Title: Preparation of non-Christian students for baptism: a case study

Author: Han, Sung Bo

Date completed: March 1992

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

Description: Unpublished Dissertation (DPT): 259 pages

Abstract:

This study is a pastoral-theological analysis and interpretation of a true case that raised pastoral-theological issues and problems. The case was analyzed using the horizontal strands of Korean socio-cultural, psychological, and religious aspects. The horizontal analysis was then interpreted using the vertical dimensions of biblical truth. The study ends with suggested solutions for the pastoral-theological problems and issues.

PART I: THE PRESENTATION

The pastoral-theological issues arose from the case of Young-Chul, a university student who enrolled at Korean Sahmyook University in Seoul, Korea. This young man from a non-Christian background discovered with initial dismay that his school was a Christian institution. Though frustrated with the religious emphasis on campus at first, Young-Chul came to be interested in being a Christian, especially after he witnessed a baptism of a classmate. Soon this young man was baptized also. He celebrated the event with his friends by holding a party at which all smoked and drank. Young-Chul when confronted with this behavior by the dean stated that he did not know that baptism signified a change in lifestyle.
The pastoral-theological issues identified from the case are: What lead this student to request baptism? What should be the qualifications for baptism according to the Bible? What is an adequate preparation for baptism and support after baptism?

PART II: ANALYSIS

Koreans have been shaped by shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. These various sources of value combine to emphasize relationships, family, and education. Included in the relationships of importance is that of student to teacher and student to student. Sahmyook University has instituted a strong holistic curriculum to convey Christian values, as well as knowledge. Yound-Chul responded to the spiritual atmosphere on campus by seeking baptism before fully understanding its meaning. The careful program of the university had failed to adequately prepare this student for joining the Christian church.

PART III: INTERPRETATION

Baptism is presented in the Bible as a rite showing the death to the old life of sin, the burial of the old life in a watery grave, and the rising to a new life in Christ. Baptism is the door to union with the Church and with Christ. The great commission of Jesus to how followers was to go, to teach, and to baptize. Biblical history indicates that the requirements for baptism were to hear the word, believe in Jesus Christ, repent of sins, and accept God’s forgiveness. The type of baptism practiced in the Apostolic Church was immersion in water. Only this mode of baptism carries out the beautiful symbol of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Moreover, baptism is only the beginning of the spiritual walk with God. New believers need to be nurtured after baptism to thrive spiritually and to be established as mature Christians.
PART IV: ACTION

The case makes clear that Young-Chul participated in baptism without a proper grounding in the meaning of a new life in Christ. The carefully structured spiritual outreach program at Sahmyook University includes Bible courses, worship activities, small group study, departmental chaplains, and a dean interested in student needs. These programs are commendable and should be continues. However, the quantity of non-Christian students leads to a routinizing of the system and a danger of losing the critical personal relationships that will promote value changes. Each student needs careful nurturing in the faith. Pastors and Church leadership needs to institute programs that will lead to a sound grounding in Bible truth for all those requesting baptism, coupled with evidence for changes in the life indicating the work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, the new converts and matures in the faith.