Title: A biblical understanding of death and the hereafter in Korean perspectives: a case study

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Date completed: March 1992

Granting Institution: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS)

Description: Unpublished Thesis (DPh): 219 pages

Abstract:

This dissertation is a pastoral-theological case study from a Korean perspective. The story of the case describes a lady with terminal lung cancer living in Korea during the early 1980s. The main pastoral-theological issue in the case is the clash between different views about death and the hereafter: the Catholic and the shamanistic view of immortality of the soul; and the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) view of death for the believer as a temporary sleep, and conditional immortality.

The purpose of the study is two-fold: (1) to give guidance to the pastor in helping a dying person to gain the Biblical truth about death, resurrection, and immortality, and (2) to identify affective ways to minister to the terminally-ill person. The study involves the following procedures: (1) description, (2) analysis, (3) Biblical-theological interpretation, and (4) pastoral action.

Part I includes two chapters which present the case and give an introduction to the research. The introduction explains the pastoral-theological issues, methodology, and delimitation of the study, presuppositions, descriptive outline, and significance of the study.

Part II presents three chapters devoted to probing the socio-cultural, physio-psychological, and religious dynamics of the case. The Korean value system is remarkably...
practical and secular. Concepts of death are as complicated and tangled as the diver’s religious and cultural influences. Death and life are inseparable. Human life is highly regarded, but death is considered to be fearful. Death is the concern of the whole community in Korea. Shamanistic concept of immortality of the soul underlies Korean philosophy about life and death.

Part III discusses in four chapters the pastoral theological issue in the case story through a Biblical-theological interpretation. The Bible speaks of death as a sleep and the grave as the place of the dead. After physical death there is no activity, no plan, no thinking. The resurrection hope is prevalent in the OT and NT, and the resurrection to life for the just takes place at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, the eternal life of man is conditional on repentance and acceptance of the gospel message. Eternal life is the free gift of God, which will be given to believers when Jesus comes again. The Christian approach to the health ministry for dying persons includes hospice care and pastoral care. The ministry should be holistic in order to care for the whole person; mental, physical, social, and spiritual. The ministry also needs to be a “blended” approach wherein pastors, physicians, and other helping persons work together for the benefit of the ill person.

Part IV describes the result of the study with summary, conclusions, and applications to ministry. The dying person can be comforted through understanding the Biblical meaning of death, resurrection, and eternal life. Pastoral ministry for the dying person, based on the hope of the resurrection and eternal life, is suggested in detail.