

# **The Structure and Characteristics of Sunday Worship in Korean Protestant Churches: Focusing on the Korean Methodist Church\***

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The purpose of this paper is to show the structure and characteristics of Korean Protestant Sunday worship by analyzing Sunday worship at Daesin Methodist Church. I focus on the space and time of the Sunday worship. In this perspective, Sunday worship shows the arrangements of symbols and the division of space and time that are designed for the hierarchical structure of the church and the pastor's sermon. I suggest that the hierarchical environment of the church has been constructed partly by the influence of Confucianism.

Keywords: structure, space, time, hierarchical structure, Sunday worship, ritual experience

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to show the structure and characteristics of Korean Protestant churches by analyzing Sunday worship at Daesin Methodist Church.

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\* Funded by the Korea Research Foundation (2005-079-AS0071). I am thankful to Prof. James H. Grayson and Prof. Pori Park for their valuable comments about this paper when it was presented at the Korean Religions Group of the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Washington D.C., U.S.A., Nov. 18-21, 2006. Also, thank you to Prof. Kim Jongmyung, the research team supervisor. And I am especially thankful to Rev. Dwala Ferrell and Rev. Michael Watts. They have always made me think of what Christianity is and should be and given me the strength that I need.

Sunday worship, a basic ritual of Protestant churches, has an important meaning not only to Methodist churches but also to other Christian denominations. In Protestant churches, worship means “a behavior of modest perception and praise of humanity for God’s nobility” (Eun Chun Gwan 1972: 46). Furthermore, worship functions as a social network between church members (Kim So Yeong 1990: 50).

The structure of Sunday worship provides the framework to the ritual elements and gives it its meaning. In other words, it is a system that composes the subject, object, time, place, and gesture of Sunday worship (Lee Eun Bong et al. 1998: 78). In the case of Protestant churches, Sunday worship is a system of behaviors where church members listen to God’s word and admire and praise him. Therefore, the structure and characteristics of Sunday worship can be found when examining the framework which gives order to ritual elements and makes processes of the ritual (Turner 1974: 36). This can be achieved by focusing on space, time and hierarchical order.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I emphasize that the framework of Sunday worship is composed of the ideological pole and the physiological pole. According to Victor Turner, the ideological pole means normative values of moral facts like kindness to children, reciprocity, generosity, and respect for elders, while the physiological pole means the phenomenon of blood, sexual organs, birth, and death relating to desire or appetite (Turner 1967: 28, Turner 1974: 55). We can find an exchange of these two poles in Sunday worship.

From this perspective, I will show the space of worship, arrangement of ritual elements, and the meaning of the elements. Second, I will examine the structure of the ritual time and its significance by segmenting the worship. Third, I will show how the Sunday worship of Protestant churches is faced with the situation to transform the form and content in regards to ritual experience.

The method of this work is based upon participant observation at Daesin Methodist Church, a Korean Methodist church. This Methodist church was selected for the following reasons. First, the Korean Methodist Church is one of the main denominations along with the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Both began evangelizing Korean society at the same time and were affected by foreign missionaries, especially from the United States. And in the early missionary periods, western missionaries of Presbyterian churches and Methodist churches sought to cooperate for evangelization of Korean society. Under the effect of the

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1. This insight came from the examination of liturgy by Roy A. Rapaport (1999: 178).

western missionaries, Methodist churches and the Presbyterian churches show the same anti-ritualism as western Protestant churches historically do. And instead of making diverse rituals according to their own creed, they have sought to evangelize Korean society and are more concerned with church growth and social issues. Therefore, there is little difference between Presbyterian churches and Methodist churches in Korea. Second, there is the utilitarian reason of obtaining information about ritual from church members since Daesin Methodist Church provided me an environment for performing my research.<sup>2</sup> I also did field work at other Protestant churches, i.e., Chungdong First Methodist Church, Manna Methodist Church, Bundang Chungang Presbyterian Church, and Hansin Presbyterian Church. While I will focus mainly on Daesin Methodist Church, I will also utilize these other churches for analyzing the Sunday worship of Protestant churches.

## **The Symbol Arrangement and Space of Sunday Worship**

Daesin Methodist Church is located near downtown Seoul around some university campuses. It was established on about 1322 m<sup>2</sup> lot donated by Ewha Woman's University in 1957. The building lot was extended to 2148 m<sup>2</sup> in 1980 and some parts of the building were renovated in 2004. Now the brick building has a basement and two floors, and parking space. The number of church members is about 1,000 and approximately 600 members attend Sunday services: the first worship (7:30 a.m.) and the second worship (11:00 a.m.). There are three pastors at Daesin Methodist Church.

The church building is divided into three sections. The basement is used as a dining room and contains a small room for worship. The first floor has office space for the pastors and church management and a small library. The second floor is used for worship. The church also has a yard for members to meet each other. The church building faces the road. There are three ways to access the church: two are connected with the front entrance of the church and the other is connected with the back gate. Sacred space is not only defined as the church building but also the access to the church is considered a sacred place. Church members may have different feelings while walking to the church along these

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2. I was a member of this church from 1986 to 1991.

paths. As they approach the church using one of the accesses, the church building is transformed into a familiar, meaningful place from an abstract space like a pilgrimage.

Church members who are worship guides welcome people when they arrive at the main entrance of the church. There is a desk for donation envelopes and the church bulletins in front of the church management's office. The church symbol and a plaque with the phrase "Let's be disciples of Christ" are located on the wall to the left of the office. To the right of the main worship hall entrance there is the collection box with the inscription "Store up your treasure in heaven (Mt. 6:20)" and a sign stating "We contribute before the service."

The main worship hall is divided between chancel, pew, and the choir. The chancel is divided into three sections. The altar is at the center of the chancel and towards the front wall when viewed from the entrance. To the left of the altar is the pulpit and to the right is the lectern for presiding over the service, reading the Bible, and praying. There are two candles on the left and the right side of the altar, and the open Bible is placed at the center of the altar. The arrangement of the altar follows Jewish tradition, when they opened the Bible on the sacred chest in the synagogue since the period of Babylonian captivity (Cheong Chang Bok 2005: 392). The candlelight symbolizes the presence and the resurrection of Christ in Christianity. Christianity has kept it as a tradition relating to the sacrament belief since the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Cheong Chang Bok 2005: 386-7). There are two seats on each side of the altar. One seat on the left side is for the senior pastor, and the other is for the visiting pastor who has been invited to preach at the church. One seat on the right side is for the junior pastor who presides over the worship, and the other is for the representative laity for prayer. The pulpit and the lectern are covered in the appropriate liturgical color. The choir is located to the right of the lectern and an electric organ and a piano are in front of the pulpit. The pews are divided into two by a center aisle covered with red carpet. Upon entering the main worship hall, church members take a seat on either side of the aisle. The ceiling above the pews is barrel vaulted and made with white mortar, while the chancel's ceiling is dome shaped. The lights above the chancel are brighter than those over the pews. The ceiling and the lighting show the difference between the pews and the chancel.

The space structure of the main worship hall and the arrangement of the symbols show us how Daesin Methodist Church symbolizes the Sunday worship. It is important for the altar to divide the space of the main worship hall since it is the center area. The altar is toward the east at Daesin Methodist

Church. In early Christianity the altar was set toward the east and this tradition generalized in the 4<sup>th</sup> century following the New Testament's reference (Mt. 24:27 and Acts. 1:11) that Jesus Christ will come again from the east (Cheong Chang Bok 2005: 348-349, Robert E. Webber 1988: 191). Once the altar is set, then the rest of the main space is defined. The pulpit is set to the north, that is, to the left of the altar, while the lectern is set toward the south, that is, to the right of the altar (Cheong Chang Bok 2005: 391). The location of the altar and the lectern reflects the classification of the right and left to the principle of the sacred and the profane (Hertz 1973: 3). The right-up-heaven is given a superior and positive characteristic while the left-down-earth is given an inferior and negative characteristic (Hertz 1973: 13). The altar is toward Jesus Christ's coming from the east. In the position of Jesus Christ the pulpit is at the right side, so the pastor who sermonizes on Sunday takes the most important position to access the sacredness because "The right side of the host is a glorious place in the social space" (Yi Fu Tuan 1999: 76). Another symbol which shows the relationship between the position and the sacredness is the arrangement of the seats on both sides of the altar. Both the senior pastor and the junior pastor take a seat closer to the altar than the laity for offering prayer. This kind of arrangement reflects the hierarchical structure of the church. As Jonathan Smith points out, the duality like up and down, right and left does not mean equality, balance, and reciprocity, but makes a hierarchical structure into a group (Smith 1987: 41).

In the main worship hall, the chancel is distinct from the pews. As previously explained, the ceiling is dome-shaped and reflects an image of heaven. The position of the chancel is slightly higher than the pews. This arrangement is based upon a human's perception of space. According to Yi Fu Tuan, the forward space is more visible than the backward from the perspective of sight, so there are some valuable things displayed in front space (Yi Fu Tuan 1999: 71-2). The movement of the participants is also related to the space arrangement. During the service, no one can step on the red carpet except pastors, the laity who are offering a prayer or gift, and choir members. When the worship begins, everyone stands and sings a song of praise, and the senior pastor along with the junior pastor and the laity for prayer follows the choir members into the main worship hall. This entrance order also shows the hierarchical structure.

Almost no other Korean Protestant churches show the same direction of the altar as Daesin Methodist Church. There are some reasons. First, there is the anti-ritualism of Korean Protestant churches. Since Korean Protestant churches have sought church growth and have emphasized more the internalization of

faith than an external symbol, it has been difficult to transfer the ritual symbols' sacredness to ritual participants.<sup>3</sup> Second, it is financially difficult to buy the land necessary to build a church, especially in a big city like Seoul. Many churches seek to build churches without concerning themselves with the direction of the altar. Therefore, some Protestant churches have a different arrangement of the chancel. For example, the Manna Methodist Church's pulpit is in front of the altar because the senior pastor considers the sermon more important than the symbolism of the altar (Yang Kyo Cheol 2003: 390). The altar is just a tool that constructs the worship in his opinion. We can find the tradition of Protestant churches which emphasize the Word of God through these cases. Nonetheless, in many cases, churches have an altar. So we can consider the altar as the center to distribute the sacredness to other things. Since the main worship hall is divided by the altar, the arrangement of the space depends on the distance from the sacred altar. If it is closer to the altar, it shows a more powerful position. Therefore, the meaning of the place is comprehended by the hierarchical structure like domination and obedience, the social position and its role (Smith 1987: 45-6). In other words, the worship space is a social space which is divided depending on the relationship and hierarchy between man and God, clergyman and laity, the elder and the youngster, and male and female (Lefebvre 1994: 73).

## Partition and Sacralization of Time

Ritual is an important medium to change physical time into something meaningful. The ritual transforms the sequence of time by dividing it into units (Rapaport 1999: 179). This liturgical period reflects not only the natural cycle, but rather it means a ritual time in which the commemoration and reminiscence of historical events are repeated. The ritual constructs the extraordinary and sacred time by endowing the continuity of time with discontinuity. In this perspective, we can find that the structure of Sunday worship is constructed around the church year, the denomination's commemoration days, and social commemoration days. The church year shows the characteristic of a commemorative

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3. For example, Manna Methodist Church and Hansin Presbyterian Church have sufficient land to set the altar toward the east if they are concerned about the symbolism of the altar. However, at the Manna Methodist Church the altar is set toward the south. At the Hansin Presbyterian Church it is set toward the northwest.

ritual (Bell 1997: 103-8), even though it includes seasonal rituals like Thanksgiving. The annual Christian cycle is constructed around the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In early Christianity the oldest season was Easter which was a criterion for Lent and Advent. Before Easter, Lent commemorates Jesus' suffering, and after Easter, the Whitsuntide commemorates the Holy Spirit's work; then the Epiphany relating to Jesus' work, Christmas, Advent commemorating Jesus' coming and his coming again within the church year (Cheong Chang Bok 2005: 140).

At Daesin Methodist Church, the church year is written in the church bulletin so church members can recognize the meaning of the day. The process of the church year is as follows: Advent → Christmas → Lent → Easter → Whitsuntide. Each season has a meaning: the days of preparing for Jesus Christ → Jesus' birthday → Jesus' work in this world → Jesus' suffering → the resurrection of Jesus Christ → Holy Spirit's work. In Christianity each season is symbolized by a particular color. For example, Advent is symbolized with violet which means hope, expectation, preparation, dignity, and humility. Christmas uses the color white to mean holiness and purity, glory, joy, victory, truth, and perfection (The Committee of Faith and Office Regulation 2002: 202-4). At the Daesin Methodist Church colors are mainly used to cover the pulpit, the lectern, and also for the pastors' stoles. Church members can understand the meaning of the day in the church year through this media.

It should be noted that the church year does not coincide with secular time. Secular time functions as just a measure to point out the special days of the church year. But a distinct meaning happens when secular time is transformed into a periodic unit. The decorations and the sermon of Sunday worship correspond to the seasons of the church year. The structure of time through the church year shows linear time and cyclic time simultaneously. The linear time means the beginning and the end of time in Christianity. In other words, Christianity has a concept of eschatological time. Christians believe that the creation of the world by God is the beginning and the final judgment is the end of the world. The eschatological is expressed within the worship. Among the seasons, Advent shows this kind of eschatological time. Advent is not only the time to commemorate his coming to earth but also to prepare for his impending advent. Also, Christianity has a structure of liturgical period, that is, cycle time. In Christianity one year is divided into six seasonal units based upon Jesus' life. Sunday worship is a ritual repeated every week for representing Jesus' life, commemorating him, and experiencing the same as he experienced. Comparing the eschatologi-

cal time with the liturgical time, the former is less clear than the latter because Christians began to seek another eschatology by delaying the impending eschatology in Advent. So in Christianity there is a twofold eschatology, that is, the realized eschatology (personal eschatology) and the cosmological eschatology (historical eschatology) (Park Sang Un 1998: 275-6).

Secular time is not entirely excluded from Sunday worship, even though the structure of time is composed of the church year. There are social commemorations for the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement, Children's Day, Parents' Day, and others celebrated at the Daesin Methodist Church. Strictly speaking, the church year is filled up with social commemorations. However, if a social commemorative day occurs on the same day as a traditional liturgical day, the sermon may focus on the social commemoration. This shows that the center of Sunday worship at Korean Protestant churches is the sermon. Since Protestant churches don't have many symbols for expressing the days of the church year and religious commemorations like All Saints' Day in the Catholic Church, the sermon topics might focus on social issues when services occur on a social commemorative day. In this context, many church members are not aware of the day of the church year, and they may even ignore the church year entirely. Of course, Protestant churches usually express the church year by covering the altar, pulpit, and lectern with colorful cloth and putting colorful stoles on the pastors' shoulders. In practice, the church members may understand the meaning of the day not with this colorful cloth but by the pastor's sermon. So if he does not refer to the meaning of the day to church members, they can not easily perceive it.

The commemoration defined by Protestant denominations is another element for making the time of Sunday worship. The commemorations defined by the Korean Methodist Church are written in Daesin Methodist Church's church bulletin. There is Pension Day for retired pastors, Commemoration of Wesley's Conversion, World Communion Sunday, Reformation Day, and a day for promoting Christian education. There is a Thanksgiving Day which has been practiced since western missionaries transplanted it to Korean churches (Kim So Yeong 1979: 140) even though it does not coincide with Korea's harvest season and there is a Korean traditional harvest season. So the meaning of the thanks for the harvest could not but decrease at Korean churches.

The time partition of Sunday worship is an important element for showing the characteristics of Protestant churches. The time partition of worship means the units of ritual behavior. Therefore, we can comprehend the characteristics of the worship if we notice which rituals and what rituals require the most time at

the Sunday worship. The time partition of Sunday worship at the Daesin Methodist Church is as follows.<sup>4</sup>

Procession	Ritual performed by:	Time required	Movements/gestures of ritual subjects
Introit	Pastors, choir members	2 minutes	Pastors: walk to the chancel with choir members and laity for prayer Laity: sing while standing
Silent prayer	Accompanist	1 minute	All members: pray while standing
Call to worship	Junior pastor, choir members	1 minute	Junior pastor: read Bible and pray Choir members: sing Laity: Pray while standing
Sing a song of praise	All members	2 minutes	All members: sing while standing
Responsive reading	Junior pastor, all members	2 minutes	Junior pastor: read All members: read
Affirmation of Faith	All members	30 seconds	All members: close eyes and confess
Gloria Parti	All members	1 minute	All members: sing while facing the altar
Collect (representative prayer)	Representative laity	4 minutes	All members: pray while sitting
Lord's Prayer	All members	1 minute	All members: pray while sitting
Responsive song of prayer	Choir members	45 seconds	All members: remain silent
Sing a song of praise	All members	4 minutes	Junior pastor: sing while standing All members: sing while sitting
Scripture lesson	Junior pastor	1 minute	Junior pastor: read the Bible All members: listen while sitting
Offering	Laity for offering Pastors	2 minutes	Laity for offering: walk to the altar to offer the offering baskets Two pastors: receive the offering baskets and place them on the altar
Offertory prayer	Senior pastor	1 minute	Senior pastor: pray All members: stand facing the altar
Church news	Pastors	4 minutes	Senior pastors: pray for new members Junior pastor: introduce new members, announce church news All members: listen while sitting
Anthem	Choir members	5 minutes	Choirs members: sing while standing All members: listen while sitting
Sermon	Senior pastor	36 minutes	All members: listen while sitting
Prayer	Senior pastor	1 minute	All members: close eyes and listen
Sing a song of praise	Choir members	5 minutes	All members: sing while standing up
Benediction	Senior pastor	1 minute	All members: stand up and listen
Hymn of benediction	Choir members	15 minutes	All members: pray silently
Postlude	Choir members	2 minutes	All members: leave
Total: 20 units		Total: 76 minutes and 30 seconds	

4. This information was recorded at the Sunday worship on May 21, 2006.

The time partition of Sunday worship can be summed up as follows: the time for ritual music (including silent prayer and postlude) required about 25 minutes; the time for prayer (including affirmation of faith) required 11 minutes and 15 seconds; the time for reading scripture (including responsive reading) required about 3 minutes; the time for offering required 2 minutes; church news required 4 minutes; and the sermon required 36 minutes. Therefore, the order of the worship is: Sermon → ritual music → prayer → reading of scripture → church news → offering. The core units of Sunday worship are the sermon and the ritual music.

There is a difference between the pastors and the laity in the time required to complete their duties during the worship. The senior pastor requires 43 minutes for introit, offering, offertory prayer, church news, sermon, the prayer after the sermon, and the benediction. The junior pastor requires 12 minutes for introit, call to worship, responsive reading, offering, and church news. Pastors perform various motions during the worship like standing, walking, speaking, sitting, and singing. For the laity, except choir members, eight minutes is necessary for responsive reading, representative praying, and offering. Most of the laities perform limited motions except for the laity for representative prayer and offering. As a result, the time partition of ritual and the movements show how much Protestant churches depend on the pastors and their roles, especially the sermon. Even though there is little difference between individual churches in the order of the Sunday worship, almost all Protestant churches in Korea have a similar situation because the Sunday worship is based upon the sermon. The Sunday worship of Protestant churches shows well the cognitive aspects through the sermon but does not express sacred experiences by bodily senses enough (Kim Sun Hwan 2001: 59-60).

In Protestant churches, communion is a core ritual that utilizes ritual senses. It is a mechanism to endow church members with sacred experiences by eating bread and drinking wine which symbolizes Jesus' body and blood. However, Korean Protestant churches do not prescribe communion as a regular ritual of Sunday worship. Without this symbol to embody the sacredness by bodily motions and ritual senses, the result is a powerless worship. Ritual movements and gestures are the smallest action for a ritual subject to get ritual meanings in a religious ritual. These kinds of motions and gestures make sense only when defined in relation to the space (Grimes 1995: 90-1). In other words, transforming a space into a meaningful place is produced by a combination of physical motions and gestures within the space. These motions and gestures must be performed in the correct sequence of time in the space. In the case of Daesin

Methodist Church, the sacred symbolism has less power, even though its space is symbolic because it is divided by the altar. Since time is divided by giving priority to the pastor, we can not agree with one Christian theologian's argument that "The time of worship is the sacralization of cyclical time in which we are sacralized ourselves" (Kim Chae Eun 1999: 402).

## **Embodiment and Ritual Experience**

Various bodily gestures are utilized during a religious ritual. These actions like sitting, kneeling, standing, walking, singing, dancing, greeting, praying, offering, and reading scripture are necessary elements to conform to a ritual. An individual's motions and gestures are transformed into ritual body or social body through the process of discipline with a certain religious value (Stephen Buckland 1995: 53). And the movements of church members are curious for keeping the decorum of church during Sunday worship. Of course, there are differences depending on gender, social position, role within the church, and age. For example, the younger generation does not care how they dress as opposed to older church members. Nevertheless, church members generally show their controlled movements and gestures in speech, walk, facial expression, and dress. We may find the fact that they try to express religious feeling to each other through their gestures and conversations. In the case of Daesin Methodist Church, church members pray silently or read the Bible before the service begins. If they enter into the main worship hall, they seldom talk to other members. Such actions show that they are preparing for the worship in their hearts. Almost all of the church members address each other using church titles like Deacon Kim or Elder Park. The religious title means that not only has the church member lived as a Christian for a long time but also that s/he deserves to be honored. The most important thing is that the religious title may assign a certain role to him/her within the church. For example, if one is an elder, s/he is responsible for the representative prayer or is a leading usher for Sunday worship. Almost all church members honor their elders by greeting them with a deep bow when they take leave of elders and pastors after the worship. While pastors' wives, female evangelists, and female elders greet and shake hands with mainly female church members, pastors and male elders greet and shake hands with mainly male church members. This is certainly a Confucian influence. Korean society has been influenced by Confucianism which emphasizes a hierarchical order in society. Younger gen-

erations have to honor the older generation in a Confucian society. The structure of the church hierarchy within Korean Protestant churches is similar to Confucianism. It is also proven by the fact that since the 1990s some churches have had a separate Sunday worship for the younger generation or church members who want a dynamical worship.<sup>5</sup> This Sunday worship for the youth is different from Sunday school which focuses on Bible study. At some churches the common characteristics of Sunday worship for young members is an expression of their religious feeling with dynamic music, loud praying, and even drama. They do not want to control their feelings and gestures at a rigorous liturgy. The Manna Methodist Church has a special Sunday worship, so called contemporary worship, emphasizing passionate music and skit drama not only for young members but also general members.<sup>6</sup> Since most churches have had a rigorous worship environment influenced by Confucianism for a long time, some churches like to deviate from the traditional Sunday worship.

Another reason for the change of worship environment is an absence of symbolism in Protestant churches. As we have seen, Sunday worship focuses on the sermon. This worship environment does not give church members an opportunity to radiate their religious feelings, especially through actions since listening and singing are the only things they do at Sunday worship. Nowadays, they seek not only to express their faith, but they also like to perform through various media such as rock music, dancing, and positive gestures. Some churches utilize multimedia like beam projection and wide screen or wide monitor for showing a film related to the sermon's topic as well as pictures during the pastor's sermon. They consider these media important complements to a worship based on the sermon. There are also other religious meetings to perform the faith, so called revival meetings. These are not a regular worship, but a special meeting for improving one's faith. Therefore it is different from, so called, contemporary worship. The most important thing is that many churches are concerned about an absence of symbolism in their worship, and they seek to change the form and content of worship while utilizing various media. It also means that they began to recognize the individual desire to emit one's faith physically which is less limited under the hierarchical circumstance.

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5. The Sunday worship for young members begins at 1 p.m. at the Daesin Methodist Church.

6. The word "contemporary worship" is translated into Korean from "seeker worship." The word is usually translated as "open worship" in Korean.

## Conclusion

This paper analyzed the structure of Sunday worship from the perspective of time, space, and embodiment of ritual while defining ritual structure as the framework to ritual performance. The framework of Sunday worship at Daesin Methodist Church conforms to a more periodical time than space like many Protestant churches in Korea. The division of worship time proved how much Sunday worship depends on the sermon. Furthermore, Korean Protestant churches have generally been influenced by Confucianism when looking at the hierarchical structure of the church.

Korean Protestant churches have not recognized the importance of symbols to transfer the meaning of Sunday worship so many church leaders have constructed church buildings without meaning. They have just sought sufficient space to accommodate the growing number of church members. However, some churches are increasingly concerned about media to transfer the meaning of worship and have church members perform their faith with physical body. They utilize multimedia and appropriate drama and rock music to concentrate worship participant's attention on worship. However, it has not been making symbolism plentiful in churches, but rather it has produced a negative effect while destroying traditional forms of worship within Protestant churches. We have to continue to pay attention to the change of Sunday worship at Protestant churches.

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