

WORLD CHRISTIANITIES PRIZE ESSAY

Ambiguities in the Search for Christian Unity: The General Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions in Korea, 1905–1912

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The formation of the General Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions in Korea in 1905 with the ultimate objective of achieving church union beyond denominational boundaries is a significant but neglected episode in the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. The council was reorganised in 1912 as the Federal Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions in Korea, which marked a significant shift of ecumenical objectives from institutional union to missionary cooperation. This article examines why and how this change happened and its implications for interpretations of the wider ecumenical movement in the twentieth century.

The search for visible unity among Christians has been understood by Christians in a variety of ways. However, for a large part of the twentieth century the pursuit of institutional union was predominantly perceived as the formal agenda for giving visual embodiment to the oneness of all Christians. Two primary ambiguities can be pointed out in this movement. The first is a tension between the search for denominational and trans-denominational reunions. The pursuit of institutional

CCC = Church of Christ in China; CPMK = Council of Presbyterian Missions in Korea; FCPEMK = Federal Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions in Korea; GCPEMK = General Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions in Korea; KMF = *Korea Mission Field*; MEC = Methodist Episcopal Church; MECS = Methodist Episcopal Church South; MRW = *Missionary Review of the World*; PCC = Presbyterian Church in Canada; PCUS = Presbyterian Church in the United States; PCUSA = Presbyterian Church in the United States of America; PCVA = Presbyterian Church of Victoria in Australia

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union was not just taken beyond denominational boundaries, but also within those boundaries. For instance, denominational families which had experienced divisions in the nineteenth century, such as Presbyterians and Methodists, witnessed movements toward reunion in the twentieth century. This was true in several countries, especially in the United States.¹ However, denominational convergence was often in tension with the objective of attaining trans-denominational reunion and, at worst, hindered it.² The second ambiguity relates to the meaning of ecumenism. While institutional union was mostly interpreted as the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement at the time, if we take a longer historical perspective it is not difficult to find that the church union movement produced plain failures, as well as some marked successes.³ Moreover, since the 1970s the trend toward acknowledging diversity – such as denominational heritage – grew within the World Council of Churches, which had been a main agent of the movement since the council's foundation in 1948. This encouraged it not to impose institutional unification as the ultimate goal, and played a role in the weakening of enthusiasm for the church union movement which had reached its peak in the 1960s.⁴ This longer historical perspective raises a significant question for the general understanding of ecumenism in the twentieth century – does Christian unity necessarily mean institutional merger?

One remarkable case, that of ecumenism in early twentieth-century Korea, sheds significant light on both these ambiguities. The General Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions in Korea (GCPEMK) was founded in 1905 by Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries,⁵ but was reorganised into the Federal Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions

¹ S. C. Neill, 'Plans of union and reunion, 1910–1948', in R. Rouse, S. C. Neill and H. E. Fey (eds), *A history of the ecumenical movement, 1517–1948*, Geneva 1993, 449–54, 496–7.

² D. H. Yoder, 'Christian unity in nineteenth-century America', *ibid.* 254–5.

³ B. Stanley, *Christianity in the twentieth century: a world history*, Princeton 2018, 132–3. The foundation of the Church of South India on 17 September 1947 was perhaps the most notable achievement of the quest for institutional union: B. Sundkler, *Church of South India: the movement towards union, 1900–1947*, London 1954.

⁴ M. Kinnamon, 'Assessing the ecumenical movement', in J. Briggs, M. A. Oduyoye and G. Tsetsis (eds), *A history of the ecumenical movement, 1968–2000*, Geneva 2004, 56–7.

⁵ The first constitution officially adopted at the first annual meeting of the council named this council as the General Council of Evangelical Missions in Korea. However, from the second annual meeting, at which the name was amended to GCPEMK, the latter name was used until the change of the council's name to FCPEMK. Thus, this council's official name should be GCPEMK and this article will refer to it as such: *Minutes of the first annual meeting of the General Council of Evangelical Missions in Korea*, Seoul 1905, 6 (hereinafter cited as GCPEMK, annual minutes, with year: likewise for the minutes of other missionary societies); GCPEMK, annual minutes (1906), 33.

in Korea (FCPEMK) in 1912. This reorganisation marked a notable shift of policy on Christian unity from institutional union to missionary cooperation. As will be highlighted, in this shift the first ambiguity, namely the tension between the drive for denominational union and wider Christian unity, was noticeable. The change was contrary to the overall trend of the ecumenical movement for most of the twentieth century, which moved from practical cooperation in mission toward the search for institutional union. In other words, the case of GCPEMK highlights the second ambiguity by unwittingly challenging the general trajectory of the wider ecumenical movement in the twentieth century. In spite of this, the case of the GCPEMK has been neglected in the study of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. For example, in *A history of the ecumenical movement, 1517–1948*, there is only one reference to the FCPEMK and none to the GCPEMK.⁶ This article will analyse how the GCPEMK was founded with a clear vision for organic union beyond denominational boundaries, why and how the shift to the FCPEMK occurred, and what this signified for the general understanding of Christian unity in the twentieth century.

Western Protestant mission in Korea and the formation of the GCPEMK

The revival movements which swept across the English-speaking world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided Western Protestants with theological and experiential commonalities, such as the necessity for personal conversion and the importance of the proclamation of the Gospel. This led them to two significant achievements. The first was the growth of the overseas missionary movement, the second, the development of the ecumenical movement.⁷ Searching for Christian unity was manifested both in the Western homelands and in the non-Western mission fields. It was most vivid in Asia.⁸ This was because the practical dynamic in Asian mission fields, caused by various indigenous factors, such as the small size of the Protestant community in relation to a nation's population or the unfavourable nature of the environment to Christian mission, functioned as a catalyst for unity by encouraging missionaries to focus less on denominational differences and more on their pan-Evangelical commonalities.

⁶ K. S. Latourette, 'Ecumenical bearings of the missionary movement and the international missionary council', in Rouse, Neill and Fey, *A history of the ecumenical movement, 1517–1948*, 389–90.

⁷ W. R. Hogg, *Ecumenical foundations: a history of the international missionary council and its nineteenth century background*, New York 1952, 1–97; J. Wolffe and R. V. Pierard, 'Europe and North America', in D. M. Lewis and R. V. Pierard (eds), *Global Evangelicalism: theology, history and culture in regional perspective*, Downers Grove, IL 2014, 114–17.

⁸ Latourette, 'Ecumenical bearings', 353.

The Western Protestant mission in Korea began in earnest in 1884. Following missionaries from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), who were the first to undertake missionary work in Korea, Western missionaries from various Protestant denominations set foot in Korea.⁹ From the beginning, the proportion of Protestant missionaries in Korea from Presbyterian and Methodist denominations, especially those from the United States, was notable.¹⁰ For instance, between 1884 and 1910 Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries made up approximately 85 per cent of all Protestant missionaries in Korea.¹¹ Most of them, except for 8 per cent who were Australian or Canadian, were American.¹² The predominance of two denominations and one national background were advantages for unity.

As children of the overseas missionary movement, Western Protestant missionaries in Korea shared theological and experiential common ground with other Western Protestant missionaries of that generation.¹³ These provided a foothold for Christian unity. Furthermore, the socio-political and religious contexts of Korea at the time provided a compelling rationale for unity. Firstly, early twentieth-century Korea experienced a series of national crises: the Russo-Japanese war which ended in 1905, the Protectorate Treaty of 1905 and the formal Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. In facing these events, most of the American missionaries in Korea took an apoliticised stance, following the policy of their home government and mission boards.¹⁴ This facilitated a concentration of energy

⁹ The list of denominations and missionary societies which sent missionaries to Korea and the year of first entrance of missionaries of those is as follows: MEC (1884), PCUSA (1884), PCVA (1889), Anglican Church (1890), PCUS (1892), Ella Thing Memorial Mission (Baptist Church background, 1895), MECS (1896), Plymouth Brethren (1896), PCC (1898), Seventh-day Adventist (1905), Oriental Missionary Society (1907), Salvation Army (1908), Congregational Church in Japan (1909): Society of the History of Christianity in Korea (ed.), *한국 기독교의 역사* [A history of Christianity in Korea], i, Seoul 2011, 135–44.

¹⁰ Kim Sung-tae and Park Hye-jin (eds), *내한 선교사 총람* [A list of missionaries to Korea, 1884–1984], Seoul 1994, 4–5.

¹¹ Byun Chang-uk, 'Comity agreements between missions in Korea from 1884 to 1910: the ambiguities of ecumenicity and denominationalism', unpubl. PhD diss. Princeton 2003, 300. The rest were from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (Church of England), Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventists, Oriental Missionary Society and so on. ¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ryu Dae-young, *초기 미국 선교사 연구, 1884–1910* [Early American missionaries in Korea, 1884–1910], Seoul 2001, 91–103; Rhie Deok-joo, *한국 토착교회 형성사 연구, 1903–1907* [A study of the formation of the indigenous Church in Korea, 1903–1907], Seoul 2001, 69–77.

¹⁴ Kim Seung-tae, '한말 일제침략기 일제와 선교사와의 관계에 대한 연구 (1894–1910)' [A study of the relationship between the Japanese Empire and Protestant

on the common task of evangelisation. Missionaries even perceived these socio-political crises as ‘a wonderful opportunity for evangelisation’ since they thought that they placed the Korean people in ‘a state of unrest’, which might result in the ‘hope that the Gospel offers’.¹⁵ Their efforts to capitalise on such openness resulted in a great emphasis on Christian unity. Secondly, the Great Revival movement swept across Korea from 1903 to 1907. Missionaries and Korean Christians not only found experiential unification across denominational boundaries but also the impetus toward it.¹⁶ Within this dual context, missionaries in Korea made efforts to express Christian unity. The GCPEMK was the most notable example.

The beginnings of the GCPEMK can be traced back to 1905 when James S. Gale of the PCUSA corresponded with Superintendent William B. Scranton of the MEC with a proposal to confer about unity for mission. At the annual meeting of the MEC on the morning of 26 June 1905, this correspondence was read out, and in response a committee for pursuing unity with the Presbyterians in mission was appointed. On the evening of that same day, roughly 150 Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries had a meeting at the home of the MEC missionary Dalzell A. Bunker, presided over by Merriman C. Harris of the MEC.¹⁷ Harris had been elected bishop of Japan and Korea in 1904 and was very keen to promote ecumenical efforts.¹⁸ His Sunday sermon on the importance of unity, preached the day before the meeting at Bunker’s home, provided the missionaries with a ‘fresh impetus’ to search for Protestant unity.¹⁹ Samuel F. Moore of the PCUSA observed that ‘without his encouragement and counsel the movement for union could not have reached its present status’.²⁰ It was probable that Harris’s presence as the chairman of the meeting itself provided a crucial stimulus for the missionaries present. Under his presidency, motions advocating unity in the fields of education, evangelism and medical treatment were passionately discussed and carried.²¹ Furthermore, Superintendent Scranton proposed the establishment of a council of Protestant missions and the formation of a joint committee of Presbyterians and Methodists to prepare for it.²² These motions

missionaries during the Japanese occupation, 1894–1910], *Christianity and History in Korea* vi (1997), 69–72.

¹⁵ ‘The time opportune’, *KMF* ii (1905), 29–30.

¹⁶ ‘Movement for church union in Korea’, *MRW* xxviii (1905), 796.

¹⁷ *Minutes of the thirteenth annual meeting of the CPMK*, Seoul 1905, 20.

¹⁸ Rhie Deok-joo, 스크랜턴: 어머니와 아들의 조선 선교 이야기 [Scranton: the mission of mother and son in Korea], Seoul 2014, 639–40.

¹⁹ S. F. Moore, ‘An epoch-making conference in Korea’, *MRW* xxviii (1905), 691.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 692.

²¹ CPMK, annual minutes (1905), 20–1; *Official minutes of the first annual session of Korea mission conference of MEC*, Seoul 1905, 20–2.

²² Moore, ‘An epoch-making conference’, 692.

were carried and reported to each mission in Korea. In the case of the MEC, this took place at the annual meeting on 27 June, a day after the meeting at Bunker's house, when the MEC approved the foundation of the GCPEMK. In the case of the Presbyterians, it was reported on 11 September to the thirteenth annual meeting of the Council of Presbyterian Missions in Korea (CPMK). This was an organisation representing the four Presbyterian missions in Korea – the PCUS representing southern Presbyterians, the PCUSA representing northern Presbyterians, the PCC and the PCVA, reorganised in 1893.²³ On the following day the CPMK also approved the foundation of GCPEMK with some recommendations.²⁴ On the evening of 11 September Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries were gathered together in the chapel of Ehwa school for girls. At this meeting, the GCPEMK was formally established with the adoption of Scranton's proposal for 'the immediate formation of an Evangelical council, to be composed of representatives of the various Protestant bodies in Korea'.²⁵ At the official first meeting a proposed constitution was established, drafted by a joint committee and defining the name, aim, powers and membership of the GCPEMK.²⁶

The constitution plainly stated that missionaries of 'all Protestant Evangelical Missions which ratify this constitution' could be members of GCPEMK.²⁷ The council also attempted to include 'the representatives of the YMCA, and Bible Societies and independent missionaries'.²⁸ As a result, several representatives of Bible societies became members after the third annual meeting in 1907.²⁹ However, the vast majority of members of the GCPEMK were Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries: they constituted around 65 per cent and 35 per cent respectively of the whole membership (*see* Table 1). These statistics reflected the fact that Presbyterians and Methodists accounted for approximately 53 per cent and 32 per cent respectively of the Protestant missionary population that came to Korea between 1884 and 1910.³⁰ Nevertheless, the extent of GCPEMK's ecumenism, largely confined, as it was, within Presbyterian and Methodist boundaries, meant that it did not live up to its ambitious name which claimed to represent all Protestants.

From the outset the GCPEMK aimed at the institutional amalgamation of denominational churches into one united Protestant Church, beyond

²³ The CPMK was originally founded in 1889 by missionaries of the PCVA and PCUSA. However, it was dissolved in 1890 because of the death of Joseph H. Davies, solely representing the PCVA. As missionaries of the PCUS came to Korea, it was reorganised in January 1893: Society of the History of Christianity in Korea, *A history of Christianity in Korea*, i. 163–4.

²⁵ GCPEMK, annual minutes (1905), 1.

²⁴ CPMK, annual minutes (1905), 12–13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* (1906), 34.

²⁸ W. D. Reynolds, 'Minutes of the first meeting of the executive committee of the General Council of Evangelical Missions', *KMF* ii (1906), 112.

²⁹ GCPEMK, annual minutes (1907), 7.

³⁰ Byun, 'Comity agreements', 300.

Table 1. The number and proportion of members of GCPEMK, 1906–7, 1909–11.

	1906	1907	1909	1910	1911
PCUSA	82	95*	113	113	122
PCUS	24 127	32* 150*	40 178	50 193	53 218
PCC	13 (65%)	14 (66%*)	14 (62%)	17 (63%)	20 (60%)
PCVA	8	9	11	13	23
MEC	44	43	60	61	80 136
MECS	25 69 (35%)	33 76 (33%*)	44 104 (37%)	50 111 (36%)	56 (37%)
Bible societies	–	2 (1%)	4 (1%)	4 (1%)	6 (2%)
Korean	–	–	–	–	2 (1%)
Religious Tract Society					
Total	196 (100%)	228 (100%)	286 (100%)	308 (100%)	362 (100%)

Note. Data gathered from GCPEMK, annual minutes (1906), 3–4; (1907), 6–7; (1909), 3–8; (1910), 5–10; (1911), 5–12. In the minutes of the annual meetings for 1905 and 1908, the list of members of GCPEMK in the year was not recorded.

* In the 1907 minutes, the list of members from the PCUSA and PCUS was somehow omitted. Thus, the 1907 figures for the PCUSA and PCUS are estimates based on the mean between the 1906 and 1909 figures.

mere practical cooperation in missionary work. In the meeting at Bunker's home, a proposal from William D. Reynolds of the PCUS advocating 'the establishment of one Korean National Church' was unanimously adopted.³¹ When the GCPEMK was founded on 11 September, remarks from William L. Swallen of the PCUSA showed the desire for church union among Protestant missionaries in Korea. Swallen gave testimony that he had once felt 'that it was impossible', though he had always favoured union in principle, but 'now he felt differently'.³² With this confidence in the feasibility of union in Korea, he argued that 'There must be mutually a Christian spirit of willingness to make concessions to magnify the essentials and to minimize the non-essential points of difference. There must be not simply a union of forces in educational and medical work, but a real union with only one native church.'³³ This desire for trans-denominational church union was reflected in the constitution of GCPEMK. Article 2 clearly stated that the establishment of one united Protestant Church was the ultimate aim of the council: 'Aim: The aim of this Council shall be cooperation in Mission efforts, and eventually the organization in Korea of but one native Evangelical Church.'³⁴ Practical

³¹ MEC, annual minutes (1905), 21.

³² S. F. Moore, 'Steps towards missionary union in Korea', *MIRW* xxviii (1905), 903.

³³ *Ibid.* 903–4.

³⁴ GCPEMK, annual minutes (1905), 6.

steps were taken to achieve this. It was officially resolved to drop ‘the terms 장로 (Presbyterian), 미이미 (Methodist, North) and 감니 (Methodist, South)’ and to take ‘the name 대한예수교회 (The Church of Christ in Korea) as the name of the united native church’.³⁵ Two separate committees on the ‘harmonisation of polity’ and the ‘harmonisation of doctrine’ were constituted. The two committees submitted positive reports on the feasibility of the foundation of the Church of Christ in Korea, respectively in 1906 and 1907. Highlighting the belief that church polity was not an essential issue, the committee on harmonisation of polity showed their confidence that a new polity could be devised for one united Protestant Church, which would combine the advantages of Presbyterian and Methodist polities.³⁶ The committee on the harmonisation of doctrine reported in 1907 that ‘it finds no difficulty in the way of harmonizing the doctrines of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches in Korea’.³⁷ This committee unanimously suggested the use of a creed devised by the committee on union of the three denominations in Canada (Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational) which would eventually unite in 1925 to form the United Church of Canada.³⁸ When the fourth annual meeting was held in 1908, it was resolved to refer ‘the report of the committee on Harmonization of Doctrine’ to ‘several missions for their consideration and request that the missions report on the same to the General Council’.³⁹ Christian unity, as conceived in the early stages of the GCPEMK, was for a trans-denominational church union which went beyond mere practical cooperation.

On the issue of unity, Korean indigenous Christians were barely allowed a voice. The GCPEMK was exclusively a council made up of male Western Protestant missionaries, which gave only ordained missionaries the right to vote. Although the CPMK allowed the presence of indigenous Presbyterian Koreans in the council from 1901, it was only for purposes of amity, and Korean Presbyterians had no voting powers. In other words, as Harry A. Rhodes of the PCUSA recognised in 1920, ‘the Koreans themselves have not had an opportunity to say officially how they stand on the question of church union’.⁴⁰ The voices of Korean indigenous Christians on the issue of unity were less audible than those of Chinese and Japanese Christians in their own contexts. This reflected the strong hand of missionary paternalism on what was still a very young Church with very few ordained leaders, but also reflected the fact that Japanese imperialism was a significant component in the socio-political background for Korean Christians. Having gained victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, Japan speeded up the colonisation process in Korea. In reaction Korean

³⁵ Ibid. 5. ³⁶ Ibid. (1906), 23–6. ³⁷ Ibid. (1907), 25. ³⁸ Ibid. 25–31.

³⁹ Ibid. (1908), 4.

⁴⁰ H. A. Rhodes, ‘The church union question in Korea’, *KMF* xvi (1920), 96.

nationalism developed. This was different from nationalism in China and Japan which was generally a reaction to Western imperialism: this included the attitude towards Western missionaries and their missions, which were often viewed as associated with Western imperialism. In this sense, Chinese and Japanese Christians not only engaged in public protest against Western imperialism, but also fought against denominationalism, which was regarded as a Western concept, and actively expressed their own desire for church union. However, as Arthur J. Brown, secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the PCUSA, gave testimony in 1909, ‘the problem of [the] relationship’ of Western missionaries and their missionary work ‘to the Native Church, which has become so prominent in Japan and China’, was hardly a problem in Korea.⁴¹ The nationalism of Korean Christians mainly manifested itself in public engagement with the Japanese imperial power, rather than in a critique of denominationalism as a Western concept.⁴² Moreover, Western missionaries in Korea by and large hesitated before delegating even limited authority over the Korean Church to Korean Christians for several reasons—such as their paternalistic attitude towards Korean Christians and their concern about the growth of national spirit among Korean Christians under Japanese imperialism, which seemed contrary to their apolitical position.⁴³ This was yet another factor in the muted voice of Korean Christians on the issue of unity. Nevertheless, there is evidence that Korean indigenous Christians, who appear not to have had a settled concept of denominationalism, were also in favour of the formation of one united Protestant Church in Korea. An unsigned article of 1906 in 그리스도 신문 [Christian News], which reads as if written by a Korean Christian, exemplified this. It confidently stated that Korean Christians favoured one united Protestant Church among three main options for church union: to establish churches following each mission, to form churches representing each denominational family or to found one united Protestant Church.⁴⁴ This article showed that Korean Christians were even praying that missionaries who did not favour church union would change their minds: ‘There are some foreign brothers who think this union is not feasible ... May the Spirit of the Lord change everyone’s hearts from considering the difficulties of the union. Let’s pray for our church to be united as Christ the Lord and

⁴¹ A. J. Brown, *Report of a second visit to China, Japan and Korea 1909 with a discussion of some problems of mission work*, New York 1909, 94.

⁴² Ahn Kyo-seong, ‘Mission in unity: an investigation into the question of unity as it has arisen in the Presbyterian Church of Korea and its world mission’, unpubl. PhD diss. Cambridge 2008, 42.

⁴³ On this attitude and concern see Ryu, *Early American missionaries in Korea*, 197–206, and Min Kyung-bae, *The Church History of Korea*, 2nd edn, Seoul 2017, 319–20.

⁴⁴ ‘하나가 될 것’ [To be united], 그리스도 신문 [Christian News] x (1906), 772.

the Father were united.’⁴⁵ In other words, although Korean indigenous voices on the issue of unity were suppressed, Korean Christians expressed their desire for unity by endorsing Western missionaries’ efforts for the formation of one united national Protestant Church.

The shift from the GCPEMK to FCPEMK

However, the GCPEMK’s movement toward church union was soon to be dramatically weakened. Following the report of the committee on the harmonisation of polity in 1906 and that of the committee on harmonisation of doctrine in 1907, which ambitiously promoted the feasibility of the foundation of a united Church of Christ in Korea, there was no noticeable progress. Although the committee on the harmonisation of doctrine still reported in 1910 that ‘there seemed to be nothing in the way of securing unity’, in reality ‘nothing further had been done’ since 1907.⁴⁶ The committee on the harmonisation of polity even made a frustrating report in 1910 which indicated a virtual renunciation of church union. In the report, the committee suggested focusing on agreement on attainable issues of polity, such as ‘transferring the members from one church to another’, rather than proposing an ideal form of church polity for one united Protestant Church, which was perceived as impossible.⁴⁷ By adopting this suggestion, the GCPEMK’s movement for church union virtually came to a halt. Owing to a retreat from the original vision, a readjustment of the GCPEMK itself was necessary. For this, a committee on making the general council a delegated body was appointed in 1910.⁴⁸ When the seventh annual meeting of the GCPEMK was held in September 1911, the committee presented an amended constitution which proposed the formation of the FCPEMK, and this was adopted.⁴⁹ Its constitution stated that the FCPEMK would support ‘the original aim of the General Council, viz. the eventual organization of but one native church in Korea’.⁵⁰ In reality, this was merely nominal, because there was no longer power to deal with the issues of polity and doctrine. The constitution stated that the FCPEMK officially had ‘no authority to draw up a common creed or form of government or worship or in any way to limit the full autonomy of the Christian bodies adhering to it’.⁵¹ In other words, by becoming a federal rather than a general council, the nature of unity manifested through GCPEMK was changed from institutional union to practical cooperation.

⁴⁵ ‘외국 형제 중에 합하기 어렵다고 생각하시는 이가 혹 있으니 ... 주의 성신이 전능하신 권력으로 모든 사람의 마음을 감동 시키사 합하기 어렵다 하는 생각은 다 없이하여 주옵시기를 원하며 구주님과 아버지께서 하나되신 것처럼 우리 교회도 하나되기를 위하여 간구하옵시다’: *ibid.*

⁴⁶ GCPEMK, annual minutes (1910), 14–15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 21–2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (1911), 22, 39–41

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 40.

Why did the shift from the GCPEMK to the FCPEMK, and thus, from institutional union to practical cooperation, occur? Among several factors, one of the most noticeable was the ambiguity in conceptions of unity among Evangelical Christians. Evangelical Christians' search for unity had always manifested itself through an ambiguous blend of denominational and pan-Evangelical identities. The Evangelical movement had individualism, an ideological heritage of the Enlightenment, as its key characteristic and, as Andrew Walls has pointed out, this characteristic had the potential to be actualised in 'societal and ecclesial atomization'.⁵² However, the rapid expansion of Protestant mission both at home and in the foreign mission fields in the nineteenth century moved Evangelical Christians to establish structures of mutual support and co-operation that would facilitate a united response to this missional situation. Their pursuit of a united mission strategy was manifested within both denominational and trans-denominational boundaries. The creation of national denominational structures was one example of Evangelical Christians' attempts to express Christian unity within denominational boundaries. For instance, the Baptists in the USA, who were both localised and independent, started to co-operate in organising ways to spread the Gospel at home and around the world. Their efforts resulted in the formation of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Mission in 1814 (the Baptist Triennial Convention).⁵³ However, once denominational structures were constructed, the result was denominational centralisation and a strengthening of denominational allegiance, which often heightened tension with other manifestations of Evangelical ecumenism beyond denominational boundaries. The growing denominational centralisation of Protestantism, which kept in check the potential liabilities of Evangelical individualism, paradoxically restricted more extensive attempts at trans-denominational unity. This ambiguity was apparent in the shift from the GCPEMK to the FCPEMK and from institutional union to practical cooperation.

The GCPEMK and its pursuit of one united Protestant Church was an exemplar of Evangelical ecumenism beyond the boundaries of the Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. The distinct missionary context in Korea catalysed this.⁵⁴ William D. Reynolds, who proposed the single united Protestant Church at the meeting at Bunker's home, was

⁵² A. F. Walls, 'The eighteenth-century Protestant missionary awakening in its European context', in B. Stanley (ed.), *Christian missions and the Enlightenment*, Grand Rapids, MI 2001, 30.

⁵³ M. A. Noll, *A history of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, London 1992, 179.

⁵⁴ 'A notable movement in Korea' and 'Missionary union in Korea', *Korea Review* v (1905), 249–50, 343–4.

an illuminating example. He was a PCUS missionary representing Southern Old School Presbyterians, who were originally more conservative than the PCUSA and thus would have been more likely to hesitate over the formation of one united Protestant Church in Korea. In fact, on the day of the formation of GCPEMK, Reynolds observed that 'before coming to Korea' he had even opposed 'union with the Presbyterian Church (North)'.⁵⁵ However, he went on to say that 'since coming to Korea' he thought 'he had been in a different atmosphere' and now desired a 'real union of all Evangelical denominations, and organic union for the native Church'. Southern Presbyterians at home were gradually moving away from conservative sectionalism in that period, and more so in overseas mission fields such as Korea.⁵⁶ Reynolds's proposal on the formation of a united Protestant Church was a noticeable example of that.

However, the impetus towards Evangelical unity among Protestant missionaries in Korea, as in North America, was also manifested within denominational boundaries. The reorganisation of the CPMK in January 1893, and its search for the establishment of one united Presbyterian Church in Korea exemplifies this. In September 1901 the CPMK formed the Committee on Church Government to prepare for the establishment of one united Presbyterian Church.⁵⁷ One year later the CPMK decided to 'request its Board of Missions' at home 'for liberty to co-operate in the organization of an independent Korean Presbyterian Church'.⁵⁸ Receiving approval from the mission boards of the PCUSA and the PCUS in 1905, the CPMK resolved to proceed with the plan for forming one united Korean Presbyterian Church that had been adopted in 1902.⁵⁹ The discussion about forming one united Protestant Church through the GCPEMK began in precisely this context. The four Presbyterian missions in Korea had to decide what their priority should be, and the resolution at the annual meeting of the PCUSA in 1906 showed what this was to be: the formation of one united Presbyterian Church came first:

Your Committee ... would recommend that as for obvious reasons the Mission would be unable to make much progress toward securing organic union of the native church before the organization of the Independent Korean Presbyterian Church next year, and as after that Church is established, it would have full and independent authority to act in this matter, it would be the better policy for our Mission as a Mission to take no action in the Matter, but to commend the

⁵⁵ Moore, 'Steps towards missionary union', 904.

⁵⁶ Lee Jae-keun, 'American southern Presbyterians and the formation of Presbyterianism in Honam, Korea, 1892–1940: traditions, missionary encounters, and transformation', unpubl. PhD diss. Edinburgh 2013, 47–72.

⁵⁷ CPMK, annual minutes (1907), 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

subject for careful consideration to those of our members who shall be members of the Independent Korean Presbyterian Church of Korea.⁶⁰

The notable success of the Presbyterian missions in Korea after the 1905 national crises stimulated this decision.⁶¹ Once the prioritising of the foundation of a single Korean Presbyterian Church had been determined, the issue of establishing one united Protestant Church was deferred to members of the planned united Korean Presbyterian Church.⁶² In other words, as early as 1906, just a year after the formation of one united Protestant Church had started to be discussed, this aim was being officially overshadowed by the CPMK's plan to found one united Presbyterian Church, a denominational manifestation of Evangelical ecumenism.

The home mission boards which had authority over key issues, such as any increase in workers and funds, exerted a powerful influence in this process. After the formation of GCPEMK, the reaction of the home mission boards was a primary concern for missionaries in Korea. Some were optimistic: 'We realize that the consent of the home boards is necessary before such union can be consummated, but we can not think the board will object to what is so manifestly for the advancement of the cause.'⁶³ Others cautiously anticipated objections from home, but they believed that unity was God's way and hoped that the Churches at home would learn from what was happening in the field.⁶⁴ However, the reaction from the mission boards at home was pessimistic. For instance, Samuel H. Chester, a secretary of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions of the PCUS, expressed perplexity at the idea of church union. Based on denominational differences of polity and doctrine between Presbyterianism and Methodism at home, he questioned what form a united Protestant Church in Korea could take:

The extent to which they propose to carry the idea of church union strikes us as somewhat startling. What is to be the form of government of the 'Church of Christ in Korea?' What deliverance will the creed of this new church contain, or will it contain any deliverance at all on those points concerning which the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in this country hold different views? ... The only word of caution we would utter is that church union in Korea or

⁶⁰ *Minutes and reports of the twenty-second annual meeting of the Korea mission of PCUSA*, Seoul 1906, 26.

⁶¹ Society of the History of Christianity in Korea, *A history of Christianity in Korea*, i. 213–14; L. George Paik, *The history of Protestant missions in Korea, 1832–1910*, 4th edn, Seoul 1987, 382.

⁶² H. A. Rhodes (ed.), *History of the Korea mission Presbyterian Church USA, 1884–1934*, Seoul 1934, 453–4.

⁶³ Moore, 'An epoch-making conference', 692.

⁶⁴ 'Missionary union in Korea', 344.

anywhere, attained by ignoring or obscuring in a creedal statement vital points of doctrine ... will be attained at too great a cost, and be of very temporary duration.⁶⁵

However, he also acknowledged the desirability of making mission fields 'receive Christianity in a less divided form than which prevails' in the USA.⁶⁶ In this sense, he 'hoped to see' the establishment of one united Presbyterian Church in Korea, for which there were precedents in Japan and China, but with the recommendation that there should be a 'somewhat more definite' creed for the Church than 'the creed of the "Church of Christ in Japan"'.⁶⁷ This response displayed a paradoxical tension between two different manifestations of Evangelical ecumenism – denominational or trans-denominational – namely, the establishment of one united Presbyterian Church, and the goal of forming a single pan-denominational Protestant Church. Chester favoured the establishment of one united Presbyterian Church, which satisfied both the demands of denominational loyalty and Evangelical ecumenism, over that of one united Protestant Church, corresponding to trans-denominational Evangelical ecumenism. Such pressure from the Presbyterian mission boards, which recommended the former and were wary of movement for the latter, pushed Presbyterian missionaries in Korea to prioritise their plan for the foundation of one united Presbyterian Church over that of one united Protestant Church. Furthermore, when the first presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Korea was finally formed on 17 September 1907, it wittingly or unwittingly became a bar to the materialisation of one united Protestant Church.⁶⁸ For Presbyterian missionaries, a single native Church with an obvious denominational identity served as an incentive to focus more on denominational affairs and accordingly to make less of an effort for the establishment of one united Protestant Church in Korea. Meanwhile, the birth of the presbytery strengthened the anxiety of Methodist missionaries in Korea and mission boards at home with regard to any organic church union of Presbyterians and Methodists. Their concern was that the establishment of one united Protestant Church in Korea would simply mean the absorption of Methodist Churches into a Presbyterian-dominated Church, which would mean breaking the link with Methodist Churches at home.⁶⁹ For instance, in a letter to Stephen A. Beck of the MEC on 22 November 1905, Adna B. Leonard, the secretary of the missionary board of the MEC, showed clear disapproval of church union without consent from the board. He stressed that the Methodist Church in Korea 'cannot be merged into one

⁶⁵ S. H. Chester, 'Church union in Korea', *The Missionary* (1906), 207–8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 208.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 207–8.

⁶⁸ Rhodes, *History of the Korea mission*, 453–4.

⁶⁹ C. A. Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius methods*, New York 1930, 135.

organization without the consent of the governing bodies here. No steps should be taken that obliterate our denominational existence in Korea'.⁷⁰ In the same vein, the proposed constitution by the committee on making the general council a delegated body pointed out that the birth of indigenous churches—one united Presbyterian Church and an independent MEC Church organised in 1908—was the main cause of the shift from GCPEMK to FCPEMK. It reported that 'The establishment of the native churches has changed the scope of the work coming under the consideration of this body, ... we realize that the carrying out of this aim has now passed into the hands of some of the Korean Churches.'⁷¹ The search for Evangelical unity within denominational boundaries coexisted ambiguously and uneasily with that beyond the boundaries. As illustrated by the CPMK's pursuit and accomplishment of a single united Presbyterian Church, it simultaneously frustrated the GCPEMK's goal of one united Protestant Church.

In the case of Methodist missions in Korea, institutional expressions of Evangelical ecumenism within denominational boundaries were less noticeable than among Presbyterians. Unlike Presbyterians, Methodist missionaries in Korea did not have a missionary council. Institutional union between the Korean churches of the MEC and those of the MECS was not accomplished until 1930, roughly twenty years after its Presbyterian counterpart. However, the tension between two different manifestations of Evangelical ecumenism was observable among Methodist missions in Korea too. Methodist mission boards showed disapproval of the movement for establishing one united Protestant Church because it was regarded as the institutional absorption of Methodist churches in Korea within a much larger Presbyterian Church. This sort of disapproval also existed among Methodist missionaries themselves. Superintendent Scranton of the MEC, who proposed to establish the GCPEMK, is a good example of this. While endorsing missionary cooperation through the GCPEMK, he expressed considerable concern at the movement for trans-denominational church union within the GCPEMK for reasons similar to those of the mission boards at home.⁷² Such internal and external disapproval led Methodist missionaries in Korea to resolve in 1906 not to pursue organic union with other missions.⁷³ But, as in the case of Presbyterian missionaries, they did pursue denominational reunion. Immediately after the resolution to disapprove organic union with other missions, they resolved that 'there should be but one Methodist Church in Korea, and this should be accomplished by uniting the two Methodist bodies in one

⁷⁰ A. B. Leonard to S. A. Beck, 22 Nov. 1905, cited in Byun, 'Comity agreements', 225.

⁷² Rhie, *Scranton*, 639–43, 665–80.

⁷¹ GCPEMK, annual minutes (1911), 39.

⁷³ MEC, annual minutes (1906), 81.

organic whole at the earliest possible moment'.⁷⁴ Owing to disapproval at home, this was not immediately realised, but Methodist missions in Korea did start to discuss the foundation of one united Methodist Church from 1906. As a result of efforts to unite theological education, the Hyupsung Theological Seminary, called the Union Theological School of two Methodist mission societies, was established in 1907. So, although less evident than among Presbyterians, institutional manifestations of Evangelical ecumenism through a common denominational identity were evident among the Methodists too. This dynamic came into confrontation with pan-Evangelical expressions of unity, especially the goal of establishing a single united Protestant Church.

From institutional union to practical cooperation

Although the establishment of one united Protestant Church was not accomplished, the GCPEMK achieved missionary cooperation in various other ways. For instance, in publications, the respective periodicals of the Presbyterians and Methodists, the *Korea Field* and the *Korea Methodist*, were integrated as the *KMF* in 1905 and was jointly issued by the two denominations. *Christian News*, an inter-denominational newspaper, was born in 1906 as a result of the integration of the Presbyterians' *Christian News* and the Methodists' *Christian Advocate*. This was renamed the *Church Herald* in 1907 and was published until a decision was made to issue separate Presbyterian and Methodist journals in 1910. Hymnals had been prepared for separate publication by the Presbyterians and Methodists, but in 1908, through the efforts of GCPEMK, a single *Union Hymnal* for both Presbyterians and Methodists was published. In education, through the GCPEMK, the Union School for secondary education in Seoul was formed by amalgamating the Presbyterian Paichai School and the Methodist Kyeongsin School. The Pyeongyang Union College, now Soongsil University in Seoul, was also founded with a joint faculty of Presbyterians and Methodists. There was also collaboration in the production of Sunday School literature, jointly edited and published through the GCPEMK. The GCPEMK also facilitated agreement on a territorial division between four Presbyterian and two Methodist mission societies which was agreed in broad outline in 1909. Bishop Harris of the MEC, the only correspondent from Korea to submit evidence to Commission Eight of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, proudly reported missionary cooperation in Korea, particularly the territorial agreement and

⁷⁴ Ibid.

growing co-operation in the field of education.⁷⁵ In sum, as one article in the *KMF* in 1910 indicated, though ‘union was not accomplished ... united understanding’, especially of practical cooperation, ‘was accomplished’.⁷⁶

In 1919, following growing the fervour for church union in the optimistic environment of the USA after the First World War, the formation of one united Protestant Church began to be discussed again among Protestant missionaries in Korea. However, the discussion at the time was not comparable with that undertaken by the GCPEMK. Firstly, while the movement for organic church union by the GCPEMK appeared to have the support of Korean indigenous Christians, the later movement did not, for several reasons, such as increasing conflict between Korean Christian leaders and missionaries over the missionaries’ apolitical stance.⁷⁷ Secondly, whereas in the earlier movement several efforts at an institutional level, such as the organisation of the two separate committees for harmonising doctrine and polity, were pursued in order to promote trans-denominational church union, the later movement was not supported by such efforts. It was not even properly discussed within Korean Presbyterian and Methodist Churches.⁷⁸

Approximately thirty years after the last discussion on pan-Protestant church union, Korean Protestant Christians quite unexpectedly witnessed the birth of one institutional Church. That was because of the establishment in July 1945 of the Chosen (Korean) Division of the United Church of Christ in Japan, which united most Korean Protestant Churches.⁷⁹ This was accomplished, ironically, as a result of Japanese imperialism, rather than of Protestant Christians’ own efforts. The move ran parallel with ecumenical movements in Japan and China. In Japan, as early as the late nineteenth century, there was an attempt to establish inter-denominational church union beyond practical cooperation in mission.⁸⁰ Though discussion did not bear fruit at the time, the issue re-emerged in the early twentieth century. Later discussion produced

⁷⁵ World Missionary Conference, *Report of commission*, VIII: *Co-operation and the promotion of unity*, Edinburgh 1910, 194–5.

⁷⁶ ‘The quarter centennial’, *KMF* vi (1910), 17.

⁷⁷ Rhie Deok-joo, ‘한국 교회 연합운동의 역사적 흐름’ [The history of the union movement of the Korean Church], *Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea Newsletter* xxiv (1996), 9–10.

⁷⁸ Society of the History of Christianity in Korea (ed.), *한국 기독교의 역사* [A history of Christianity in Korea], ii, Seoul 2011, 73.

⁷⁹ This ecumenical organisation lasted only until 1946 when the decision to restore each of the previous denominational systems was made by Korean Protestant leaders after independence from Japanese imperialism in 1945. For this organisation see Suh Jeong-min, ‘일제 말 일본기독교조선교단 형성과정’ [The formation of the Chosen Division of the United Church of Christ in Japan during the late Japanese colonial period], *Christianity and History in Korea* xvi (2002), 71–100.

⁸⁰ O. Cary, *A history of Christianity in Japan*, New York 1909, 193–5.

several important results at an institutional level, including the formation of a joint committee of representatives from twelve denominations in 1930 and the drawing up of a provisional draft for church union in the same year.⁸¹ However, this movement did not secure church union which was instead imposed by the imperial state. The Religious Organisation Law enacted in 1939 made it hard for some denominations to survive as it granted legal licences only to denominations with over fifty churches and 5,000 baptised members.⁸² Furthermore, the Ministry of Education strongly urged Protestant Christians to establish one Protestant denomination. The result, in June 1941, was the birth in Japan of the United Church of Christ, which most Protestant denominations joined. In China the movement toward church union was observable in the early twentieth century. This resulted in the official foundation of the Church of Christ in China (CCC) in October 1922, which consisted of sixteen denominations (mostly Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist).⁸³ However, the CCC was not the organic union which Chinese Christians originally intended, but was rather a federation. Moreover, from the 1920s, when antipathy against Christianity in the socio-political sphere and theological debates between fundamentalists and modernists, were growing, the ecumenical drive among Chinese Protestants began to weaken and the church union was fractured. For instance, because of its embrace of modernists, fundamentalists broke away from CCC and founded their own ecumenical organisation, the League of Christian Churches, in December 1929. Ultimately, Chinese Protestant Christians, like those in Japan, came to institutional church union in an unexpected way: in 1954 the Three-Self Church was formed forcibly by the Communist state which had come to power in 1949. In other words, in two East Asian nations, as in Korea, a vision for organic church union was eventually realised by the coercive power of the state, and not at Christians' own initiative. This places a question mark against the tendency of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement toward institutional union.

The case of GCPEMK underlines two major ambiguities in the pursuit of Christian unity in the twentieth century. Firstly, it shows how the search for the reunion of separated Churches within one denominational family intersected with the wider search for pan-Protestant reunion. A primary reason for the shift away from this wider goal was the fact that the formation

⁸¹ Ibid. 414.

⁸² Neill, 'Plans of union', 460–1; Ebisawa Arimichi and Miyakoda Tsunetaro, 'Japan, movement toward church union in', in S. W. Sunquist, D. Wu Chu Sing and J. Chew Hiang Chea (eds), *A dictionary of Asian Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI 2001, 414.

⁸³ On this organisation see Xiaojing Wang, 'The church unity movement in early twentieth-century China: Cheng Jingyi and the Church of Christ in China', unpubl. PhD diss. Edinburgh 2012.

of one united Presbyterian Church in Korea became the more immediate priority for Presbyterian missionaries, who constituted the majority of Protestant missionaries in Korea. Paradoxically, the consequence was the promotion of denominational allegiance among both Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, which served to weaken the impetus for a broader ecumenical union. Secondly, the case of GCPEMK highlights an ambiguity in the understanding of ecumenism itself. The GCPEMK's substitution of the more limited goal of missionary co-operation for institutional church union was in opposition to the general trajectory of the wider ecumenical movement in the twentieth century towards institutional union. Thus the GCPEMK was unintentionally challenging the prevailing interpretation of ecumenism in which institutional union was the ultimate goal.

The ecumenical movement, as expressed through the GCPEMK, was mostly an expatriate movement led by ordained missionaries. Its local impact was muted. A territorial agreement divided the nation into regional blocks, each assigned to one missionary society.⁸⁴ Under these circumstances, most ordinary Korean Christians had little first-hand experience of meeting Protestants from other traditions, except for in a very few urban centres where there was more than one missionary tradition, such as Seoul, or on particular occasions like united revival meetings. The foundation of one nationwide Presbyterian Church provided local Presbyterian leaders who took part in regional or national synods with exposure to those from other localities. However, this exposure was limited by denominational boundaries, and was restricted to a relatively small number of Korean Presbyterian leaders. Furthermore, the voices of indigenous Korean Christians on the issue of unity were largely muted. These voices were less audible than those of Chinese or Japanese Christians in the same period. This can be attributed to the stronger hand of missionary paternalism over the infant Korean Church, and the different accent that Christian nationalism assumed in Korea. This was directed primarily against Japanese colonialism rather than against Western influences, which indigenous Christians in other parts of Asia perceived to be the source of denominational divisions. However, the 1906 article in *Christian News* does suggest that Korean indigenous Christians expressed support for GCPEMK's attempt to found one united national Protestant Church. If this enthusiasm was truly widespread, the failure of missionaries to live up to their original commitment is highlighted. The general absence of Korean Christian voices or participation was a clear limitation on an ecumenical movement led by ordained Western missionaries. Although appearing to be initially supportive of the efforts to form a national Protestant Church, Korean Christians increasingly followed their

⁸⁴ On the full process of comity agreement in Korea and its ecumenical implications see Byun, 'Comity agreements'.

missionaries in prioritising the consolidation of denominational allegiance that resulted from the *rapprochement* between different missions within the same denominational family.