conze 1980:25). For the purpose of training for the discovery of the real ego (enlightenment), Buddhist temples tended to be built in the mountains, separate from the villages.

Park (1992:173) notes: "In its process of assimilation into traditional religious thought, Buddhist beliefs at the grass-root level were integrated with shamanic beliefs, and ancient folk beliefs were maintained alongside the Buddhist rituals". For instance, references to monks and Buddhist temples commonly occur in ancient literature and folk tales, where monks are frequently viewed as a prophet and/or fortune teller. This example illustrates the shamanic influence upon Buddhism.

In modern Korean society, Buddhism, which is concerned with freedom from the



trammels of ordinary life, seeks the real ego, by means of vigorous participation in political and social activities, and is one of the larger religions of Korea. A number of Buddhist temples have moved from the mountains into urban areas, where schools and hospitals have been founded on Buddhist principles, and new Buddhist social and economic organisations have arisen. Tedesco (2002:135) mentions that “Most progressive Korean Buddhist social leaders view their activities as a re-empowerment or revitalization of their ancient national Buddhist heritage ...”. Because of conversion to Christianity, including Catholicism, in modern society, the influence of Buddhism has been weakened. In this sense, the altered activities of Buddhism can be understood as a response to a need in the modern religious situation of Korean society.

1.6.3 Christianity in Korea

Since Christianity was introduced to Korea in 1882, Christianity (especially the Protestant Church) has experienced enormous growth, along with modernisation in Korea (A E Kim 2002:301, Grayson 2002:155). When Christianity arrived in Korea, it stimulated and enriched social modernisation. With regards to education, the foreign missionaries established and operated schools at all levels, from kindergarten to college. Protestant Christianity informed several key values for political modernisation, such as freedom, human rights, democracy, and equality (A E Kim 2002:301).

Grayson (2002:164) highlights the remarkable ‘church growth’ of Korea in the 1960s. From this point until the end of the century, more than one quarter of the national



population became Protestant. There are many church buildings all over Korea. Most foreigners are astonished by the numerous red cross signs (which represent church buildings) in every village. With the rapid increase of Christianity, it has formed unique characteristics which have been influenced by Korean folk religion. The tradition of the early morning prayer service commonly practised in Korean protestant churches, the minister is seen as a charismatic figure in conservative circles, the extensive content of the preaching that is centred on belief in *kibok*, a wish for blessings in life, are peculiar characteristics of Korean Christianity (Grayson 2002:165). These unique traditions of Korean Christianity have been influenced by folk religions such as shamanism and Confucianism. Grayson (2002:165) explains these traditions as being problematic for adequate Christian nurture and for education, caused by the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea. In spite of some negative aspects, these traditions have contributed to achieving incomparable, passionate faith and explosive growth in a short period of time.

Currently, Christianity plays a major role socially and politically, while at the same time tension exists within Korean society. Moon (2002:1) explains that Korean Christianity has experienced tension in the relationship with unspecified people, who have publicly adopted Korean culture together with the irreligious members of modern society. Christianity is frequently described as being a violent, exclusive religion that opposes Korean traditional religions and culture. In this sense, Christianity faces new difficulties with non-Christian Korean people who regard Christianity as an imported alien religion in modern society.



1.6.4 Unique characteristics of the Korean family

In modern Korean society, the structure of the family has become nuclear, yet the concept of the extended family is still retained. For instance, the vertical relationship within the family and the focus on the harmony of the whole family rather than individual personality, are characteristics that still remain in the modern nuclear family in Korea. In the present section, I would like to discuss several unique characteristics of the Korean family compared with those of the Western family.

The most remarkable characteristic of the former is the emphasis on the family as a whole. The concept of the 'family' differs between Western and Korean societies. In Western society, the family is generally regarded as a basic social unit comprising one or two parents and their children, and individuals possess the reasonable right to pursue their own happiness, whereas Korean society emphasises the family as an entity or organic community. Each member of the family is obliged to contribute to the future prosperity of his or her own family (Kim 2001:140). Therefore, the individual personality of the family members tends to be ignored for the sake of the community of the family.

The above concept of the family as an organic community can be linked with the unique family relationship witnessed in Korea. In order to establish order within the family, it is important to seek prosperity for the family community. The relationship among the family members tends to be vertical. The nature of this vertical relationship is patriarchal thus emphasising the power of the family head which is normally bestowed upon the eldest man in the family. In the modern society of Korea,



this vertical relationship has been weakened by the influence of individualism and democracy. Nevertheless, the tendency of family members to respect and obey the family head and the older members is evidence of the moral values that are retained in the family.

Moreover, Koreans usually experience a very short period, if any, of independent living in their life cycle. Usually, people live with their parents prior to marriage (Shin 2001:136). Therefore, adults continue to live under the powerful influence of their parents.

The above characteristics of the Korean family have emerged in modern Korean society as a unique form of Korean familism.

1.7 SUMMARY

One of the religious characteristics of Korea is that a number of religions coexist, such as Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and several new religions. Against this multireligious background, both religious harmony and discord among various religions coexist in Korean society. Many religions live side by side without any restrictions being imposed by the government; people can choose any religion for themselves; and religious organisations compete and develop without restraint. These facts indicate the religious harmony of Korean society. On the other hand, an uneasy tension can be detected among the various religions.

Within the family, religious harmony and discord may also occur. Normally, when a



person chooses a religion, s/he tends to consider the family religion and/or its effect on the family members, known as the religious identity of the family. In this sense, religious homogeneity within the Korean family can be preserved. Therefore, to adhere to a religion different from that of one's own family will cause serious difficulties and/or conflict within the family.

In the present study, I would like to listen to the stories of young adults who are in conflict with their parents and their brothers and sisters and wish to maintain their Christian faith in this respect. These young adults are unmarried people; thus, they have not yet become independent. Furthermore, I would also like to concentrate on the church life stories of young adult Christians with a non-Christian family. Because of their specific faith background, sometimes they feel as though they are being marginalised from other Christians in the church.