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The May 18 Gwangju Popular Uprising and the Activities of the Korean Catholic Church:

From the 1980 Gwangju Uprising to the 1987 June Democratic Uprising

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Abstract: This study examines the social role and prophetic mission fulfilled by the Korean Catholic Church during and after the May 18 Gwangju Popular Uprising of 1980, analyzing its profound impact on the South Korean democratization movement. Although the Catholic Church, awakened to social issues following the Second Vatican Council, had grown into an axis of resistance during the 1970s, it initially exposed the limitations of an institutional church and showed signs of helplessness during the early stages of the uprising in the face of the brutal suppression by the new military junta. However, centered around the priests of the Archdiocese of Gwangju and the Diocese of Jeonju, the Church progressively put its prophetic mission into practice against state violence through acts such as participating in the Citizens' Settlement Measures Committee, undertaking the "March of Death" to prevent further bloodshed, and organizing movements after the suppression to expose the truth and support detainees (e.g., Monday Masses and Prayer Meetings on the Current Situation). Notably, the 1982 Busan US Cultural Center Arson Incident marked a critical turning point; faced with the arrest of Father Benedictus Choi Ki-sik, the Church proclaimed to society that the legitimacy of a priest's conscience and pastoral practice supersedes the standards of positive law. Fueled by this incident and intertwined with sustained efforts to "visualize the truth" of the May 18 uprising (via photo exhibitions, the distribution of video media, and publications), the Church gradually established itself as a mass-oriented, active focal point of the anti-government struggle. Ultimately, the exposure of the fabricated truth regarding the torture and death of Park Jong-cheol during the 7th-anniversary memorial Mass for the Gwangju Uprising at Myeongdong Cathedral in 1987 served as the decisive catalyst for the June Democratic Uprising. In conclusion, this study reveals that the Gwangju Popular Uprising served as a historical watershed, transforming the Korean Catholic Church into a proactive agent that spearheaded the nation's democratization by refusing to remain silent against state violence and bearing the cross in profound solidarity with the grassroots *minjung*.

Keywords: May 18 Gwangju Popular Uprising, Korean Catholic Church, prophetic mission, new military junta, June Democratic Uprising, state and religion, democratization movement

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Introduction — History of the Korean Catholic Church

The history of pre-modern Christianity in Korea was synonymous with the history of Roman Catholicism itself. In Korea, the acceptance of Catholic doctrine began during the late Joseon Dynasty when Catholic texts—introduced alongside Western scientific treatises by critical intellectuals and Confucian scholars of the *Silhak* (Practical Learning) school—were embraced as a subject of academic inquiry known as *Seohak* (Western Learning). Peter Lee Seung-hun, who studied doctrine within this research group, accompanied a diplomatic mission to Beijing in Qing China as an attendant, where he received instruction at the Beitang (North Cathedral) and became the first Korean to be baptized in February 1784; this year is traditionally regarded as the inception of the Korean Catholic Church. Subsequently, the pastoral oversight of the Bishop of Beijing was indirectly institutionalized, and through the energetic ministry of Father James Zhou Wenmo, a Chinese priest, the Church expanded significantly, extending its reach deep into the lower socioeconomic strata and among women. The Joseon government, perceiving that Catholic doctrine posed a risk of undermining the state's ruling Confucian ideology, systematically suppressed it. Against this backdrop, Korean Catholicism endured prolonged and extensive persecution, resulting in the martyrdom of numerous clergy and laity (Jeong-min Seo 2015, pp. 11–95). As the Joseon government was compelled to sign unequal treaties with Western powers in the 1880s, Catholicism also formally secured the freedom of worship and missionary work through the Gyomin Treaty in 1899 and the Missionary Treaty in 1904. Thereafter, Korean Catholicism transitioned into a relatively insular yet devotion-oriented faith, maintaining amicable relations with the royal court and avoiding notable persecution. During the Japanese colonial period, the Church refrained from active resistance on national issues, maintained a degree of cooperation with the Government-General of Korea, and distanced itself from the independence movement. In the post-liberation era, it aligned with the policies of the U.S. Military Government, and from an anti-communist stance, actively supported the establishment of a separate southern government. Following the armistice of the Korean War, the Church focused predominantly on personal piety, while its public engagement remained largely restricted to charitable and educational initiatives.

It was from the late 1960s that the Korean Catholic Church began to assert its autonomy and speak out actively on social issues. The Church began to pay attention to the contradictions and irrationalities in the political, economic, and social spheres caused by the state-led economic development policies initiated in the 1960s. The emergence of this critical awareness was profoundly influenced by the internal reflection within the Church prompted by the Second Vatican Council. The council, convened by Pope John XXIII from 1962 to 1965, emphasized the legitimacy and necessity of social change, the importance of joint action by clergy and laity,

solidarity with the poor and marginalized, the instability of social and political structures, human dignity, and coexistence with other religions. This was a manifestation of a strong sense of urgency that the Church must actively engage with the various problems of modern society. Furthermore, in 1962, Pope John XXIII promulgated a papal bull establishing the hierarchy of the Korean Catholic Church. As a result, the Korean Catholic Church shed its status as a "mission territory" to become an independent local Church, acquiring autonomy as independent dioceses—namely, the power of orders and jurisdiction. Thereafter, taking the ecclesiastical province as its basic unit, the Korean Catholic Church built a solid organizational structure by establishing dioceses under its jurisdiction, as well as various Catholic organizations, monasteries, hospitals, and educational institutions within those dioceses (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea n.d.). During the 1970s, driven by the industrialization of the 1960s and the ensuing changes in social structure, and amidst a theological and ideological backdrop marked by the emergence of *minjung*[1] theology—influenced by Latin American liberation theology and the Second Vatican Council—sub-organizations of the Korean Catholic Church, alongside the student movement, emerged as a central axis of the resistance forces. In response to political oppression under the authoritarian regime and the thorough exclusion of the grassroots populace, the activities of groups under church organizations associated with industrial ministry were strengthened, with student associations, Catholic Young Christian Workers (JOC), and the Catholic Farmers' Movement actively participating in resistance movements. In particular, the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice (CPAJ), formed in the wake of the arrest of Bishop Daniel Ji Hak-sun of the Diocese of Wonju in 1974, played a pivotal role in the Korean democratization movement of the 1970s due to its organizational spontaneity and theological progressivism. Driven by the emergence of the CPAJ, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, founded in 1970, was re-launched in December 1975 as a body directly under the Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference, emerging as a central force driving the democratization movement of the era (Park 1995, p. 309).

The Activities of the Catholic Church During the Gwangju Popular Uprising

On October 26, 1979, President Park Chung-hee was assassinated, bringing a sudden end to his eighteen-year regime. For many citizens, Park's death signified the end of the Yushin system, and expectations for democratization soared. The

1 *Minjung* literally means "the people" or "the masses," but in the context of modern Korean history, it specifically refers to the politically awakened grassroots populace who were oppressed by the authoritarian regime yet emerged as the active subjects of the democratization movement.

following day, Prime Minister Choi Kyu-hah assumed the acting presidency; however, emergency martial law was proclaimed across the nation, excluding Jeju Island. Within the military, internal friction intensified between the high-ranking leaders seeking a transition away from the Yushin regime and the "*Hanahoe*" (Group of One) faction composed of key figures such as Security Commander Chun Doo-hwan. On December 12 of that year, the new military junta centered around *Hanahoe* seized de facto power. In February of the following year, when dissident figures such as Kim Dae-jung were reinstated by Choi Kyu-hah's interim government, hopes for democratization reached their peak. However, Chun Doo-hwan was maneuvering to usurp power by controlling public opinion through media domination. By April, labor disputes had spread nationwide, and student movements advocating campus democratization and opposition to mandatory military training reached a climax in mid-May. This culminated in a street demonstration on May 15 in downtown Seoul, demanding the lifting of martial law and early constitutional reform. Earlier, on May 8 of the same year, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea issued a statement titled "For the Democratization of Our Nation" during its spring meeting. In this statement, the Bishops' Conference emphasized the "mission of moral judgment regarding the political order and the renewal of the temporal order," demanding the lifting of emergency martial law, the release and reinstatement of pro-democracy activists, and the political neutrality of the military, while asserting that any new democratic constitutional regime must be grounded in freedom, human rights, and reconciliation. The following day, the Committee for the Promotion of Democratization at the Catholic University Department of Theology also released a resolution titled "On Joining the Young People's Grand March," declaring: "As theology students who believe in a God of liberation and freedom, as intellectuals who regard the nation's problems as our own, and as part of the populace who constitute the primary driving force of history, we maintain our stance." They thus expressed a clear intention to oppose a return to the Yushin system and to participate in the nationwide grand march of youth dedicated to national development (Pastoral Institute for Joy and Hope 1997, pp. 99–101). However, even the resolute messages from the Bishops' Conference and theology students could not curb the tyranny of the new military junta. On May 17, the junta arrested Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-pil, placed Kim Young-sam under house arrest, and decreed an expansion of emergency martial law nationwide, thereby enforcing university closures and strict press censorship. By the following day, the National Assembly was occupied by martial law forces.

From the collapse of the Yushin system triggered by the assassination of Park Chung-hee until the coup d'état by the new military junta on May 17, 1980, the Catholic Church's democratization movement was carried out along three main trajectories. First, during the interim government, which was increasingly dominated by the new military junta, it sought to undertake the role of checking and monitoring

the systemic transition process. In its statement titled "Principal Proposals for Constitutional Revision"—sent to the president, heads of the three branches of government, leaders of political parties, and the Special Committee on Constitutional Revision of the National Assembly—the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace demanded freedom of speech, the lifting of emergency martial law, the release and reinstatement of political prisoners, the guarantee of the three primary labor rights for the working populace, and the exclusion of privileged classes and chaebols from the constitutional revision process. Furthermore, it explicitly declared that expressing the will toward unification in the preamble of the new constitution, along with restoring complete liberal democracy and establishing social justice through distributive justice, constituted fundamental principles of the constitution. Through the March 1st Declaration, the CPAJ criticized the interim government's passive attitude, which prioritized crisis management over the transition to democratization, and gave concrete form to the demands of the Justice and Peace Commission by emphasizing that national reconciliation for a new era must be achieved based on democracy, justice, and national spirit. Second, it promoted the comprehensive reinstatement of victims under the Yushin regime. The Korean Catholic Church exerted dedicated efforts toward the release of detainees—including the poet Kim Chi-ha—and the reinstatement of dismissed journalists. To achieve democratic journalism, the CPAJ urged *Chosun Ilbo* and *Dong-A Ilbo* to reinstate their dismissed reporters. In particular, the movement for Kim Chi-ha's release developed on a church-wide scale and was buttressed by international solidarity, fostering an atmosphere that called upon the Holy See to exercise its influence. Third, it defended and supported grassroots *minjung* movements. Although it remained a movement for institutional redress focusing on realizing democratic agricultural administration and ensuring institutional guarantees for farmers' rights, the movement served a role akin to that of a tribune (*tribunus plebis*), wherein the state and the church shared roles while accommodating the national security ideology that had persisted since the Yushin regime (Park 1995, pp. 311–313).

During this period, the pro-democracy movement led by the Catholic Church lacked a sufficient understanding of broader societal changes and the political situation. Consequently, it failed to conduct an objective situational analysis and underestimated the internal discord within the pro-democracy camp. Thus, based on an overly optimistic outlook, it demanded the restoration of democracy from the interim government. This limitation also applied to the social movement forces that spearheaded the push for democracy. Within the student movement, a hardline stance became dominant, attempting to mobilize the public for the anti-dictatorship struggle through large-scale demonstrations starting on May 12, 1980. However, conflicts arose between dissident forces and opposition parties due to ideological differences, and dissonance and mutual conflict began to emerge (Chu 2009, pp. 140–141). Capitalizing on this turmoil, the new military junta (*Singunbu*) led by Chun

Doo-hwan formally seized power and revived the Yushin system. Trampling upon the aspirations of the absolute majority of the public for the dissolution of the Yushin regime and for democratization, the new military junta expanded emergency martial law nationwide on May 17, in order to maintain an oppressive political regime.

The new military junta deployed martial law forces to major universities nationwide. However, on the morning of the following day, May 18, a clash erupted in front of the main gate of Chonnam National University in Gwangju between airborne troops and students protesting the campus closure. While students marched demanding the resignation of the military junta and the release of Kim Dae-jung, the airborne forces used batons and bayonets to inflict indiscriminate violence upon students and citizens. The next day, May 19, enraged citizens joined the demonstrators, fighting back with wooden clubs, iron pipes, and Molotov cocktails. Starting the night of May 20, the airborne forces began firing live ammunition. The violence escalated drastically at 1:00 PM on May 21, when troops opened concentrated fire on citizens gathered in front of the Jeonnam Provincial Government Building; in response, citizens seized weapons from the Homeland Reserve Force armories, organized a citizens' militia, and engaged in armed resistance. Triggered by this event, the resistance spread across Jeollanam-do, including Mokpo, and numerous young people residing in provincial areas joined the demonstrators in Gwangju. Although the martial law forces temporarily retreated to the outskirts of the city after the militia occupied the provincial government building, they completely isolated Gwangju by severing railway, road, and telecommunication networks. Under Martial Law Decree No. 10, issued by the Martial Law Command earlier on May 18, all political activities and assemblies were banned, prior censorship of speech and the press was imposed, and the dissemination of rumors was strictly prohibited, thereby thoroughly concealing the events unfolding in Gwangju. At the time, the Korean government defined the citizens of Gwangju as "rioters incited by North Korea," a narrative echoed across the mainstream media. Over a four-day period from May 23 to 26, determined to resist to the end, the citizens' militia held five rallies at the roundabout in front of the provincial government building. However, at 4:00 AM on May 27, approximately 30 citizens were killed during the suppression operation by martial law forces, and the building fell to the military. The Gwangju Uprising was both a civic resistance against military forces seeking to perpetuate the Yushin system and a popular uprising that evolved into an armed struggle led by the grassroots *minjung*.

The Gwangju Popular Uprising can be divided into three phases based on its progression (Joong-seok Seo 2012, p. 172), and the activities of the Catholic Church can also be examined through these periodic divisions. The first phase spans from May 18, 1980, to the evening of May 21, when the airborne forces retreated to the outskirts of the city. The critical questions during this period are why the airborne troops deployed to suppress student protests exercised indiscriminate violence even

against civilians unrelated to the demonstrations, and where the resistance power of the *minjung*, who forced them to retreat, originated. The second phase is the period of civic self-governance from May 22 to 27, when Gwangju became a liberated zone. During this period, carrying on the spirit of the uprising and reaching a peaceful resolution to the current situation were the foremost tasks; however, differences in stance regarding these tasks crystallized into sharp debates over the collection of weapons from the citizens' militia. The third phase is the period following the events of May 27, when the final resistance of the citizens' militia was crushed by a bloody suppression. Although there were efforts during the Gwangju Uprising itself to make the truth about the event known, uncovering the truth became the paramount task after May 27.

1. The Catholic Church's Response in the Early Phase of the Uprising—From May 18 to the Evening of May 21

Located in Jeollanam-do, the city of Gwangju served as a prominent stronghold for student, dissident, and peasant movements throughout the entire duration of the Yushin system.[2] Chonnam National University, located in Gwangju, was one of the central hubs for the nationwide student movement; in 1974, eighteen university students were arrested in connection with the National Democratic Youth-Student League Incident, and in 1978, eleven professors who issued the "Declaration of Democratic Education" were dismissed, while twenty-four students received indefinite suspensions or expulsions. Furthermore, religious and social organizations—such as Catholic and Protestant peasant associations, youth groups, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the YMCA, the YWCA, and the Gwangju chapter of Amnesty International Korea, as well as dissident groups including the Democratic Youth Council, the Institute of Modern Culture, and Nokdu Bookstore—were based in Gwangju, establishing a solid foundation for dissident youth and these groups to organically communicate and build solidarity when necessary. At the same time, under the Park Chung-hee administration's unbalanced regional development policies, Gwangju was relegated to the role of a mere consumer city surrounded by rural areas, fostering a widespread consciousness of "regional discrimination" against the Honam region across Gwangju and the rural areas of Jeollanam-do. The presidential candidacy, subsequent electoral defeat, and ensuing ordeals of Kim Dae-jung—a native of Jeollanam-do who was expected to improve these conditions—resonated with the experiences of the people in Gwangju and Jeollanam-do, becoming shared as a firm collective consciousness (Jeonnam Social Movement Council 2018, pp. 35–41).

2 For information on the process of the Gwangju Uprising, this study mainly refers to Jeon nam Social Movement Council (2018), Han (2020), Joong-seok Seo (2008), and Moon (2018).

In May, when student movements surged nationwide, the National Democratization Assembly (Minjok Minjuhwa Seonghoe) was held in Gwangju from May 8 to 14. Demands such as campus autonomy and the lifting of emergency martial law intensified, reaching a level of fervor that even surpassed that of Seoul. On the final day of the National Democratization Assembly, approximately 7,000 Chonnam National University students marched into the streets. This demonstration continued on May 15, and at 8:00 PM on May 16, a "Torchlight Rally for the National Democratization Assembly" (*Minju Daeseonghoe*) was held, with over 50,000 students and citizens participating. The downtown area was illuminated with torches, and citizens encouraged the torchlight demonstrators with applause, or followed behind the procession along the sidewalks on both sides, chanting slogans, thereby further strengthening their sense of solidarity with the students. Although the assembly and demonstration were conducted on a large scale, they proceeded in a consistently orderly manner, demonstrating a mature protest culture. On that day, the students dispersed after promising to assemble in front of the main gate of Chonnam National University the following morning if "something unusual" were to happen. On May 17, most leaders of the nationwide student movement—including members of the National Council of University Student Presidents in Seoul—were arrested; however, the student council leadership in Gwangju evaded arrest by going into hiding. Nevertheless, the absence of central leadership made unified guidance of the subsequent student movement difficult.

At dawn on May 18, the 33rd and 35th Battalions of the 7th Airborne Special Forces Brigade were deployed to Chonnam National University, Chosun University, and Gwangju National University of Education, arresting students who had been occupying the campuses overnight. That same morning, students gathered in front of the main gate of Chonnam National University and shouted slogans such as "Lift Martial Law" and "Resign Chun Doo-hwan," but airborne troops struck them with lethal batons and brutally suppressed the protest. Scattered students resisted by throwing stones while fleeing into alleyways, but were ultimately apprehended, covered in blood. Afterwards, other students marched onto Geumnam-ro, a major downtown street, and staged a sit-in protest. At 1:00 PM, airborne troops disembarking from over twenty trucks—armed with firearms and batons—inflicted indiscriminate violence not only on demonstrators but also on passing female students and elderly citizens. The detention of youths and students continued throughout the night.

The Catholic Church's involvement in the uprising began on the very first day, May 18. Father John the Baptist Lee Young-soo, who served as Pastorate Director at the Archdiocese Office on the sixth floor of the Catholic Center located on Geumnam-ro, witnessed the atrocities committed by the martial law forces. After protesting to the head of the Jeollanam-do Provincial Police Bureau, he also reported the situation to Archbishop Victorinus Youn Kong-hi (Youn et al. 1989, p. 11). Around 10:00 AM

on May 19, three to four thousand Gwangju citizens gathered on Geumnam-ro, and their numbers rapidly swelled. Shortly after clashes between the police and citizens erupted, airborne troops disembarked from over thirty military trucks and charged at the demonstrating crowd. Their military uniforms were already stained crimson with the blood of the demonstrators. The slaughter by the airborne forces proceeded in the same manner as the previous day: kicking open doors at random, beating young people indiscriminately regardless of gender, and dragging them outside. Those captured were bound with their hands behind their backs and forced to crawl on their stomachs and sides. The airborne troops were indulging in "Operation Splendid Holiday" to their heart's content, true to the operation's code name. Taxi drivers spontaneously transported the mounting number of wounded to hospitals, but if discovered by the airborne troops, the injured were dragged out of the vehicles and the drivers themselves were violently beaten. Due to the frenzied and murderous suppression by the airborne forces, human presence vanished from the streets by noon that day, leaving the area shrouded in a somber silence where only foreign journalists and foreign TV camera crews were visible. Citizens who witnessed the atrocities of the airborne troops transformed into the *minjung* who actively resisted. The struggle from that afternoon onward underwent a qualitative leap; the core driving force of the demonstrating crowd shifted from students to ordinary citizens, who adopted an offensive stance to defend their right to survival and human dignity. Subsequently, a fierce battle unfolded between the military/police and the citizens. The tragedy of Gwangju stemmed from the slaughter operation conducted by the airborne troops on May 18 and 19, and foreign media outlets such as the Associated Press described the event as "the most tragic loss of life on the Korean Peninsula since the Korean War." However, the new military junta defined the atrocities they committed over those two days as a response to a "simple riot," and branded even the initial peaceful student protests as a "riot," completely denying their own brutal acts (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 311).

On May 19, Archbishop Victorinus Youn also witnessed people collapsed and bleeding from the sixth floor of the Catholic Center. Attending the Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference in Seoul that afternoon, he reported the situation in Gwangju to Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan. When Cardinal Stephen Kim asked, "Did people die?" the archbishop replied, "I saw people shedding massive amounts of blood, so if anyone told me they had died, I would readily believe it." Father Cornelius of the Missionary Society of St. Columban, who was active in the *Myeongdohoe* (Society of the Christian Doctrine) of the Archdiocese of Gwangju at the time, testified about the state of the martial law forces on that day as follows:

> There were about six or seven to ten young people. To be honest, I was scared as well. I don't know how to express it, but I once encountered those soldiers

> head-on; their eyes were shining strangely, as if they were on drugs. Their bloodshot eyes were terrifying enough to send a chill down my spine. After a while, the soldiers who were guarding the young people, as if to dispel their boredom, climbed onto the bare thighs of the kneeling youths with their combat boots on and played by sliding down them as if on a slide. As their skin peeled off and blood flowed, the young people writhed their entire bodies and screamed in pain. However, paying no heed to these cries of agony, the soldiers only added further beatings with batons and kicks. (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 109–111)

The terror experienced by those who witnessed the airborne troops' atrocities was beyond imagination, and the same was true for the priests in Gwangju. Archbishop Victorinus Youn spoke as follows regarding his inability to help a fallen youth:

> A young man was caught and being beaten by two suppression soldiers. His head was covered in blood, perhaps having been struck by something. I thought that if left alone, he might die. However, my own fear was so overwhelming that I could not go down from the building to stop it. Even now, I worry whether that person is alive, and the thought of why I could not stop it has never left my mind. Recalling that scene still pains my heart as a clergyman. Repenting over that moment time and again, I continue to pray to God for forgiveness even today. (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 293)

At this time, the archbishop recalled the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" and was seized with remorse, feeling as though he were the very "priest who saw the man attacked by robbers and passed by on the other side." On the same day, May 19, Father Pius Cho Cheol-hyun, pastor of Gyerim-dong Catholic Church, received a flood of phone calls from citizens reprimanding the Church's stance, asking, "What are the clergy doing while the citizens are suffering?" The following day, May 20, the head of the Civil Defense Division at the Dong-gu Office visited him and requested, "We hope the clergy will resolve this difficult situation." Overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness and pressure, Father Pius Cho held discussions with the priests at the Catholic Center, but they could do no more than worry about the situation without being able to devise any countermeasures (Cho 1994, pp. 28–30).

Although the rain that had been falling since the previous night ceased around 9:00 AM on May 20, citizens braved the downpour, flocking to downtown Gwangju from surrounding areas. The crowd, joined by housewives, high school students, and even the elderly, discussed the previous night's damage and the horrifying reality of the slaughter, deepening their shared indignation and hostility. By around 3:00 PM, the crowd on Geumnam-ro swelled to tens of thousands, and at approximately 5:50

PM, over 5,000 people linked arms to launch a physical charge toward the Provincial Office. Around 7:00 PM, a convoy of more than 200 taxis suddenly appeared, honking their horns and shining their headlights, with large vehicles such as heavy trucks, express buses, and intercity buses lined up at the front. Using the vehicles as a vanguard, demonstrators armed with iron pipes and Molotov cocktails engaged in a fierce battle outside the Provincial Office against the military and police, who fired tear gas canisters into the crowd. The crowd on Geumnam-ro expanded to as many as 200,000 people. By around 9:00 PM, the demonstrators seized the City Hall; by 10:00 PM, they also occupied the Gwangju Police Station and the Seobu Police Station, and the MBC broadcasting station building, which had reported the martial law authorities' fabricated announcements on the 7:00 PM news that evening, also began to be engulfed in flames. The citizens who poured into the streets appeared to form a single, unified mass, driven by the misery of becoming targets of slaughter by the airborne troops and the deep resentment of facing discrimination as "Jeolla-do thugs." The entire city was engulfed in intense fervor, and with the exception of a few locations guarded by the military, such as the Provincial Office, the prison, and Gwangju Station, the city surged with waves of people. The citizens' resistance lacked any organized structure. Instead, it was an explosive manifestation of shared anger against the unilateral atrocities of the airborne troops, transcending political ideologies and class interests (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 337). The fierce clash that unfolded from late that night into the dawn of May 21 resulted in numerous casualties across various locations, but it served as a decisive battle that forced the martial law forces to retreat to the city outskirts from the entire city, with the sole exception of the Provincial Office building.

May 21 marked a critical turning point in the course of the uprising. That morning, the new military junta precipitated a bloody tragedy by issuing orders to open fire on citizens under the pretext of invoking the right to self-defense. By approximately 2:00 AM that day, the areas previously occupied by martial law forces had become zones beyond military control; however, troops from the 20th Infantry Division, newly deployed the previous night, commenced operations at around 10:00 AM. Around this time, the demonstrating crowd gathered in front of the Provincial Office elected their representatives and decided to initiate negotiations with the provincial governor. The negotiating representatives demanded a public apology from the governor for the bloodshed, the release of detained citizens and students, the verification of the whereabouts and status of the wounded, and the total withdrawal of martial law forces by noon on May 21. At exactly 1:00 PM, as the national anthem played through speakers installed in all four directions on the roof of the Provincial Office, hundreds of gunshots rang out. The martial law forces' indiscriminate firing upon the peacefully demonstrating crowd resulted in massive casualties, overwhelming both general hospitals and private clinics with the severely wounded. This firing shattered the Gwangju citizens' hopes for a peaceful resolution

through dialogue and compromise, serving as the catalyst that shifted the Gwangju Uprising into a completely new phase. Demonstrators riding in vehicles seized weapons from armories near Gwangju and returned to the city center. A youth demonstration unit of several hundred, armed with various firearms, advanced toward the Provincial Office. This armed demonstration unit came to be called the "Citizens' Army" (*Simingun*) by the people of Gwangju, who referred to the Citizens' Army as friendly forces and the martial law troops as the enemy. Although the entire downtown area transformed into a fierce battlefield, around 4:00 PM the airborne troops began to retreat, and by approximately 8:00 PM, the demonstrators took over the Provincial Office, turning Gwangju into a "liberated zone" for its citizens. Since the previous day, all transportation and communication networks connecting outside the city—including phone lines, trains, and express buses—had been severed, leaving Gwangju completely blockaded. The retreat of the martial law forces was not an inevitable withdrawal due to a tactical disadvantage caused by the emergence of the Citizens' Army; rather, it was intentionally planned by the new military junta under the premise of executing a re-suppression operation. The new military junta sought to swiftly suppress the protests in Gwangju to prevent them from spreading to other regions. In other words, to achieve their treasonous objective of seizing power, they forced the retreat based on the premise of a re-suppression operation—dubbed "Operation *Sangmu Chungjeong*"—that would inevitably entail civilian casualties (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 395).

Around 11:00 AM on May 21, four to five priests from the Archdiocese of Gwangju gathered at Honam-dong Catholic Church. The situation in front of the Provincial Office was already extremely tense, on the verge of a clash between the demonstrators and the martial law forces. The priests received reproaches from the believers, who asked, "Why aren't the church and the priests stepping forward as leaders of the people to resolve the situation?" At approximately 2:00 PM, eight priests from the Archdiocese of Gwangju gathered once again. The priests resolved to act as mediators to bring about a peaceful resolution between the martial law forces and the citizens. Wearing white albs and holding placards that read "Protection of Citizens' Lives and Property" and "Abolition of Martial Law and Release of Pro-Democracy Figures," they prepared to go out in front of the fountain at the Provincial Office. However, this plan was thwarted by threats from the Commander of the Martial Law Branch, who warned that his troops might open fire even if the priests stepped forward and that they would bear no responsibility. Father Pius Cho, who was participating in the preparations, witnessed a helicopter in the sky and heard the sound of machine-gun fire. The other priests also heard the gunfire and judged that a peaceful resolution would be difficult. In Seoul, Cardinal Stephen Kim personally visited Defense Security Commander Chun Doo-hwan on May 20 to stop the bloodshed in Gwangju, but Commander Chun concluded that the Gwangju uprising was an insurrection and unilaterally terminated the meeting. On May 22,

Cardinal Stephen Kim also visited U.S. Ambassador Gleysteen and Martial Law Commander Lee Hui-seong, demanding that the situation be resolved through peaceful means. Meanwhile, the neighboring Diocese of Jeonju convened its Justice and Peace Commission on May 20 and resolved to dispatch representatives of the diocese to Gwangju and actively engage in awareness campaigns to correctly convey the truth about the Gwangju events (Cho 1994, pp. 31–32). On May 22, Bishop Augustine Kim Jae-deok, Father John the Baptist Kim Bong-hui, and members of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Jeonju headed to Gwangju, but were unable to enter due to military control. In the initial stage of the Gwangju incident, the priests of the Archdiocese of Gwangju witnessed the atrocities of the martial law forces and, despite their fear, sought a peaceful resolution between the martial law forces and the citizens out of a sense of duty as clergy. Cardinal Stephen Kim in Seoul was also searching for peaceful ways to resolve the situation. Among all the dioceses, the Diocese of Jeonju alone showed a swift and organized response across the entire diocese.

2. Activities of the Catholic Church during the Period of Civic Autonomy—From May 22 to May 27

(1) Settlement Measures Committee and Weapon Retrieval Activities

Having confirmed the withdrawal of the airborne troops from downtown Gwangju, citizens gathered at the Provincial Office square on the morning of May 22, buoyed by a sense of victory. Later that day, citizens undertook the task of cleaning the Geumnam-ro area, and the leadership of the resistance began the process of identifying the bodies left around the Provincial Office. Measures were taken to prevent hoarding caused by the shortage of daily necessities, and housewives and shopkeepers provided rice balls, bread, milk, and beverages to the Citizens' Army. To maintain public order, the Citizens' Army and students prevented acts of destruction and took charge of guarding key facilities, organizing self-governance bodies such as vehicle control teams, medical teams, and firearm retrieval teams. Armed with outdated and inferior firearms such as carbines and M1 rifles, the Citizens' Army secured the Provincial Office on the morning of May 22, from which the martial law forces had withdrawn the previous day. Around the fountain in front of the Provincial Office, the "Citizen Rallies to Defend Democracy" were held every day, and on May 23, more than 50,000 citizens gathered at the square in front of the Provincial Office. On this day, two settlement measures committees, composed of prominent local figures and students, were established as executive bodies of the autonomous community. The General Settlement Committee focused on negotiations with the military authorities and persuasion of citizens, while the Student Settlement Committee was tasked with managing practical civil affairs.

On the morning of May 22, Archbishop Victorinus Youn telephoned the Commander of the Martial Law Branch and protested, warning, "Unless the military apologizes for its violent suppression, resolving the situation is impossible." That same morning, the Vice Governor of Jeollanam-do discussed settlement measures with prominent figures from various fields, and the archbishop was also asked to attend. Shortly after noon, the Citizens' Settlement Measures Committee was formed, and Archbishop Victorinus Youn was recommended as chairman; however, he entrusted the duties related to the settlement to Father Pius Cho and instead exchanged views over the phone regarding negotiations with the governor and the martial law forces (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 16–17). Concurrently, the Settlement Committee visited the Martial Law Branch and presented seven demands for disarming the Citizens' Army—including a halt to military deployments until the situation was settled, the release of all detainees, acknowledgment of excessive suppression, and compensation for the deceased—but the Commander of the Martial Law Branch rejected them. On this day, the Martial Law Command announced the interim investigation results of the "Kim Dae-jung Sedition Conspiracy Case," claiming that the 'Gwangju incident' was orchestrated behind the scenes by Kim Dae-jung. Park Choong-hoon, who had just been appointed Acting Prime Minister following the cabinet's resignation, also visited Gwangju that day, but returned to Seoul after receiving only a briefing from the Commander of the Martial Law Branch. He then released a statement via evening television and radio broadcasts stating, "One must not be misled by the groundless rumors of a very small number of rioters or rebellious elements." On the same day, General Wickham, Commander of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command, approved the movement of troops from the 20th Division under his command; as a result, the U.S. military was subsequently viewed as an accomplice in the brutal suppression operation in Gwangju. Since the previous day, the resistance had spread to surrounding areas such as Mokpo and Naju, but the media consistently reported the Gwangju Uprising as a violent riot.

The two Settlement Committees did not fully understand where the citizens' explosive behavioral patterns originated. The individuals who joined the committees had participated in the resistance out of pure conscience and a simple sense of justice. At that time, the student movement leaders and dissident figures who had fought against the Yushin dictatorship and led the democratization movement had already been mostly arrested or gone into hiding due to the nationwide expansion of martial law on May 17. Therefore, even as the uprising entered its fifth day, there was a lack of leaders and organizations to accurately assess the situation and provide direction (Young-taek Kim 2010, pp. 421–422). During the period of civic autonomy, a major point of contention was the issue of weapon retrieval, which sparked fierce debate. The Settlement Committee members judged that weapon surrender was necessary to minimize casualties, so they engaged in weapon retrieval and collected about half of the weapons held by the Citizens' Army by May 23. The issue of weapon retrieval

was intricately intertwined with perspectives on the Gwangju Uprising, views on the political situation, views on life, and worldviews; those who opposed weapon retrieval were mainly the grassroots *minjung*, including workers (Jeonnam Social Movement Council 2018, p. 132). Judging that it was extremely dangerous for youths to possess lethal weapons and explosives, Father Pius Cho of the Settlement Committee tirelessly traversed various areas of Gwangju to persuade members of the Citizens' Army who refused to surrender their weapons. Archbishop Victorinus Youn was similarly concerned about the citizens' possession of weapons (Cho 1994, p. 150), but this was due to a pastoral and theological conviction seeking peace, nonviolence, and infinite love (Joong-seok Seo 2012, p. 185). On May 23, with the cooperation of an American priest, the archbishop requested that officials at the U.S. Information Service in Gwangju convey the truth about the Gwangju incident to Cardinal Stephen Kim. At the Second Citizen Rally to Defend Democracy held on May 24, the Settlement Committee announced the results of the previous day's second negotiation with the martial law forces to the 100,000-strong crowd gathered at the Provincial Office Square. Hearing this, the crowd regarded the committee members' attitude as collusion with the Martial Law Command and an act of surrender, expressing their anger with fierce jeers. On the same day, Father Franciscus Kim Seong-yong, who attended the Settlement Committee meeting held at the Provincial Office, also judged that he could no longer act together with the capitulatory members of the Settlement Committee at the Provincial Office, who focused solely on weapon retrieval while staying in contact with the Martial Law Command (Youn et al. 1989, p. 55).

On May 23, Cardinal Stephen Kim in Seoul, following the decision of the Emergency Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference, appealed to believers nationwide for a "Special Prayer for National Stabilization." The bishops' message sent to believers across the country maintained a neutral stance, stating, "The bloodshed that resulted in casualties, the exact number of which remains unknown, has expanded to Gwangju City and surrounding areas, leaving the entire nation facing tomorrow amidst tension, sorrow, and anxiety," and emphasizing that the inhumane situation must be stopped. However, at the same time, it viewed the Gwangju incident as a "misfortune stemming from differences in political views" and claimed that "the foundation of the nation is shaking due to the irrational struggle among brothers and sisters," thereby revealing its limitations by failing to address the essence of the situation, such as its causes and background (Gyu-hyun Moon 2015, pp. 364–365). On May 25, the cardinal delivered a message of consolation and 10 million KRW in relief funds to Archbishop Victorinus Youn through a military chaplain (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 21–22). On May 24, the Archdiocese of Gwangju articulated the Church's official position on the Gwangju Uprising through a special letter from the archbishop. In the letter titled "The Victory of Resurrection through the Cross," released on the occasion of Pentecost, Archbishop Victorinus Youn stated,

"The citizens of Gwangju have experienced an unprecedented and tragic trial," and called upon people to "unite their hearts in prayer for the unidentified deceased and their families." However, regarding the issue of those responsible for causing the tragedy, it maintained a somewhat moderate stance, emphasizing "national love and reconciliation" (Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju 1985, p. 7). The following day, on May 25, Father Franciscus Kim read Archbishop Victorinus Youn's special letter at the Pentecost Sunday Mass at Namdong Catholic Church; during the subsequent homily, the priest urged the congregation in an impassioned tone to make a life-risking resolve to fight, declaring:

> Now we must crawl on all fours, shove our faces into food troughs to eat like dogs or pigs, and live like beasts. This is because the remnants of the Yushin regime, who routinely commit violence and murder, have treated us like beasts—beating us, dragging us like dogs to the slaughter, stabbing, and shooting us to death. If we are to walk on two legs and live as human beings, we must throw ourselves into the struggle for democratization, risking our very lives. We are paying the price right now for our past silence—that cowardly silence. (Youn et al. 1989, p. 57)

At 2:00 PM on May 25, Father Franciscus Kim, the parish priest at Namdong Catholic Church, Father Pius Cho, and several pro-democracy figures gathered to review the issue of dissidents—such as lawyers, professors, youth from student movements, and YWCA officials—joining the Settlement Committee. They debated whether to join the General Settlement Committee at the Provincial Office, which had lost the public's trust, or to act as an independent organization; ultimately, at 5:00 PM, they joined the committee. The dissidents resumed their meeting in the Vice Governor's office at the Provincial Office and unanimously passed the "Four-Point Proposal for Settling the Situation" proposed by Father Franciscus Kim, which demanded: (1) that the government acknowledge the current situation as its mistake, (2) that it apologize and seek forgiveness for this situation, (3) that the state assume the responsibility for compensating all damages, and (4) that no disadvantageous measures be taken. They then decided to include these four items in the "Appeal to President Choi Kyu-hah," who was scheduled to visit Gwangju (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 57–58). The newly formed Settlement Committee's stance differed from that of previous committees in that it recognized the Gwangju Resistance as a civic uprising or a righteous uprising. President Choi arrived at the Martial Law Branch around 6:00 PM along with four cabinet ministers, including the Minister of National Defense and the Martial Law Commander; however, after listening only to local briefings and issuing a statement, he returned to Seoul. Around 7:00 PM, students and youth who advocated for life-or-death resistance formed a new resistance leadership. That night, Father Franciscus Kim visited the Student Settlement Committee and encouraged

them, saying, "The Gwangju incident is an event in which the pent-up anger accumulated by Gwangju citizens over decades has exploded. Let us unite our strength to carry through our demands," and stayed with the students until dawn (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 58–59).

(2) The March of Death

Meanwhile, as preparations for the new military junta's re-suppression operation, dubbed "Operation *Sangmu Chungjeong*," proceeded as planned, martial law troops—comprising over 20,000 soldiers from 47 battalions, including airborne units, the 20th Infantry Division, and the 31st Homeland Defense Division—were advancing from five directions with tanks at the forefront, aiming to secure four key locations in downtown Gwangju (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 526). At 5:30 AM on May 26, as the tanks moved in, the interior of the Provincial Office was engulfed in extreme tension. Father Franciscus Kim, who had kept an all-night vigil since the previous evening, soothing the armed students in a desperate attempt to prevent bloodshed, acutely realized that heavy casualties were inevitable if the situation continued, and prayed as follows:

> One wrong move, and the citizens of Gwangju will face destruction. If the young people, deprived of sleep and exhausted in body and mind by relentless fear and fatigue, set fire to the TNT, everything will be over. I must stop them. The thought flashed through my mind like lightning that I had to calm down the agitated youths and overcome this crisis. I must take courage. Lord, help me! Give me strength! (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 59–60)

Father Franciscus Kim proposed to the 17 Settlement Committee members who had stayed up all night at the Provincial Office, "Let us demand that the military withdraw to their original positions within an hour, and if the demand is not accepted, let us call for the arming of all citizens to launch guerrilla warfare, and in the end, detonate the TNT and all perish together," to which everyone agreed (Youn et al. 1989, p. 60). He then called Father Cosmas Park Sang-sou at the Catholic Center, asking him to report the situation at the Provincial Office to Archbishop Youn. With the resolve that "if we must die by gunfire, so be it" to prevent the military's advance and bloodshed, the priest embarked on the "March of Death" with the Settlement Committee members. Behind them, several hundred citizens joined, and foreign correspondents also accompanied them. After they marched about 4 km from the Provincial Office and reached the front of the martial law army's barricade around 9:00 AM, the martial law forces assumed a firing stance; however, Father Kim strongly protested to the deputy commander of the Martial Law Branch against moving the tanks contrary to their prior promise. After the tanks retreated,

negotiations continued at the Martial Law Branch from 10:00 AM to 2:30 PM but failed to reach a settlement (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 59–61). Upon returning to the Provincial Office that afternoon, Father Kim was given a mission by Archbishop Youn to go to Seoul and reveal the true situation in Gwangju. Passing safely through nine checkpoints, he arrived at Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul around 10:00 PM on May 27 (Youn et al. 1989, p. 64). The Bishops' Conference, having received the report on the situation in Gwangju from him, did not take any further unified stance. The response to the Gwangju incident by the Bishops' Conference was limited to the request for special prayers issued on May 23. Because of differences in personal views, diocesan affiliations, or regional interests among individual priests, it was difficult to expect all priests to play a prophetic role in confronting unjust power. Meanwhile, the priests of the Diocese of Jeonju were only able to visit Gwangju on May 29, after the Citizens' Army was suppressed (Yoon 2002, p. 239).

In Gwangju, at the 5th Citizen Rally to Defend Democracy held on May 26, it was resolved to fight to the end. The Citizens' Army members remaining at the Provincial Office, determined to fight to the death, numbered around 200; among them, about 120 were youths and high school students with no military experience, including 10 female students. At the YWCA building on Geumnam-ro, around 70 male and female students were also preparing, but some returned home after being persuaded by adults. Thus, the 157 members of the Citizens' Army who remained at the Provincial Office to the end were preparing for a final stand (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 532). The martial law troops deployed in the new military junta's re-suppression operation totaled 6,168, comprising 276 officers and 5,897 enlisted soldiers, among whom the airborne unit members organized as a special assault team leading the operation numbered 317, including 37 officers and 280 enlisted soldiers. In contrast, the weapons possessed by the 157 members of the Citizens' Army, who were little more than a ragtag group, were merely carbines; however, massive troop numbers and the latest weaponry were deployed to suppress them (Young-taek Kim 2010, p. 526). On May 27, the martial law forces completely blockaded the outskirts of Gwangju and, from 3:30 AM, engaged in a gunfight with the Citizens' Army near the Provincial Office, surrounding the building around 4:00 AM. When the Citizens' Army fired at the searchlights illuminating the Provincial Office, a volley of fire from the airborne units began. From above, armed helicopters supported the airborne units. The airborne units even shot and killed eight members of the Citizens' Army who had surrendered and come out to the square in front of the Provincial Office. After about an hour of combat, the Provincial Office, the final stronghold of the Citizens' Army, was seized by the martial law forces at 5:10 AM.

As a result of the suppression operation on this day, 17 members of the Citizens' Army were killed, and the survivors were classified as "firearms possessors" and "special rioters" and escorted under guard to the military base. On May 31, three days after the conclusion of the suppression operation, the Martial Law Command

officially announced, "The Gwangju incident was orchestrated from behind the scenes by Kim Dae-jung, and the martial law troops were deployed to suppress it." According to a report released in 2024 by the May 18 Democratization Movement Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the official statistics are tallied at 166 dead, 179 missing, and 2,617 injured—including injuries, aftereffects, and post-injury deaths—during the period of the uprising (Jeong 2024). Considering the unknown martyrs who remain secretly buried and unidentified, as well as those who have lived their entire lives hiding their victimization out of fear of the guilt-by-association system, the actual number of victims is estimated to exceed the official statistics.

During the period of civic autonomy, the Archdiocese of Gwangju took the lead in retrieving weapons and demanding an apology for the excessive suppression by the martial law forces, playing a central role in the Settlement Committee. This central role was made possible by the fact that the Catholic Church had earned social trust, and that its activities were based on theological convictions and a pure sense of justice. Priests of the Archdiocese of Gwangju maintained the Church's stance of embodying agape love until the Gwangju Resistance was suppressed. Thus, the priests did not join the armed resistance of the Citizens' Army, but fulfilled the Church's prophetic mission to bring about a peaceful resolution through actions such as undertaking the "March of Death." As in the early stages of the uprising, during the period of civic autonomy, such responses were limited to the Archdiocese of Gwangju and the Diocese of Jeonju. Consequently, excluding the efforts of Cardinal Stephen Kim, it must be concluded that the Catholic Church in Korea, at the institutional level, remained a bystander to the situation in Gwangju.

Activities of the Catholic Church After Suppression—May 27 Onward

Activities of the Catholic Church to make known the truth about the Gwangju Resistance were also carried out during the uprising period. As mentioned earlier, the Diocese of Jeonju held a Standing Committee meeting of the Justice and Peace Commission on May 20 and decided to dispatch representatives to investigate the situation in Gwangju, but due to military control, it was impossible even to enter the city. At the extraordinary priests' assembly convened on May 23, it was resolved to focus efforts on activities revealing the truth about Gwangju. On the same day, with approximately 60 priests and over 300 believers gathered at the Central Cathedral of the Diocese of Jeonju, a memorial Mass for the victims of the Gwangju Resistance was offered, celebrated by Bishop Augustine Kim Jae-deok. Furthermore, they produced a leaflet containing the testimonies of those who witnessed the Gwangju Resistance, titled "Chun Doo-hwan's Gwangju Massacre Operation," and distributed it to believers through each parish within the Diocese of Jeonju along with a statement of protest, while also sending it to Seoul, Busan, Daegu, and other cities.

Additionally, each church under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Jeonju broadcast Mass homilies through outdoor speakers to spread the truth about Gwangju.

Following the suppression of the resistance, between June and July, activities to inform the public of the truth about the Gwangju Resistance were conducted primarily through the Catholic Church. Cardinal Stephen Kim first visited Gwangju on May 31 and stayed for several days, comforting Archbishop Victorinus Youn, as well as the priests, religious, and believers. Subsequently, on June 2, the cardinal visited the Blue House and delivered the letter that the archbishop had written to President Choi Kyu-hah earlier on May 26 in the name of the Standing Committee of the Priests' Council, requesting a truth investigation into the Gwangju Incident. He visited the office of the Archdiocese of Gwangju again on June 4, where the gathered citizens poured out their indignation over the Catholic Church's response to the tragic reality of Gwangju (Seung-Chan Park 2019, p. 11). On June 25, the cardinal issued a statement titled "On the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the June 25 War," pointing out that "the Gwangju Incident is a lamentable and deeply agonizing fact" and that "a resolution through military force is a major factor that will greatly hinder future national harmony and unity" (Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju 1985, p. 22). This message from the head of the Korean Catholic Church was distributed at the Prayer Meeting on the Current Situation held in the Archdiocese of Gwangju and the Diocese of Jeonju. He also issued a joint statement on the current situation demanding a peaceful resolution of the Gwangju Incident along with dissident figures such as Yun Bo-seon, Ham Seok-heon, and Cheon Gwan-u; however, it was not reported by media outlets other than the *Dong-a Ilbo* (Seung-Chan Park 2019, p. 12).

1. Production and Dissemination of Testimonies

Even in the midst of the uprising, various printed materials to make known the truth about Gwangju were disseminated by individuals with a strong sense of mission; however, their contents included items of unknown origin or low credibility. On May 30, after the Gwangju Resistance was suppressed, a university student named Kim Ui-gi scattered copies of "A Letter to Our Fellow Countrymen" in an effort to make known the actual situation in Gwangju and jumped to his death in protest from the sixth floor of the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS) building in Seoul, but all of the printed materials were confiscated by the police. Two important collections of testimonies published in June as part of the Catholic Church's activities to make known the truth were "Sadness Rather Than Anger" and "The Truth About the Gwangju Incident." Having escaped Gwangju on May 26, Father Franciscus Kim Seong-yong, who was staying in Seoul, was encouraged by Father Thomas Oh Tae-soon of the Archdiocese of Seoul and others to write a testimony titled "Sadness Rather Than Anger." This testimony, based on Father Franciscus Kim's account,

underwent some editing such as toning down provocative and strong expressions, but at its beginning, it emphasized the role of a priest with a prophetic mission and described the progression of the Gwangju Incident on a day-by-day basis. It was also produced as an audio tape and disseminated widely. On June 2, a meeting of the CPAJ was held at the Presbytery of Myeongdong Cathedral, attended by Father Franciscus Kim and Father Paulus Jeong Hyung-dal from the Archdiocese of Gwangju, as well as Sister Rosalia, who had compiled her own eyewitness account on May 30 into "Report on the Gwangju Situation." During this meeting, amidst rumors of unknown origin flying about, the necessity of testimonies by an organization possessing social credibility was emphasized. As a result, Father Paulus Jeong authored "The Truth About the Gwangju Incident," and Father Cosmas Park took charge of its production and distribution. In its statement of purpose, this testimony declared that "exposing fabrications and investigating the truth is the mission charged to us who believe in Christ." This testimony specifically described the brutal acts perpetrated by airborne troops in the early stages of the resistance and the process that led to the civil resistance (Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju 1985, pp. 12–14). The printed materials, produced using the printing press at the office of the Archdiocese of Gwangju, were delivered to all dioceses by personal couriers, but later, Father Cosmas Park was taken to the Security Command and interrogated (Youn et al. 1989, p. 140). On June 30, a statement signed jointly by the priests' councils of all dioceses across the country, excluding the Archdiocese of Daegu, was issued, declaring that "we believe that 'The Truth About the Gwangju Incident' is true" (Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju 1985, p. 15).

Activities to expose the brutal reality of the Gwangju Resistance were also actively carried out overseas. Over a three-day period starting on May 28, hunger strikes and protest marches led by international students and resident Koreans in Germany were held in Berlin. At universities across Germany, Korean student associations were formed, and statements related to the Gwangju Resistance were issued. Furthermore, on June 3, the Korean Student Association at the University of Tübingen released "Our Resolution," handwritten with a brush, and Christian student associations at universities in Munich and Essen produced resource materials in German (Eo 2024, p. 34). On June 6, the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace (hereinafter, the Justice and Peace Commission) translated and distributed "The Torn Flag." On June 10, "A Message Offered by the Clergy and Religious in Rome," authored by Korean clergy and religious figures residing in Rome, was issued, and on June 16, a letter stating, "We decisively support the protection of human rights in the Korean Church," was delivered to Archbishop Youn on behalf of the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In a parallel effort, Reverend Kang Shin-seok of the Protestant Church left Gwangju on May 26

and, while staying in Seoul, sent materials on the Gwangju Resistance to countries including Germany and Canada (Joong-seok Seo 2012, p. 201).

During the Gwangju Resistance, clergy who engaged in activities as members of the Settlement Committee or worked to reveal the truth faced severe suppression by the authorities. In early June, after discussing the future course of action regarding the wanted Father Franciscus Kim and Father Pius Cho with believers, Archbishop Victorinus Youn judged that "while students and dissidents are being detained and suffering, priests should not be hiding," and advised the two priests to voluntarily present themselves to the Security Command. After doing so, the priests were formally arrested on June 14; subsequently, priests and sisters from the Archdiocese of Gwangju and the Archdiocese of Seoul were also apprehended in succession.[3] Sister Marianne, upon being taken into custody, suffered severe aftereffects, including brain damage, lower-body paralysis, and a speech impairment, due to the torture she endured in the basement of the Security Command. Father Peter Park Chang-sin of the Diocese of Jeonju, who had distributed "Chun Doo-hwan's Gwangju Massacre Operation" during the Gwangju Resistance and broadcast the truth about the Gwangju Incident through outdoor speakers, was struck on the head with an iron pipe by an unidentified assailant on the night of June 25, and tragically suffered multiple stab wounds even after losing consciousness (Joong-seok Seo 2012, pp. 201–202).

2. Prayer Meetings on the Current Situation and Monday Masses

Efforts to disseminate the truth about Gwangju through Masses were first undertaken at Bukgyo-dong Catholic Church in Mokpo. On May 31, priests and many believers from the Mokpo region attended a Mass, and the attendance exceeded the church's capacity, to the point where outdoor speakers had to be installed for those who could not enter the building (Jung 2013, p. 22). Through "The Truth About the Gwangju Incident," released by the priests' council of the Archdiocese of Gwangju, and the Prayer Meetings on the Current Situation held on several occasions, the citizens of Gwangju, who had been isolated from Korean society, received great comfort. The Mass held on June 23 at Gyerim-dong Catholic Church was the first Mass offered in the Gwangju region in connection with the Gwangju Resistance, and despite overt interference from the authorities, many believers and priests attended. With this Mass serving as a catalyst, it was decided to

3 On June 19, Father Julianus Nam Jae-hee was detained; on June 21, Father Thomas Jeong Kyu-wan; on June 23, Father John the Baptist Lee Young-soo and Father John Jang Ji-kwon; and on July 21, Father Paulus Jeong Hyung-dal. In the Archdiocese of Seoul as well, Father Thomas Oh Tae-soon, Father Eusebius Yang Hong, Father Peter Kim Taik-am, Father Luke An Chung-suk, Father Nicholas Chang Dok-pil, and Sister Marianne Jeong of the Labor Issues Counseling Office were apprehended.

offer Mass every Monday, and starting on June 30, Masses were successively offered at churches in various locations where the priests who had been detained had served as parish priests. A Mass was scheduled to be offered at Nam-dong Catholic Church at 8:00 p.m. on June 30, but the church was completely blockaded by the police from 6:00 p.m., and notices and warning letters were delivered from the Chief of the Jeonnam Provincial Police Bureau and the Commander of the Martial Law Branch (Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju 1985, pp. 25–26). When the strict cordon enforced by soldiers with fixed bayonets made it difficult for even the priests to enter, believers and citizens offered Rosary prayers and sang hymns at the main gate of the church (Youn et al. 1989, pp. 29–30).

3. Release and Amnesty to Detainees and Support Activities

From July onwards, the activities of the Catholic Church focused on the release and amnesty to those involved in the Gwangju Resistance, as well as support activities. On July 7, at Buk-dong Catholic Church, which was then the cathedral of the Archdiocese of Gwangju, Archbishop Victorinus Youn presided over the Monday Mass. On this day, 20 native priests of the Archdiocese of Gwangju sent a resolution to the archbishop titled "Regarding the Detention of Our Fellow Priests," asserting that they "would not hesitate to make any sacrifice for the amicable resolution of the Gwangju Incident and the release of the detained priests" (Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju 1985, p. 29). In his homily during the Monday Mass held at Nam-dong Catholic Church on July 15, Archbishop Youn strongly urged "an investigation into the truth about the Gwangju Incident, including the specific details of the orders received by the commander." This was also a protest against the Martial Law Command's apprehension of six priests and one sister of the CPAJ on July 12 on charges of fabricating and spreading groundless rumors. On the same day, the priests' council of the Archdiocese of Gwangju issued a report titled "The Second Report on the Truth about the Gwangju Resistance and Our Resolution," which chronicled the course of the Gwangju Resistance in greater detail than previous collections of testimonies, and demanded an accurate official disclosure from the authorities regarding the full picture of the incident and an apology from the martial law troops. Furthermore, the council argued that blocking the prayer meetings and Masses held by the Church constituted religious oppression, and made it clear that they would continue the struggle based on the spirit of the Gospel (Pastoral Institute for Joy and Hope 1997, pp. 149–159). On July 17, the priests' council issued a statement titled "A Request to the Bishops," urging proactive responses and a resolution of the issue regarding the eight priests from the Archdiocese of Gwangju and five priests from the Archdiocese of Seoul who were detained at the time (Pastoral Institute for Joy and Hope 1997, pp. 159–160). At the homilies and prayer meetings held every Monday by the Archdiocese of Gwangju,

10 to 15 priests and 150 to 200 believers and residents gathered and shared updates on the situation. Following the election of Father Paulus Jeong Hyung-dal as the chairperson of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju in February 1981, the Monday Mass was offered at Nam-dong Catholic Church under the commission's auspices. Marking the release of Father Franciscus Kim Seong-yong on August 15 of the same year as a turning point, it transitioned into a monthly Mass, which continued until December 24, 1982, when all those involved in the Gwangju Resistance were released (Young-taek Kim 2010, pp. 589–590).

On May 9, 1981, the priests' council of the Archdiocese of Gwangju issued a statement titled "Our Assertions on the First Anniversary of the Gwangju Resistance" at a priests' training session held in Suwon, Gyeonggi-do, demanding fact-finding investigations and the release of detainees (Pastoral Institute for Joy and Hope 1997, pp. 390–391). On that day, the priests' council traveled to Seoul, and on May 10, a Mass presided over by Archbishop Youn was celebrated at Myeongdong Cathedral. In his Mass homily, the archbishop explained the Gwangju Incident, saying, "At first, it was a peaceful demonstration by students, but the citizens rose up due to the brutal suppression by the airborne special forces, leaving them no choice but to seize weapons and resist." He strongly criticized the authorities' distortion of facts, stating, "To suppress the aspiration for truth and justice with falsehood, incitement, and violence is to deny humanity itself." Immediately following the Mass, printed materials recording the truth about the Gwangju Resistance were distributed (Youn et al. 1989, p. 38). Archbishop Youn's homily on this day holds significant meaning as an official statement directed at citizens and believers outside of Gwangju. As the bishop in charge of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Korea, he directed the commission to provide legal support for those detained in the Gwangju Resistance. Father Paulus Jeong, the head of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju, along with the families of the detainees, spearheaded a clemency campaign seeking the signatures of bishops nationwide, and priests and religious in every diocese across the country also joined the signature campaign (Youn et al. 1989, p. 34). Furthermore, appealing for clemency for Kim Dae-jung, who was sentenced to death by the General Court-Martial of the Army on September 11, 1980, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Korea sent a statement to the President, arguing that a bold decision by President Chun Doo-hwan regarding the defendants facing severe sentences was necessary to achieve a peaceful transition of power and national reconciliation (Pastoral Institute for Joy and Hope 1997, pp. 160–161).

The Gwangju Uprising, the June Democratic Uprising, and the Role of the Catholic Church

1. The Korean Catholic Church After the Busan US Cultural Center Arson Incident

In August 1980, following the resignation of Choi Kyu-hah, the president of the transitional government, Chun Doo-hwan was elected president by the National Conference for Unification on August 27, taking office as the 11th President of the Republic of Korea the following month. The Chun regime ruthlessly suppressed all civil society activities related to democratization in a manner tantamount to a reign of terror. Students relentlessly continued their struggles to expose the truth about the Gwangju Uprising and the regime's brutality and immorality. On the other hand, the Catholic Church's activities at the time were relatively passive and subdued compared to the preceding Yushin era. As 1981 marked the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Joseon Apostolic Vicariate for the Korean Catholic Church, the Church's full capabilities were concentrated on commemorative events, making the government's cooperation indispensable for the preparations. Consequently, to avoid direct friction and conflict with the government, the Catholic Church sought indirect methods for the release of detainees, such as submitting letters of opinion or petitions rather than issuing formal statements. This stood in stark contrast to the students, who labeled Chun Doo-hwan a "murderer" in connection with the Gwangju Uprising and engaged in anti-government struggles. At the time, students believed that the responsibility for the bloody suppression of the Gwangju Uprising lay not only with the Chun regime but also with the United States, which had acquiesced to it, and this critical perception naturally led to a fundamental reassessment of the US. Judging that the United States, which held operational command over the South Korean military, had effectively abetted the suppression of the uprising, the students' outrage surfaced primarily through the arson attack on the US Cultural Center in Gwangju in December 1980. Furthermore, when Chun visited the United States at the invitation of US President Ronald Reagan, the students became convinced of American complicity in the suppression of Gwangju (Lee 2004, p. 251).

Under these circumstances, the arson attack on the US Cultural Center in Busan on March 18, 1982, which occurred as an extension of this series of anti-American struggles, was a critical turning point that reverted the ambiguous relationship between the Catholic Church and the government back to one of extreme tension. Following the arson, Father Benedictus Choi Ki-sik of the Diocese of Wonju was arrested on charges of providing a hideout for the perpetrators. The state-controlled media at the time smeared the Catholic Church as a subversive group and condemned Father Choi as the figure behind the arson or the leader of leftist

ideological education. On April 8 of that year, Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan emphasized during a Mass homily that "the actions taken by Father Choi were the proper fulfillment of his duties as a priest." Priests from the Dioceses of Andong, Incheon, Busan, and Wonju subsequently issued statements supporting Father Choi's actions. In response to the ideological suppression by political authorities, the Catholic Church, through the Justice and Peace Commission on April 12, refuted accusations of being pro-communist. The Church elucidated that even if Father Choi's actions were illegal under positive law, they constituted a pastoral act guided by a priest's conscience. Critics point out that the Church's response to the arson at the Busan US Cultural Center and the arrest of Father Choi was self-defensive and reactive—much like during the democratic civil rights movements of the 1970s—and that it was an approach that turned a blind eye to the essence of the incident due to an over-consciousness of the United States (Moon 2015, pp. 373–374). Although there were such limitations, this incident served as an opportunity for the Korean Catholic Church to gradually strengthen its mass-oriented nature (Jae-Jeong Park 1995, pp. 317–318). Subsequently, the direction of the Church's activities expanded broadly into active anti-government struggles and social evangelization movements, and within this current, efforts to uncover the truth about the Gwangju Uprising also began to spread in earnest.

2. The Catholic Church's Memorial Events for the 5th and 7th Anniversaries of the Gwangju Uprising

From 1980 onward, the fervor for fact-finding and the defense of human rights, which had been confined to the Archdiocese of Gwangju and a few clerics, spread to the Catholic Church nationwide. In May 1985, a "Resolution for a Parliamentary Investigation into the Truth about the Gwangju Incident" was submitted to the National Assembly by lawmakers from the opposition New Democratic Party. As this brought the issue of the Gwangju Resistance into public discourse, dioceses that had previously remained silent also began participating in commemorative and solidarity activities. On May 17 of that year, the priests' council of the Archdiocese of Gwangju defined the Gwangju Righteous Uprising as a "popular uprising that offered fresh blood on the altar of democracy in the face of the dictatorship's violence" in a statement titled "On the Occasion of the 5th Anniversary of the Gwangju Righteous Uprising." This statement marked a significant step forward from the Catholic Church's previous stance on the Gwangju Resistance (Gwangju Metropolitan City 5.18 Historical Materials Compilation Committee 1997, pp. 606, 610–620). On May 18, during the "Memorial Mass and Ceremony for the May 18 Gwangju Righteous Uprising" hosted by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju at Nam-dong Catholic Church, Father Augustine Ham Sei-ung of the Archdiocese of Seoul delivered a lengthy homily titled "O Gwangju! The

Cross of Our Nation!" in which he acknowledged and reflected upon the silence of the Catholic Church outside the Dioceses of Gwangju and Jeonju during the uprising. In May of that year, prayer meetings, memorial Masses, and truth-reporting sessions were held in the Dioceses of Jeonju, Incheon, and Masan, as well as in the Archdiocese of Daegu, in solemn remembrance of the 5th anniversary of the Gwangju Resistance. Furthermore, a memorial service for the 5th anniversary was held at Catholic University, and after the Catholic Student Association held a "PAX Prayer Meeting" at the Catholic Student Center to demand a fact-finding investigation, the Catholic Student Association of the Diocese of Wonju offered a memorial Mass for the victims.

The year 1987 was a historical watershed that brought an end to the military regime and paved the way for democratization through direct presidential elections. Triggered by the torture and death of Park Jong-cheol in January 1987, the pan-national demand for constitutional reform allowing direct elections intensified. In response, under the pretext of resolving political turmoil, the Chun Doo-hwan regime enforced the "April 13 Measure to Defend the Constitution," banning all discussions on constitutional revision and declaring a transfer of power under the existing indirect election system. However, this measure provoked public outrage and ultimately served as the direct catalyst that sparked the June Democratic Uprising. Amidst this political climate, the Catholic Church's stance in observing the 7th anniversary of the Gwangju Resistance took on an unprecedented significance. In the case of the Archdiocese of Seoul, following a notice published in the May 11, 1986 issue of the Seoul Weekly Bulletin regarding a "Memorial Mass for the May Gwangju Righteous Uprising" organized by the Youth Federation at the Myeongdong Cathedral Cultural Center, a memorial Mass marking the 7th anniversary of the May 18 Uprising was held the following year on May 18, 1987, at Myeongdong Cathedral, presided over by Cardinal Stephen Kim (Yoon 2012, pp. 18–19). At this Mass, jointly hosted by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Korea and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Seoul, over 2,000 believers were in attendance, and more than 50 priests concelebrated. Through his homily, the cardinal urged those responsible for the May 18 Gwangju Resistance to confess their sins before the nation, emphasizing that "the Gwangju Incident is the *han*[4] of the nation and the *han* of history." In particular, the exposure of the truth through the statement, "The Truth about the Torture and Death of Park Jong-cheol Was Fabricated," issued at this Mass by the CPAJ, ignited a fierce explosion of the public's boiling anger, serving as the decisive catalyst that led to the June Democratic Uprising (Pastoral Institute for Joy and Hope 2001, pp. 202–207). On the evening of the same day, the

4 In Korean culture, *han* represents a complex emotional state encompassing deep-seated sorrow, unavenged injustice, and a collective sense of tragic loss. In the context of modern Korean history, it often embodies the internalized trauma and unresolved anguish of the people against oppressive power.

Archdiocese of Gwangju offered a memorial Mass for the 7th anniversary of the Gwangju Incident at Nam-dong Catholic Church. Presided over by Archbishop Victorinus Youn Kong-hi and concelebrated by over 40 priests, the Mass was attended by more than 3,000 believers, including bereaved families. In his subsequent homily, Archbishop Youn consoled the bereaved families and the injured of the Gwangju Resistance, while stressing that what could heal and sublimate the trials of the uprising was the "establishment of democracy and civilian rule." He also strongly criticized the "April 13 Measure" for betraying the national consensus and aspirations. During the second part of the memorial ceremony held immediately after the Mass, the priests' council of the Archdiocese of Gwangju marked the 7th anniversary by declaring that true democratization is only possible through the united actions of the people, adopting a seven-point resolution. Through this, they forcefully demanded comprehensive democratization, including constitutional reform for direct elections and a signature campaign, the unconditional release of prisoners of conscience, the condemnation of torture and violence, the abolition of the Basic Press Act, and moral accountability from the United States for the Gwangju massacre. Meanwhile, on May 17, the Diocese of Wonju offered a one-day fasting prayer at each parish, and the Archdiocese of Daegu held a 7th-anniversary Mass at Beomeo Cathedral, concelebrated by over 20 diocesan priests and priests from the Order of Friars Minor Conventual, with more than 500 believers in attendance. The Diocese of Incheon held a "Prayer Meeting for the Memorial of the Souls of Gwangju and the Aspiration for Democratization" across its parishes from the 17th to the 24th, and offered a memorial Mass at Dapdong Cathedral on the evening of the 20th under the auspices of the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission. The Diocese of Andong also celebrated Sunday Masses in all its parishes with the intention of praying for the peaceful repose of the souls of those sacrificed in the Gwangju Incident, and the Diocese of Jeju offered a "Memorial Mass for the 7th Anniversary of the Gwangju Incident and Prayer Meeting for National Salvation" on the evening of May 18 at its cathedral, Jungang Cathedral, hosted by the diocesan CPAJ (*The Catholic Times* 1987).

3. Visualizing the Truth: Publication of Documentary Materials and Utilization of Visual Media

Along with the aforementioned initiatives for fact-finding and memorial solidarity, multifaceted endeavors for "visualizing the truth" were undertaken within the Church to expose the atrocities of Gwangju by actively utilizing visual media such as photographs and videos, as well as publishing related sourcebooks. In May 1985, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju collected materials related to the Catholic Church's activities for the 5th anniversary of the Gwangju Resistance and published *Gwangju Uprising Sourcebook: Focusing on the Activities of the Catholic Church*. This sourcebook was also distributed to the Jeonju

region through Father Paulus Mun Kyu-hyun of the Diocese of Jeonju. Subsequently, by 1989, six sourcebooks and related videotapes were produced, including *O Gwangju, The Cross of Our Nation: Focusing on the Activities of the Catholic Church*, *If That Day in May Comes Again* (Photo Sourcebook), *Survey of Gwangju Citizens' Social Consciousness: Focusing on the Gwangju People's Resistance*, *From May to Unification: Hong Seong-dam's May Resistance Documentary Woodcuts and Kim Jun-tae's Poems*, and *Resistance and Contemplation: Archbishop Youn Kong-hi and Priests' Testimonies of the May Resistance*. Archbishop Youn and the priests of the Archdiocese of Gwangju published *Resistance and Contemplation: Archbishop Youn Kong-hi and Priests' Testimonies of the May Resistance* in 1989, testifying to the atrocities in Gwangju during the May 18 Resistance that they had witnessed firsthand as priests. Additionally, Father Pius Cho Chul-hyun published *Priest's Testimony: A World That Does Not Believe Even When Told the Truth* in 1994 (Yoon 2002, pp. 253–254). The Korean Catholic Church published collections of testimonies and oral accounts on three occasions: in 1989, 2006, and 2012. The 1989 sourcebook was composed entirely of the testimonies of priests, recording statements from the time of the Gwangju Resistance and immediately following it. The 2006 sourcebook contains many oral accounts from lay believers and staff, while the 2012 sourcebook includes those from priests outside the Gwangju and Jeonnam regions (Jung 2013, pp. 30–31).

The first instance of utilizing visual media as an activity to disseminate the truth about the Gwangju Resistance was the planning of the "5.18 Uprising Resource Center" hosted by the Gwangju Democratic Youth Council in November 1984, but this initiative was thwarted by the authorities' suppression. Subsequently, the photo exhibition held at Myeongdong Cathedral was where visual media effectively yielded tangible results in disseminating the truth. The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission held the "Gwangju People's Resistance Photo Exhibition" on the first floor of the cathedral's Cultural Center from May 17 to 27, 1986. Displayed at this photo exhibition were 60 photographs taken by citizens during the May 18 uprising and over 40 photographs related to people's movements after May 18, such as demonstrations by workers and farmers (Jung 2013, p. 31). Meanwhile, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju determined that securing videos and images of the May 18 uprising was an urgent priority for uncovering the truth, and undertook the collection of materials. They requested materials from priests who had served as the director of visual media for the Order of Saint Benedict or the Director of Amnesty International Korea, as well as photojournalists in the Gwangju area at the time. However, they initially faced difficulties in securing the materials. Under such circumstances, black-and-white film was provided by reporter Na Kyung-taek of the *Jeonnam Maeil Shinmun* in Gwangju, and color photographs published in a German magazine during the Gwangju Uprising were provided by Father Albertus Chang Yong-ju, who had returned from Germany. Having acquired copies of reporter Na's black-and-white film and Father Chang's color photographs,

the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju held a May 18 photo exhibition on the 2nd floor of the Gwangju Catholic Center on May 12, 1986. This exhibition was also held in Busan in early June, where many citizens witnessed the reality of the violence committed by the new military junta. The ripple effect of the exhibition was significant, and it became a major driving force for citizens in places like Gwangju and Busan to participate in large-scale demonstrations during the June Democratic Struggle the following year. In 1987, along with the aforementioned 7th-anniversary memorial events by diocese, activities to make the truth known using various visual media were carried out across multiple regions, going beyond religious rituals. Beginning with the Diocese of Incheon hosting performances of the *madang-geuk*[5] "Beyond Death" and a four-district touring photo and art exhibition, the Archdiocese of Daegu and the Diocese of Jeonju also consecutively held documentary photo exhibitions and video screenings immediately following their memorial Masses, vividly conveying the truth about Gwangju to the public (*The Catholic Times* 1987).

Encouraged by the citizens' response to the photo exhibition, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju planned the publication of a photo book around the time the June Resistance was unfolding. After the June 29 Declaration, taking advantage of the somewhat relaxed atmosphere, they produced the first edition of 25,000 copies of the photo book *If That Day in May Comes Again*. To avoid surveillance by the authorities, they purchased a bookbinding machine themselves, continued production through repeated night shifts, and covered the production costs with financial support from priests in Busan, Seoul, Suwon, and elsewhere. Completed around September 1987, the photo book was distributed through Catholic churches nationwide, widely circulated amidst an explosive response, and subsequently reprinted several times. Alongside the publication of the photo book, the Catholic Church's relentless and fierce efforts to make the truth known through video documentaries also continued. In early 1987, Father Albertus Chang of Gyerim-dong Catholic Church risked danger to bring a 40-minute special video on the Gwangju Uprising produced by the North German Broadcasting (NDR) into the country through three detour routes. This video was composed based on documentary footage shot in Gwangju by Jürgen Hinzpeter, a reporter for the Association of Public Broadcasting Corporations in the Federal Republic of Germany (ARD). To overcome technical difficulties such as the difference in broadcasting systems between Germany and South Korea, conversion work was carried out secretly at the Sewoon Arcade in Seoul. It was then supplemented with materials

5 *Madang-geuk* (open-air theater) is a traditional Korean theatrical form characterized by satire and active audience participation. During the 1970s and 1980s, it was widely utilized as a vital cultural medium in the pro-democracy and grassroots (*minjung*) movements to criticize oppressive regimes and raise political awareness among the public.

from NHK and the BBC, and with the insertion of Hangul subtitles, the nation's first May 18 videotape was completed. Mass-duplicated on the sixth floor of the Gwangju Catholic Center, over 5,000 copies of this video were produced in Gwangju alone and also distributed overseas. Eliciting an immense response that surpassed the impact of the photo book, it was widely screened at major Catholic churches and student districts nationwide leading up to the 1987 presidential election race (Yang-nae Kim 2019).

Concluding Remarks

Efforts to uncover the truth about the May 18 Gwangju Popular Uprising were incorporated into the public sphere through the opposition party's proposal for a parliamentary fact-finding resolution in 1985 and the May 18 parliamentary hearings in 1988. A full-scale historical re-examination of the event materialized in the late 1990s. In particular, the enactment of the Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, etc. in 1995 was a significant achievement brought about by the persistent demands of civil society. Initially, the prosecution's decision not to indict the new military junta sparked public outrage. As strong public opinion led to the enactment of the Special Act, a decisive legal foundation was established to judicially punish key figures of the new military junta who had destroyed the constitutional order. Amidst this current of truth-finding, the CPAJ and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Gwangju publicly released a petition with over 120,000 signatures in September 1995, urging the enactment of the Special Act. Clergy, religious, and laypeople from all 14 dioceses of the Catholic Church in Korea participated extensively in the signature campaign that preceded this. They visited the Speaker of the National Assembly, delivered the collected signature roster and the legislative petition, and strongly urged the enactment of the law. The participation of all dioceses nationwide in the petition suggests a shift in the Catholic Bishops' Conference's perception of the May 18 Uprising, while simultaneously demonstrating that Catholic believers embraced it as a universal agenda transcending regional issues. Subsequently, in 1997, May 18 was designated as a statutory national commemorative day, officially recognizing its legitimacy as a democratization movement. Following the designation of those involved as persons of distinguished service to democratization in 2001, former President Kim Dae-jung, who had been sentenced to death for charges including conspiracy to commit rebellion, was acquitted in 2004. Furthermore, in 2011, documentary heritage related to the May 18 Uprising was inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, establishing it as a global human rights heritage. Notably, this documentary heritage included a large number of testimonies and statements proactively collected by the Catholic Church at the time, adding to its historical value. Today, amidst efforts to counter attempts by some to distort history, discussions are underway to include the

spirit of May 18 in the preamble to the Constitution. Thus, the historical significance of the May 18 Democratization Movement continues to deepen and expand as a universal norm sustaining South Korean democracy (Yoon 2012, pp. 28–35).

The Catholic Church in Korea largely maintained a politically conservative stance prior to the 1970s due to the severe persecution it endured during its settlement process as a foreign religion. However, in the late 1960s, embracing the teachings of the Second Vatican Council—which declared that "it is the legitimate duty of the Church to engage in social issues and pass moral judgments on the political order"—the Church awakened to its role as a religious community pursuing national and social justice, embarking on a path of full-scale active engagement with reality. Consequently, under the authoritarian military regimes from the 1970s through the Fifth Republic, the Church served as a shield for a violently oppressed civil society and the socially marginalized. Through continuous prayer meetings and the issuance of statements, it directly criticized the abuse of state power, and took the lead in advocating for prisoners of conscience and political prisoners falsely accused of pro-communist activities, thereby defending human dignity and freedom. This proactive praxis and the massive organizational network of the Church bestowed firm moral legitimacy upon the existing anti-regime resistance movements, which had been centered around students and a minority of intellectuals, serving as a decisive foundation for building broad social solidarity. It also contributed significantly to elevating the universal values of "human rights" and "social justice"—which had been buried under the ideologies of economic development and national security—into social norms.

Viewed within this historical context, the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980 was not only a crucial catalyst for the democratization movement but also a grave and painful litmus test measuring the "practical duty of religion to realize social justice against state violence." At the time, the Catholic Church in the Gwangju area actively resisted the oppression of the new military junta in solidarity with the suffering of the citizens, but this praxis had a distinct limitation in that it remained an isolated effort at the level of the Archdiocese of Gwangju, the birthplace of the uprising. Of course, the Diocese of Jeonju and some priests, including Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan, actively sought solidarity with Gwangju. Even so, despite Gwangju's desperate pleas urging a joint response at a pan-ecclesial level, the vast majority of the Catholic Church in Korea, including the Catholic Bishops' Conference, turned a blind eye to the tragedy and consistently maintained a passive silence. Post-uprising responses also unfolded largely under the leadership of the Archdiocese of Gwangju for some time. Even amidst this initial isolation, through events such as the Busan US Cultural Center Arson Incident, the pain of Gwangju gradually came to be recognized as a communal task that Korean society and the entire Church had to shoulder together, which became the practical groundwork for the Catholic Church to take a deep interest in and participate in a wide range of social issues in the late

1980s. Consequently, the Gwangju Uprising demands profound introspection as a historical event that simultaneously revealed the weight and the limitations of practical solidarity in the course of a religious community pursuing national and social justice. Such reflection on past limitations poses a profound question for us today regarding how the Church should quietly and steadily partake in the communal tasks of our society, while remembering the historical significance of May 18, which has established itself as a universal norm sustaining South Korean democracy.

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