

## **SELF-DEIFICATION AND MAMMON: A WEBERIAN THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT INTO CHURCH DECLINE TRENDS IN PROTESTANT SOUTH KOREA AND THE OCCIDENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this work, Max Weber's social analysis is employed to demonstrate that human self-deification is the cardinal reason for church decline. Weber's social analytical tool unearths the various sources of human self-deification in the church respectively as secular humanism as well the traditional religions. For example, Korean Shamanism, Buddhism and Confucian hierarchical culture may instigate or reinforce human self-deification. This is achieved through the intuitive agreement with an observed cultural value (human self-deification) known as Ideal Type and its logical explication. The paper shows that postmodern ethic tends to deify the human personality which self-deification also is promoted by scientific materialism. Hence the church declines because it loses its object and focus of worship thereby losing her relevance in postmodernism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this article, the attempt is made to put the church on the spotlight concerning its decline in some parts of the globe. In accomplishing such a task, the social analytical method of Max Weber is employed. This study is crucial, because it goes on to examine the church in a world that is rapidly changing. In addition, it looks at the church and her role in a world that is enchanted by science and technology; religion and culture.

The Weberian method of social analysis is engaged regarding the church situation in our world today. The analysis is to show that human self-deification, a form of human centeredness (anthropocentrism) may be the motivation for some followers of Jesus Christ. Human self-deification follows materialism and secular humanism which is embodied in scientism. The study will show that churches in the Occidental world and the Protestant church of the Oriental South Korea may have their God centeredness (theocentric) under threat—reason for numerical church decline. Again the position is that anthropocentrism is a corollary of materialism. Self-deification in the form of scientism, secular humanism, materialism may be motivated by human self-centredness and primal religions. The study shows how human self-deification in secular humanism and in primal religions may adversely impact church growth qualitatively and quantitatively.

### **Weberian and Marxist Sociological Studies**

Karl Marx taught that religion is a creation and a tool of those in power for the acquisition of material things in order for them to maintain their human self-transcendence. Hence, for Karl Marx society manufactures religion. Max Weber also taught that religion may be central to acquisition of material wealth. Therefore for Weber, religion creates society.<sup>2</sup> However an analysis of both positions could show that Weber moves deeper<sup>3</sup> to show that human anxiety in existence is the key to explaining the phenomenon. The anxiety creates a chain reaction of the human urge for self-transcendence.

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<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich H. Tenbruck, 'Max Weber and the Sociology of Science: A Case Reopened' in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 3(3), 1974: 314.

The social life of human existence is made up of empirical issues as well as purpose driven issues. It is when the two parts of the human life are understood that life can be properly viewed with meaning. Empirical science provides facts but it does not provide meaning to life. ‘What shall we do and how shall we live?’<sup>4</sup> are the two questions which empirical science does not attempt to solve. Weberian social sciences, however, endeavour to find meaning in life.

The Weberian analysis is particularly interested in the ‘means to an end’ in any social phenomenon. In other words, the Weberian theory is more prophetic<sup>5</sup> notably for its ethical concerns. And also because it thrives on inspiration and intuition. Moreover, it has a metaphysical nature and yet acceptable as a social scientific analytical tool. It has the predisposition of bridging the gap between science and religion in an acceptable way. It also has the power to douse the superiority of science because it succeeds in bringing to light the essence of human social behaviour to the spotlight.

Therefore, Weber objected to the idea that ethical values should not be associated with the social sciences. He says that “in our opinion, it can never be the task of an empirical science to provide binding norms and ideals from which directives for immediate practical activity can be derived”.<sup>6</sup> Weber’s social science theory unlike other subjective social sciences modifies the Romantic idea of intuition into logical and dialectical rationalism. Hence, science as a vocation is an inner devotion to a task such as in an artist.<sup>7</sup> Unlike rational science which is chained with progress and renewed constantly the work of logical and dialectical intuition never grows old because it has an enduring impact.<sup>8</sup>

### The Objective Ideal Type

Weber sees social phenomenon as an “object” under investigation, although, differently, when it is related to science. Therefore although the “objective” study is a sociological study it is empirical.<sup>9</sup> It is also a method that finds meaning in the social phenomena driving society. There are two hands in the “objective” social science in as much as it seeks to “understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the causes of their being historically so and not otherwise”.<sup>10</sup> There may be myriad phenomena occurring to the social scientist in the concrete reality (“object”) both intuitively and externally but the one which seems to be the representative and compatible culturally significant value with all the others is the single “law”.<sup>11</sup>

This is therefore a scientific study based upon qualitative values extracted mainly as psychological and intellectual (*geistig*) realities which is similar to quantitative research in the mechanics for example.<sup>12</sup> This is however, not obtainable through analytical laws (*Gesetzbegriffen*) because the “object” or empirical data is the cultural value and this can be achieved by presuppositions.<sup>13</sup> Through presuppositions we derive meaning from the empirical data present. This goes against the attainment of general or the average inference. The presuppositions arise from the objective possibilities and adequate causation arising from the “object”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ibid; See also Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* trans. & ed with intro. H. H. Gerth and C Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 143.

<sup>5</sup> Weber identified himself as the Prophet Jeremiah; See Ibid, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* trans & eds. Edward A. Shills and Henry A. Finch (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949), 52.

<sup>7</sup> Weber, *From Max Weber*, 137 -138.

<sup>8</sup> Weber, *Max Weber*, 138.

<sup>9</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 72.

<sup>10</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 76, 77-85.

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena [cultural constellation<sup>15</sup>], which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (*Gedankenbild*).<sup>16</sup>

This is the objective process. It involves the objectification of social phenomenon and values in them as empirical data.<sup>17</sup> It also involves the use of presupposition or intuition in selecting the ideal type. As stated earlier the ideal type is different from the general concept because general concepts are average common features while the ideal type is the accentuation of a particular feature by the synthesis of one or more features which are compatible.<sup>18</sup>

The “personality” of the individual is crucial in formulating a value-judgment irrespective of the individuation and self-realization issues. It may even be alluded to faith decision as it springs from the intuitive realms of a personality.<sup>19</sup> In short, science cannot make value-judgments in cultural values and socioeconomic life because in doing so it damages itself. This is where the social sciences fill in. What should be done is a value-judgment of a person based more or less on his private conscience and the logical analysis of the ideas and axioms undergirding the end of an enterprise such that it is in consonance with the reality?<sup>20</sup>

This is against indifference which is a position which does not clearly make value judgements. It also opposes the cacophony of value-judgments which aims at either satisfying people or merely attacking people. It is a value judgment which is not economic or material but historically conditioned in the milieu under question.<sup>21</sup> This is obtained from the milieu as a significant cultural value.

### **The Subjective logical and dialectical analysis of Ideal Type**

Max Weber starts from the philosophical standpoint, which ethically asserts that the end does not justify the means or the means ought to justify the end. Consequently, Weber employs logic and other forms of philosophical reasoning to explicate the true nature of value-judgment or the ideal type ascribed to a social phenomenon.<sup>22</sup>

This will then help the social scientist to let the social actor compare in weight his actions of the desirable and undesirable consequence of his actions. Hence, the measure is to find out the cost of values in terms of value loss per an end. Again this logical processing of the means which has been ethically valued is what he calls the “technical criticism”.<sup>23</sup> It is a process that is completely absent from science. The technical criticism is the responsibility of the actor or the social scientist to choose from the scientific [logical] espousal of cultural values.<sup>24</sup>

The purpose of the technical criticism is to help decision making regarding the ideas undergirding the achievement of the goals or end that has been set.<sup>25</sup> This ought to be done in a logically consistent manner such that it “does not overstep the boundaries of science which strives for an “analytical ordering of empirical reality” although the method which is used in interpreting the cultural (*geistiger*) values are

<sup>15</sup> Weber, *From Max Weber*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 76, 72-85.

<sup>17</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 90.

<sup>19</sup> Weber, *From Max Weber*, 138.

<sup>20</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 60, 61-63.

<sup>22</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 52&53.

<sup>23</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 53.

not “inductions” in the usual sense”.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the logical explication of ideas it has the portions which aim at critically engaging the axioms which lead a social actor to a desired goal or end. This is done to help the social actor to re-examine his axioms with which he operates. He says that “It can assist him in becoming aware of the ultimate standards, of value which does not make explicit to himself or, which he must presuppose to be logical”.<sup>27</sup> The ultimate standards of value should be glaring enough so as to avoid speculation.<sup>28</sup>

The nature of Max Weber’s theory is strongly based upon more or less a prophetic meaning or an intuitive presupposition. It has at the background ethical presuppositions he calls values which are mainly Kantian. It means that the means to an end in the society is equally important to the desired goal or end. It is therefore a scientific way of critiquing society because it is logically expressed. It reflects the intellectual axioms and psychological dispositions which drive society or a community to the desired end.<sup>29</sup>

In the following discussion we shall delve into the postmodern ethic of human self-deification as embedded in the spirit of science and mammon. In doing so, the ideal type of postmodernism shall be shown to be human self-deification. This will later be related to the phenomenon of church decline.

### **The Spirit of Science and Mammon in Postmodernism**

During the early part of this discussion, we showed how ideal type in the theory of Weber could be employed in analyzing a social phenomenon. In the reflection done here, there will be a demonstration that ‘human self-deification’ is the ideal type for the postmodern ethic and the spirit of science and mammon.

The decision for a presupposition for the postmodern world today is not religion or materialism per se, although, they all may be part. The choice falls on anthropocentrism or egoism of the human person. The term which shall be adopted for anthropocentrism, egoism, and human self-transcendence in particular is ‘human self-deification’. Human self-deification is a situation in which the goal of existence is placed in human life. In postmodernism there is an attempt to deconstruct traditional authorities of existence be they an idea, system, belief or persons.<sup>30</sup> It is prone to self-centeredness because there is no reality, which may be more real than the individual. Consequently, the individual opinion is what is to be respected.<sup>31</sup> This opinionated lifestyle is what has led to relativism. Relativism challenges ethical norms and makes them subjective.

In addition, it is important to reckon that the individual life has its own predicament. The human predicament is the psychological state in which every person is confronted with anxiety.<sup>32</sup> The anxiety of humanity stems from the uncertainty in existence and the negative forces which threaten an individual’s existence. Existentially it may be explained as threat of non-being.<sup>33</sup> There is a constant psychological reaction to this anxiety. It is the human self-determination to self-transcend human anxiety.

Francis Bacon renowned as the father of science’s life and work epitomizes the position which we have discussed above that there is psychological urge for humanity to transcend its fears.<sup>34</sup> For Bacon, the

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<sup>26</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Weber, *The Methodology*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> John Blanchard, *Does God believe in Atheist?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958); See also Tenbruk, ‘A Case Reopened’, 314; Again for the Christian life itself and life in existence in general, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume Three: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963), 230& 281

<sup>33</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Volume One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

<sup>34</sup> See where in the *New Atlantis* he emphasizes that “the end always to be kept in view is the application of the truth acquired to the good of mankind”. Note that the knowledge acquired was not for God primarily but for humanity –

way out is through science. He believed that through science humanity would be able to deal with his predicament. Over the years it has come to light that science, although it constantly advances has not resolved the problem of the human predicament.

Science has therefore sought refuge in the idea of utility; the application of science i.e. technology to provide goods and services. It preaches that through the acquisition of the myriad applications and technologies of science an individual's life may be improved. Money and profit making is the power driving science and technology. Science and technology are the foundation upon which money is made in the world today. The presupposition of the pleasure of elevating the human self through the acquisition of material resources is directly linked to science and neoliberal economy. The goal of humankind basically is finding pleasure in self-elevation and this self-elevation means the development of science.

Therefore, Science as an epistemological tool attempts to find meaning in serving the cause of humanity. Likewise, the scientist may agree, at least, in the postmodern era, that utility<sup>35</sup> is the sole purpose for the pursuance of science. Science is being driven forcefully as a means of providing knowledge which could create more wealth and power for the preservation and enjoyment of the human race. Scientific advancements all become technologies applied for human comfort and well-being as utility.

This utility is closely linked to the provision of goods and services for profit where profit becomes a satisfaction for human ego. It becomes satisfaction because the 'needs of the flesh' and the 'pride of existence' is met by making profit. Therefore, profit making is directly related to human self-deification when the means to it is not a priority. Postmodernism is the ideological environment for free profit making by the individual. Secular humanism in the contemporary world takes out religion and other ethical standards which may be interpreted as inimical to profit making.<sup>36</sup> In scientism, any religious idea, which stifles science, is an intolerable idea even at the expense of ethical standards. Of course there may be exceptions but by and large that is what pertains in the world today. This explains the phenomenal genuflection toward science as the controlling knowledge in the world today.

It is worth noting that the presupposition of science and utility or materialism is a presupposition of the human self-deification. The postmodern ethic is a position which aims at acquiring worldly knowledge, power and possessions for the pleasure of 'self-transcendence'. This presupposition is buttressed by the biblical myth which deceptively assured the human being that she or he shall be like God if there is an actualization of the self (Genesis 3: 4-7). Humanity out of anxiety actualizes itself under self-transcendence or self-deification as a matter of self-preservation. The second biblical scenario which is amenable to human self-deification is the myth (not a scientific data but a story with kernel truth) of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

It should be unequivocally stated that science has not shown any capability of resolving the human predicament. It is because it has not got the final understanding which is why it progresses. In that sense, it is only a way by which many individuals try to deal with their anxiety in life. 'The more we have, the better we become' is the psychological disposition that explains why many people want to work to acquire purchasing power.

Having explored and observed the social status of the world today we posit the presupposition that fundamentally, human life is explainable by an understanding of human self-deification. It does this through science and neoliberal economy. The ideal type therefore, is satisfaction of the human ego or a phenomenon of human self-deification.

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buttressing the idea of anthropocentrism or human self-deification. See Frank Thilly, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), 286; James R. Moore 'Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century' in eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 322-323.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich H. Tenbruck, 'Science as Vocation – Revisited' in Ernst Forsthoff and Reinhard Hörstel (Hrsg.) *Standorte im Zeitstrom: Festschrift für Arnold Gehlen* (Frankfurt: Athenäum Verlag, 1974), 360.

<sup>36</sup> Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 16-36.

The following deliberation shall show how human self-deification in opposition to the worship of God may be associated with church decline in the contemporary world.

### Human Self-Deification and Church Decline

Secularization is a typical bane on church growth in Europe but in South Korea traditional religions have been identified as the reason for church decline.<sup>37</sup> In observing the phenomenon of church decline regarding Europe and South Korea, intuitively three culturally significant values may be identified (cultural constellation) from the writer's personal convictions, following Weber's theory. Firstly, human self-deification where the human ego desires to be satisfied above all else is the dominant presupposition. As already identified as the ideal type for postmodernity in the previous discussion, it is linked to the pride of life.

Many life's decisions have been made based upon the selfish ego of humanity. The consequence of this "undue" anthropocentricism and super-egoism is sure to be the cause of conflicts and strives in the micro and macro levels of life. This idea resonates very well with postmodernist pluralism, relativism and deconstruction. Everybody has a mind and a will therefore it is pluralism and since no will and mind are the same they are relative; hence a deconstruction which establishes itself as absolute. Ethical values, religious beliefs and other established norms of society as absolutes are challenged with myriad opinions unless it does something to support the selfish human desires. Moreover, the flourishing of the selfish human self, engenders the promotion of utility. Utility behaves as if it is the end for which society strives yet it is not. The striving for utility is because of desire. And this we have shown as the ideal type in our previous discussion on post modernism. Biblically, it has been related to the fall of humanity and the building of the tower of Babel.

The second intuitive explication for the church decline is materialism.<sup>38</sup> The desire for worldly things which is linked to the egoism of the human self is the cause of conflict and strives in the world. Biblically, the apostle admonishes that the love of Mammon is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). And Jesus alludes to it as a god that people worship (Matthew 6:24). Hence it seems to be an end which satisfies the human ego and life.

Thirdly, the diabolical has the tendency to influence people's lives just as God can be the motivation for achieving all human self-transcendence. It may be rational or irrational depending on how it is observed. In Africa, many people depend on magic to succeed in life.<sup>39</sup> Some Africans consult witchdoctors and perform rituals for money. There is public display of magical production of foreign currencies and so on. This phenomenon cannot be ruled out because biblically the people of God forsook God and worshipped other gods like Baal for the sake of prosperity. It should be understood that there is also an irrational component which shows that the religion of a person is the sole end or reason or purpose for living. So people live with a dedication to some deity or principle. And the attainment of the desired goals of the deity or principles is fulfillment in itself. So for some, living an ascetic life is an end in itself. For some killing others is an end to satisfying the tenets of a religion. These practices are rife in the world today.

Religion has been reduced to charity in order to remain relevant in the community. But that is not the fundamental purpose of religion because Jesus appeared not only to provide for the needy but also to

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<sup>37</sup> Gil-Soo Han, Joy J. Han, Andrew Eungi Kim, "Serving Two Masters': Protestant Churches in Korea and Money' *International Journal for the study of the Christian Church* 9. 4 (December 16, 2009), 338 & 354; Concerning church decline itself see, Ben Toh, 'State of Christianity in Korea' in *ubfriends.org* (March 19, 2012), <http://www.ubfriends.org/2012/03/19/is-ubf-in-decline-along-with-the-church-in-seoul/> Accessed December 10, 2014; K Hyung-rhul, 'Why is the number of Christians decreasing in Korea?' (August 10, 2006), [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_opinion/148175.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_opinion/148175.html) Accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> See also Gil-Soo Han, Joy J. Han, Andrew Eungi Kim, "Serving Two Masters': Protestant Churches in Korea and Money' *International Journal for the study of the Christian Church*, 9. 4 (December 16, 2009), 338.

<sup>39</sup> See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 199-202.

lead people from sin and death to eternal life. This goal focuses on spiritual essence of life and not material ends. It is important to understand from the point of view of Jesus Christ that one cannot serve two masters. One cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. Jesus states further that one will serve only one and leave the other. Therefore people who genuinely serve God cannot stop worshipping God when all is well with them or they are materially blessed. On the contrary those who aim at material gain for selfish pursuits employ religion as a tool. And when material gain satisfies selfish ambition they reject and deny religion.

Genuine religion cannot be destroyed by material gain. This idea is pursued biblically with great examples like Daniel and his friends and in the temptation of Jesus Christ (Daniel 1:8; Matthew 4:4). True allegiance to God cannot be derailed by the desires of the flesh or the pride of this life. The metaphor of the good soil used in the parable of the sower and Pauline theology of allegiance to Christ may support this argument (Luke 8:8 & 15; Romans 8: 35 - 39). The point is, Christianity stands for a religion which seeks genuine relationship with God and it is expected that the true Christian will overcome the temptation of the self and world. Therefore Christianity has not been designed to necessarily make people rich. Unfortunately, people who worship Mammon may use Christianity as a tool for that end. These are people who do not truthfully worship God because they have deified the human self. So it is admissible that people pretend to be religious in order to satisfy themselves but that is not true religion. True religion like Christianity has God as the essence or purpose for living. This has been couched beautifully as living for the “Glory of God” by John Calvin.<sup>40</sup>

### **Oriental Korean Decline: Materialism and Greed**

As we think about the anthropocentrism and materialism in the world, it is important to relate it to the decline of the Protestant church in South Korea.

According to the 2005 Population and Housing Census Report by the National Statistical Office, the number of Christians in Korea stood at 8.6 million. Compared to 10 years before, the Buddhist population increased by 3.9 percent, whereas the Christian population decreased by a whopping 1.6 percent. In a large shift, Catholics in Korea increased by a whopping 74.4 percent.<sup>41</sup>

Then in 2012, it was revealed that,

While Korea is often cited as being 30-35% Christian, the most recent census numbers indicate that that number has decreased to about 18%. While this is still a staggering number for Asia, the drastic decline is hard to ignore. Furthermore, it is now the case that less than 2% of 20-somethings regularly attend church, leading us to believe that Korea’s religious future may look quite a bit like that of other developed nations. Yes, there was a cultural moment 20 or 30 years ago when an attractional, come-and-see model produced results and numbers, but this is simply no longer the case.<sup>42</sup>

Contemporary information also shows particularly for the Protestant church in South Korea, that it is the least liked of all religions. And many young people are moving out of it because of the self-interest and materialism of leadership.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it is crucial to understand the decline fundamentally as human self-deification at the expense of true worship of God.

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<sup>40</sup> See Terry Gray (February, 1996), ‘Westminster Catechism’,

[http://www.creeds.net/Westminster/shorter\\_catechism.html](http://www.creeds.net/Westminster/shorter_catechism.html) accessed: June, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Kwok Hyeok-rhul, ‘Why is the number of Christians decreasing in Korea?’ (August 10, 2006), [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_opinion/148175.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_opinion/148175.html) Accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> B Toh, ‘State of Christianity in Korea’ in *ubfriends.org* (March 19, 2012), <http://www.ubfriends.org/2012/03/19/is-ubf-in-decline-along-with-the-church-in-seoul/> Accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Hyunsu Yim, ‘Sadly, Churches in South Korea are Seeing Decline; Survey Reveals Public Views Protestants as ‘Selfish, Materialistic’ in *Black Christian News Network One* (January 1, 2018)

Moreover, the Korean society is one which has been built upon the foundation of the eastern religions particularly Shamanism, Buddhism and Confucianism. It cannot be an overemphasis that Confucianism has a dominant influence on the people. In this religion, self-transcendence from the human anxiety is the key in understanding success. Again, focus is not on a deity as a source of fulfilment for the human self-transcendence, the human self is the focus. Therefore self-deification is more probable in Korea because of the propensity for it to be aggravated through the religion and culture of Confucianism.

The Journalist Michael Breen says the following regarding the deep impressions Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoist religions had made on Koreans. Concerning Shamanism he says, They [Koreans] are not restrained, mannered, thoughtful moral engineers, seeking through *self-cultivation* to change both *themselves* and their society. There is a contradictory passion and earthy sensuousness to Koreans. You would think this kind of behaviour would have been outlawed by Confucians and relegated to the unwashed masses, but not so. This is because of the existence of a deeper sediment in the Korean psyche – Shamanism.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding Buddhism's influence on Koreans, Christians and non-Christians, Breen states that: When you examine this Korean-ness, you find in fact that the values of all the religions that have influenced Korea exist within the Korean mind. Each has deposited its sediment. Buddhism was the predominant faith in Korea for almost a millennium up to the end of the fourteenth century. The Zen concept of no past or future, just a constantly flowing present, can be seen behind the immediacy and impatience of Koreans of all faiths. Also, the Buddhist idea that the spiritual and physical worlds flow into one another is more pragmatically appealing to many Christians than the idea of waiting afterlife. Many Christians consult with Buddhist and Shamanic fortune-tellers to tap into the spiritual world for advice.

Because of traditional poverty, both Buddhism and Christianity have a dominant blessing-type mentality. Instead of emphasising Buddhist compassion and Christian love, the stress has been on buying your way into paradise. The full Gospel Church, which claims over half a million members and has the single largest congregation in the history of Christendom, has a very simple appeal. Accept Jesus and guarantee your health and wealth, the two items which always figure on top in opinion polls about what Koreans most worry about. The founder, Cho Young-gi, had a beautifully simple strategy for growth. The congregation burgeoned, with the massive influx of people from the villages into the cities in the 1970s, around home groups, mostly of women, who met once a week to study a Bible text and pray for sick members and for their husbands' promotions...of waiting for an afterlife.<sup>45</sup>

Again, regarding the impact of Confucianism Breen shows that: From the late fourteenth century onwards, neo-Confucian scholar-bureaucrats eclipsed Buddhism. Through education and social regulations, Confucian ceremony and values reached all levels of society. This influence went deeper than it ever did in Japan or China and it remains today. While many reject Confucianism for its association with an old class system and with authoritarianism, Koreans still adhere to many of its principles and rituals.

Confucian precepts, with their emphasis on vertically ordered human relationships, have informed Korean thinking and social organisation for centuries.<sup>46</sup>

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[blackchristiannews.com/2018/01/sadly-churches-in-southk-korea-are-seeing-decline...](http://blackchristiannews.com/2018/01/sadly-churches-in-southk-korea-are-seeing-decline...) Accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Breen, *The Koreans: Who They Are, What They Want, Where their Future Lies* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 43.

<sup>45</sup> Breen, *The Koreans*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Breen, *The Koreans*, 43.



When it comes to Taoist influence, Breen says, “In particular, the Taoist ethos that ‘the way that can be discussed is not the way’ figures in Korean attitudes. There is a deep animosity towards discursive argument.”<sup>47</sup>

This position may be identified through religio-cultural systems of hierarchy<sup>48</sup>, high sense for concreteness<sup>49</sup>, *Han* and *Kibun*.<sup>50</sup> It means that Korea is a society built on utility which constantly seeks for a concrete expression of knowledge hence the advancement of science and technology.

Therefore the deification of the self through hierarchy may lead to the pursuit of science and technology as utility. This is so when money making becomes the chief end of the church and the church exists as a spring board for persons in the church to possess health and wealth. It is also a situation when church leadership by the undergirding principles of Confucianism arrogate to themselves high powers similar to royalty. It may reflect the current Korean church growth decline as the figures show. This self-deification may also be the reason behind the seemingly detestability of self-criticism. Because loyalty to leadership is paramount in Korean culture, there is acquiescence, to all manner of un-Christian forms of ideals such as running churches as business entities<sup>51</sup>.

Both the concepts of *han* and *kibun* are means of self-restraint and self-transcendence. Self-restraining in the sense that individuals suppress instinctive urges against injustice and suffering<sup>52</sup>. And self-transcending because “it seeks the harmony in relationships over objective truth and goodness.”<sup>53</sup> But acquiescence to evil leads to hypocritical behaviour<sup>54</sup> which could make corruption in a church for instance become a canker. Such behaviour can never be entertained as biblical Christianity. The reason is that human centeredness leads to human pleasing attitudes and characters while on the other hand, God pleasing character is bound to please God irrespective of those involved. Therefore Korean Protestant Christianity ought to grow deeper by digging<sup>55</sup> up religio-cultural elements which have not been transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As to the reason, which may be associated with the negative attitude of South Korean Protestantism against communism, a simple answer of American geopolitical influence may be given. This may be justified by the fact that the North Koreans who were also influenced by Confucian class structure had to abandon it because of geopolitical hegemony of Russia and China. Nonetheless, the South Korean Christian negative attitude against communism may be the undergirding Confucian hierarchy. The Confucian hierarchy may have affinity with Roman Catholic hierarchical theology and ethos. The belief of the Protestant priesthood of all believers, one of the bases for human freedom and human equality perhaps is yet to be understood in its full depth. In a nation where Protestants may be more in number compared to Catholics, it is natural to admit that the hate of communism by the Christian community may not be attributable to Christianity at all but rather to the undercurrent of Confucian hierarchy.

<sup>47</sup> Breen, *The Koreans*, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University press, 1992), 1-14.; See also 125.

<sup>49</sup> Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 21, 101-102.

<sup>50</sup> Breen, *The Koreans*, 38-40.

<sup>51</sup> Compare the Confucian capitalist values, with Seong Hwan Cha, ‘Myth and Reality in the Disclosure of Confucian Capitalism in Korea’ in *Asian Survey*, 43. 3 (May/June, 2003), 492.

<sup>52</sup> Breen, *The Koreans*, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Breen, *The Koreans*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> On separation of morality from political and social order which implies that those in authority may simply ignore ethics and morality in the discharge of their duties, compare Seong Hwan Cha, ‘Modern Chinese Confucianism: The Contemporary Neo-Confucian Movement and Its Cultural Significance’ in *Social Compass* 50. 4 (2003), 485.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Cha, ‘Myth and Reality’ 505-506.

## Occidental Decline

Many reasons, including scientific materialism and its ally, secularization, are the main issues pertaining to church decline.<sup>56</sup> According to the *Atlas of global Christianity 1910 -2010*, the number of Christians living in the Occident in 1910, decreased from a high of 66% of global Christians to a low of 25.6% in 2010.<sup>57</sup> This may be deeply associated with humanism which existed before the Reformation and persisted after it through science and technology.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it is so much needless, to say, that, the church in Europe has declined because it is a stark reality. Of the many reasons ascribed to the decline, the notion of the human ego and its urge for self-transcendence which is sought after through the acquisition of material things explains the decline. This is what we have termed in this paper as human self-deification.

The Christendom period showed that from Constantine to the end of the middle ages, Christianity was employed as a tool of creating and ruling the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>59</sup> A common observation, of, any imperial system, is, the power to control wealth. There is no doubt that each nation in the fragmenting Roman Empire of Europe wanted to advance in control and in power through wealth. Notable is the important role the church played and how it contributed directly and indirectly to advance science and technology through humanism.<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, it should be added that the competition among the Europeans led to another round of imperialism and competition. This competition among the countries of Europe for material gains continued in the areas of explorations and discoveries of places in North America, Africa<sup>61</sup> and South America. These places became the grounds for the production of raw materials for industries in Europe<sup>62</sup>. The competition for material gain did not only promote slavery and exploitation, but continuous rivalry and conflict among Europeans. This is evidenced by the fact that before the Reformation explorers had started trading in West Africa before gaining momentum in the European Industrialization.

Basically, the competition which existed among the nations and the resultant hegemony ensured that each group advanced their course to outwit the other. Notable of the consequences of this hegemonic spirit for the sole aim of material gain triggered the terrible world wars. The totalitarianism of Nazi holocaust and the urge to conquer the world by one nation were all driven by the spirit of the human ego and its satisfaction through materialism.

## CONCLUSION

What we have attempted to do so far, is to show what Weber's sociological theory is, employing the concept of ideal type. We have shown how, the ideal type of human self-deification is, highly immersed in the postmodern world. Moreover, the human self-deification as an ideal type, has been used to show the undercurrents of Christianity, such as secular humanism, hierarchy, *han* and *kibun*, which are vital in explaining church decline in Protestant South Korea and Europe respectively.

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<sup>56</sup> Wener Ustorf 'Local Theological Research in Great Britain' ed. Volker Kuster in *Reshaping Protestantism in a Global context*, (Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2009), 99; Elijah J. F. Kim, *The Rise of the Global South: The Decline of the Western Christendom and the Rise of Majority World Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 19.

<sup>57</sup> Todd Michael Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross and Sandra S. K. Lee, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 8; quoted in Kim, *The Rise of the Global South*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Kim, *The Rise of the Global South*, 1; Tenbruck, 'Science as Vocation – Revisited' 360 – 362; Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 285-288.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), 150 – 154.

<sup>60</sup> Tenbruck, 'Science as Vocation – Revisited' 360 – 362; Lindberg and Numbers, *God and Nature*.

<sup>61</sup> Carl Christian Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 2007), 26-28.

<sup>62</sup> Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, 26-28.

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