

PASTOR NAMJU BYUN AND THE GWANGJU DEMOCRATIZATION MOVEMENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Although scholars have carried out comprehensive research on the 1980 "Gwangju Democratization Movement" (GDM) and the 1987 "June Democratic Struggle," they have notably overlooked exploring the role of Protestant leaders throughout these crucial times in South Korea's modern era. The lack of this data in the academic literature extremely limits our knowledge of the greater sociopolitical aspects that influenced these movements. Hence, the major goal of this research is to address this lack of knowledge by assessing Pastor Namju Byun's stewardship and highlighting the significant contribution of Christian leaders as well as Christian communities to South Korea's political movement. It is evident that Pastor Byun's social and religious principles not only significantly contributed to the progress of the democratic movement but also provided steadfast leadership to his fellow believers. This research underscores the integral connection between political activism and Christian faith, focusing on how leaders like Pastor Byun exemplified faith-driven initiatives. By doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the transformative impact of Christian leadership on shaping social and political change.

Keywords: Christian activism, Gwangju Democratization Movement (GDM), June Struggle, Namju Byun, South Korea

1.0. INTRODUCTION

In his innovative study, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), Barrington Moore advanced a fourfold theoretical framework to classify the modernization trajectories of nations based on their innovative socio-political and economic transformations. Moore acknowledged the bourgeois revolutionary paradigm, as illustrated by the United States, Great Britain, and France, in which modernization was governed by the rise of a capitalist economy and a robust middle class seeking democratic changes. The second paradigm, the socialist

revolutionary road, is illustrated by Russia and China, where agricultural revolutions and class battles culminated in the establishment of socialist countries. Japan and Germany emphasized the top-down modernization model, which involved centralized state control and authoritarian elites pushing industrialization and political reform. Finally, Moore stressed the colonial modernization paradigm, which classified nations like Korea, the Philippines, and India as modernizing within the framework of colonial control, typically mixing foreign effects with indigenous reactions.

The colonial modernization paradigm provides a critical lens through which to examine South Korea's developmental path toward democratic consolidation and industrialization. During the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), Korea experienced a form of state-driven modernization, primarily serving Japanese imperial interests. Following Japan's defeat in World War II, Korea came under U.S. military governance (1945–1948), during which American-style economic and political structures were implemented. This period of transitory governance was considerably impacted by the ideological division of the Korean Peninsula into the Soviet-aligned North and the U.S.-aligned South, which opened new ways for the development of the Republic of Korea in 1948 (Suh, 2020).

South Korea's journey toward democracy and a free-market economy was neither linear nor without significant challenges. The March First Movement for independence from Japan in 1919 and the Student Revolution of April 19, 1960, have been retained as historical lessons for Koreans to pursue democratization through self-determination (Oh, 2018). The nation's history of resistance reached new heights with the Gwangju Democratic Movement (GDM) in 1980 and the June Democratic Struggle in 1987, recognized by Jang (2017) as pivotal events in South Korea's political resistance against military dictatorships. These movements were instrumental in the eventual democratization of the country, catalyzing significant political and social reforms.

While studies such as Yoon (2002) have acknowledged the role of Catholic involvement in the GDM, they often overlook the substantial contributions of Protestant leaders, particularly Pastor Namju Byun. Pastor Byun's leadership during this tumultuous period played a critical role in mobilizing grassroots movements for justice and democracy. This paper seeks thus to analyze Pastor Byun's leadership, his religious conviction, and his socio-political commitment, and fill this gap in scholarship. This study attempts to understand Pastor Byun's contributions to the GDM by incorporating multidisciplinary methodologies, including Ricoeur and Gadamer's hermeneutics of history, Freire's educational theory, and coaching psychology as proposed by Whitmore and Seok, to explain its role in democratizing and modernizing South Korea.

South Korea's eventual advancements in democracy and economic modernization were also deeply rooted in the persistent efforts of its people to resist authoritarian regimes. The presidency of Syngman Rhee (1948–1960) consolidated anti-communist governance but faced widespread public opposition for its repressive tactics and electoral manipulation. After Rhee was replaced, South Korea had three successive military regimes of Chung-Hee Park, Doo-Hwan Chun, and Tae-Woo Roh imposing economic modernization through state-led industrial policies while limiting political freedom. These constraints notwithstanding, the people's

never-ending battle against democratic reform was demonstrated through community-based resistance as seen in the movements of 1960, 1980, and 1987.

By situating Pastor Namju Byun's leadership within this broader socio-historical context, this research not only underscores his critical role in South Korea's democratization but also provides a nuanced analysis of how religious dedication intersects with socio-political movements. Such an interdisciplinary approach illuminates the interconnectedness of modernization, democratization, and faith-based leadership, offering a deeper understanding of South Korea's transformation into a vibrant democracy and global economic powerhouse (Chung, 1992; Lee et al., 2024).

2.0. DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Historical Background of the 1980s Gwangju Democratization Movement

The Gwangju Democratization Movement, or Gwangju Uprising, was a breakthrough in the democratic struggle of South Korea (Tiezzi, 2022). The assassination of President Chung-Hee Park started political instability in 1979. After Park's death, military general Doo Hwan Chun launched a coup and fuelled the public's dissatisfaction with military rule. Martial law was declared and media were restricted in the wake of this revolt in the chaotic streets, closed universities, and the suspension of the constitutional process. Many Koreans opposed this authoritarian military government, including college students who had long been advocating for Korean democracy on campus. Gwangju is well known for its long tradition of resisting oppressive rule (Jeong et al., 2021), and thus, the protests began on May 18, 1980. The protests were initially conducted by students at Chonnam National University, who denounced the detention of political leaders under the military's violent martial law as an attempt to prevent them from engaging in legitimate activities (Choi et al., 2022; Kang et al., 2022). The military regime responded by spreading false information that the demonstration was a North Korean communist conspiracy to overthrow the South Korean government. As a result, they dispatched special military forces to Gwangju and brutally suppressed the citizens by assassinating them. The citizens of Gwangju were furious by this cruel suppression, and they joined the young student protesters in an intense fight against the military violence.

For several days, Gwangju and the Jeonnam region were surrounded by terror and violence. Key government buildings in Gwangju were occupied by protesters in an organized manner. And on May 27, the military launched a ruthless attack and mercilessly crushed the citizens resisting the military government. There are approximately 200 civilian deaths reported by the government, though most GDM researchers believe that many more were killed — more than 1,000 — by martial law forces. The GDM became a powerful symbol of civil resistance as well as a principal driving force behind the Korean people's struggle to counter human rights abuses, thereby triggering a democratic movement. It was a decisive factor in their making the path for the "June Struggle of 1987," in which South Korean people opposed the military dictatorship and eventually brought about democratic reforms. The GDM was a pivotal moment in Korean history, marked by the people's extraordinary courage and determination as they fought for democracy amidst overwhelming terror and oppression.

2.2 Namju Byun's Active Involvement in Gwangju Democratization Movement

Pastor Namju Byun was a Korean national, born on 29th December 1934 in Jeollanam Province. After graduating from Presbyterian Theological Seminary Byun acquired his ministerial ordination on October 18, 1964. Even before receiving a formal ordination, Byun exhibited his dedication to establishing churches while sharing the gospel. He started working as a preacher at the Shinseongpo Church in Seungju County, Jeollanam Province, in 1952. Following that, he served in different churches situated in Yecheon County, Gwangsan County, and Muan County in Jeollanam Province including Ando Church and Chosan Church (now Donggok Central Church). He served sincerely and fruitfully in numerous churches, such as Seodaejeon Church, Iridongsan Church, Naju First Church, and Gwangju Seohyun Church, after being ordained (Byun, 2004: 376-379). Pastor Byun retired on December 30, 2004, following 51 years of exceptional church ministry. He was a distinguished leader of Korean Protestantism, serving in numerous leadership roles, including the chairman of the board of directors of Gwangshin University, a board member of Gwangju Soongil School, and president of the Korean Bible Society, in addition to his duties as a pastor. His impact was immense on numerous Presbyterian communities throughout Korea, extending beyond the Honam region—which encompasses the southwestern areas of South Korea, including present-day Jeonju, Gwangju, Mokpo, and Yeosu. One notable example of his influence was his pivotal role in assisting Pastor Kyu-Oh Chung (1914–2006) in achieving one of the most significant milestones in Korean Protestant history: the successful union of the Presbyterian (Hapdong) and Presbyterian (Gaehyuk) denominations in 2005. This historic unification, driven by Pastor Chung's unwavering advocacy for unity, was a testament to their collaborative efforts. Pastor Byun's contributions, particularly in fostering dialogue and bridging divides, were instrumental in realizing this landmark event that reshaped the Korean Presbyterian landscape (Chung et al., 2015).

Pastor Byun initiated GDM on May 18, 1980, three years after he began his pastoral duties at Seohyeon Church in Gwangju. The church was also located in the center of Gwangju and had to deal with a chaotic situation because the military brutally crushed protesters, which eventually led to a wave of violence and horror. Therefore, the church could not perform its regular act of worship services. After Pastor Byun, acting as a mediator, visited the hospitals where some of the injured protesters were admitted to offer condolences and deliver 20 million won in relief funds, memorial services were held. Byun collected these funds to help finance the basic needs of the injured citizens and to keep them in hopes of not losing heart (Byun, 2024: 250). The military regime was so furious by Pastor Byun's deep concern over the families of protest victims they threatened to stop this thing. The military accused Pastor Byun of acting under North Korea's instigation to carry out these actions (Byun, 2024: 251). Pastor Byun's perspective regarding the military dictatorship was significantly changed by this threat. He realized that the conservative Christian leaders in South Korea at the time were not fulfilling their prophetic role by criticizing the dictatorship that was oppressing the people. He recognized that this view was completely in contrast with his Reformed theological convictions, and he was compelled to explain his stance.

John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, especially the argument in Book 4, Chapter 20, Section 31, advocating resistance against tyrannical rulers, profoundly influenced Byun (Calvin, 1960; Chung, 1998; Kim & Chung, 2013). Byun, motivated by Calvin's teachings, resolved to oppose the military dictatorship and strive for the establishment of a democratic government (Byun, 2024: 252). Pastor Byun thereafter consistently underscored in his weekly

sermons and prayers that "the military government is not a legitimate government, but an illegal regime that has seized power through violence, and the soldiers must return to their rightful positions, allowing for the establishment of a lawful democratic government" (Byun, 2024: 254). After the time of the military's threats, Pastor Byun has served funerals of the victims of the Gwangju Uprising without fear. He later said that "he suffered from severe headaches and dizziness every May for several years afterward due to the vivid memories of that period" (Byun, 2024: 253).

The police killed Jong-Cheol Park (1965-1987), a student who matriculated at Seoul National University in 1984 and served as the student body president of the Department of Linguistics, in 1987. That was why Pastor Byun participated in the June Struggle of 1987. In April 1986, Park was arrested while participating in a demonstration that sought to legalize the Cheonggye Garment Workers' Union. He was sentenced to 10 months in prison on July 15, 1986, and was shortly released. Six police investigators from the Central Investigation Bureau forcibly removed him from his boarding house in Seoul at approximately midnight on January 13, 1987. He died the following day, January 14, after being subjected to electric shock and waterboarding. The murder of a college student in a cruel manner provoked widespread anger and resulted in nationwide protests. Nevertheless, the military government responded with tear gas and violent suppression, which only worsened the public's anger. This was further fueled by the death of another student, Han-Yeol Lee (1966-1987), from Hwasun, Jeollanam Province, who was enrolled at Yonsei University.

A massive demonstration against the regime was organized by millions of protesters on Geumnam-ro in Gwangju. Pastor Byun participated in a joint prayer meeting on Geumnam-ro on May 24, 1987, with other Christian leaders from conservative and progressive denominations. He recalled that the tear gas launched by the authorities caused him to be unable to open his eyes or breathe properly (Byun, 2024: 257). Afterward, Pastor Byun was appointed co-chairman of the Gwangju-Jeonnam branch of the National Movement for the Realization of a Democratic Constitution and acquired a leadership role in the organization. The GDM has been transformed into a "June democratization movement," in which individuals from all walks of life unite to demand a democratic constitution and put an end to military dictatorship.

The Gwangju Seohyun Church, where Pastor Byun works, became a vital sanctuary for approximately 200 protesters, offering food and a place to rest amidst the turmoil. These individuals were given guesthouse quarters in the first-floor hall of the church, but the surrounding air was saturated with tear gas and it was difficult to conduct services as usual. On Sunday and Wednesday worship services, the acrid vapors penetrated the second-floor sanctuary, forcing tears into congregant's eyes and disrupting in some way the solemnity of worship. That situation kept escalating and got some people in the church speaking out against Pastor Byun's actions. They believed that the church should not act in politics, and would remain strictly within the realm of religion. The stated fear of these members was that hospitality to would-be protesters who were engaged in politically charged demonstrations would mar the church's reputation and damage its mission as a spiritual one. Undeniably, Pastor Byun found himself at a crossroads, grappling with the challenge of maintaining a clear distinction between religion and politics. Pastor Byun, however, kept on the works with their criticism. He was sure the church had to be both a spiritual sanctuary and a moral force to stand for justice. Convinced that faith demanded action in the face of oppression, Byun viewed

supporting the protesters as a divine responsibility to uphold human rights and contribute to the establishment of a democratic government. His deep-seated faith emphasized his steadfast view that genuine spirituality goes beyond ceremonial practices, reaching into the struggle for social change and the quest for justice for the marginalized.

The Christian Vanguard, which was comprised of approximately 150 Gwangju Christians who made significant contributions to the demonstrations, was established during this period by such organizations as Campus Ministry and the Christian Student Association. The Vanguard, in addition to conducting numerous prayer sessions, also took on additional responsibilities, including providing emergency medical assistance to the wounded and supplying food to protesters during the demonstrations. According to Pastor Byun, the fundamentals of Christian worldview and faith are that freedom and responsibility, based on human dignity and *vaFlue*, are God's gifts to humans. Consequently, believers should engage in the pursuit of democracy. He developed an orderly logic that, despite theological differences, it is natural for each Christian group to unite and fight the corrupt military government with undemocratic elements (Kang & Chung, 2015). This logic was crucial in the unification of various Protestant groups.

His sermons, which were given during this period, were indicative of the populace's deep sorrow and distress. He emphasized the importance of moral and spiritual renewal in the pursuit of political reform. In the end, it was the military government's approval of direct presidential elections that would prove the movement's ultimate success, and Rev. Byun would symbolize the culmination of popular will and faith-based opposition. By late 1987 Pastor Byun had earned a reputation as a towering figure in the democratization movement and both religious and political circles. The establishment of what became a more democratic Korea was his attempts and those of many others. His narrative was consonant with the Reformed theology and the Bible, and his commitment to justice and peace suggested that Christianity might help effect social and political reform. The June Struggle did not mark the end of the aspiration for democracy in Korea but continued there. It did try to establish a stable democratic government to compensate victims of the May 18, 1980 incident and to search for the truth of the incident. On 20 May 1990, a prayer meeting for the Gwangju Uprising's 10th anniversary was held at the Mujin Hall of the YMCA and a street march followed. Pastor Byun delivered a passionate sermon titled "The Role of Saints in Democratic Unification" (Ephesians 4: 1-6) on August 16, 1992, at a joint worship service for peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula (Byun, 2024: 262). Pastor Byun retained his advocacy for democracy and justice, conducting a united prayer meeting on July 30, 1995, in which he advocated for the reversal of laws that had granted amnesty to those guilty of the massacres of May 18. He criticized the government's decision to grant pardons in his sermon, "The Stones Will Cry Out" (Luke 19:40), comparing the lack of prosecution of the Gwangju massacre culprits to giving exemptions to unrepentant criminals:

"It has been 15 years since the May 18 Democratization Movement. However, now the prosecution has decided on 'no right to prosecute,' effectively granting amnesty to those who massacred innocent citizens without any repentance. The logic that a successful coup cannot be punished and the argument of political acts as acts of state will only bring ridicule from the entire world. How were the war criminals dealt with after World War II? Even the former president of Argentina, who engaged in terror, is now serving a life sentence ... Jesus said, 'If these people keep quiet, the stones will cry out. This is the Word of the Lord . . . There is no

need to care about anyone's opinion or to be afraid of what they might react to" (Byun, 2024: 264-266).

2.3 The Historical Meaning of the GDM from the Perspectives of Phenomenological Hermeneutics

Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) employed the term *Wirkungsgeschichte* (effective history) to describe the ongoing process by which our current knowledge of historical events influences those events. Pastor Byun served as an example of leadership during the Gwangju Uprising. In 1980, during the political unrest in South Korea, Byun evaluated his Christian beliefs regarding divine sovereignty, mercy, and justice. Gadamer's theory allows us to view historical phenomena not as a static, unchanging narrative, but as a dynamic force that reveals various actions arising from the fusion of human spiritual aspirations and political realities. In this way, Pastor Byun's fervent Christian faith provided him with the motivation to overcome the contradictory aspects of Korean politics and led him to see democracy as the embodiment of God's justice.

Gadamer's phenomenological hermeneutics offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals from diverse cultural and historical contexts engage in meaningful interactions and convey their distinct perspectives. He conceptualizes this process as the "fusion of horizons," a dynamic interplay wherein intercultural dialogues critically interrogate and resolve preconceptions and assumptions. This dynamic is manifest in Pastor Byun's involvement in the Gwangju Democratization Movement. The socio-political realities of the time catalyzed a horizontal fusion of his Christian faith, facilitating his active engagement in the political interpretative process. This fusion created a platform for the seamless integration of his religious convictions with his socio-political activism. Through this interpretive lens, Pastor Byun recognized that the political persecution by the military regime was not merely a political matter, but a profound moral and spiritual dilemma. By considering the prophetic tradition of biblical justice, which underscores the imperative of social justice, alongside his response to the military regime's brutality, Pastor Byun's perspective reveals the potential resolution of this dilemma through the process of horizontal fusion. His actions, motivated by the imperative to protect the oppressed citizens of Gwangju, were driven by a commitment to realize divine justice and moral ideals, as understood through this fused perspective. In this context, we observe the intersection and integration of Pastor Byun's Christian spirituality with his socio-political stance, embodied through the horizontal fusion of these two realms.

This research draws upon Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1984), which emphasizes the central role of memory and narration in shaping individual and collective identities (Teng & Chug, 2024). According to Ricoeur, communities define themselves through the narratives they construct about their past. In this framework, Pastor Byun's efforts to honor the memory of the Gwangju Uprising can be understood as a critical contribution to the identity formation of South Korean Christians. His sermons and writings functioned as powerful narratives that integrated the democratic movement into the broader Christian themes of freedom, and justice. These narratives did more than preserve historical events; they imbued the movement with moral and spiritual significance, reinforcing its status as a great moment in the ongoing discourse on ethics and spirituality.

Ricoeur's concept of memory as an ethical necessity (2006) offers further insight into Byun's leadership. By preserving the memory of the Gwangju Movement and its transformative impact on public consciousness, Byun's actions align with the ethical dimension of recollection that Ricoeur describes. Rather than merely recounting historical events, Byun sought to ensure that the legacy of the resistance would continue to serve as a moral and spiritual compass for future generations. Through his integration of the Gwangju Uprising into the Christian narrative of justice and redemption, Byun reframed the democratic struggle not only as a political achievement but also as a profound expression of Christian principles. His commitment to honoring Gwangju's legacy exemplified how ethical memory can sustain both the spiritual and political dimensions of historical events. From the perspective of Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics, Byun's leadership during and after the Gwangju Uprising highlights how narrative can serve as a bridge between past and future, ensuring the ethical implications of history endure. His work transformed the memory of Gwangju into a source of ongoing inspiration, reinforcing the democratic movement as both a political milestone and a manifestation of Christian faith in action.

In short, Pastor Byun's profound understanding of compassion and justice, contextualized within the dynamic process of historical interpretation, shaped his leadership in transformative ways. Seen through the lens of Gadamer's and Ricoeur's hermeneutical theories, Byun's actions during the Gwangju Uprising demonstrate how Christian ideals can guide political engagement while safeguarding the moral and spiritual significance of historical struggles (Lee & Chung, 2024).

2.4 Theological Significance of Pastor Byun's Contributions

Pastor Byun's participation in GDM was greatly influenced by his theological understanding of justice, which was founded on biblical teaching and Reformed theology (Jeong et al., 2022; Bass, 2021). Pastor Byun positioned the GDM within a broader biblical narrative of liberation, comparing the Korean people's struggle against military dictatorship to the Old Testament narrative of Exodus, in which the Israelites fought for freedom from the tyrannical Pharaoh of Egypt. This parallel provided the Christian community with a sociopolitical structure for resisting oppression (Seo et al., 2023; Park et al., 2024b; Rheem & Chung, 2024). In his sermons, Byun continually highlighted the church's commitment to protect those under attack and challenge oppressive authorities, in addition to the principles of divine justice and equality for everyone. His theological understanding not only validated resistance but also correlated it to God's decree, thus proving that resisting injustice was a kind of obedience to the justice of God. In addition, Byun's viewpoint on democracy was optimistic. He regarded the GDM as an illustration of God's authority on Earth, and he thought that justice on Earth would prevail over oppression as the outcome of this movement. This approach equipped him with the strength to work together with those protesting by incorporating their fight into God's scheme for justice and freedom (Kang et al., 2021). Byun contended in this theological reflection that the achievement of democracy was not only a political desire, but an essential spiritual vocation that demanded action. The fight for democracy was an element of a broader, spiritual order, as the development of an unbiased government was crucial to the accomplishment of God's will on the planet. By blending Calvinist theology, past examples of the English Puritan resistance, and biblical narratives of freedom, Byun could justify his protest against the military dictatorship. The political and spiritual aspects of the GDM were strengthened by his religious

vision and Korea's battle for democracy, which motivated community involvement as a narrative for better justice from God (Kim & Chung, 2023).

2.5 Pastor Byun's Significance from the View of Coaching Psychology

We are now going to evaluate Pastor Byun's management during the GDM in the setting of coaching psychology. This analysis is particularly important in the context of contemporary coaching psychology theories that value personal development and peaceful community development. Whitmore's (2021) psychological model is a more comprehensive explanation of Pastor Byun's stance, as it underscores the transformational potential of leaders to promote healthy self-awareness, autonomy, and future growth by improving human relationships and cultivating community development.

Pastor Byun, a visionary coach, assisted the demonstrators in developing their inner courage and independence, as opposed to guiding them in political conflicts at the forefront. Stanier (2016), a coaching psychologist, has defined authentic leadership as the ability of individuals to realize their full potential by utilizing a well-organized support system. The characteristics of this support system can be reflected in his capacity to inspire and motivate the demonstrators. A useful model for the psychological impact on those who participated in the democratization movement is Pastor Byun's leadership, which exceeds political and religious boundaries. In other words, his sermons can be interpreted as planned initiatives to inspire the audience, solidify their resolve, and develop ethical behavior in the presence of severe adversity. All of this is in line with the findings of Passmore and Lai in their coaching psychology (2019), which is that successful coaches need to help their clients in the journey of self-discovery by revealing their hidden talents. Pastor Byun's influence worked as an ethical guide and a source of religious and psychological support throughout the GDM (Seok & Chung, 2024). Byun's comprehensive approach, which integrated the coaching concept with the acute needs of the democratization movement, developed a model for revolutionary leadership during periods of political and social instability.

2.6 Pastor Byun's Political Activism from the View of Education

Pastor Byun's significant contributions to political activity can be studied more closely through the lens of educational theory, particularly critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire's (2018) concept of education as a liberatory act is especially relevant, as it is in line with Byun's theological and leadership contributions to the Gwangju Uprising. Freire asserts that education must serve an objective beyond mere instruction to free and empower individuals. Byun's political and theological teachings served as a liberating force for the oppressed Korean population, fostering critical awareness, an essential component in the promotion of social transformation and revolution. Byun's educational philosophy aligns with the perspective offered by modern educational theorists, such as Henry Giroux (2020), who says that educators should function as transformational scholars. Pastor Byun's theological teachings exceeded mere religious direction by urging his followers to participate actively in the political struggle. Giroux highlighted the significance of education in the development of a cautious population that could resist oppression. Similarly, Pastor Byun advised his audience to actively engage in social movements rather than stay idle and ponder without acting, to serve the times.

Furthermore, the educational life of Pastor Byun is remarkably similar to the education for democracy that John Dewey (1944) strongly recommended in his classic work. For Dewey, education is about educating students to become active citizens who contribute to the development of a democratic society. Through his sermons and publications, Pastor Byun's public leadership prepared his followers with the intellectual and moral resources essential to defeat authoritarian military regimes (Chung, 2023). Rev. Byun's comprehensive social vision, which is the fundamental value of his theological education, is evident in his support for democracy, equality, and resistance to injustice. This has developed into a public education that exceeds individual character and devotion.

During periods of social unrest, moral frameworks often deteriorate, leading to fear-driven behavior and societal chaos. Christian ministry, grounded in biblical teachings, reinforces essential moral values such as love, justice, and integrity, fostering ethical behavior and social cohesion. Furthermore, through life education, Christian ministry helps individuals confront adversity, discover meaning in their existence, and cultivate resilience. By integrating moral and life education, Christian ministry serves as a stabilizing force, promoting individual transformation and contributing to societal reconstruction during times of instability.

Pastor Byun's leadership during the democratization movement is a realistic and incredible demonstration of how religious education can promote both individual spiritual growth and community commitment to social and political engagement. He indicates that religious education is a crucial tool in the movement for human rights and democracy by combining theological and social justice principles (Kim & Chung, 2024). Pastor Byun's educational and spiritual guidance for the Korean people convincingly shows that education can be powerful when theology and politics are interwoven. He is a very important model for how religious people can promote the idea of personal and collective responsibility for social justice. His life's actions show that the strength of an academic model can produce freedom, democracy, and continual social change.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 The Biblical Narrative and Reformed Theology

Pastor Byun's religious outlook was greatly affected by John Calvin's principles on resistance to oppressive leaders, which proved especially important in his dislike of a military regime in the larger context of the Exodus narrative in the Old Testament (Jeong, 1996; Kim & Jeong, 2014). From preaching to other public activities, Byun sought to remind his fellows that resistance to the unjust military government was a Christian duty; the regime was an insult to divine order and human dignity. He led the church in carrying out its role of serving democracy and justice, interpreting how Christian beliefs can catalyze political resistance and community action when most needed (Chung et al., 2021).

3.2 The Church as a Place of Worship and Social Purity

Seohyun Church was an important catalyst in the Gwangju Democratization Movement, acting as both a religious place of worship and the center of activities for protesters, under the supervision of Pastor Byun. The church offered a physical haven for demonstrators, so that they received clothing, food, a home, and healthcare, besides finding religious shelter in prayer

(Chung, 2003; Choi & Chung, 2023; Seo et al., 2024). The study reveals that religious entities, like Seohyun Church, operate as both spiritual refuges and motivators that encourage people to participate in the social justice movement.

3.3 Christians' Long-term Involvement in Democratization

The permanent nature of Christian engagement in the battle for democracy is demonstrated by Pastor Byun's engagement with the June Democratic Struggle and his following fight for justice (Chung, 1998; Kim & Chung, 2021; Go et al., 2021). Byun continued his call for transparency, especially concerning the government's forgiveness of those accountable for the Gwangju massacre, after his earliest political achievements in 1987. Yang and Chung (2023) indicate that the effect of religion on political and social shifts extends outside distinct events in history. His unrelenting devotion to Christian-based justice illustrates how belief can help develop democratic values over time.

4.0 SUGGESTIONS

The outcomes yield many proposals for future research on political campaigns and faith, including some for contemporary religious leaders. The value of religious leaders adopting a spiritual role during political instability is further demonstrated by the instance of Pastor Byun. Byun's approach has the opportunity to motivate Christians and other religious leaders in today's world to effectively use their positions for the benefit of equality, freedom, and justice. This strategy provides ethical advice and direction to the general population and their communities, along with being following the Word of God. Throughout the GDM, Seohyeon Church is a prime instance of a church that performs as a social action base and community resource center besides being a worship place. During instances of political or social instability, religious organizations may offer crucial help through spiritual guidance, ethical support, and administrative assistance, as exemplified by Pastor Byun's ministry (Seo et al., 2021, 2022; Park & Chung, 2024). Future justice movements might benefit from preserving this dual purpose. To acquire a deeper awareness of the various methods by which religion impacts political engagement and the pursuit of democratic administration, it is important to compare research from various kinds of religious perspectives (Lee et al., 2021; Tsyrfya et al., 2023; Jeong et al., 2024).

5.0 CONCLUSION

Pastor Byun's leadership during the Gwangju Democratization Movement and the June Democratic Struggle exemplified a successful synthesis of political involvement, community participation, and religious commitment. Byun built a strong ethical and spiritual framework rooted in Reformed theology, drawing particularly from Calvin's teachings on resisting tyranny, which empowered him to boldly oppose the authoritarian regime. His extensive leadership experience reflected a remarkable ability to empathize with and address the needs and struggles of the underprivileged, guided by his theological perspective. His contribution to organizing peaceful protests is evident in his effectiveness in uniting and inspiring the determination of protestors, demonstrating his adept use of coaching psychology. Byun wisely transformed Seohyeon Church into a vibrant center that harmonized its religious mission with the promotion of civic education and ethical values, significantly contributing to the intellectual and moral foundations of the democratic movement. This evolution was supported by an

educational philosophy that emphasized the church's role as a nurturing ground for intellectual inquiry and ethical behavior. Ultimately, Byun's work illustrates how Christian theology, empirical research, psychology, and education can be integrated to foster innovative leadership and drive lasting social change. His life's work stands as an inspiring example for future generations, showcasing the enduring impact of a faith-driven movement in the pursuit of human rights and social justice.

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