

**Commentary on the paper „Comparative Study
of Korean and Bulgarian Religious Policies and Their
Impact in Times of Slavery
(with a Focus on Christianity)“ by Kim Se-won**

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The universal problem of yoke reveals similar political tendencies and similar spaces of influence and response, of aspiration and awareness even in cultures that are quite different-faced in their essence. In this sense, Korea and Bulgaria, with their akin cultural and historical situations – „colonial rule“, and „under yoke“ – are a good example.

The problem of interest is too comprehensive, with its multi-layered structure. For the purposes of today’s meeting, however, the presented study focuses on one of the key components, reflecting the space of enslavement, namely religious policy in times of slavery. With both people, it passes through several stages, assuming different manifestations during each required or historically imposed transition, since, naturally, as the author herself points out, in both cases, the times of slavery feature periods marked by harsher or more liberal actions and tendencies.

The structure of the author’s presentation focuses on the national-ecclesiastical liberation movement in the context of the international political processes of the time. With respect to the problem the author

is interested in, i.e. the achievement of independent church with both enslaved peoples, the impact of the relationships of the Empire of Japan with Great Britain and the USA, and the impact of the relationships of the Empire of Turkey with Greece and Russia appear to be decisive. Apart from this, the author draws her conclusions based on the push exerted by the hatli-sheriff (1839) and the halti-humayun (1856) with their reforms aiming to align the Ottoman Empire with Europe. The Sultan decrees proclaimed equality of rights for all nationals of the Empire, freedom of religion, equal civil rights for the Christians to the rights of the Moslems. This gave some freedoms to Bulgarians. But nevertheless and notwithstanding the fact that, in the XIX century, there were Christian Bulgarians among the great officers of the Ottoman State (such as the descendants of Sofroniy Vrachanski – Stefan and Aleko Bogoridi), the provided freedoms would not be possible or admissible in a strong Turkey. It is namely in the conditions of politically insecure times that the free spiritual valences increase their intensity by intervening in and showing up certain communities (e.g. the community of the Bulgarians from Constantinople or of the missionary movements on the Korean Peninsula) - a consistent phenomena, skillfully emphasized by the author.

On the one hand, the study shows up one poorly studied and insufficiently reflected fact in Korean scientific literature – the establishment of a strong group in the Korean Church itself, which declared itself to be against the presence and influence of western missionaries in Korea. They believed that their religious-enlightening

activity served foreign interests and aimed to establish spiritual control. This phenomenon found its platforms to manifest its negative attitude and went side-by-side with the purely Japanese policy against western missionaries' practices, a policy, which resulted from the deterioration of the relationships between Japan, Great Britain, and the USA. Ultimately, with their expulsion from the country in the beginning of World War II, these attitudes, which were isolated within a circle of Korean supporters, resulted, though for quite a short time, in the establishment of a Japanese-Korean Christian Church.

On the other hand, the study outlines the major problems of the Bulgarian national-ecclesiastical liberation movement, i.e. the problems between the Bulgarian people and the Greek clergymen, as well as the key processes and turns of the Turkish-Greek relationships. In the field of religious activity, they pass through the liberal Islamic policy towards the Greek Orthodox Church in the XVII–XVIII century to reach to increasingly straining relationships in the XIX century. The author uses rich bibliographical material in Korean and Bulgarian and traces the movement against the Greek clergymen, its emergence during the second half of the XVIII century, its evolution into all-national movement, the turning point of Bulgarian Easter until the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870. One of the fundamental works dedicated to this period, *Bulgarian Easter or Bulgarian Passions*, of Prof. Toncho Zhechev, could supplement the understanding of the processes and spirit of the Bulgarian National Revival namely in the focus adopted by Kim-Se-Won.

Among the conclusions of the study, the statement persists that

both in Bulgarian and Korean cultural and historical situation of enslavement, a second, parallel, spiritual control is existing. It is exercised by an additional foreign force, which in this case were Greek and western clergymen.

However, to me, the topic of interest instigates several problems. Firstly, Christianity in Korea spread in the beginning of the XIX century with the arrival of French and Chinese catholic missionaries, and later, of British and American missionaries. The first French missionaries were killed on the order of the Korean Court (1839), which was the first wave of refusal to accept western missionaries. It also meant that, in the beginning of Japanese colonial rule, the Christian Church in Korea was still in the process of growth and consolidation until later Christianity became one of the major religions in Korea and one of nowadays strongest churches in East Asia (in contrast to Japanese Christian Church). In the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century, in spite of the leading Confucianism, shaman practices and beliefs were still alive among the Koreans, and namely these were first attacked by the Japanese authorities which forced the Korean population to pay homage at Shintoist sanctuaries.

Secondly, its relatively quick growth was due to a great extent to the use of the Korean script hangŭl, to translate the Bible and disseminate religious literature in Korean language, thus succeeding to access the wide masses. At the same time, Protestant missionaries introduced reforming ideas and laid the foundations of modern education by establishing schools accessible to more common

Koreans. While Greek clergymen took no care of Bulgarians' education.

In this sense, during the Japanese colonial rule, the Korean Christian Church developed while standing for its national and religious independence, but in realities that may hardly be compared to those of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of the XIX century, mostly from the viewpoint of the multi-century lasting accumulation of religious beliefs and practices in the cultural memory of the whole people. Naturally, in her thesis, the author brings to the fore rather the typological similarities between Bulgarian and Korean religious policy in the spaces of slavery, and not direct and categorical comparisons.

Thirdly, in the beginning of the XIX century, an increasing number of western missionaries started heading through China to the Far East. At the same time, the new conditions in Turkey after the end of the Crimean War, which ended in Great Britain and France's victory over Russia, exerted another push on Bulgarian national movement, but, apart from this, revealed new potentials for political and economic expansion of the great west-European States on the Balkans and the East. And if we return to the problem of the free spiritual valences, which intensify when the policy of a certain State needs consolidation, we would find outstanding the free activities in which the different religious communities were involved. It was namely religions who often were the first to start searching for an approach and ways of conquering new territories and spaces aiming to augment their flock.

What happened in Bulgaria after the end of the Crimean War and

after Russia's maintaining the thesis of Orthodox unity? The archaic canon of the unity of Ottoman empire-residing Christians under the supremacy of the Patriarchy of Constantinople came in harsh contradiction with national principles. This impaired Russia's influence and allowed western States to intensify their religious-political actions and cultural influence on the Balkans. The State to intervene particularly actively in East-Church relationships during and immediately after the Crimean War was catholic France, which was tempted by the idea to push Russian influence away of the East. Thus, in Bulgaria, The Movement of Uniates arose – a form of Catholicism combined with Orthodox rituals. It resulted from the XIX century struggle of the Bulgarian people for independent church and national hierarchy. During 1854–1856, in Constantinople, a circle of Bulgarians was formed headed by Dragan Tsankov, who took the road of Unitarianism. Gradually, Unitarian communities in the Macedonian and Sub-Balkan regions grew to enumerate about 15,000 followers in 1860. The French diplomats in Constantinople even solicited the Sublime Porte to acknowledge officially the Bulgarian Unitarian community (Генчев, Николай: 1995). In the conditions of these political tendencies, Russia got afraid of the western religious influence in Bulgaria. The crushing of the Uprising of Crete, which resulted in Greece's swinging towards the western States was a turning point in the course of Russian political actions and ultimately resulted in their insisting before the Sublime Porte for the ecclesiastical dispute to be resolved in favour of the Bulgarians.

In the XIX century, another strong movement in Bulgaria was the

Protestant movement which was admitted by Turkey for the purpose of splitting Bulgarian Christians. It penetrated in the beginning of the century and intensified its activity after the Crimean War. It was most actively distributed by the representatives of the *British and Foreign Bible Society* and the *American Council of Foreign Mission Agents*. The translation of the Bible in New-Bulgarian language, made under the supervision of Neofit Rilski, was initiated namely by the British Bible Society. Published in Constantinople, the Bible' translation, as Pencho Slaveykov said „*put an end to the language disorder, the struggle for supremacy of the various dialects and established literary language*“, actually initiating a national Bulgarian language reform. The missionaries used successfully various means, among them the establishment of mundane schools for boys and girls, in their effort to familiarize Bulgarians with Reformation's teaching. Protestant colleges were very strong, among them the *Robert College* in Constantinople. Many of its graduates ranked among the most prominent political or cultural figures of Bulgaria after the Liberation (Konstantin Stoilov, Ivan Geshov, Petur Dimitrov...). Not least the Bulgarian Protestants took active part in the national liberation movement.

With these reflections I believe that the study of Kim Se-Won reveals new prospects providing to derive a similar typological mechanism between the Catholic and Protestant missions in Korea and the Uniates and Protestant movement on Bulgarian lands as part of the religious policies in times of enslavement during the XIX–XX century.