

The Legacy of Henry G. Appenzeller

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The rapid growth of the Christian churches of Korea has attracted attention in recent years. Researchers explore the contrast of growth in Korea as compared with the limited growth in China and Japan, searching for a "secret of success" to assist church growth elsewhere. There is a parallel interest in mission history, which has led to a number of studies by Westerners of missionary pioneers and their methods.¹ Korean historians also have been reexamining Korean Christian history from their standpoint, producing a story that is often at variance with more familiar accounts.

In such a context Methodist pioneer in Korea Henry Gerhard Appenzeller (1858–1902) proves to be a figure who resists explanation through familiar generalizations. Appenzeller's work was influential in a number of ways, if only because he helped set mission precedents in Korea. This article sketches the main contours of Appenzeller's contribution to early Protestant Christianity in Korea and suggests some ways in which his work and thought influenced subsequent generations.

Background and Formation

Henry Appenzeller's family came from Swiss and German stock in Pennsylvania.² His parents belonged to the German Reformed Church, although his mother had been a Mennonite. He attended Franklin and Marshall College, which was at that time under the influence of the Mercersburg theology of John W. Nevin and Philip Schaff. That meant a solid liberal arts foundation joined to a piety rooted in the Christian tradition, with stress upon church and sacraments, while critical of the excesses of the camp-meeting revivalism of that era.

Nevertheless, Appenzeller was attracted to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Lancaster, probably because of its evangelistic outreach and lively fellowship. He joined at age twenty one, about three years after his conversion, then served as a Methodist preacher before attending theological school at Drew.

At that time Drew was fighting the battle for an educated clergy in an anti-intellectual Methodist environment. The school toed a conservative theological line, in part to prove it was not undermining the Methodist evangelical impulse, even requiring of its faculty an oath of fidelity to Methodist doctrines.

Appenzeller volunteered for overseas missionary service while at Drew. A week or so before receiving his appointment to Korea, Appenzeller married Ella Dodge, who had been raised a Baptist. Thus, by the time Henry and Ella Appenzeller headed for Korea, their lives represented a more diverse background than might be expected of Methodists in their day.

Appenzeller was a forceful, confident representative of a nineteenth-century American missionary tradition supremely assured of its culture and theology, and which thought in military metaphors of "conquering the world for Christ."³ In him, however, this was tempered by an awareness of the views and needs of others and a willingness to cooperate; this produced a missionary stance that was unusually sensitive and complex.

Appenzeller was among the first Protestant missionaries sent from the United States. The Appenzellers arrived in Inchon with their Presbyterian counterpart, Horace Underwood, on Easter morning, 1885. The arrival on this all-important day of the Christian calendar increased their sense of historic destiny, reinforcing hopes that their trailblazing would eventuate in a Christian Korea.

Seoul was then in the throes of a political struggle, which forced the postponement of evangelistic activity. Missionaries could join in medical work or begin educational projects but could not preach or organize churches. There had been bloody persecutions of Catholic Christians only twenty years before, so Appenzeller and the others acquiesced, although they did not give up their intention to evangelize and hoped that their work would awaken an interest in the Gospel. Until the restrictions were lifted, evangelism among Koreans was conducted in secret, and not without confrontations with both Korean officials and cautious missionaries and mission board secretaries.⁴ By the fall of 1887 it was possible to conduct worship in public for Koreans, so a chapel was opened and services begun.

During the first two years Appenzeller spent much time preparing a missionary residence. Dr. William B. Scranton, a medical doctor, had come with his wife, daughter, and mother. (His mother, Mrs. Mary F. Scranton, was to pioneer in women's education.) The Appenzellers and Scrantons joined in establishing a Methodist compound in the foreign enclave near the American and British legations; they took pride in creating a "miniature America" that might become an example to Koreans of enlightened family living.⁵

Appenzeller's life was cut short in 1902, at the height of his powers at the age of 44, in a collision of small coastal steamers as he traveled to attend a meeting. Although a strong swimmer, he was reported to have lost his life attempting to save others, further reinforcing the tendency toward heroic interpretations of his missionary career.

Institutional Legacy

First among Appenzeller's accomplishments was the founding of a boys' school, which the Korean king named *Paichai Hakdang*, or "Hall for Rearing Useful Men," in February of 1887. Appenzeller saw this school as a means of exposing young Korean men to the Gospel, introducing beneficial Western knowledge into Korean society, training Koreans to lead Korean Methodism, and establishing a fully rounded university.

In 1890 Appenzeller began the Trilingual Press at Paichai, to provide work scholarship help for students. This Korean, Chinese, and English press became the home of important publications, including the *Korean Christian Advocate*, the first Korean-language Christian newspaper, and the *Independent*, which became the focus of Paichai's commitment to the Korean independence movement.

Appenzeller was also one of the founders of the Korean Methodist Church and helped to establish many other Protestant religious institutions. He founded the Chong Dong, or First Methodist Church in Seoul, and served as its pastor for most of the years from its start in 1887 as the Bethel Chapel until his death.

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A brick church building was completed in 1897. Chong Dong was the largest Methodist congregation during Appenzeller's years in Korea and produced many believers who had a profound impact on the development of Korean Christianity.

Appenzeller's other principal activity was his participation in the translation of the Bible into Korean. He was on the Board of Bible Translators from 1886, a work he shared with several of the early Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries and a number of Korean translators. It was in the course of his work on the Old Testament that he and a Korean translator lost their lives on their way to a meeting in Mokpo.

Appenzeller was involved in other activities that led to the founding of lasting institutions.⁶ He opened a bookstore in 1894, edited the *Korean Repository* and *Korea Review* to introduce Korea abroad, and was active in the Korean Asiatic Society. He helped

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found the Seoul Union Church, mainly serving missionaries and other expatriates in Seoul, and the Seoul Union Club, a social and recreational organization for foreigners. Appenzeller also served for a time as the superintendent of the Methodist mission group in Korea.

It has been said that "Appenzeller left three visible symbols of his contribution to the Korean people: Paichai College Hall, the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Seoul, and the New Testament in Korean."⁷ Paichai Hall is gone, but the school has a proud history and lately produced Paichai University in Taejon, the institution of which Appenzeller dreamed, Chong Dong First Methodist Church continues in a much larger building next to the structure Appenzeller struggled to underwrite in the 1890s. The Bible has gone through many translations since 1886, including a common translation done jointly with the Roman Catholic Church.

Appenzeller's Intangible Legacy

It is more difficult to specify those ways in which Henry Gerhard Appenzeller may have influenced subsequent generations of missionaries and Korean Christians through his thought and attitudes. The following is not exhaustive but may help toward sorting out an extremely complex and much-disputed history.

Attitudes toward Korea

From their earliest contact the Appenzellers were impressed with the otherness of Korea. Henry and Ella were fascinated by a terrain and culture of exotic beauty but were disturbed by the sight of so many people living in conditions that seemed backward, harsh, and unhealthy. Henry hastened to introduce Christianity and progressive Western culture; Ella seems to have retreated into a compound that duplicated Western living as nearly as possible. While Henry ventured beyond Seoul in search of places to plant Christian churches, he seems never to have considered adapting to Korean cultural ways, although he struggled from the beginning to master the language.⁸

One reason for this cultural distancing seems to have derived from Appenzeller's anti-Catholic bias. He felt that the Catholic missionaries' wearing of Korean clothing and following Korean ways was dishonest and suggested to him a devious camouflaging of the distinctiveness of Christianity.⁹ He was also suspicious of French political maneuverings and seems to have felt that the Catholic missionaries were cooperating in a subversion of Korea's political independence. As result of this and a growing concern about the encroachments of both Russia and Japan in Korea, Appenzeller was confirmed in his belief that a frank expression of Americanness was the best method of pursuing missionary work.¹⁰

Long before the emergence of an internationally recognized Korean independence movement in 1919, Appenzeller became firmly committed to Korean independence and autonomy. He felt for a time that Japan might hold the key to Korean development, but he became disillusioned as he witnessed the reality of Japanese control. He believed that Koreans could master their own destiny only through Western-style knowledge and political institutions.

In his early years in Korea, Appenzeller commented upon the laziness, dishonesty, and inequality he saw as rampant in Korean life, and upon the baneful influence of Confucianism and other religious traditions, especially ancestor worship. This early rejection of things Korean gradually gave way to a more positive appreciation of the culture and people. He began to probe the literature about Asian religions and even made comments about positive aspects in the Confucian tradition.

Appenzeller was the kind of person who respected others and acknowledged their abilities. He had high praise for Korean associates and their Christian faith and sought to put authority and leadership into Korean hands as quickly as possible, believing that this would assure progress in evangelization. But he retained the paternalistic attitude of reserving the right to decide when the transfer of leadership should take place.¹¹

Missionary Approaches

Appenzeller, like most of his colleagues, believed that the central purpose of all missionary effort was conversion. Even though he affirmed the value of meeting human need on all levels, from the medical to the intellectual,¹² he said that the reason missionaries were in Korea was to bring Koreans to repentance and Christian belief.¹³ This was the heyday of the triumphalist vision of building Christian nations, and Appenzeller had no qualms about struggling heroically toward that ideal.

The sense of historic destiny as a pioneer, combined with Appenzeller's commitment to Korean cultural and political development and his determination to bring Koreans to personal religious commitment, led him into many confrontations and risky undertakings. Appenzeller actively supported antigovernment political movements among the students at his Paichai school and even gave sanctuary in his home to persons wanted by the Korean police.¹⁴ He also pursued direct evangelistic activities when they were expressly forbidden by Korean law and the orders of missionary supervisors and colleagues.

There was a strong competitive spirit among some of the early missionaries that contrasted with the positive cooperation so obvious between Methodist Appenzeller and Presbyterian Underwood. The two mission boards in New York also encouraged competition, and each seemed quite jealous of the other, eager to be the first to establish any new work in Korea.¹⁵

Many interpreters of early Protestant mission work in Korea have claimed that the Methodists preferred to engage in educa-

tional and medical work, while the Presbyterians gave their attention to church planting. This interpretation seems mistaken, however, for both Appenzeller and Underwood, together with many colleagues, seem to have been committed to a diverse approach with evangelism at the center.

Approach to American Constituency

Appenzeller was so completely immersed in Western values and familiar Western cultural patterns that he never seems to have questioned the appropriateness of duplicating those structures in Korea. He seems not to have considered whether institutional maintenance might not be compatible or might compete for energies and resources with the central task of direct evangelism. Yet while he began a course of missionary work that soon engaged him inextricably with building and maintaining institutions, he had the good sense to avoid financial overextension, although fund-raising consumed much time and effort.

He was probably exceptional in suggesting at one point that his supporting churches refrain from sending further financial contributions for a while so that the centrality of the gospel call to repentance would not be compromised.¹⁶ In addition, he seems to have avoided the pattern of projecting a missionary story that did not correspond to the realities of his work. Although Appenzeller wrote many articles and spoke in the United States in a way designed to arouse sympathy and generate support, he seems not to have gone beyond the facts.

Appenzeller did, however, perpetuate some misunderstandings and inaccuracies about Korea and Asia. His picture of the state of hardship and backwardness of the people of Korea did not always include recognition of the cultural achievements that he only gradually came to appreciate. To his credit, though, Appenzeller continued in his cooperative work, pursued his educational and translating goals, and served a broad spectrum of social groups in Korea, despite pressures to concentrate more on Methodist matters and to avoid politically sensitive issues.

Theological Legacy

Appenzeller was not much given to theological reflection, preferring to immerse himself in action, confining his writing more to political and work-related matters. His theological stance must be inferred from those documents and the sermons that remain, some of them from the earliest, even pre-Korea days.¹⁷ The overall pattern suggests a robust, assured, triumphalist American missionary, expressly conservative in theology, unself-conscious about his culture, and secure in a traditional missionary method, but tempered somewhat by a diversity of background and an emerging openness toward different viewpoints.

Appenzeller's theological position was salvation centered, concerned with the power, love, and hope to be found through the positive preaching of the gospel message.¹⁸ Appenzeller was aware of the biblical scholarship of the day,¹⁹ yet followed a conservative, almost literal, exposition of the Scriptures when dealing with such issues as resurrection, judgment, creation, and the dispute over evolution. He opposed the doctrine of predestination, as a Methodist would, yet had no sympathy for universalism.²⁰ He had a passion for ethics and personal piety, and his opposition to alcohol and tobacco may have led to Presbyterian Horace Allen's calling him "a most ardent Methodist of the John Wesley type."²¹

Although he allowed for the revelation of truth in other religions and the possibility of salvation before Christianity is

known, Appenzeller held firmly that full salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ.²² He felt that other religions could provide a preparation for the Gospel, especially by sensitizing persons to religious need. The core of his preaching was Christ's power to save individuals from sin. Persons may be accepted and taught in the Christian community before they have conformed to Christian standards,²³ but the goal is always a full integration into the experience, beliefs, and moral life of biblical Christianity as Appenzeller envisioned it.

Despite the strongly individualistic emphasis of much of Appenzeller's perspective, he had a powerful sense of social justice. The vision he held for Korean society was Western in its values and structures, yet the principles of love and justice were consistently related to biblical themes.

One message relating to both society and religion was Appenzeller's frequent call for positive, constructive living. He felt that "the rubbish of idolatry, superstition and custom" must be removed to make way for a bright, positive life free of the dark, enervating work of Satan.²⁴

Assessing the Legacy

How much of this constitutes a "legacy," and how much was never realized because of Appenzeller's early death? Certainly the institutions which he helped found contributed to the emergence and growth of Korean Methodism, the Korean ecumenical movement, and the modern Korean nation. Many of Appenzeller's convictions were shared, affirmed, and transmitted, both by sympathetic missionary colleagues and by convinced Korean Christians.

Korean Protestantism retains to this day an evangelical fervor that has contributed to steady growth in most denominations. The prevailing theological climate remains conservative, with a strong biblicist current. How far these characteristics derived from the pioneers and how much came from later conservative missionaries may be impossible to determine. A more liberal theological position was taken by some early missionaries and persists as a minority view in Korea. Appenzeller's positions do not fit easily into the narrower positions of subsequent groups but cover a wider spectrum of theological and social stances.

At the same time, a number of conflicts, both visible and latent, had begun to emerge even during Appenzeller's time.

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Some missionaries had opposed support of the early independence movement, and this would become even more divisive during the Japanese period after 1910. Soon after Appenzeller's day, Korean pastors would raise questions about a more positive relationship between Korean religious and cultural traditions and the Christian gospel.²⁵ The separateness of the Western lifestyle of the missionaries isolated them in their foreign enclave during Appenzeller's years of service. There was also resentment

over the missionaries' retention of administrative and financial power in the emerging Korean churches.

While there were a few notable incidents revealing these problems, they were left unresolved for many years, and only recently have Korean historians brought such matters to light.²⁶ Appenzeller, to the extent that he remained insensitive to the implications of Western cultural domination in the Korea mission, contributed to this legacy of resentment and tension. As for his theological position, his emphases on evangelism and individual conversion, conservative biblical hermeneutics, strict

morals, and the social implications of Christian faith have all been carried forward, though often by separate groups held in a tenuous unity within Korean Methodism.

Appenzeller's legacy is not preserved in a corpus of published works but in less personal ways through institutions and ideas carried forward by others who have added their unique contributions. Although this appropriately reflects the corporate nature of Christian life, it makes Appenzeller's legacy difficult to isolate. His place in Korean Methodist history is secure, but the precise nature of his legacy will be debated for years to come.

Notes

1. See the bibliographic note below for some recent works.
2. Davies's *Life and Thought of Henry Gerhard Appenzeller (1858–1902), Missionary to Korea* (1988) is the most thorough study to date and may be consulted for further details about much of the information presented here.
3. Appenzeller was fond of this military imagery and once preached a sermon entitled "The Christian Soldier" (Sermon no. 115, dated September 21, 1884). In an address he once said, "We are here to take this country for the Lord Jesus Christ" (Address no. 151, p. 3 [unnumbered pages]). See also Sermon no. 132 for more on this theme. (Sermons, documents, and other Appenzeller items cited here and below are located in the Appenzeller Papers, Union Theological Seminary Library, New York.)
4. Some of these events are related in Davies, *Life and Thought*, chap. 4.
5. Ella Appenzeller wrote in a letter in 1886, "We, with the Presbyterians and the Legations, are making this end of the city a miniature America. We can show thousands what a home is like, and have made ours as pleasant as possible" (Ella Appenzeller to Mrs. J. S. Wadsworth, May 14, 1886, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 185). See also a quote in Griffis, *Henry G. Appenzeller: A Modern Pioneer in Korea*, p. 101. Ordinary Koreans were ill at ease entering this enclave, prompting Dr. William Scranton, who lived there, to move his medical clinic to a location near the South Gate Market, leading to the establishment of the Sang Dong Methodist Church.
6. Some of this information is summarized in Griffis, *Appenzeller*, pp. 224–27.
7. Davies, *Life and Thought*, p. 325.
8. Appenzeller, for example, never became used to Korean food and, like most other Protestants, viewed Korean culture from the standpoint of an outside observer.
9. Some of this is dealt with in Griffis, *Appenzeller*, pp. 160–61.
10. "We do not go about in the mourner's garb [ordinary daily clothing] of the natives as do the Jesuits, but are open and frank in all our dealings with the Koreans" (Methodist *Missionary Report*, 1886, p. 267); "Every thing, therefore, that we do or can do is done with the consciousness that the law is against us and may at any time be enforced" (*ibid.*, 1887, p. 314).
11. Davies refers to Appenzeller's successful opposition to Bishop Earl Cranston's wish to grant full equality to Korean local preachers in 1898. Appenzeller felt that the Koreans were not yet adequately prepared. See Davies, *Life and Thought*, pp. 323–24.
12. Document 184.
13. Sermon 138, p. 7.
14. Referred to in Griffis, *Appenzeller*, p. 118.
15. See Hunt, *Protestant Pioneers in Korea*, chap. 3, for more details.
16. Notebook no. 7, July 4, 1890.
17. I have dealt with Appenzeller's thought in more detail in my article "The Theology and Missionary Strategy of Henry G. Appenzeller."
18. Sermon 104, p. 4; Sermon 123, p. 6, and other references.
19. This is alluded to by Appenzeller in Sermon 137, p. 9.
20. See Sermon 110 and Sermon 111.
21. Quoted in Griffis, *Appenzeller*, p. 207.
22. Appenzeller's view of other religions was generally negative. He wrote, "Buddhism wrecked the last dynasty after a supremacy of 480 years; Confucianism has had sway for more than 500 years and has brought the country to the verge of ruin; Shamanism with its gods

many and spirits many has failed to elevate its myriads of devotees from the lowest depths of ignorance and superstition. Christianity alone can save the individual and the state" (Document 161). Yet he could be generous toward them, as when he said, "Will they [the Romanists] not be saved? Certainly. But so will a Buddhist, a Taoist or any earnest seeker after the truth" (Sermon 132).

23. See Address no. 150, p. 9, on this point.

24. Quoted in Griffis, *Appenzeller*, p. 163.

25. This can be seen in the ministry and thought of the Rev. Byong Hon Choi (1858–1927), colleague of Appenzeller's and considered to be one of the first to attempt a Korean theology. His life and work have been extensively reviewed (in the Korean language) in *Sinhak Gwa Saige* (Theology and the World), no. 6 (Seoul: Methodist Theological Seminary, 1980).

26. Among the many historians who could be mentioned, the work of Presbyterian Kyong-Bae Min and Methodist Dok-Ju Lee are representative of the new Korean historical approach.

Bibliographic Note

The best bibliography of Appenzeller material is in Daniel M. Davies, *The Life and Thought of Henry Gerhard Appenzeller (1858–1902), Missionary to Korea* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), pp. 409–44 (a published form of Davies's 1986 Drew University Ph.D. dissertation). The most important single source is the Henry Gerhard Appenzeller Papers, lodged at the Union Theological Seminary Library in New York City. Some of these papers were transcribed in typewritten form under the sponsorship of Chong Dong First Methodist Church (Seoul) in 1986, in six volumes under the series title *H. G. Appenzeller Papers*. Other important archival collections are located at the United Methodist Archives Center and University Archives at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, and at Yonsei and Ewha Woman's Universities in Seoul.

Recent works based upon research in the H. G. Appenzeller Papers are Everett N. Hunt, Jr., *Protestant Pioneers in Korea* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980); Martha Huntley, *Caring, Growing, Changing: A History of the Protestant Mission in Korea* (New York: Friendship Press, 1984); Edward W. Poitras, "The Theology and Missionary Strategy of Henry G. Appenzeller, Pioneer Methodist Missionary to Korea" (in English), in *Sinhak Gwa Saige* (Theology and the World), no. 11 (Seoul: Methodist Theological Seminary, 1985); and Davies *Life and Thought*.

An earlier biography, done in the heroic style that is still useful for details, despite some errors is William Taylor Griffis, *Henry G. Appenzeller: A Modern Pioneer in Korea* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1912).

Most mission histories of Korea and many other works touch on Appenzeller and the pioneer missionaries. Among the better known and more useful are George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832–1910*, 3d ed. (Seoul: Yonsei Univ. Press, 1980); and Charles D. Stokes, "History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1885–1930" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1947).

Writings by and about Appenzeller appear in many mission reports and periodicals. Aside from Methodist and other annual reports, some are *The Independent* (New York, 1885–1902); *The Independent (Tongnip Sinmun)*, vols. 1–4 (Seoul: Trilingual Press); *The Korean Mission Field*, vols. 2–37 (Seoul); *The Korea Repository*, vols. 1–5 (Seoul: Trilingual Press, 1892, 1895–98); *The Methodist Review* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1885–1902); and *Theological Review* (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House, 1900–1902).