Networks of Parish Churches across a Growing Metropolis

Catholic Territorial Strategy in Late Twentieth-Century Seoul, South Korea

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Abstract

This article offers a new perspective on interactions between religion and urbanism through an exploration of the territorial strategy implemented by the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, South Korea, in the late twentieth century. In this growing Northeast Asian metropolis, the archdiocese was remarkably prosperous, benefitting from drastic urban development, a rapid nationwide economic boom, and the boost given to Catholicism around the world by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). By mapping and statistically analyzing the construction of parish churches between 1973 and 1994, we argue that the archdiocese strengthened its influence over society and space in the city thanks to a strategy that was open and responsive to the extensive urban development driven by central and local governments.

Keywords: Catholicism, parish church networks, religion-city relationship, Seoul, urban development

Introduction

Recent studies of the relationship between religion and urban space have suggested several innovative approaches, such as urban religious practice that promotes “vernacular modernities” (Hancock and Srinivas 2008), the “postsecular city” (Beaumont 2008), and the “fundamentalist city” (AlSayyad and Massoumi 2010), as well as “entrepreneurial religion” in neoliberal urbanism (Lanz and Oosterbaan 2016), and “sociospatial fragmentation” during religious revival (Poblocki 2021). Their focus, however, has remained predominantly on
Europe, the United States, and the global South. The collection of articles edited by Hancock and Srinivas (2008) contributed significantly to the postcolonialism of the field by dealing with urban religions in West Africa, West Asia, and South and Southeast Asia. This attempt at postcolonialism was reinforced by another collection of articles, edited by Lanz and Oosterbaan (2016), covering cities in South America, West Africa, and the margins of Southeast Europe. Despite this, both collections left one region out of reach: Northeast Asia. Moreover, the articles in these collections, focused on how religion develops its urban infrastructure, referred mostly to cases of exclusive urban areas for certain religious-social groups, including an enclosed community complex for middle-class Muslims (Çavdar 2016), a Pentecostal prayer camp comprising residential, business, and prayer sites (Ukah 2016), and a shantytown complex renovated by the Pentecostal movement (Lanz 2016). Each of these religious urban clusters was governed – sometimes even built – by logic, founded on the religion’s internal value system, rather than an interaction with other surrounding urban affairs.

This article focuses on Seoul, a Northeast Asian metropolis, and probes the late twentieth-century territorial strategy of the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul by mapping and statistically analyzing parish church construction from 1973 to 1994. The different regional settings of the archdiocese’s practice in this study reveals a new facet of the interactions between religion and urbanism. We argue that the archdiocese strengthened its influence over Seoul’s society and space by implementing a strategy receptive to government-driven urban development, consequently forming citywide networks of Catholic parishes and erecting churches in beneficial urban locations.

In wake of the Korean War (1950–53), Christianity dramatically increased in South Korea, reaching approximately 26% of the population in 1995 (Statistics Korea 2007). This increase was remarkable in a conventionally Buddhist and Confucian country, especially considering pre-war efforts by foreign missionaries that had seen only modest success. In South Korean Christianity, the Catholic Church continued to grow, eventually reaching around 7.51% of the population in 1994. In the Archdiocese of Seoul, the proportion of the Catholic population grew from roughly 5.38% in 1983 to around 9.28% in 1994. Membership growth in the Korean Catholic Church fell to under 4% in 1995, however, reflecting the limits of high growth (Catholic Conference of Korea 1984, 22; 1995, 6; 1996, 8). South Korean Catholicism’s most prosperous period overlapped with rapid national economic growth, the worldwide Catholic reformation of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), and the drastic urban development of Seoul from 1973 to 1994. Against the backdrop of these many historic changes, numerous new Catholic church buildings were erected in Seoul.

This article identifies three major stakeholders and their interactions with regard to church buildings and their geographical networks: the universal Catholic Church and its global territorial organization; the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul as the ecclesiastical province of the centralized global Catholic Church, responsible for all local diocesan parishes; and the Seoul Metropolitan Government under the national central government. How did the global Catholic reformation and social, political, and economic changes, in addition to governmental urban projects, affect the archdiocese’s territorial strategy for locating new parish churches in the city?
Collecting Dispersed Catholic Data for Mapping and Quantitative Analysis

We have assembled a database of the 150 parishes founded from 1882 to 1994 and of church construction projects in the Archdiocese of Seoul. This includes basic information (parish establishment dates, mother and daughter parishes, past and present addresses, and church completion dates). Since recent archdiocesan archives cannot be accessed for private purposes, research materials were obtained mainly from official Korean Catholic websites and two Catholic academic institutions (the theology library of the Catholic University of Korea and the library of the Research Foundation of Korean Church History). Most information was collected from the Guide to the Catholic Church in Korea, a website containing the addresses of Catholic institutions including parishes provided by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, and Catholic Parish Boundaries of Seoul Archdiocese (in Korean), edited by the archdiocese (2013). This database allowed us to carry out quantitative analysis of the geographical and chronological distributions of parish establishment and church construction projects. To accompany the statistics, we have included maps that show the geographical organization of parish church construction projects, mostly in the research period (1973–94), and in the two previous periods divided by the end of the Korean War (before 1953 and 1953–72). Mapping has been rarely used by previous studies of the history of Korean church architecture, although new digital tools have brought revolutionary ways of mapping to the field of research into historical landscapes, allowing for an exploration of “spatio-temporal relationships that have previously remained hidden” (Coomans, Cattoor, and De Jonge 2019, 9–14).

To locate elements on the map according to an accurate universal geographical standard, all maps were compiled based on the online diocesan map produced by the Seoul Archdiocese’s Administrative Geographic Information System. We consulted historical maps

1 For cases in which church completion dates could not be found, the dates of dedication, first mass, or relocation were used. Dates of land purchasing were collected for church buildings located within 1 kilometer of subway or train railroads.

2 http://directory.cbck.or.kr/OnlineAddress/Default.aspx.


5 This diocesan map shows every parish and its governing area, other Catholic organizations, and shrines on the digital map of Seoul (Archdiocese of Seoul n.d.-b).
of the years closest to the end of each period to describe urban contexts. Further information on administrative boundary alterations were supplemented with publications by the Seoul Historiography Institute, and more precise data on mountain contours was acquired from digital topographical maps of present-day Seoul. Each church construction project was located on the maps following a search for its address in Naver Map, an online digital map and navigation service specialized for South Korean regions. Mapping temporary churches was an important step in the process. Where the location of a (temporary) church building is unknown or untraced in the current address system, the location of the next (temporary) church building of the parish has been borrowed.

**Seoul, A Key City for the Korean Mission: Time and Space**

The Catholic mission in Northeast Asia was initially headed by the Society of Jesus in Japan and China in the mid-sixteenth century. While Joseon, the last Korean dynasty (1392–1910), remained closed to Catholic missionaries, Chinese Catholic books introduced Christianity to Korean Confucian scholars. In 1784, Yi Seung-hun (1756–1801), a scholar who had paid a short visit to Beijing, was baptized by a foreign missionary. On returning to Joseon, he founded the first Korean Catholic community. Catholic communities were constantly persecuted because of differences between Christianity and Confucianism (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2018, 12–23), a situation that recurred across the country with the 1801 Sinyu Persecution (J. Choi 2006, 111–12, 118–27).

6 These urban contexts include the administrative boundary of Seoul, the Han River, mountain contours, and the city wall, as well as infrastructures such as main buildings, roads, and subway or train railroads. Historical maps of reference are: *Seoulsigeoongjochungjeonggilljungyebuindeoko* [A scheme drawing of Seoul’s urban planning after the re-designing of its parks], the early 1950s (estimated), 1:15,000 scale, courtesy of Seoul Museum of History’s Seoul History Archives, archive no. 67542; *Seoulsigeoongjeonggilljungyebuindeoko* [Seoul urban planning street network map], 1953, 1:15,000 scale, courtesy of Seoul Museum of History’s Seoul History Archives, archive no. 67530; *Seoulsigeojido Seoulsigeoongjochungjeonggilljungyebuindeoko* [Seoul Special City street map], 1955, courtesy of Seoul Museum of History’s Seoul History Archives, archive no. 72660; *Seoulteukbyeolsi* (Seoul Special City) *jido* [Seoul Special City map], 1957, 1:12,500 scale, courtesy of Seoul Museum of History’s Seoul History Archives, archive no. 67517; *Seoulteukbyeolsigado* [New Seoul rough map with roads, lot numbers, and improvement zones], 1968, 1:135,000 scale, courtesy of Seoul Museum of History’s Seoul History Archives, archive no. 67533; *Seoulteukbyeolsigado* [Seoul Metropolitan City full revised map], 1974, courtesy of Seoul Museum of History’s Seoul History Archives, archive no. 67535; *Seoulteukbyeolsi* [Seoul full map], 1994, 1:100,000 scale, in *Seoulteukbyeol* (M. W. Choi 1994).

7 The following books have been consulted: *Seourni giil* (City History Compilation Committee of Seoul 2009a, 166–68), *Seoul 2chonnyeonsa*: 32, byeonidae Seourni haengjeong (Seoul Historiography Institute 2016a, 78–82), and *Seoul 2chonnyeonsa* 6, byeonidae Seourni doigungseol (Seoul Historiography Institute 2016b, 26–31).

8 These digital topographical maps can be accessed via Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport n.d.

9 [https://map.naver.com](https://map.naver.com).

10 Temporary parish churches refer to parish places of worship that were either newly constructed for temporary use, formerly constructed for a secondary station, or formerly constructed for other uses such as residential, commercial, or office work, in addition to other Christian community services.

11 In the event that the lot number of an address had been changed in the current address system; its new lot number was traced through the website “Bakkwinjibeon chatgi” (Seoul Metropolitan Government n.d.).
Despite persistent oppression, the Vicariate Apostolic of Korea was established by Pope Gregory XVI in 1831 and has been staffed by French missionaries from the Paris Foreign Missions Society since 1836. Since the signing of the first commercial treaty with Western countries in 1882, religious freedom had been implicitly accepted in Seoul and persecution consequently came to an end. The 1886 France-Korea Treaty provided regulatory grounds for Catholic missionaries to evangelize in Joseon, leading to Korean Catholics receiving legal approval in 1899. During the Japanese colonial era from 1910 to 1945, the Catholic Church was under governmental control that restricted missionary work. After the end of WWII in August 1945, the Catholic Church was faced with two contrasting mission fields: in North Korea, most priests were arrested and churches closed, while in South Korea, native bishops and priests gradually replaced foreign missionaries. The Holy See sent the first papal envoy to Seoul in 1947 and welcomed the establishment of the South Korean government in 1948. Conflict between these two opposed governments came to a head with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2018, 50–53, 84–86, 108–30).

Figure 1. Parish churches and the topography of Gangbuk and Gangnam in 1952 (map produced by Youngji Kang).
Meanwhile, Seoul played a vital role in the development of the Korean Catholic Church. The first Korean Catholic communities emerged in the city and most Catholic missionaries were based there, benefitting from the networks of foreign legations after the 1886 France-Korea Treaty. The first noticeable growth of the Korean Catholic Church with unofficial religious freedom began in Seoul before spreading to other provinces (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2011a, 51–55, 73–81, 145–50). Seoul’s first Catholic parish was founded within the walled city. Subsequently, most parishes were scattered around Gangbuk, the area north of the Han River, while only two parishes were established in Gangnam, the area south of the river, before the Korean War.  

Knowing the city’s topography and boundary development is required to understand the geographical spread of Catholic parishes in Seoul (Figure 1). Yi Seong-gye (1335–1408), the first king of Joseon, established Hanyang as the capital in 1394, Seoul’s old core and its surrounding area in Gangbuk, a favorable location in the middle of the peninsula and with access to well-established river traffic. Moreover, Hanyang and its royal ancestral shrine, altar, and palaces faced the Han River at the front and were surrounded by mountains – Bugaksan to the north, Inwangsan to the west, Naksan to the east, and Namsan to the south – forming an exceptionally auspicious arrangement in fengshui theory (Hur 1994, 207–8; City History Compilation Committee of Seoul 2009b, 99, 106–9, 310). The capital’s administrative boundary was extended across the Han River by the Japanese colonial government in 1936 and included modern-day Yeongdeungpo-gu (Yeongdeungpo-gu Office 2019), where the first Catholic parish in Gangnam was established in the same year (Archdiocese of Seoul 2013, 450).

The Korean War (1950–53) severely damaged the Catholic Church both in North and South Korea: church buildings were destroyed; educational, publishing, and social welfare businesses were discontinued; and native and foreign clergy, along with laypeople, were arrested, killed, or disappeared. However, after the war, the number of South Korean Catholics increased from around 170,000 in 1953 to around 530,000 in 1962 due to constant ecclesiastical and social restoration work. Wartime aid funds from international Catholic networks enabled reconstruction and relief work for refugees and orphans. The postwar South Korean Catholic Church, supported by relocated or newly settled missionary societies and monastic orders, involved laypeople in its activities, while initiating the credit union movement for overcoming extreme poverty and vocational guidance education for widows and the unemployed (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2018, 132–35).

This expansion was also based on the higher social and political authority of the Catholic Church, whose passive and seclusive attitude under ceaseless persecution was revolutionized by Kinam Ro, the first native bishop of Seoul from 1942 to 1967. Kinam Ro’s efforts to support political participation among Catholics led to cordial relationships with political powers. The Catholic Church eventually strengthened its practical status in mainstream Seoul society while simultaneously contributing actively to pro-American and anti-communist propaganda, combined with the Holy See’s principle of social ministry after WWII (Ro 2005, 142–49, 156–57, 178–81).

Data from “Bondang” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea n.d.).
Although Syngman Rhee’s subsequent dictatorship gradually alienated the Catholic Church (Ro 2005, 179–80), initial friendly relations with the first two post-1945 governments had laid a firm foundation for the spread of Christianity. In the Cold War system, the US military government’s religious policy supported Protestantism and Catholicism, while suppressing Confucianism, Buddhism, and other folk religions, which advocated nationalism rather than pro-Americanism and anti-communism (Ro 2002, 3–13). Syngman Rhee, a Methodist himself, inherited the previous government’s principles of religion and preserved Christianity as the nationally recognized religion (D. K. Kang 1993, 37–41). His intentional interference in the internal disruption of Confucianists and Buddhists weakened their resistance against the government (Ro 2002, 11–12).

Moreover, the Catholic Church benefited from the Protestant boom that had been generated since the mid-1890s by the American Protestant mission’s modern medical service and education, overcoming the population’s bias against Westerners and Christians (C. Park 2003, 16–22). Before the Japanese colonial era, some Korean Protestant pastors and believers had already managed their congregations autonomously, amounting to 1% of the whole population in 1910. During the occupation, Protestants led independence movements against the Japanese. After the partition of the country, members of Protestant churches grew from 3% of the South Korean population in the 1950s to 6% in the 1960s. This increase in proportion broke down conventional social prejudices towards Christianity, allowing the public to perceive it as a trustworthy and good religion, which also encouraged Catholics to participate in mission works (Grayson 1995, 247–58, 267–68).

The Flourishing Catholic Church in an Emerging International Metropolis

In 1973, Seoul’s urban growth was stimulated by the central and city governments through the announcement of redevelopment areas, which were based on the amended 1971 urban planning law and facilitated by a US presidential visit and North-South Korean diplomacy. Lyndon B. Johnson’s visit to Seoul in 1966 attracted more than two million citizens, who welcomed him in the streets and on city hall square. Exposing adjacent slum areas on television channels provoked Korean-American associations to petition for slum clearance around the city hall. In addition, the joint communiqué between North and South Korea on July 4, 1972, led to periodical Red Cross conferences in Seoul and Pyongyang, which motivated the former to become a well-developed modern city (Son 2003a, 117–26, 159–65).

High-rise buildings of approximately twenty stories were promoted by Seoul’s urban planning bureau in the redevelopment areas announced in 1973. An overseas field trip was organized with the head of Jung-gu’s district office and influential local merchants who owned land and real estate. After visiting New York’s Rockefeller Center, the Barbican district in London, and La Défense in Paris, they were convinced that economic growth needed to be accompanied by high-rise redevelopment. Subsequently, major conglomerates purchased small plots from numerous landlords to erect large, lofty buildings. In 1976, the completion of the Seoul Plaza Hotel and of the Samsung Group building transformed the urban scenery near the city hall (Son 2003a, 165–73).

These high-rise redevelopment projects prospered with rapid economic growth, while South Korea’s per-capita GNI increased slightly more than fourfold from 1980 to 1991, resulting in a desperate need for office space. Furthermore, the 1986 Asian Games and 1988
Olympics required sports stadiums and accommodations for athletes and tourists, as well as urban infrastructure that complied with internationally accepted standards (Son 2003a, 185–86). Before the 1988 Seoul Olympics, no fewer than 93 redevelopment areas of a total of 426,490 square meters were completed in the city center. Regeneration also began in the outskirts from 1983, with cooperative projects between resident associations and construction companies that eliminated illegal shanties in the Han riverside and the city as a whole (Son 2003c, 45–46). Subway construction contributed to Seoul’s radical transformation into a highly compacted megacity within about 600 square kilometers. Four subway lines were built before the 1988 Olympics. Financial difficulties slowed momentum until 1996, when line no. 5 was opened (Survey and Research Division in the Seoul Museum of History 2015, 31–37, 148–50).

In 1988, thirty-five years after the Korean War, the population of Seoul exceeded ten million (Survey and Research Division in the Seoul Museum of History 2015, 11). A little-known and war-ravaged small capital city had metamorphosed into a metropolis with global standards. Besides shiny new buildings on neatly rearranged sites with subway networks, the city was equipped with crucial infrastructures: an urban expressway along the Han River to improve traffic flow between eastern and western areas, a tourist bus terminal and parking lots, and green open spaces that included two parks for international competitions, as well as agricultural, marine, and electronics markets (Son 2003c, 41–47).

Meanwhile, Korea’s Catholic population more than tripled from 166,471 in 1953, to 530,217 in 1962, which led to recognition within the global Catholic Church. On March 10,1962, Pope John XXIII established the official clerical hierarchy with legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within the Korean Catholic Church. From then on, Korea was no longer a mission field, and the vicariate apostolic of Seoul became an archdiocese. This emancipation came twenty years after the consecration of the first native vicar apostolic of Seoul in 1942, thus transferring institutional operations from French missionaries to Korean clergy. The elevation of the Korean Catholic Church in the universal Catholic Church resulted in Korean bishops attending the Second Vatican Council, 1962–65, where Pope John XXIII declared that the Catholic Church needed updating – known as the aggiornamento. Liturgical and practical reforms were implemented accordingly, with three major focuses: the Korean language replaced Latin in church liturgy, lay people became more involved in pastoral work, and the Catholic Church committed to socio-economic and political participation (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2011b, 143–45, 225–49; 2018, 146).

The Archdiocese of Seoul experienced its most dynamic era under Cardinal Kim Sou-hwan, the second archbishop of Seoul from 1968 to 1998. It reached out to various social groups including industrial laborers, the urban poor, and prisoners, while supporting pro-democracy movements against consecutive military dictatorships. The archdiocesan Catholic population grew more than sevenfold from 156,722 in 1969 (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2011b, 263–75, 316–37), to 1,129,376 in 1994 (Catholic Conference of Korea 1995, 6).

This prosperous period was accompanied by enormous church ceremonies in public spaces and popular rallies in the cathedral of Seoul, showing that Catholicism was no longer a persecuted cult, but rather an influential Korean religion. In 1984, Pope John Paul II canonized 103 Korean martyrs on Yeouido Square and celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Korean
Catholic Church in the presence of around one million of the faithful (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2018, 152–55). In 1989, more than 650,000 people gathered on the same square during the 44th International Eucharistic Congress (Catholic Peace Broadcasting Corporation n.d.). At the same time, the Myeongdong Cathedral emerged as a safe place for civic movements against the military government, especially during the June Democracy Movement in 1987 (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2011b, 332–37).

Behind this rising social influence, however, the archdiocese was faced with two main challenges. On the one hand, massive parish communities made it harder for parish members to sustain a sense of community, and alarmed the archdiocese, with the average number of members per parish reaching 7,000 in 1992 (Archdiocese of Seoul 1993, 5–7). On the other hand, increasing middle-class dominance in the Korean Catholic Church impeded parishioners in other classes from taking a leading role in parish operations. The financial commitment of middle-class parishioners was required for the construction and management of large church buildings for sizeable congregations, enhancing their leverage in the communities (M. Park 2016, 47–50). In 1992, 84.5% of the Korean Catholic population belonged to the middle class and 34.6% lived in Seoul (U. Seo 1994, 158–59).

**Gangbuk and Gangnam: Contrasting Settings for Church Construction**

Another issue faced by the Archdiocese of Seoul during its heyday was the unbalanced urban development of Gangbuk and Gangnam, the two main areas of Seoul, north and south of the Han River. Once the capital had been brought directly under the authority of the prime minister and its mayor promoted a position equivalent to that of a minister in 1962, large areas of present-day Gangnam were incorporated into Seoul in 1963 (City History Compilation Committee of Seoul 2009b, 323–24). The drastic urban development of these areas started with the Yeongdong Land Readjustment Project, designated in 1967 as the starting point for the highway to link Seoul with the cities of the south. In addition, land development in Gangbuk was officially prohibited in 1975 to concentrate its population and industrial endeavors into Gangnam. In particular, the remarkable Yeongdong area development received continuous governmental incentives that produced beneficial infrastructures such as subway lines no. 2 and no. 3, express and intercity bus terminals, and large apartment complexes. The prosecutors’ office and prestigious schools were moved from Gangbuk to Yeongdong, which experienced one of the nation’s highest land price rises, increasing more than 1,300-fold between 1963 and 1979 (Son 2003b, 69–70, 86–95, 158–71, 344–53).

This Gangnam-focused development led to population movement into and within Seoul. Population influx from other cities and provinces peaked in 1975, with almost 995,000 immigrants, continuously exceeding 680,000 every year until 1990 (Statistics Korea 2022). Gangnam’s growth rate was higher than Gangbuk’s. The population of Gangnam formed about 20% of the population of Seoul in 1970, climbing to almost 50% in 1990 (Seoul Development Institute 2008, 36).

This population drift was carefully observed by the Archdiocese of Seoul, which strived to found new parishes. The 1979 pastoral guide determined a yearly need for the establishment of five or six new parishes because of high population density and housing complex construction projects (Archdiocese of Seoul 1979, chapter 1). The annual pastoral guides issued by the archdiocese between 1979 and 1982 referred to highly focused areas for parish
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establishment, notably fifteen neighborhoods in Seoul, nine of which were in eastern Gangnam and five in eastern Gangbuk (Archdiocese of Seoul 1979, chapter 1; 1980, 7; 1981, 14; 1982, 14). Among today’s 232 parishes in the Archdiocese of Seoul, 84 were established between 1973 and 1994.\textsuperscript{13} New parishes became increasingly clustered in Gangnam and eastern Seoul, rather than in Gangbuk and western Seoul. Among the 83 new parishes (excluding the international parish that was not affiliated with a certain area), 52 were in Gangnam and 31 in Gangbuk. In other words, 56 were in eastern Seoul and 27 in western Seoul.

Not every newly established parish directly led to church construction, however, particularly since 1979, as the interval between parish establishment and construction completion indicates. This trend can be largely attributed to financial shortfall, given that in its 1979 pastoral guide the archdiocese officially clarified that its earlier custom of purchasing land for new parishes would be no longer observed due to colossal land values (Archdiocese of Seoul 1979, chapter 1).

Although the Archdiocese of Seoul faced difficulties in providing financial assistance to its parishes, its provision of centralized supervision and advice on building parish churches is still ongoing. Church architecture and construction were governed by the department of finance under the archdiocesan regulation on administrative and personnel systems, which took effect in 1972 (Archdiocese of Seoul n.d.-c, 8–9, 30). This department was succeeded by the current department of administration (Catholic Publishing House 1984, 163–68; Archdiocese of Seoul n.d.-a). The archdiocese also had two committees that were concerned with parish church construction: one that focused on the architecture and the other on the art. In March 1968, Kyeonghyang Magazine, a Korean Catholic periodical founded in 1906 (Yun 2006, 11–12), reported the creation of the committee of architecture, which was composed of a coadjutor bishop and roughly five priests, and was affiliated with the archdiocesan council (Kyeonghyang Magazine 1968, 38–39). In January 1969, this magazine announced that the architecture committee had recruited new members, including three laypeople: Seungyong Moon, the diocesan secretary general, Cheonsu Han, a company president, and Changjun Moon, a businessman (Kyeonghyang Magazine 1969, 47), revealing that the committee dealt primarily with administrative and economic issues relating to church architecture.

The archdiocesan subcommittee for art deliberated over architectural designs for parish churches (S. Seo 1971, 17–18). In April 1964, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea decided to found the committee for liturgy in May 1964 and elected William John McNaughton (1926–2020), the bishop of Incheon, as its first chairman. Every diocese was required to appoint at least one priest as a member of this committee, or if possible, three priests to oversee liturgy, music, and art, respectively (Kyeonghyang Magazine 1964, 4). The discussion of church construction reported in Kyeonghyang Magazine in July 1971 revealed that the subcommittee for art in the Archdiocese of Seoul included two lay advisors: Soonsuk Lee (1905–86), a craftsman who pioneered Korean applied arts, and Sechoong Kim (1928–86), one of Korea’s first contemporary sculptors (S. Seo 1971, 18). Both were professors at the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University and served as the first two presidents of the

\textsuperscript{13} Data from “Bondang” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea n.d.).
Catholic Artists’ Union of Seoul, founded in March 1970 (Kyeonghyang Magazine 1970, 58–62; Kim Se-choong Memorial Foundation 1996, 251–53; Catholic Artists’ Union of Seoul 2008). Sechoong Kim, however, pointed out that this subcommittee did not have sufficient power to assert its opinion over parishes, which was the result of a situation that saw construction funds raised primarily by the individual parishes rather than the archdiocese (S. Seo 1971, 18–19).

Figure 2. Sincheondong Catholic Church surrounded by apartment complexes (photo reproduced from Midumgwa sarangui baljachwi: Cheonjugyo Sincheon Bondang yeoldol [Sincheon Bondang 10nyeonsa Pyeonchanwiwonhoe 1991, 159] by permission from Sincheondong Catholic Church).

Meanwhile, as the schedules in the 1979 pastoral guide show, by the late 1970s, the archdiocesan committee for architecture was already meeting regularly (Archdiocese of Seoul 1979, chapter 2, chapter 3), indicating that church construction had become a major activity. Parish church construction, particularly around new residential complexes, was also a means of expanding religious influence (Figure 2). For example, the archdiocese purchased sites marked for development into residential zones in the Yeongdong area, corresponding to modern day Gangnam-gu and Seocho-gu, anticipating a consequent population influx. As expected, radical population growth of about 100,000 new arrivals per year from the late 1970s to the early 1980s occurred in the Yeongdong area, where parish churches were constructed around apartment housing areas to spread Catholicism (E. Choi 2001, 6, 23, 38). The congregation of Cheongdamdong Church, for example, rose to 5,289 in 1983, nearly tripling
since the completion of its parish church building in 1977 (Cheongdamdong Catholic Church 1984, 110, 135, 501). Another example in Songpa-gu, also in eastern Gangnam, was the construction of Sincheondong Church, which was completed in 1985 in a residential zone where eight apartment complexes for more than 11,300 households were erected during 1974–89 (Sincheon Bondang 10nyeonsa Pyeongchanwiwhonhoe 1991, 26–30, 157), while the parish received 3,287 new congregants during 1985–89 (Sincheondongbondang 30nyeonsa Pyeongchanwiwhonhoe 2011, 342–43).

From 1973 to 1994, 94 new churches were constructed by 83 of 150 parishes, with 49 new parishes leading almost 60% of these projects. Overall, church construction reveals greater geographical balance than the establishment of new parishes: 47 projects in Gangnam and 47 in Gangbuk; and 55 in eastern Seoul and 39 in western Seoul.

However, categorizing each project according to its sequence within its parish presents distinctive geographical distributions. Around 66% of first projects were located in eastern Seoul, where roughly 67% of new parishes were located. Around 64% of second projects and 75% of third projects were based in Gangbuk, where the Catholic Church had begun to disperse earlier, resulting in a more deeply rooted local history. Among second and third projects, 75% were implemented on the same sites on which previous church buildings had been demolished and removed, suggesting that second and third constructions were mainly the result of a need for new places of worship, rather than a location change. Meanwhile, the completion of two construction projects by eleven parishes primarily aimed to provide larger space for their congregations (Archdiocese of Seoul 2013, 36, 88, 116, 186, 244, 248, 260, 334, 404, 464, 466). Six of these parishes moved to new sites, demonstrating their urgent need for more space.

The Mother-Daughter Networks of Parishes

The territorial system of the Catholic Church is structured by dioceses divided into parishes. As soon as the need arises, a diocesan bishop can establish a new parish by altering an existing one, according to a fission development mechanism comparable to that of cell division. The new parish has a juridical personality, and the diocesan bishop is required to entrust the parish to a diocesan priest, who will be appointed the proper pastor of the parish, reside in the parish, and be in charge of the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop (“Code of Canon Law” 1983, canons 515–52). Thus, there is always a mother parish and a daughter parish, and these develop complex genealogies since a mother can have one or more daughters, granddaughters, etc. Each parish has one parish church, which is a sacred place that cannot be built without the consent of the diocesan bishop and, after completion, is dedicated or blessed by the diocesan bishop (“Code of Canon Law” 1983, canons 1205–22).

Cardinal Kim Sou-hwan, Archbishop of Seoul, applied the universal principles of the Catholic Church to the context of Seoul. Networks of parish church buildings were the key feature of the geographical organization of his ecclesiastical province,14 linked by mother and daughter relationships between original parishes and their separated parishes (Figure 3). These

14 The parish church buildings that form networks exclude temporary churches.
networks need identification in order to understand the spread of parishes and consequent church construction, since mother parishes tended to financially support their daughters.

Figure 3. Parish church construction projects from 1973 to 1994 (map produced by Youngji Kang).

This type of financial support was boosted by the way in which the archdiocese established parishes under Cardinal Kim. The distinctive feature of the new system involved designating existing parishes as the main stakeholder in the founding of new parishes. This idea was roughly introduced in the pastoral guide of 1979 (Archdiocese of Seoul 1979, chapter 1) and more explicitly explained in the guide of the following year. The goal was to approach the establishment of parishes from a new perspective: existing parishes would establish secondary stations and support them to develop into parishes. The archdiocese stressed that the rate of increase for priests was less than half that for believers and that the expense of founding a parish was enormously high, despite the need for four or five new parishes every year. It added that if this new system did not work fully, existing parishes would need to extend their functions to cover the growing pastoral needs in the area (Archdiocese of Seoul 1980, 7). In its 1981 pastoral guide, the archdiocese reported that it had reached its goal of establishing two parishes out of three and encouraged parishes to make a greater effort, putting forward the increased goal of founding five parishes in a year. This goal also considered that existing parishes would provide absolute support for preparing land or buildings for the establishment
of secondary stations and elevate them to parishes (Archdiocese of Seoul 1981, 14). In 1982, the archdiocese put forward nine parish candidates – almost double that of the previous year (Archdiocese of Seoul 1982, 14). This new system of parish establishment, as provided by Cardinal Kim Sou-hwan, conformed to the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, which states that it is “only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes,” following a requirement to hear the opinions of the presbyteral council, and that “when certain communities cannot be erected as parishes or quasi-parishes, the diocesan bishop is to provide for their pastoral care in another way” (“Code of Canon Law” 1983, canons 515–16).

Figure 4. Parish church construction projects from 1953 to 1972 (map produced by Youngji Kang).

Enhanced financial solidarity between mother and daughter parishes created unique geographical networks of parish church buildings in Gangnam and Gangbuk. Gangnam’s networks tended to be interconnected with more components, while Gangbuk’s networks were mostly linear with fewer components. This can be attributed to previously built church landscapes. Most of the central areas of Gangbuk had already been occupied by older parish church buildings, whereas Gangnam had more potential sites for creating opportunities to evangelize in every direction. Accordingly, Gangbuk’s networks developed along the boundaries of Seoul and the Han River, while Gangnam’s networks sprawled into the outskirts of Seoul and simultaneously into central areas, both widening the archdiocese’s influential
sphere and increasing its density of church buildings. Additionally, some comparatively rich parishes in Gangnam impacted the geographical distribution of the networks. For instance, Gangnam’s Cheongdamdong Church received the second highest income in the archdiocese, behind Myeongdong Cathedral in 1978 (Cheongdamdong Catholic Church 1984, 181–82). From 1973 to 1994, the Cheongdamdong Church separated developed four daughter parishes. These five parishes completed no fewer than six church construction projects, leading to the construction of five granddaughter churches and consequently contributing to creating the biggest network over the largest area in this period, covering Yeongdong.

Comparison of parish church construction networks during the period 1973–94 and the previous period 1953–72 shows a clear evolution (Figure 4). In the latter, parish church construction remained in the city center before spreading out to the margins. Construction projects across the Han River to Gangnam began to appear more frequently than before, yet make up only around 27% of all projects and were concentrated in the west.

**Church Construction along Metropolitan Railroads Penetrating City Cores**

When Seoul was under Japanese occupation in the late 1920s, private companies were responsible for the first subway projects required by the rapid population increase and subsequent traffic congestion (Korean Society for Railway and Korean Society of Transportation 2003, 5–7). A 1939 government article on Seoul’s traffic problem predicted that the city would reach 930,000 inhabitants in 1945 and that the population outside the compacted center would predominantly increase, requiring public transport across broader areas. The article’s author suggested converting what were then national railroads into electric double tracks and linking them with underground and partly elevated railroads to disseminate tram and bus passengers (Ahn 1939, 86–88). These early plans for a subway across the historical downtown and connecting the existing railroads in marginal areas were not realized, but the concept was revived in the 1960s (Korean Society for Railway and Korean Society of Transportation 2003, 5–9).

In the post-Korean War era, subway route design was closely linked to urban planning. This policy began in the early 1970s, as subway line no. 1 offered a compromise to a city government dealing with both traffic congestion and low-class housing shortages under financial constraints. Line no. 1 resulted in an integrated railroad network that radiated out to the north and south, providing workers from adjacent cities with one-hour commutes rather than low-cost housing within Seoul. This alternative gave the government breathing space before the need for residential projects, as well as allowing for greater investment of the municipal budget in subway construction (Survey and Research Division in the Seoul Museum of History 2015, 36–37).

Initial planning foresaw a single core city that included the main commercial business district within the walled city and the development of radial transport routes extending out to marginal areas. Reversing the mono-core plan, subway line no. 2 was a circular line intended to link three or four city cores in a loop, encouraging the growth of both smooth traffic flow and other commercial business zones (Survey and Research Division in the Seoul Museum of History 2015, 38–40). This urban plan was aimed at dealing with an unevenly distributed population – 72% of which was concentrated in Gangbuk – by creating two new cores in Gangnam for business and residential districts. Furthermore, subway lines no. 3 and no. 4,
running diagonally across Seoul and the existing lines, were designed to pass through the city cores and resulted in the intersection of all lines, taking passengers to their destinations without the need to transfer more than once, if at all. Circulating buses were intended to ferry citizens who did not live near subway stations. Subway line no. 2 was completed in 1984 and lines no. 3 and no. 4 in 1985 (Korean Society for Railway and Korean Society of Transportation 2003, 21–22, 932–34), quickly transporting almost two million passengers daily (Noh 1985). In 1994, the Seoul subway carried roughly 3.7 million passengers per day, representing around 24.6% of the city’s entire transport network (Song 1994).

Figure 5. Multiple city cores in 1994 generated by subway lines no. 2, no. 3, and no. 4 (map produced by Youngji Kang).

The subway became Seoul’s most vital mode of transport and, as a result, multiple city cores were developed gradually, as the government had planned (Figure 5). Commercial and business activities in the old core were largely moved to Yeongdeungpo-gu and Gangnam-gu, in western and eastern Gangnam, respectively. In Yeongdeungpo-gu, financial institutions and mass media organizations carved out their own neighborhood in Yeouido. In Gangnam-gu, department stores and shopping malls were clustered in Apgujeong-dong, while large office buildings and hotels gathered around Teheran Street, where a concentration of skyscrapers was formed within about a decade along subway line no. 2. Substantially expanded
employment in office, sales, and service sector endorsed this conversion into a multi-core urban structure, urging relevant companies to leave the old commercial business core to pioneer a new one. Moreover, the new cores in Yeongdeungpo-gu and Gangnam-gu brought benefits of higher-quality road systems, cheaper land prices, and less time-consuming land purchase processes (Korean Society for Railway and Korean Society of Transportation 2003, 934–36).

Figure 6. Parish churches built from 1973 to 1994, classified by distances from subway lines and subway-connected train railroads (map produced by Youngji Kang).

Lines nos. 1 to 4 are classified as the outcome of the first subway construction period spanning from 1971 to 1985 (Survey and Research Division in the Seoul Museum of History 2015, 47, 148, 168). The network of city cores and the areas that linked them were visualized based on the aforementioned purposes and development contexts. Parish church construction projects completed between 1973 and 1994 were often located along these first-period subway lines (Figure 6). Sixty-nine of the ninety-four church projects were situated within 1 kilometer of subway lines or train railroads connected to subway lines, suggesting that the Catholic Church of Seoul closely monitored subway construction and, consequently, modernized traffic systems. This hypothesis becomes more reasonable if we compare the chronology of the construction of each subway line and the adjacent churches (Table 1). Twenty of forty-nine
projects within 1 kilometer of a subway line, namely about 41%, purchased their construction sites during the interval between the line’s last full route design before ground was broken and the full opening of the line (Interval A). This proportion rises to around 55% if we add one or two years before and after this interval, respectively (Interval B). This indicates that the archdiocese anticipated urban revitalization following the development of subway lines and their surrounding city cores, as well as the construction of new churches in line with an increase in the general and Catholic populations.

Table 1. Parish church construction projects within or further than 1 kilometer from railroads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church construction projects</th>
<th>≤ 1 kilometer from Line no. 1</th>
<th>Line no. 2</th>
<th>Line no. 3</th>
<th>Line no. 4</th>
<th>Train railroads</th>
<th>&gt;1 kilometer from any railroads</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing sites during Interval A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing sites during Interval B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Intervals A and B are defined based on construction process dates from the Korean Society for Railway and Korean Society of Transportation (2003, 15–32, 1007–1013).
Source: Authors’ statistical calculations

The construction projects of parish churches located further than 1 kilometer from subway lines or subway-connected train railroads were mostly on mountainsides or in marginal areas, particularly in Gangnam’s west and east ends. Ninety-six percent of those projects, however, remained within 1 kilometer of main roads, suggesting that the archdiocese had still considered their ease of access to public transportation (Figure 7).

Conclusion

Our investigation has uncovered the territorial strategy of the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, which promptly responded to and benefitted from extensive urban development driven by central and local governments for the growth of the Catholic population and influence in the city. Our findings demonstrate that in a specific regional state, a receptive rather than defensive territorial strategy implemented by a religious institution can be more powerful at protecting, and even strengthening, its presence in a city, inviting flexibility to prevail over rigidity. By unearthing new material about a Northeast Asian city, this article also contributes to postcolonial religious and urban discourses.

15 These main roads are marked in yellow on Seoulseojendo [Seoul’s entire map], 1994, 1:100,000 scale, in Seoulseondok (M. W. Choi 1994).
Instead of building gated complexes or enclaves, the archdiocese cautiously monitored urban changes and anticipated population migrations into and within Seoul. Based on this observation, it purchased sites around which potential or existing believers would converge, especially in housing complex development zones and new city cores that profited from the proximity of new subway stations. The sharpest rises in the separation of daughter parishes from mother parishes into surrounding areas, both increasing the density of parish churches and widening the Catholic Church’s reach within Seoul, shows that the archdiocese’s considered choices of location provided effective physical environments and positions in the city, sustaining the Catholic boom. The archdiocese had become a major player in Korean society by the late 1980s, with its growing international and domestic renown, capable, to some extent, of protecting its territory from the reaches of governmental power.

The intrinsic characteristics of late twentieth-century Seoul were behind the archdiocesan strategy: drastic economic and urban development under the might of military governments and pro-Christian geopolitics had become entangled with anti-communism since the Cold War. The construction of citywide networks of parish churches over roughly two decades was
also achievable thanks to both the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, which stimulated Catholics to make inroads into modern societies, and the centralized archdiocesan system based on the global Catholic territorial principle.

The year 1994 was transitional for the city and archdiocese of Seoul. With the past two decades of dynamism that had brought Catholic infrastructure general revolutions in urban networks, as well as in architecture (Y. Kang 2021), now a thing of the past, the relationship between religion and urbanism entered a new era. Under the first civilian government established in 1993, as part of the 1994 celebrations marking the city’s 600th anniversary as the capital, the Seoul Metropolitan Government implemented special projects aimed at enhancing the city’s historical, livable, cultural, and international appeal, shifting the focus from previous development goals. As a major urban and architectural project, the government demolished apartment buildings on Namsan Mountain to create a central public park and to bring back earlier views of the mountain and its topography (Seoul Metropolitan Government 1995, 72–73, 154–55). This came about a month after the collapse of Seongsu Bridge, one of the main bridges across the Han River (Dong-A Ilbo 1994), symbolically revealing some of the limits of seemingly cutting-edge technology. Meanwhile, the Archdiocese of Seoul was confronted by the constraints of its rapid growth, since the proportion of dormant and unidentified archdiocesan members reached almost 25% in 1994 (Y. Park 1995). To deal with the social alienation caused by massive parish sizes, the archdiocese started that same year to train laypeople to lead small community movements, even tackling the doubts harbored by some priests (Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2011b, 292–94). In general, the upward curve in South Korean Catholicism began to decline, with the growth rate dropping to 3.36% in 1995, and as low as 1.9% in 2003 (Catholic Conference of Korea 1996, 8; 2004, 8).

The case of the Catholic Church in Seoul as discussed in this article reveals that the interaction between religion and urbanism is shaped amid contemporary configurations of political, economic, social, and urban contexts, as well as global and domestic religious conditions. Organically linked to these constantly changing factors, the relationship between religion and city also evolves continuously over time. Therefore, it may be possible, to get a fuller understanding of this relationship by considering the features of these chronological shifts. Many Northeast Asian megacities, Seoul among them, have the potential to provide appropriate case material based on their turbulent modern and contemporary histories – usually accompanied by dramatic and multifaceted urban transformations – effectively and definitively revealing evolutions in the relationship between religion and city.

Bibliography


Networks of Parish Churches across a Growing Metropolis


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