

# Encouraging Male Participation in the Life of the Church

by Hoon Choi

While there is currently a general reduction in participation in Sunday mass in the United States, it is not unusual to find a steep decline among young adults. Several broad and interconnected dynamics may contribute to this tendency. For example, young adults may have a hard time finding a local church that matches their “prior experiences [in] college campus ministries.”<sup>1</sup> Emily Jendzejec, a PhD candidate in theology at Boston College, argues that “many of us had parish-hopped and found we were in an awkward in-between stage of being too old for college ministry yet not ready to join the Sunday morning family crowd...”<sup>2</sup> Others have become jaded by the problems dealing with power, exclusion, and especially neglect within their churches.<sup>3</sup>

A lack of male young adult participation has become particularly visible in liturgical or sacramental participation retreats, volunteer programs, and religious services in colleges in the US in general, and particularly in Korean American Catholic communities. This absence of men is especially puzzling due to the fact that men hold most positions of power in Korean American Catholic communities. While there may be multiple factors contributing to this trend, one influence that I want to pay particular attention to in this article is the ambivalent nature of male religiosity, a sensibility long present within the Catholic Christian tradition but often neglected.

Hoon Choi is an assistant professor of theology at Bellarmine University, specializing in World Christianity and Gender/Masculinities from a Korean Roman Catholic perspective.

In this article, I will examine the potential sources of this ambivalence, consider how they contribute to discouraging male young adult religious participation, and suggest how male religiosity can be retrieved to encourage healthy involvement in the lives of local churches. It may seem odd to suggest that there is a need to retrieve male models from the tradition when the Bible and the Christian tradition is dominated by and overwhelmingly slanted toward men and male-centered stories. However, my contention is not that there is not enough male religiosity in the Bible or tradition. Rather, I suggest that we need to revisit the stories within our tradition to *reexamine*

often overlooked suggestions for men and male religiosity, both of which have been hindered by stereotypes of maleness in our society at large. For example, while acknowledging certain commonly shared characteristics with

1 Emily Jendzejec, “Nourishing the Creatively Maladjusted,” *C21 Resources* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, The Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center, 2017), 24.

2 Jendzejec, “Nourishing the Creatively Maladjusted,” 24.

3 Some of the disaffiliated young Catholics are categorized into three major groups: the injured, the drifters, and the dissenters. For more information, see the study conducted by Saint Mary’s Press Catholic Research Group and The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (CARA), *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2018).

in the malleable category of maleness, my reference to “male” religiosity does not necessarily include stereotypes of maleness (e.g., stoic, power/control-seeking, monolithic, machismo). Moreover, as these stereotypes function in connection with patriarchal structures, this can lead to greater dysfunction and ill-health in the life of the Church.

To make my case, I will identify certain problems Korean American Catholic communities face today, such as negligence toward male spirituality and ineffective models of male participation, while using the story of the angel’s “annunciation” to St. Joseph as a means to discuss them.<sup>4</sup> I aim to accomplish this by focusing on St. Joseph’s setting and characteristics as found in the Gospel of Matthew and interpreting them through the cultural lens of Korean American Catholicism. In examining the intention and method of the author of the gospel, as well as the context in which Joseph is presented, I will argue that Joseph is one of many men within the Christian tradition who can be a model for maintaining male participation.<sup>5</sup> I will suggest and explain that as master craftsman (*Jangin*), father/husband, and a counter-cultural figure, Joseph would have embodied characteristics—including persistence and patience, warmth and attentiveness (*Jasang-ham*), and confidence and courage (*Jashin-gam*)—that young-adult Catholic men can embody to play a more active role in the life of the Church today.

### Korean American Catholic Generational Struggles

Generally speaking, the challenges Korean American Catholics face today are broad and large. While I cannot address all of these challenges in this article, I want to discuss at least a few different kinds of conflict that relate to generational disagreement. Many communities struggle with generational disagreements concerning various issues within their communities, such as how elders speak to younger members (and vice versa), the authoritative and paternalistic style of ministry and parish life, the extent to which an older generation is given a stronger say in decision-making processes due to their past efforts and sacrifices, how men speak to and about women, and certain methods by which the business of a church is conducted (including vote-rigging and opaque financial transactions and allocation), just to name a few.

When disagreements or simple preferences or opinions are expressed by a younger member of a church, one often hears about how ill-mannered (버릇없다 [*beoreut-eopda*]) he or she is. On the other hand, when an older member makes a comment about proper attire for church (e.g., no slippers, or appearing well-kempt), certain Korean-speaking younger members often accuse such members in a derogatory manner as being too “old-fashioned” (터춧대감 [*teotjut-daegam*]). The attitude toward younger church members, and, more problematically, the temperament of the younger generation itself is such that many refer to elder events as “adult” (e.g., adult mass 어른 미사 [*eoreun misa*], adult retreat 어른 피정 [*eoreun pijung*], adults’ gathering 어른들 모임 [*eoreun-deul moim*]), which implies that young-adult masses, retreats, and gatherings are not yet considered “adult.” Many Korean American Catholic young adults are beginning to express dissatisfaction with this generational ethos and its distinctions. When such types of conflicts arise, resentment typically grows deeper, especially when those of the older generation reflect upon the amount of time, energy, and money they sacrificed in days past.

Generational divides can grow exponentially when one adds gender and money into the equation. For example, conflict can arise when older (and even some younger) members of the church make certain essentialist comments about maleness or femaleness, such as “for a man” or “for a woman” (남자가 [*namja-ga*] and 여자가 [*yeoja-ga*],

4 Referring to Joseph’s angelic encounter as an “annunciation” is strategic in its aim. It serves to draw attention to an already established term of importance, thereby drawing attention to Joseph more closely.

5 It is important to point out that I understand all theology to be contextual theology. Indeed, much of my observation, exploration, and suggestions in this discussion come from a Korean American Catholic context. However, I also believe that the most “local understandings” of Catholic theology gesture toward the universal. As such, my suggestions are not limited solely to a Korean American Catholic context, but may also have more universal implications. For the foundations for my understanding of contextual theology, see Stephen B. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 4 and 165.

respectively.<sup>6</sup> Different notions of gender roles and capabilities today lead to culture clash. Moreover, there is still a lingering tendency (one that may have been justifiable in an initial, small, struggling community) to decide on the next leaders for various positions within a church *before* a committee-wide vote, as well as to decide what to do with communally collected money. Many members of younger generations, while not limited exclusively to them, find the continuation of such practices to be immoral and at the very worst even illegal.

Undoubtedly, these are problems without simple answers. The aforementioned authoritarianism among men and/or previous generations derives from multiple sources, though the patriarchal culture of the older generations' homelands, churches, and America itself plays a key role. The younger generation, however, is not without culpability in these conflicts, as they too hear and accept certain traditions that advocate for a kind of unattainable power, beauty, and wealth as being essential to happiness.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of more than twenty-five years of participation in Korean American Catholic communities, I have found two means of addressing these difficulties to be ineffectual: dismissing the actions and thoughts of the older generation simply as *gushik*, or "older ways" (구식), and blindly accepting "American ways" or the "new ways" of the *shin-saedae*, or new generation (신세대). How, then, ought one to go about taking the initial steps in this regard? What can one learn from the word of God that can direct one toward overcoming these conflicts and moving toward salvation? To answer this question, I turn to the angel Gabriel's annunciation to Joseph.

### Why Annunciation?

When Christians think of "annunciation," they immediately conjure up an image of Mary and the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of Jesus. We are inundated with such an image from paintings, homilies, and Christmas plays. We often overlook, however, the story of an angel coming to Joseph to foretell Jesus's birth. If we consider how male spirituality is similarly overlooked in the story, we can learn something about how to encourage male participation by shedding new light on existing stories, such as that of Joseph. To understand the story of the annunciation more fully, we need to locate it within a specific biblical and historical context, namely the Gospel of Matthew, circa 80-90 CE.<sup>8</sup>

### Matthean Intensification of the Jewish Tradition

One of the functions of the Gospel according to Matthew is to demonstrate that the new Jewish movement surrounding Jesus of Nazareth is both a continuation of the received Jewish tradition and a new interpretation of social norms and the Law of Moses. Thus, Matthew begins with a genealogy that connects the Jesus movement to Jewish tradition, hence legitimatizing the Messiah's human and divine origin and Jesus's statement in his Sermon on the Mount: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17).<sup>9</sup> The six antitheses that contrast the Jewish law in Mt 5:21-48 ("You have heard... But I say to you...") show that while this movement represents a continuation of the received Jewish tradition, traditional norms have been intensified and perfected (v.48) in the New Law. Therefore, the Jesus movement can be understood in terms of this Matthean formula: a Jewish movement led by a rabbi that moves beyond simplistic obedi-

6 See Hoon Choi, "Being a Man in the Korean American Church: How can Korean American Catholic Communities Address the Gap Between Men's and Women's Work?" *U.S. Catholic* 81, no. 10 (October 2016): 34-35.

7 American men are often told not to cry, to be tough and muscular, to be (sexually) powerful and wealthy; our culture effectively cuts men off from certain traits such as creativity, kindness, and attentiveness. See Hoon Choi, "Imagine! An Examination of Race and Gender in Korean American Catholicism," in *Embracing Our Inheritance: Jubilee Reflection on Korean American Catholics (1966-2016)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 92.

8 Dennis C. Duling, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 1857.

9 All biblical quotations come from the New Revised Standard Version in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*.

ence to the Law to the intensification of that Law, which may in turn require followers to intensify their received theo-cultural norms.<sup>10</sup> The same basic Matthean formula is operative, then, in the annunciation to Joseph, which speaks to the need to go beyond the religious and cultural norms of that time.

### Emergence of Joseph's Habitus: Three J's (Korean Character: ㄺ)

After linking Joseph to the lineage of Jewish forefathers in the first chapter, the author of the gospel reveals that Mary conceived Jesus "from the Holy Spirit" rather than from Joseph. Mary's conception out of wedlock puts her in a perilous standing, as such a status was punishable by "public disgrace" (v.19) in first-century Palestine. In full knowledge of the consequences of the norms of his time, Joseph thus plans to comply with the customs of antiquity and quietly dismiss her (v.19). However, in a dream, an angel of the Lord announces to him the coming birth of one who will save his people and instructs him to take Mary as his wife. The author records Joseph's response as "He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (v.24).

What Joseph has agreed to is remarkable. "Being a righteous man," Joseph agrees to answer the Lord's calling in the most unusual of circumstances. Everywhere he goes he will have to defend Mary and the child from ridicule, look beyond the customs of his time (i.e., with regard to Mary's unexpected pregnancy), and demonstrate warmth and compassion by sticking by his wife and family. This warmth and gentleness is what people of Korean descent may understand as "*Jasang-ham*" (자상함). Joseph's society will ridicule Mary's out-of-wedlock pregnancy and the non-traditional family that he has agreed to protect. The public disgrace from which Joseph wants to protect her involves humiliation and public execution. The assumption of a woman losing her virginity outside of the context of marriage is punishable by being stoned to death (Dt 22:20-21). Simply being accused of an adultery means that a woman has to go through a disgraceful ritual that involves her publically drinking "bitter water" mixed with dust that can cause infertility (Nm 5:11-31), a sexist presumption of guilt until proven innocent.<sup>11</sup> Against this backdrop, Joseph firmly yet quietly decides to disrupt such social assumptions and norms by accepting God's call and staying with Mary, which puts his life in danger as he is marked as being subversive, inciting, and a threat to the state. Regardless of being seen as strange, different, and perhaps even abominable, Joseph persists in following the counter-cultural instructions of God. Certainly, it took courage and confidence, what might be called "*Jashin-gam*" (자신감), to face such devastating social rejection. His counter-intuitive solidarity with Mary, Jesus, and God is certainly challenging but perhaps a necessary model for a male spirituality equipped to face head-on *today's* cultural norms that pit against Christianity certain types of men *perceived* to be unfit to be Christians.<sup>12</sup>

In examining the annunciation to Joseph in Matthew, one is able to understand Joseph not only as a metaphor for today's neglected male spirituality, but also as following a method for men's participation in the church. One aspect of such a method is to respect while deepening received norms and traditions, as modeled by the Matthean intensification of the "old law." This deconstructive method requires a constructive approach to yield certain specific characteristics of Joseph (*Jasang-ham* and *Jashin-gam*). However, because so little is written about Joseph beyond his dreams and because he is so "quiet" in the gospel, some imagination is required to determine his characteristics.

---

10 Jesus's "great opponents are the rabbinic heirs of the Pharisees" and thus his ethics is presented as "a superior ethic, a higher justice... a moral piety." That is, the "old law" is not false but not enough. "Jesus regards the traditional interpretation as inadequate"; Raymond E. Brown, SS, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 641-42; In other words, Jesus is "more authoritative than Moses, and seems to legislate with all the assurance of the God of Sinai" Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 179. For background information on the Pharisees as the "most influential" and the "leading heresy" in Jesus's time and in the Matthean community, see Francois Viljoen, "The Matthean Community within a Jewish Religious Society," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (September 2016): 1-8.

11 See Brown et al., eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 635.

12 I will discuss this point more in depth later in this article. See footnote 16, 18, and 19.

For example, one can imagine Joseph teaching the young Jesus some of the necessary skills of becoming a good carpenter (or a “craftsman,” *Tekton* in Greek). James Martin, SJ, sees a master craftsman as having patience, for “waiting for the wood to dry and ready”; judgment, for “ensuring that your plumb line is straight”; honesty, for “charging people a fair price”; and persistence, for “sanding until the tabletop is smooth.”<sup>13</sup> These skills that Joseph would have taught the young Jesus, which Koreans might refer as a *Jangin* (장인), are the marks of a master craftsman. Such a *Jangin* mentality, or *Jangin-Jungshin* (장인 정신), molded Jesus to be “the instrument most needed for the salvation of the world.”<sup>14</sup> The three J’s of *Jasang-ham* (warmth and attentiveness), *Jashin-gam* (confidence and courage), and *Jangin-Jungshin* (the mindset of a master craftsman) can be understood as characteristics handed down to Jesus by his mentor and father, Joseph, that we can encourage young-adult Catholic men to develop so as to play a more active role in the life of the Church.

### Today’s Received Norms

Salvation history continues today, and the instruments required for the world’s salvation are needed now more than ever before, especially given our current divisive political climate.<sup>15</sup> Christians today need to practice their own version of the “intensification” of received religious and social norms so as to identify obstacles and hand down the faith to future generations in a way that does not overlook the importance of proper male involvement in the life of the Church.

What are some of the norms that get in the way of young-adult male religious participation in general, and, more particularly, that of Korean American men? Others have written elsewhere more extensively about the various sources that inculcate male norms and expectations and serve to deter male integrity and growth, which include Korean Neo-Confucian culture, military and American “guy” culture, religious institutions, the Western philosophical and theological tradition, and the American media, to name a few.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, however, there is undoubtedly a common sentiment among young men that religious practices fall mainly within the domain of women. Such an impression is fueled by the fact that many Korean American dads dominate only decision-making positions of power in the church that involve administrative and business-related duties whereas mothers practice domestic, educational, worship, and devotionally related duties in the church.<sup>17</sup>

---

13 James Martin, SJ, *My Life with the Saints*, 10th Anniversary Edition (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2016), 307.

14 Martin, *My Life with the Saints*, 307.

15 I am thinking more specifically of today’s climate that embraces heteronormative hegemonic masculinity, also known as “toxic masculinity.” See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 77; see also Terry A. Kupers, “Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 61, no. 1 (June 2005): 714.

16 Hoon Choi, “Brothers in Arms and Brothers in Christ? The Military and the Catholic Church as Sources for Modern Korean Masculinity,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 75-92, reprinted in Mary Jo Iozzio and Patricia Beattie Jung, eds. *Sex and Gender: Christian Ethical Reflections* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017); Choi, “Imagine!” 90-117. Note that the most recent work by Richard Rohr, OFM, fits well with the discussion. I am aware that his earlier work is categorized with a “Christian mythopoetic” label and is criticized for invoking polarity that perpetuates simplistic gender role (e.g., encouraging men to develop their “feminine side”). See Joseph Gelfer, “Identifying the Catholic Men’s Movement,” *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 16, no. 1 (Winter, 2008): 43, 44, 53. For example, Gelfer suggests in no uncertain terms that “most official church rituals appeal much more to the feminine psyche than to the masculine... [which includes] color coordinat[ion], lace and silk... doll-like statues... and just prettiness in general,” all of which are straight out of a mythopoetic writer Leon Podles, whom I quote in note 19, below. At the time, Rohr wrote that Podles’s claims “might make you angry, and you might not agree with everything, but it is hard to dismiss his major thrust and argument”; Richard Rohr, *Adam’s Return: Five Promises of Male Initiation* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 145, 182. However, in his more recent work—notwithstanding his insistence on retrieving the “king, warrior, magician, lover” as male archetypes “that we now recognize [as] the four parts of the male soul”—he has refined the rhetoric and theology. Thus, he wrote of the true king/father in his fullness and calm authority, the warrior with healthy energy who exercises a more courageous power of nonviolence, the magician/sage who is wise and whose wisdom is more alternative than conventional, and the gentle lover with sacred heart and divine mercy, and that one needs “all four to fully balance out.” Furthermore, he asserts that “male and females are most alike at their most mature levels... most different at their most immature levels.” Richard Rohr, *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditation for Men* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 303-06, 324-29, 337.

17 Choi, “Being a Man in the Korean American Church,” 34-35.

The perception of American Christian culture as being “feminized” carries with it the concern of the “feminization of Christianity” as a threat to male participation. The controversial Pastor Marc Driscoll, along with Brandon O’Brien, Associate Editor of *Leadership* and BuildingChurchLeaders.com, Randy Stinson, Executive Director of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and David Murrow, the author of *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, are leaders within a new masculinity movement that holds such a perception. These individuals believe that current music, sermons, and ministries cater to women in the church and serve to drive men away. They believe that “‘real men’ avoid church because it projects a Richard Simmons, hippie, queer Christ,” producing “a bunch of nice, soft, tender, chickified church boys.”<sup>18</sup>

The Catholic Church is not immune to such a cultural evaluation. Indeed, the American male culture outside of the church may see various Catholic traditions—namely, the sacramental tradition that teaches that acknowledging wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but spiritual strength, the liturgical tradition that caters to human senses, and the charismatic tradition to verbalize one’s feelings about one’s pain—as weakening the church and moving men away from it. Leon Podle, for example, claims that, “The whole atmosphere of Anglo-Catholicism, its preciousness, its fussiness, its concern for laces and cassocks and candles, struck the average Victorian (and later observers) as unmanly.”<sup>19</sup>

There are at least two opposing ways that one can respond to the current socio-religious climate vis-à-vis Catholicism. One way is to assume that the new masculinity movement evaluates the situation accurately, and so we must re-masculate Jesus (perhaps as an “ultimate fighting Jesus”)<sup>20</sup> and create conditions in the church whereby such men are drawn in. This condition may include incorporating physical activities, such as basketball, golf, football, billiards, and table tennis into religious education and fundraising programs. Such a method would focus on competition, dominance, physicality, and wielding power.

Indeed, many Korean and Korean American Christian institutions decisively accept and encourage the kind of men that gravitate toward power and control by creating more positions of power with titles and ranks given to members. Aside from a senior pastor and some associate pastor positions, for example, it is not unusual to find the majority of men holding some kind of a title or status, with different ranks of elders (장로), deacons (집사), and ministers and evangelizers (전도사). In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find adult male members without a ranking title.<sup>21</sup> If retaining members is the measure of success, many of these institutions are successful. I have also witnessed lingering tendencies in the Korean Catholic Churches to engage in male-bonding activities that involve alcohol, Go-Stop (card gambling that many Korean men engage in), and betting on golf games, among other things.

I want to be clear. Some traits and practices, even the ones that are part of the “re-masculinization” of Jesus, are not inherently harmful. Being assertive, encouraging competitiveness, developing leadership skills, engaging in playful games, or even having a drink or two are not inherently harmful characteristics and practices. However, essentializing and attributing or “boxing” these traits solely to men restrict men from access to congeniality, cooperation, compromise, dialogue, attentiveness, creativity, temperance, kindness, etc. Simultaneously, there lies an

---

18 Brandon O’Brien, “A Jesus for Real Men: What the New Masculinity Movement Gets Right and Wrong,” *Christianity Today* 52, no. 4 (April 2008): 48; see also David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* revised and updated edition (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2011), <https://cbmw.org/uncategorized/feminine-christianity-turns-men-away-from-church-cbmw-executive-director-says/>

19 Leon Podle, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Richard Vigilante Books, 1999), 6-7.

20 O’Brien, “A Jesus for Real Men,” 48.

21 Some churches do give the title of deaconess (권사) to some women.

undertone that renders women less capable of the so-called “masculine” traits. After all, the Jesus of the Gospel thrived on a harmonious blend among all these characteristics.<sup>22</sup>

### A (Korean American) Catholic Response

Alternatively, another way to respond to this issue is counter-culturally. This method deems the so-called “feminization” phenomenon as an inaccurate and sexist product of received norms that must be transgressed. This approach sees the Catholic sacramental, liturgical, and charismatic tradition as innately human, and claims that the aforementioned social norms limit the full humanization of men and call for religious “intensification.” For example, one can evoke *Jashin-gam* (confidence and courage) to be confident in one’s faith when peer, cultural, and social pressures suggest that going to church, seeking reconciliation, singing a love song to Jesus, and asking for healing are unmanly.

Korean American Catholics appear to face a specific kind of challenge in this regard. One does not often hear accusations of feminization very strongly within this community. Rather, the issue here is more generational in nature. While many male older members are for the most part loving toward and concerned about members of the next generation, their language has not caught up with their lived attitudes and practices. As such, members of the younger generation at times feel hurt or worried when the elders make certain expressions, i.e., “for men,” “for women,” or “adult” mass, as mentioned above. While many have taken the easy path and learned to ignore such expressions over the years, perhaps some may have had the *Jashin-gam* to suggest alternative, more inclusive, and sensitive expressions. Language has implications beyond the immediately visible and is tied to building just and loving communities. Notwithstanding how young adults are outnumbered and how the previous generation can be overbearing, church members ought to consider taking a road less traveled with *Jashin-gam*.

This generational challenge also relates to money. I have witnessed, for example, fights related to money and lack of transparency in at least three Korean American Catholic communities of which I was a member. It is often the case in these situations that older male members of a church appeal to how things were done in the old days, and/or how such ways were directly responsible for erecting their ethnic Catholic church from scratch. The younger generation is deemed audacious and ungrateful for pointing out any abuse of communal money. When the traditional Korean expectation of respect for the elderly is added to such situations, they become even more difficult. *Jashin-gam* is thus required to face overpoweringly authoritative men (and at times women) when injustice is present. Instead of acquiescing to the ways in which communal money is allocated or spent, one can refuse to participate in such practices in honesty and courage. One can even exude *Jashin-gam* in suggesting that it is the lackluster nature of such practices, not “feminization” or “Americanization,” that is contributing to reducing male participation in the church.

However, and more important in my estimation, one must not lose discipline in utilizing *Jasang-ham* (warmth and attentiveness). If so, one may continue to fuel the very aggressive characteristic that has contributed to many of the church’s problems in the first place. After all, Pope Francis has reminded all people of good will that, “Tenderness is... fortitude,” not weakness.<sup>23</sup> As such, when suggestions from the younger generation are perceived as ill-mannered, one ought to practice painstaking *Jasang-ham* and make congenial efforts with affable language to find common ground. Surely, if someone is totally unwilling to listen, no suggestion will ever get through to him or her. However, one surely sets oneself up for a better chance in this manner than one who simply accuses an older person of being an “immovable old member.” If we recognize the sacrifices of the previous generations, we will be

<sup>22</sup> Choi, “Imagine!” especially 104-111.

<sup>23</sup> Francis, “Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone,” TED Talk, April 2017, [https://www.ted.com/talks/pope\\_francis\\_why\\_the\\_only\\_future\\_worth\\_building\\_includes\\_everyone?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/pope_francis_why_the_only_future_worth_building_includes_everyone?language=en)

more patient in negotiating common ground with those who have helped to build our churches. At the same time, I acknowledge that it is often painstaking to talk to older members about new methods of which they have little knowledge.

Much of what being *Jangin* (read Christian master craftsman) involves is painstaking. *Jangin* is required to be steadfast and patient in seeing one's craft through to completion. We need such persistence in and *Jashin-gam* for faith, especially when we are doggedly told that devotional practices, wanting reconciliation, seeking healing, and the affects of liturgy in general are unmanly. We need the right judgment of a *Jangin* to see that men should be involved in all aspects of the life of a church community, including those arenas where received norms can render them essentialists and even sexists. The power of socio-religious constructions is so strong that one must develop the patience, courage, and judgment of a *Jangin*.

To combat such power, men must exercise their capacity for *Jasang-ham*. Many priests who preside over the sacraments and devotional practices exemplify such gentleness and nurturing skills. Developing *Jasang-ham* will help men to become better involved in those arenas where they were ideologically and at times theologically prohibited, such as cry rooms, CCD classrooms, and church kitchens, among others. Furthermore, a *Jangin* mentality will allow church communities to invest time and care for areas of long-term community growth, including its children, youth, and often-neglected young adults. Emily Jendzejec concurs that "the need for parish-based young adult ministry as spaces to cultivate moral development and religious belonging has never been greater."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, *Jangin-Jungshin* (the mindset of a master craftsman) would help young members to introduce new creative methods and visions (required of a *Jangin*) in a bold yet gentle manner to the church while showing continued respect for its traditions. In this manner, Korean American Catholic communities can become good examples of how to combat both authoritarianism within the church and harmful norms received from communities outside the church. Indeed, this is reminiscent of the Matthean formula that the author of the Gospel of Matthew used.

## Conclusion

The method I presented here is both mimicry of Matthew's formula and a modeling of Joseph. Joseph responds by intensifying the received norms and by risking his life to be true to God's calling in light of potentially being ridiculed, ostracized, or persecuted. In following Joseph, and indeed Jesus, Korean American Catholic young adult men may also need to risk being ridiculed, perceived as deviant, and even being ostracized by certain members of their community and/or society at large.

To risk so much, however, we need actual living models within the church more than we need biblical models. We need respectable peer-mentors. When the going gets tough, when outside temptations set in to discourage us from participating in the church, we need individuals with knowledge of discipleship, in addition to parents and priests, to guide our young adults, using *Jangin* and other relatable metaphors. A friend of mine, Andrew Kim, is a lapsed second-generation Korean American Catholic who left the church because of a perceived lack of cultural guidance. He said, "I remember coming back from a one-week silent retreat... and I had very little support as I integrated back into the real world."<sup>25</sup> No one properly addressed his lack of proficiency in Korean, his unwillingness to drink alcohol with his peers, the subject of intimacy and masculine-feminine dynamics, or his disconnect with priests from Korea. His years of teaching in CCD and caring for students were not enough for him to overcome such neglect. Thus, he eventually sought help outside the community.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Jendzejec, "Nourishing the Creatively Maladjusted," 26.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Kim, interview conducted by the author, May 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Kim interview.

Most ethnic churches realize that they have a “double presence” of interacting between host and homeland.<sup>27</sup> They know that when people move they bring “invisible baggage,” such as “language, cuisine, music, and, intertwined with these, their faith.”<sup>28</sup> A good amount of work has to be done, therefore, to showcase these churches as more than “vessels of faith,” but also “a source [of] emotional rejuvenation to nostalgic immigrants and facilitators for the integration of newcomers.”<sup>29</sup> Today, not enough work is being done to properly address the young adults in these churches, especially American-born male young adults. Every church community has their young adult “Andrew Kim.” Each community must therefore identify its own distinctive problems and find ways of imitating their exemplary models. What I have presented here is but one such manifestation of a method for church rejuvenation in this regard, with the hope for its broader application.

Using the Gospel of Matthew with the story of Joseph as a framework leads me to a version of a Korean American Gospel and its version of intensification in order to move beyond what is harmful in our received tradition. I offer the following antithesis and intensifications:

You have heard that religion is inherently feminine, but I say to you that it is inherently human.

You have heard that devotional practices are for sissies, but I say to you that much of the practices that make a life worth living require devotion.

You have heard that needing healing and expressing your emotions is a sign of weakness, but I say to you that releasing emotions and being open to help is a sign of strength, courage, and, indeed, a healthy person.

You have heard that liturgy that involves singing and adoration is not manly, but I say to you ritualistic singing and adoration is both human and manly and has been present in all cultures and nations throughout history.

You have heard that the elders’ ways should be dismissed as old fashioned, but I say to you that they built the church that you attend and deserve much respect.

You have heard that the main church is for “adults,” but I say to you that you are also an adult and should demand to be treated and spoken to as such.

You have heard that men do not belong in the kitchen or Sunday schools and women in decision-making and leadership positions, but I say to you that without them in those areas of service, our church will never be a church of integrity.

You have heard that you do not need to acknowledge your shortcomings and to ask for forgiveness, but I say to you without reconciling them your relationships will never be true relationships. Without true relationships among humans, how do you expect a true relationship with God?

In this intensified setting, an angel of the Lord might appear before us. The angel, however, might make a different kind of announcement today, asking us to do something similar to Mary, Joseph, and other followers. Today,

---

27 Ruy Llera Blanes, “Double Presence: Proselytism and Belonging in an Angolan Prophetic Church’s Diaspora in Europe,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4, no. 3 (2011): 413, quoted in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights*, eds. Jonathan Y. Tan and Anh Q. Tran, SJ (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 98.

28 Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Light of the World? Christianity and Immigrants from the Global South,” in *World Christianity*, eds. Tan and Tran, 87.

29 Joanne Van Dijk and Ghada Bottos, “The Importance of Ethnicity and Religion in the Life Cycle of Immigrant Churches: A Comparison of Coptic and Calvinist Churches,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 41, no. 1-2 (2009): 192; quoted in *World Christianity*, eds. Tan and Tran, 88.

God can ask for our *Jashin-gam* to say “yes” despite the demand for all about us to say “no,” and to be continually involved and invested in the life of the church. With this, God looks for us to use *Jasang-ham* to be gentle, humble, tender, and merciful when exerting such confidence. That means supporting those with the least power and the most need in our communities in a non-accusatory manner without seeking position, rank, recognition, or power. Indeed, God asks for us to become our own *Jangin*, one that is deeply devoted to the mastery of his or her craft, which demands patience, good judgment, honesty, and persistence. Joseph certainly had all of these characteristics, even when he was surprised and perhaps not very well prepared; his character, built over the years through the mentality of a *Jangin*, *Jashin-gam*, and *Jasang-ham*, indeed prepared him for the annunciation. Facing our set of norms and obstacles, Christians today ought to help young adults develop their disposition (*habitus*) so that they may move beyond the unjust norms of today and be prepared to say, “Let your will be done.”