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Correlating the Nevius Method with Church Planting Movements: Early Korean Revivals as a Case Study

Abstract

John Nevius served as a missionary to China in the late nineteenth-century. From his field experience, Nevius argued for radical changes in missionary methodology. His greatest influence may have been on the mission to Korea beginning in the 1890s. David Garrison, currently serving in South Asia, served for several years in influential administrative roles within the International (formerly Foreign) Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He studied and advocated Church Planting Movements [CPM], necessitating a change in contemporary missionary methodology. Both men have made major contributions to the practice of missions. This article endeavors to show the similarities between their methods, viz., the Nevius Method and CPMs, through the historical lens of the introduction of Protestant Christianity to Korea. The impetus behind this analysis is the role and value of missions history in developing missionary strategy. Both the Nevius Method and Church Planting Movements implement certain similar strategies that have proved effective and are worthy of consideration.

Keywords

Nevius, CPM, Revival, Indigenous, Three-self, Korea

Cover Page Footnote

PhD Candidate in Applied Theology

INTRODUCTION

The study of the history of missions is an integral part of the ongoing revision of missionary methods. Affective missionaries have taken cultural context seriously and adjusted their methods accordingly. One contemporary method that not only takes culture seriously, but also values both the health of local churches and their exponential growth is that associated with Church Planting Movements.¹

However, ever since the First Great Awakening, Western missionary advance has also included, among other things, missionaries' labor and prayer that God would pour out His Spirit in revival. One such period of revival that is important for the discussion of missionary methodology is the Korean revivals of the early twentieth century.² As will be shown in the historical section of this article below, the missionary methods of John Nevius were put on display through these revivals.³ The Nevius Method,⁴ as his emphases have been called, is a methodology fitting to be compared to the contemporary emphasis on Church Planting Movements.

The thesis of this article is that there is significant continuity between Church Planting Movement methodology and the Nevius. A comparison of these methods establishes that certain missiological principles are useful for the missionary engagement of any people, and that contemporary methods can learn from both the mistakes and successes of the past. The practicality of this comparison may also be a catalyst for younger missionaries to further study the history of missions. Furthermore, this study is another illustration of the importance of the continued study of global Christianity. Not only has Christianity greatly expanded in the non-Western world, as many studies have shown,⁵ this

¹ Church Planting Movements will be defined and discussed at length later in this article.

² The Presbyterian (North, first, then later South) and Methodists (North) were among the first Protestant groups to enter Korea and instantly became the overwhelming majority of Protestants in Korea, particularly the Presbyterians. It is important to note that, as will be discussed later in this article, when John Nevius visited Korea, these denominations largely adopted the his methods, as did their respective church plants. This article, when speaking of "early Protestant Christianity in Korea," is referring primarily to the Presbyterian and Methodist denominational endeavors.

³ John Livingston Nevius (March 4, 1829-October 19, 1893) served as a missionary with the American Presbyterian Board of Foreign missions for forty years in China. Three years prior to his death, Nevius was invited to speak to the young missionaries in the newly opened field of Korea. The Korean missionaries, and subsequently, the Korean Church, adopted Nevius' principles, becoming the first of very few contexts to implement the Nevius Method. See Helen S. Coan Nevius, *The Life of John Livingston Nevius: For Forty Years a Missionary to China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1895); Everett N. Hunt, Jr., "John Livingston Nevius, 1829–1893: Pioneer of Three-Self Principles in Asia," in *Mission Legacies*, 190–6.

⁴ To be discussed in detail later in this article.

⁵ These works are published frequently. A strong and current example is Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How Twentieth-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); See also the earlier call for Global Church History by Wilbert R. Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 2, (Apr 1996): 50–7. Cf. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity

ongoing history is important learning material for the continued mission of the church.

Why compare the Nevius Method with CPM methods?⁶ Missiology, like every other discipline, needs the infusion of fresh ideas. Sometimes, the fresh idea is a new implementation of a tested ideology. Both the Nevius Method and CPMs benefit from ideas generated by two great missionary statesmen—Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn. These men developed the groundwork for a fresh philosophy of mission so desperately needed during the nineteenth century. They called for an indigenous, three-self church: self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating.⁷ While Venn’s and Anderson’s pioneer voices faced criticism, a way of thinking had been birthed—a way of thinking that elevated the value of a native and vibrant church.⁸ With Venn and Anderson, a philosophy of mission emerged that continues to be incarnated in contemporary missiology—the principle of indigeneity.⁹

Since 1945,” *IBMR* 24, no. 2 (Apr 2000): 50–8; Tite Tiénou, “Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 37–51. The last works are only a brief introduction to the subject. Several other general publications as well as works on specific peoples and regions also deserve attention.

⁶ Proponents often argue that CPMs are fresh movements of God in response to *new ideas* in missionary methodology. For instance, Jim Slack, in his article evaluating CPMs claims that “If one investigates the various historical movements and compares them to the ‘in-the-field’ dynamics of a CPM, the differences between them will be clearly seen.”; Jim Slack, “Church Planting Movements: Rationale, Research and Realities of Their Existence,” *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 6 (Spring 2007): 33. In other words, he argues that CPMs are contemporary phenomena in the modern missions movement. Whereas other historical examples may serve to prove Slack’s point, the growth of Christianity in Korea demonstrates that when it comes to church planting movements “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). The irony of quoting this verse is found in referring to the 1999 booklet published by the Office of Overseas Operations of the International Mission Board [IMB] of the Southern Baptist Convention entitled “Something New Under the Sun.” This booklet outlined the “New Directions” of the IMB as it transitioned from being focused on established fields and institutions to focusing on pioneer and unreached areas, strategically from “evangelism that leads to churches” to “church planting movements” and “comprehensive strategies.” For a thorough investigation of the factors leading up to the changes, see Richard Bruce Carlton, “An Analysis of the Impact of the Non-Residential/Strategy Coordinator’s Role in Southern Baptist Missiology” (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa), 2006.

⁷ Rufus Anderson, a life-long administrator with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM], and Henry Venn, another life-long administrator with the Church Missionary Society [CMS] of the Anglican Church, independently yet virtually simultaneously advocated these three principles for developing the native church. For further study, see: Max Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); R. Pierce Beaver, ed., *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); C. Peter Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church: A Study in Victorian Missionary Strategy* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990).

⁸ Stephen Neill labels Venn’s failure at implementing his ideology in Sierra Leone as being “almost wholly disastrous.” Neill favors the solution offered by Bishop A. R. Tucker of Uganda whereby “African and foreigner would work together in true brotherhood, and on a basis of genuine equality.” Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1964), 221. Venn, an Anglican, advocated a native church separate from the expatriate community in the colonies. Peter

Later in the nineteenth century, from 1885 to 1886, Nevius published a series of articles in the “Chinese Recorder” that would prove to be equally revolutionary as controversial. These articles, collected and published in 1895 under the title “Methods of Mission Work,”¹⁰ critiqued the prevailing missionary paradigm in mid- to late nineteenth-century China. One hundred fourteen years later, David Garrison published a short booklet, entitled “Church Planting Movements,”¹¹ calling for a radical reorientation of missionary efforts in the late twentieth-century.¹² Both men, separated by over a hundred years of missionary thought and practice, faced environments in need of change, and both called for missionaries to seek indigeneity from the very beginning of their church planting ministries. The similarities in the methods and intended results of these strategies, then, deserve careful inspection.

WHAT WAS THE NEVIUS METHOD?

Nevius, unlike Anderson and Venn, was not an administrator; he was a lifelong practicing missionary. Though the genesis of the Venn and Anderson’s three-self philosophy of mission coincided with Nevius’ tenure as a missionary, Nevius’ methods arose more from his disgust with the situation he found once arriving in China rather than out of appreciation for their published views.¹³ Upon arriving at

Williams argues that criticisms of Venn centered on accusations that his policies violated the unity of the Church. Williams, *Self-Governing Church*, 258–63. R. Pierce Beaver, though championing Anderson’s rejection of “civilization” as a goal of Christian mission, summarily critiques Anderson for not “[questioning] the superiority of Western civilization and [failing] to see the need for thoroughgoing cultural adaptation in the younger churches.” R. Peirce Beaver, “Rufus Anderson, 1796–1880: To Evangelize, Not Civilize”, in *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson *et al.* American Society of Missiology Series, No. 19 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 552. William R. Hutchinson, on the other hand, emphasizes Anderson’s peculiar recognition that missionaries did not recognize the close link between their Christian mission and their own cultural biases—“his understanding of the subtler forms of cultural imposition makes him worthy of more notice than he has yet received.” William R. Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 88.

⁹ Traditionally, indigeneity referred to the independence of the native church. Melvin Hodges defines this as being “responsible.” Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1993), 15–21. Andrew Walls goes further by making a simple, but compelling, argument that both indigeneity, the church being at home in any culture, and “pilgrim”-ness are intrinsic to New Testament Christianity, as well as for understanding its subsequent history. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 7–15.

¹⁰ Republished in 1899 under the title “The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches”, Nevius’ work remains in print as of 2003 in its fourth edition. John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Hancock, NH: Monadnock Press, 2003).

¹¹ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: IMB, 1999).

¹² Former Associate Vice President of Strategy Coordination and Mobilization of the IMB, Garrison now serves with the IMB in a strategic leadership role in South Asia.

¹³ Young Min Kim disagrees, claiming that Nevius was totally dependent on Venn and Anderson: “Nevius built upon the “three-selves” concept of Venn and Anderson, but he took sharp exception to the practice of hiring nationals with mission funds, which was advocated even by Rufus

the Ningpo Mission, Nevius encountered the “mission station” and its “employment system,” that is hiring paid pastors and evangelists to carry out the mission work.¹⁴ Samuel Chao analyzes this system as follows: “Because this employment system dominated all missionary methodology . . . it inevitably institutionalized the Chinese dependency on Western foreign missions This pattern generated financial dependence, and virtually created a ‘parasitic ministry’ model.”¹⁵ Nevius made several objections to the “Old Method” of employing paid converts. He argued that it not only injures the natural and voluntary life-mission of an unpaid convert, but it even endangers their progress in Christian discipleship, creating a class of mercenary Christians.¹⁶ Thus, Nevius sought to free the native church and the missionary enterprise from the entanglements of foreign dependency through his “New Method.”

Two of the major contributions of Nevius’ “New Method” are his insistence that Christians be encouraged to remain in their pre-conversion vocation and that there be instituted a comprehensive discipleship and training program leading to a missional engagement by the church.¹⁷ Charles Allen Clark summarizes the Nevius Method in nine principles that have become the standard summary of the method: (1) widespread itinerant personal evangelism by the missionary; (2) self-propagation, that is, every believer as an evangelist and teacher of someone, as well as a learner, a model called layering; (3) self-government, where unpaid believers lead their own individual churches; circuit helpers (paid by locals) aid these local believers by travelling from church to church, functioning as an elder but unable to administer sacraments; later, paid pastors replace circuit helpers once the church is able to support its own pastor; (4) self-support—believers build their own chapels, each group contributes to paid helpers salary, schools receive only partial subsidy, and no pastors of single churches paid by foreign funds; (5) systematic Bible study through a system of classes for biblical education of all believers; (6) strict church

Anderson despite his “self-support” concept. This was Nevius’ most significant contribution to the history of mission methodology, and his policy has been widely adopted by mission agencies since his day. He added to his strongly indigenous concept two other vital elements: thorough and systematic Bible study and missionary itineration. These were not new ideas, but Nevius gave them a new dimension by projecting them into the context of a more radically indigenous idea of planting and developing missionary churches.” Young Min Kim, “The Nevius Method and the Early Mission Policy of the Presbyterian Church in Korea: A Reappraisal in the Light of Recent Criticism” (Th.M. thesis, Regent College, 1995), 99. But Samuel Chao retorts, “The Nevius Plan, nevertheless stands distinct from the ideas of others in that it stresses the self-support concept. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of carefully making the gospel relevant to peoples in their particular situation.” Samuel H. Chao, “John L Nevius (1829 – 1893) and the Contextualization of the Gospel in 19th Century China: A Case Study,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2 (October 1988): 298.

¹⁴ Samuel H. Chao, “John Livingston Nevius (1829–1893): A Historical Study of His Life and Mission Methods” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1991), 52–3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60–1.

¹⁶ Nevius, *Missionary Churches*, 22–28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29–40.

discipline; (7) co-operation and union with other bodies; (8) non-interference in lawsuits; and (9) general helpfulness in economic life problems of the people.¹⁸ The Korean nationals adopted these principles as central to the makeup of the church.

Though Nevius contrasted his system with the method of employing native agents, the Nevius Method presented a broader philosophy of mission that dealt with, *inter alia*, the daily activities of the missionary,¹⁹ the life of the native church, including its discipline and discipleship, and the relationship of mission agencies to one another. Whereas Nevius' philosophy of mission bore mixed results during his lifetime, it radically changed the future of Korean Christianity.²⁰ In 1890, Nevius

¹⁸ Charles Allen Clark, "The National Presbyterian Church of Korea as a Test of the Validity of the Nevius Principles of Missionary Method" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1929), 29–30. Samuel Chao follows the second "edition" of Clark's published dissertation in adding a tenth principle (becoming the new second principle)—"The Bible should be the [*sic*] central to every part of the work." Chao, "Nevius", 216. cf. Charles Allen Clark, *The Nevius Plan of Mission Work in Korea: Illustrated in Korea* (Minneapolis: E. C. Heinz, 1937), 42. Kim adds, "Because Nevius firmly believed the Bible is absolutely authoritative as the Word of God, he sought the basis of all his work in the Bible, and consequently emphasized the importance of systematic Bible study." Kim, "Early Mission Policy," 136.

¹⁹ Chao summarizes Nevius' view on missionary work: "All missionary work, Nevius maintained, consists of three distinct activities: 1) making or gathering disciples; 2) baptizing and organizing them into churches; and 3) teaching them and building them up in the faith." Chao, "Historical Study", 120.

²⁰ G. Thompson Brown reports that during Nevius' tenure as missionary, "[he] felt that his plan was working. The number of meeting places increased to over sixty. One thousand adults were baptized in the first seven years the plan was in operation." However, Robert E. Speer, reported, "In 1899 [six years after Nevius' death] there were only ten fully self-supporting Presbyterian churches [remaining]," so he made "a more vigorous appeal [that] self-support should be initiated. He cited with approval the Nevius Plan and the Shandong policy whereby 'The people provide the place of worship, though it be but a humble home. And supervising them by an itinerant evangelist, to whose support they shall be induced to contribute as soon and as liberally as possible.' [Robert E. Speer, *Report on the China Missions of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Board of Foreign Missions, 1897), 29–33]." Brown continues, "The Nevius methods, while never fully accepted, nevertheless had their influence. Shandong, where Nevius worked, became the strongest synod for the Presbyterians and the one that most clearly exemplified a Three-Self church." G. Thompson Brown, *Earthen Vessels and Transcendent Power: American Presbyterians in China, 1837–1952*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 25 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 85, 142, 317. Everett Nichols Hunt, Jr., disagrees that the Nevius Method is a sufficient explanation of the "success" of Protestant beginnings in Korea." Interestingly, he cites Roy E. Shearer in support of his claim. What must be noted is that the temporal scope of Hunt's work is the early beginnings of Protestant work in Korea (1883–90), when the missionaries were struggling to get a foothold in the country, while Shearer looks at the period after 1890. Furthermore, combining Shearer's arguments with Hunt's, one realizes that there is no simplistic answer for the success of the Korean Church. The zeal associated with the revival in addition to the many sociological factors of the period deserves equal attention in answering the question: "Why did they succeed?" Even so, Shearer attributes the success of the Korean Church after 1895 to tenets of the Nevius Method. Furthermore, later in the book, Hunt admits the success of the Bible Class system in Korea, borrowed from Nevius. Everett Nichols Hunt, Jr., *Protestant Pioneers in Korea*, American Society of Missiology Series, No. 1 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980), 2, 77. To be fair to Hunt, in an article published much later than his monograph, he concedes, "The greatest tribute to John L. Nevius is that the Nevius Plan is the most frequently cited factor in the outstanding growth of the Korean Church." Everett N. Hunt, Jr. "The

visited the young missionaries in Korea and instructed them in his methods.²¹ These young missionaries implemented and adapted the Nevius method as part of the constitution of the Presbyterian mission in Korea. This implementation served as a catalyst for several years of both revival and growth.

Traditionally, the cause of the growth has been attributed to revival alone, as a spiritual overflow following the Welsh Revival of 1904–06. However, while many histories mark the beginning of the Great Revival in Korea as 1907, scholars note that the revival occurred in three phases: the early sparks (1895–1903); the Early Revival Movement (1903–6); and the Great Revival (1907–10).²² By 1910, only fourteen years after Protestant missionaries began ministering without fear of government persecution, the number of Christians in Korea eclipsed two hundred thousand.²³ Though the beginnings of Korean Christianity have been attributed to early revivals in the country, the explosion of church growth in Korea began eight years before the earliest revivals; and yet, the years after 1907 saw a slower growth rate than the years before the revival.²⁴ These two facts serve as prime evidence that the growth certainly included yet transcended the revival.²⁵

The growth can be analyzed by looking at two subsequent time periods: (1) from 1895–1905, and (2) from 1905–10. Roy Shearer lists two factors that contributed to the growth from 1895–1905: the Sino-Japanese War, and the ability of missionaries to train and incorporate communicants into the ministry of the

Legacy of John Livingston Nevius,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15, No. 3 (July 1991): 124.

²¹ Chao, “Historical Study,” 244ff.

²² Chang Ki Lee views the three different waves of the revival as the revival at Wonsan (1903), the spread of the revival throughout Korea (1904–6), and the Pyongyang revival (1907). Chang Ki Lee, *The Early Revival Movement in Korea (1903-1907): A Historical and Systematic Study* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2003), 68–118.

²³ L. George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea 1832–1910*, 2d edition (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1971), 423; cf. Roy E. Shearer, *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 48, 167.

²⁴ Jin-Kuk Ju, “The Missionary Nature of the Church and its Implementation in the Korean Church” (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), 128.

²⁵ Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge cite Young-Hoon Lee, “Korean Pentecost: The Great Revival of 1907,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001): 81, who references the annual reports of the Presbyterian and Methodists missions in Korea, respectively, to argue that the explosive growth of the church between 1906 and 1907 supports their thesis that Korean church grew in revival fervor as the result of the spread of the news of the 1904–5 Welsh revival. Hansen and Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 109. Roy Shearer goes to great lengths to distinguish between inquirers (the community) and communicants in his study of church growth during this same time period. While there were spikes in the size of the community during the revivals, he finds that the communicant membership of the Korean church grew quickly and steadily through 1914. Shearer, *Wildfire*, 50. These two interpretations of the numbers are not contradictory. One is looking at the overall influence of Christianity (Hansen and Woodbridge); the other is looking at the conversion and assimilation growth specifically (Shearer). Nonetheless, the health of the church arguably should be gleaned from the growth of the communicant membership.

church.²⁶ The latter factor must be attributed to the Nevius Method. From 1905–10, Shearer noted the impact of the Russo-Japanese War, the use of the Bible class, the “Million Souls Campaign,” and the independence of the Korean church.²⁷ Though not attributing the church growth to one factor, he notes that the Nevius Method’s emphasis on Bible classes and the self-government of the church had more impact on church growth than the revivals, so that the success of Christianity in Korea has been roundly attributed to the incorporation and adaptation of the Nevius Method.²⁸ The missionaries, and the Korean church, learned from Nevius the importance of native and voluntary engagement in church planting.²⁹ Therefore, the revivals in Korea benefited from cutting-edge, culturally appropriate missionary methodology. As it will be seen, following the Nevius Method aided the planting of churches in several ways.

First, the itineration of the missionaries aided their understanding of the rural peasant and it aided the spread of the church further into the interior. At that time, over eighty percent of the population was rural while eighty percent of the

²⁶ Shearer, *Wildfire*, 49–53. Kenneth Scott Latourette lists several other factors to be considered as well, including social and political motivations for Koreans to favor Christianity. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century in Northern Africa and in Asia*, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, vol. VI (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 425–30. Cf. G. Thompson Brown, “Why Has Christianity Grown Faster in Korea Than in China?” *Missiology: An International Review* XXII, No. 1 (Jan 1994): 78. Contrast the argument of Rodney Stark for the growth of Christianity in the first three centuries. He makes a compelling argument that the growth of Christianity should be attributed to social causes, such as the forces of social conversion, the role of women, epidemics, etc. Though he was looking at the birth of Christianity in the Mediterranean world, the role of social factors in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century cannot be ignored. Even so, social factors do not negate that rapid growth indeed occurred. There is no argument that the social context heavily favored the introduction of Christianity into Korea. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997). David Garrison also recognizes the influence of the social context on a CPM. Though he claims that the Common Elements of a CPM are in no particular order, it is interesting that in 1999 “Perceived leadership crisis or spiritual vacuum in society” was ordered sixth of ten while in 2004 “Climate of Uncertainty in Society” was listed first of ten. Cf. Garrison, *CPM* [1999], 39; Garrison *CPM* [2004], 221–2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 53–9.

²⁸ See, for instance: Charles Allen Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Method* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1930); G. Thompson Brown, “Why Has Christianity Grown Faster in Korea Than in China,” *Missiology: An International Review* 22.1 (Jan 1994): 77–88; Myung Keun Choi, *Changes in Korean Society between 1884–1910 as a Result of the Introduction of Christianity*, Asian Thought and Culture, Vol. 20 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 265–6; Chun Beh Im, “A Critical Investigation of the Influence of the Second Great Awakening and Nineteenth-Century Revival on Revivals in Korea (1884–1910)” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), 85–91. Wi Jo Kang, “The Nevius Methods,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34, no. 6 (June 1963): 335–42. cf. Keun Whan Kang, “A Critical Study on the Early Mission Policies of the Council of Missions in Korea in the light of the Nevius Plan,” *Ching Feng* 1 (New Series), no. 2 (Fall 2000): 201–220. Contrast Roland Allen, *The Nevius Method in Korea* (New York: World Dominion Press, 1930), 10–6.

²⁹ Shearer clarifies Nevius’ intent that his methods were “intended to be practical in all respects, including the disciplined use of foreign funds for *planting churches*” (emphasis added). In other words, all of Nevius’ innovations were aimed towards the reproduction of healthy churches. Shearer, *Wildfire*, 196.

ministry was urban. Nevius' methods reversed the paradigm. For instance, the missionaries regularly employed the use of the *sahrang* in evangelizing the people.³⁰ Initially, churches met in these *sahrang*s. Church members later built buildings, but they did so with their own funds. Furthermore, the locals imitated the itineration of the missionaries, so missionaries stumbled into villages finding churches planted and people awaiting training.³¹ The conversion growth in these villages followed family networks. Significantly, in any given village, as many as thirty families shared kinship ties.³²

Second, each believer was held responsible for preaching and teaching. Thus, the laity heavily involved themselves in church life. Moreover, the church adopted two years of intense instruction for the catechuminate. One could be denied baptism if he or she had not tried to lead another to Christ or was not teaching another.³³ The native church, not just the missionaries adopted these principles: "the Mission and the Church have been marked pre-eminently by a fervent evangelistic spirit."³⁴ Also, instead of giving money, poor Christians gave time and service as lay evangelists and preachers. Thus, the locals understood and adopted self-propagation and self-support.

The Bible classes brought the Scripture to the whole church. From these classes, lay Christians were developed into leaders through total life-submission to the Bible. These classes were led, for the most part, by the Korean believers. Classes were held on regional and local levels all the way down to the local church, some believers walking miles to participate.³⁵ Thus, Dr. William Blair, a Presbyterian missionary in Korea summarized the Bible classes:

The Bible-study class system is a special feature of the Korean work. Each Church appoints a week or longer some time during the year for Bible study. All work is laid aside. Just the Jews kept the Passover, the Korean Christians keep these days sacred to prayer and the study of God's Word. The result of such uninterrupted Bible study is inevitably a quickening of the entire Church, a true revival of love and service.³⁶

³⁰ The *sahrang* was an inner room in a home where Korean men would routinely stop to converse and rest. Allen D. Clark, *History of the Korean Church* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1916), 90–1.

³¹ Shearer, *Wildfire*, 145–51.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁵ Lee, Young-Hoon, "Premillennialism and Korean Presbyterianism: A Historical Study of the Premillennial Tradition of the Korean Presbyterian Church (1884–1945) from a Missiological Perspective" (D.Miss. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, 1997), 145–9.

³⁶ William Newton Blair and Bruce F. Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings Which Followed* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 67.

The advent of the revival greatly furthered the multiplication of the classes, so much so that Shearer saw the Bible class as an indisputable factor in Korean Church growth.³⁷ The number one spiritual factor upon the revival was the Bible class, an innovation drawn from the Nevius Method.³⁸ Thus, as Samuel Chao remarks, “Nevius must be called the originator of indigenization.”³⁹ The revivals set the missionary and the Korean Christian on equal footing; the Nevius Plan empowered and enabled an indigenous movement through the revivals.

WHAT IS A CPM?

Just as the method bearing Nevius’ name grew out of his experience on the mission field, the concept of a Church Planting Movement grew out the collective experience of Non-residential Missionaries working in countries previously considered closed to foreign missionaries.⁴⁰ These missionaries, with the purpose of mobilizing other Christians to reach their target people, found that these otherwise hidden peoples were extremely receptive to the gospel. As more missionaries reported the extreme receptivity of the gospel, David Garrison with a group of almost a dozen other Southern Baptist missionaries who were experiencing these phenomena convened to describe what they had been experiencing.⁴¹ From this meeting came the following definition of a CPM:

³⁷ Shearer, *Wildfire*, 52–6. Cf. Sung Won Yang, “The Influence of the Revival Movement of 1901–1910 on the Development of Korean Christianity” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 196. Yang argues that “The Nevius methods are not merely a system of self-support, self-propagation, and self-government. Its real core was in the Bible study system, which encouraged every Christian to study his Bible and to be able to pass on to others what he found there.” See also, Choi, *Changes in Korean Society*, 265–6; Yang, “Influence of the Revival Movement,” 95.

³⁸ Commenting on Allen’s critique of the Nevius Method (see note 24), Peter Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever give the following summary, “In a critical report on Nevius’ method as applied to Korea, Roland Allen queries whether the fundamental principle was, in fact, self-support or the Bible-class. Allen tends to think these were quite separate features and goes on to argue, therefore, that even missionaries who do not accept the financial aspect of Nevius’ method may nevertheless accept his emphasis on the Bible-class system. For Nevius, however, the two principles were inseparable. It is most unlikely, at any rate in Korea, that Nevius’ method as a whole would have been so successful had it omitted either of them.” Peter Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever, *The Responsible Church and the Foreign Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 94.

³⁹ Samuel H. Chao, “Case Study,” 297.

⁴⁰ See the emphasis on comprehensive strategies and especially the chapter on “Does it Work?” in V. David Garrison, *The Nonresidential Missionary: A New Strategy and the People it Serves* (Birmingham: New Hope & MARC, 1990), 24–31, 68; cf. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

⁴¹ Garrison, *CPM* [2004], 18.

A Church Planting Movement is a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.⁴²

Flowing out of this definition, the Overseas Leadership Team described “Ten Universal Elements” that were present in every CPM studied: prayer, abundant gospel sowing, intentional church planting, scriptural authority, local leadership, lay leadership, cell or house churches, churches planting churches, rapid reproduction, and healthy churches.⁴³ They also identified “Ten Common Factors,” most of which were found in most of the CPMs: worship in the heart language, evangelism has communal implications, rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church, passion and fearlessness, a price to pay to become a Christian, perceived leadership crisis or spiritual vacuum in society, on-the-job training for church leadership, leadership authority is decentralized, outsiders keep a low profile, and missionaries suffer.⁴⁴ Based on these twenty categories, the Global Research Department created assessment guidelines whereby an assessment team could determine not just that a CPM exists but “measure the history, dynamics, characteristics, and thus the health of a given CPM.”⁴⁵

The two main categories of questions used to determine if a CPM exists are “Sustainability” and “Rapid Reproduction”.⁴⁶ Under “Sustainability”, the assessment team asks three basic sets of questions, which relate to: (1) the evangelism, discipleship, and church planting efforts by the churches and their members, (2) how leaders are chosen, how they are trained, who trains them, etc., and (3) the indigeneity of the churches, meaning the issues of contextualization, self-support, self-governance, and self-propagation.⁴⁷ These questions emphasize the importance placed on local, lay leadership of churches. They also emphasize the importance of biblical discipleship and leadership training and the freedom from foreign dependency.

Under “Rapid Reproduction”, the team determines the rate of growth, the percentage of churches within the movement growing, and the even spread of growth throughout the target population.⁴⁸ The assessment team asks numerous

⁴²Garrison, *CPM* [1999], 7. David Garrison nuanced the definition for his 2004 book to read “rapid multiplication” instead of “rapid and exponential.” Jim Slack defends this change to accommodate movements that may not fit the exponential criteria but still exhibit traits of multiplication (mathematically). For the purposes of analyzing CPMs, Slack states that the IMB goes by the definitions put forth in Garrison’s 1999 booklet, not the 2004 book, since the analyzing criteria had already been created prior to the newer work. Therefore, this paper will follow the 1999 definitions. Slack, “Rationale, Research and Realities,” 37.

⁴³ Garrison, *CPM* [1999], 33–6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–40.

⁴⁵ Slack, “Rationale, Research and Realities,” 38.

⁴⁶ “Church Planting Movement Assessment Guide,” Global Research Department, IMB, personal copy in author’s possession.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

other questions which, though they witness to the overall quality and depth of the assessment, seek to determine to the health of a CPM and thus are outside the bounds of this article. In other words, for the purposes of comparing the situation in early-twentieth century Korea with more contemporary examples, what is of utmost importance are questions of being, rather than of well-being.

WERE THE EARLY REVIVALS IN KOREA EVIDENCE OF A CPM?

Historical distance prevents a team from completing the meticulous research of a CPM assessment. However, examining the extensive scholarly research on early Protestant Christianity in Korea through the lens of CPM principles reveals several similarities, just as Garrison states, “For years evangelicals have watched Korea with reverent amusement. Many felt that it was a movement of God, but one that was uniquely Korean. Today, we can see that it has parallels in other Church Planting Movements that God is birthing across Asia and around the world.”⁴⁹ Garrison’s assessment is noteworthy, particularly as it has been argued that in Korea, a pioneer area, the primary method of growth was church planting that blossomed into cross-cultural church planting.⁵⁰ Arguably, the growth of the church before, during, and after the revivals in Korea may be a prime example of a Church Planting Movement. How then does the history of early Protestant Christianity in Korea compare with CPM common and universal elements?

SELECT UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS AND COMMON FACTORS

The first universal element of a CPM is prayer. The revivals brought about an increased attitude of prayer. It is important to note that a strategy for prayer was not an explicit part of Nevius’ strategy. However, the Korean church developed several indigenous prayer movements in the wake of the revivals from 1903–10. This prayer movement, beginning with the passionate prayers of the revival meetings, culminated in the “early morning prayer meeting.” Sun Chu Kil led the prayer movement, which quickly drew large numbers of attendees.⁵¹ Missionaries may have witnessed, even initiated, great moments of prayer during their services, but it was the early morning prayer meetings that became representative of Korean Christianity. The early morning prayer movement continues to this day in Korea, 102 years after its inception. Jim Slack confers that “on-site prayers” are a “common

⁴⁹ Garrison, *CPM* [2004], 83.

⁵⁰ See, for instance: Hwal-young Kim, “From Asia to Asia: A History of Cross-Cultural Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Hapdong), 1959–1992” (D.Miss. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, 1993).

⁵¹ In Soo Kim, *Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean Nationalism, 1885–1920: A Study of the Contributions of Horace G. Underwood and Sun Chu Kil*, Asian Thought and Culture 16 (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 131. An excellent biographical introduction to the life and influence of Sun Chu Kil can be found in Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices From Africa and Asia* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 168–184.

and significant” finding among CPMs.⁵² Therefore, the Korean church exhibited the type of prayer associated with CPMs.

A second universal element is abundant gospel sowing. Self-propagation was built into the Nevius Method.⁵³ This fit the Korean context well since the earliest Protestant missionaries to Korea were not Westerners, but Koreans. Before Protestant missionaries could enter the country, native Koreans were trained outside of their homeland and sent back to Korea as missionaries. In 1873, John Ross entered a community of Koreans living in Manchuria. There, he introduced Christianity and translated the Bible into Korean. One of his acquaintances, Kyongjo, was baptized in Seoul in 1887, later to become one of the first seven Koreans ordained in 1907. By 1880, Ross translated the New Testament into Korean. Thus, four years before foreign missionaries could settle on Korean soil,⁵⁴ Ross sent Korean missionaries from Manchuria into their homeland with a Korean Bible.⁵⁵ The impact of Ross’ translation cannot be overvalued. This translation provided the young converts a New Testament to read and from which to share the gospel. Moreover, it reinforced their ability to worship God in their heart language. When missionaries arrived, they found the harvest field already toiled. In fact, the first Protestant missionary to Korea, Horace G. Underwood, “found thirty-three men ready for baptism who had in large part been converted and instructed by Suh Sang-Yun and his brother.”⁵⁶ Later, as the church was established, every Korean was expected to be a witness, so much so that new believers were not baptized unless they won someone to Christ, or could show that they were involved in witnessing.

Ecclesiological elements of CPMs are “intentional church planting,” “churches planting churches,” “home or cell churches”, and “healthy churches.” These elements were at the heart of the Nevius Method. Ultimately, Nevius’ goals in ministry were discipling and gathering believers into churches.⁵⁷ This played out tremendously well in Korea—in village after village, as missionaries itinerated, they found where a Korean believer had already planted a church prior to their arrival.⁵⁸ On the strict principles of self-support, these churches met in homes until they could build their own building with their own funds.⁵⁹ This church planting

⁵² Slack, “Rationale, Research, and Realities,” 41.

⁵³ John Nevius, *Missionary Churches*, 53, 89.

⁵⁴ Choi, *Changes in Korean Society*, 178–82.

⁵⁵ Other Koreans were exposed to Christianity outside of their country and returned to evangelize their families and neighbors. Kim, *Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean Nationalism*, 16.

⁵⁶ Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume II 1500–1900*, American Society of Missiology Series, No. 36 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 531.

⁵⁷ John Nevius, *Missionary Churches*, 45–6.

⁵⁸ Shearer, *Wildfire*, 145–51.

⁵⁹ Klaus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig, and Mariano Delgado, eds., *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America 1450–1990: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 77–8.

fervor overflowed into cross-cultural missions. When the first call came for cross-cultural missionaries to go from Korea to China, the whole Presbyterian assembly volunteered to serve as missionaries.⁶⁰ Thus, when it came to ecclesiology, the Korean church exhibited healthy habits, valued by proponents of CPMs, including being implicitly and explicitly missionary by nature.

Other elements that are intimately related are “Scriptural Authority,” “Local Leadership,” and “Lay Leadership.” Scholars uniformly agree that the main reason for both church growth and revival in Korea was the Bible class. The Bible was at the center of church life and training. While the Bible class was a more centralized form of theological education, and though open to all, the layering method turned every believer into a responsible trainer of other believers. In layering, each member is responsible both to teach another and to be taught by someone else. Thus, the layering method by its nature strongly encouraged lay involvement. Garrison advocates the similar 222 Principle. Based on 2 Tim 2:2, this principle encourages church planters to mentor other church planters who then mentor other church planters.⁶¹ Layering and the 222 Principle function very similarly.

Church leaders were chosen from the laity according to their gifts, and some of these leaders were allowed to attend seminary at their own expense during the off-months of the year.⁶² From these trained leaders, the Presbyterian General Assembly was formed as an autonomous body—it did not report to other foreign boards. While the foreign missionaries served for periods of time as over-pastors, and even though paid pastors eventually would arise in the Korean church, these factors did not slow down the early growth of the church, since it was the Koreans themselves, not the missionaries, who decided to and contributed to the paying of their own elders and pastors. Thus, the contextual implementation of theological education served as a catalyst for the explosive growth.

Though the investigation of the ten universal elements above provides sufficient warrant for understanding one force behind the Korean revivals as a Church Planting Movement, one common factor deserves particular attention—worship in the heart language.⁶³ The missionaries used the Korean language, and

⁶⁰ Kim, “From Asia to Asia”, 30.

⁶¹ 2 Tim 2:2, “These things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (NASB). Garrison, *CPM*[1999], 44; *CPM*[2004], 265.

⁶² Chao, “Historical Study,” 276.

⁶³ Each of the common factors warrants attention. The passion and fearlessness of the Korean believers was demonstration as they faced intense persecution by the Japanese, not just for being Christians, but for being Korean. The geopolitical situation in Korea was in upheaval. Missionaries agreed that the upheaval created the unique opportunity for the gospel. Samuel Hugh Moffett reports that “the result was a rare opportunity for friendly relations between Koreans and the missionaries, and for the presentation of the gospel of the cross as a message of hope in the face of defeat.” Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume II*, 537. Regarding the training of leaders, particularly the way seminary training was handled, the seminary met only during the three winter months when people generally were not outside of the home so the regular way of life of the people were not interrupted. The Nevius principles influenced how theological education was

the language of women and the uneducated.⁶⁴ The *literati*, on the other hand, used Chinese and studied the Chinese classics. Thus, when the missionaries used the common language, they subverted the Confucian order. The combination of the use of the Korean and the introduction of modern education raised the people out of illiteracy: “Suddenly as it were, a people who sat in darkness, saw the Great Light through the printed page.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, as already mentioned, the Bible had been translated into Korean prior to the arrival of the missionaries, and in 1907, the *Hangul* New Testament was produced further indigenizing Korean worship and church life.⁶⁶

As important as the growth and methods employed may be, there were concerns. The missionaries created institutions, such as hospitals and seminaries, which were troublesome to hand off to the local leaders. Young Min Kim listed one of the results of this weakness is that the Korean church “has generally tended to consider its theological seminaries as separate institutions from itself.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, the seminaries were somewhat centralized. Even though the classes were offered at the most convenient time of the year, the nationals had to raise their own funds for the higher training. Since so few of the Koreans could obtain the necessary funds, very few of the nationals received higher theological training. Kim concludes that “[t]he strict policy of self-support resulted in a weakness in theological training of native ministry.”⁶⁸ Kim also warned that though the Nevius Method was excellent for training leaders in the beginning of the work, he feared the missionaries “did not provide theological training at a high level, because they wished to keep the Korean Church continually under their own theological influence.”⁶⁹ These are important criticisms. However, the emphasis on providing biblical and theological education to the nascent Korean churches as a whole was a definite positive of the Nevius Method. It stands to reason that theological education would expand in availability and depth over time, as a native faculty is developed.

accomplished. Nevius based his entire argument on 1 Corinthians 7:20 that Christianity should not take a man out of the “life in which they are called.” Nevius, *Missionary Churches*, 29.

⁶⁴ Ironically, a wise, scholar king Yi Taijong, in AD 1446, created the Korean script, “to let the rank and file of the people into the joys of literature.” Little did that king know that at the end of his dynasty, his alphabet would allow the rank and file the enjoyment of the literature of God. Harry A. Rhodes, ed., *History of the Korea Mission, Presbyterian Church U.S.A. 1884–1934* (Seoul: Chosen Mission Presbyterian Church U.S.A, 1934), 90–1.

⁶⁵ Rhodes, *History of the Korea Mission*, 94.

⁶⁶ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2009), 156–7.

⁶⁷ Kim, “Early Mission Policy,” 256.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 225. Paul Hiebert accuses such missionary strategy of “theological colonialism” for not allowing the church to mature to this level. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 45–8. Like the Nevius Method and the training of leaders, a CPM is a great method for the young life of the church, but more needs to be done to provide high-level theological education later in the progression of the church.

AN ANALYSIS

Having examined the growth of the church in Korea in light of CPM strategy, what can be concluded? Based on the above evidence, the Korean church met the criteria of “Sustainability.” Church planting, evangelism, and discipleship were all carried out in a reproducible manner by the laity of the church, as well as by its leaders; this ministry certainly was performed in conjunction with the ministry of missionaries, but led, supported, and propagated locally by Korean believers. By definition, the church was indigenous.⁷⁰

The church also met the criteria of “Rapid Multiplication.”⁷¹ From 1895 to 1910, the church had grown from 500 believers to over 200,000.⁷² These believers were spread throughout the country organized into numerous churches, most of which were planted by lay people.⁷³ Furthermore, the leadership of the church was developed theologically from the beginning as the missionaries opened a seminary in 1901 to train a native clergy to lead the Presbyterian General Assembly. Thus, when seven Koreans graduated from the first class from the Pyongyang Theological Seminary in 1907, the goal of the Nevius method was symbolized—self-government.⁷⁴ The early work benefited from the missionaries’ concern for theological education.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the Nevius Method, and its philosophy of mission, was to build a healthy, indigenous church, led by locals, supported by locals and not dependent on missionaries or foreign Missions. Given well-documented nature of the the evidence surrounding the Korean, and that most scholars agree on the nature and cause of the phenomenal growth in Korea, it is profitable to compare the Nevius Method

⁷⁰ Mark Shaw argues that in light of the global dynamics, one must conclude that the Korean revivals were indigenizing the transmission of the westernized Christian faith—“Global revivals have the power to take what is alien and transform it into the indigenous.” Shaw, *Global Awakening*, 51–2.

⁷¹ Hoyt Lovelace questions Garrison’s focus on rapidity. This question is valid. However, the problem seems to be the nature of the category, whether it is prescriptive or descriptive, not the category itself. If one retains “Rapid Reproduction” as a descriptive category, as it appears the Global Research Team so does, rather than a prescriptive category, as it appears Garrison does in both the 1999 booklet and his 2004 book, then the critique falls short. But, as the differences between the Global Research Team and Garrison’s publications show, the biggest critique of CPM methodology is the unclear distinction between prescription and descriptive. See Hoyt Lovelace, “Is Church Planting Movement Methodology Viable?: An Examination of Selected Controversies Associated with the CPM Strategy,” *JEM* 6 (Spring 2007): 50.

⁷² In 1906, there were 843 churches (with 56,943 members). To show the growth in congregations, by 1930, there were 3000 churches. Beyerhaus and Lefever, *Responsible Church*, 91, 94.

⁷³ Kim, “Early Mission Policy,” 174.

⁷⁴ Clark, *Korean Church and Nevius Methods*, 98–109.

with that of CPMs.⁷⁵ It has been demonstrated that a church planting movement occurred between 1895 and 1910 and that the Nevius Method was an important factor in its existence and health. In this case, the historical record contributes to contemporary missiology by validating certain missiological ideas as evidenced by the success of the Nevius method and its common traits with the CPM. Adopting pioneering missiological methods like the Nevius Method, or pursuing a CPM, can yield valuable advances for the missionary. Moreover, this study gives impetus for further research on similar historical situations.⁷⁶ This researcher is hopeful that similar conclusions may be reached.

⁷⁵ An obvious weakness of this paper is the lack of direct interaction with primary source materials in the Korean language. Even so, numerous sources in this paper are trustworthy dissertations by Korean scholars, as well as published monographs by the same, and by reputable Western missionaries who had access to Korean documents. See, for example, the works referenced throughout by Samuel Chao, Charles Allen Clark, Young-Hoon Lee, Jang Yun Cho, and In Soo Kim among others.

⁷⁶ Moreover, given the importance of methodology in church growth, further biblical and theological research is needed.

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