

A Fruitful Leadership of Raymond and Mariella Provost

Moo-jin Jeong & Jun-ki Chung

Institute for PietatisTheologia Kwangshin University

36, Yangsantaekjiso-ro, Buk-gu, Gwangju-gwangyoksi, South Korea, 61027

Corresponding Author: Jun-ki Chung, Email: junkichung@gmail.com

The Authors:

1). Dr. Moo-jin Jeong teaches "History of Christian Thought," Department of Church History, Kwangshin University.

2). Dr. Jun-ki Chung, Head Researcher at Institute for Pietatis Theologia, Kwangshin University. He also serves as a reviewer of SCI journal articles published in the US.

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ABSTRACT:

A leader is someone who possesses the necessary qualities to both attract loyal followers and to give them direction in life. Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan are often cited as examples of leaders who not only were great politicians and military strategists but were also responsible for destruction which cost many people their lives. While their leadership deserves recognition in political and military spheres, a closer look at their spiritual leadership shows it to be problematic. A true leader in the spiritual sense is one who protects the lives of his or her followers with peace and reconciliation, not destruction. This paper intends to showcase a true leader, by studying Raymond and Mariella Provost, a 20th-century missionary couple to South Korea.

Key words: Christian, education, leadership, Mariella, Raymond, Provost, Korea

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century Korea faced a difficult time socially and politically. Following the rise of Western imperialism at the end of the 19th century, Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and ruled her ruthlessly for 36 years (Seok, et al., 2021). In 1945 Korea became independent from Japan, but it was unable to unite itself as a single nation and thus divided into North and South Korea. The entire Korean Peninsula was then largely destroyed by the Korean Civil War (1950-1953), instigated by North Korea. This war resulted in more than 200,000 widows, 100,000 orphans, and over 10 million separated families (Seon & Chung, 2021). At this time, a missionary couple, Mariella and Raymond Provost, entered into the suffering of Koreans by serving them as spiritual teachers

and friends. Through their service local children had the opportunity to receive a democratic education, and under their care many orphans began new lives.

We need to be careful when referring to the Provosts as leaders because they are not world history-changing political or military leaders like Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan (Bentley, et al., 2015; Bowden, 2014; Freeman, 2014). Leaders who changed world history by moving their armies have carried out horrific acts such as genocide. However, because these leaders made contributions such as enabling the exchange of Eastern and Western cultures, repairing roads, and raising the level of education, scholars emphasize their achievements and minimize their ruthlessness. The leader image put forth in this paper,

however, is based on a Christian perspective. A leader in Christianity is a person who carefully follows the life and leadership of Jesus. Jesus summarized his leadership in John 10:10: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (NIV). Jesus enabled his followers to live an abundant life. The abundant life of which he spoke points to an eternal, transcendent realm rather than mere material abundance or pleasure (Colossians 3:2–3; Matthew 6:25–32). Theologically, this is called *eternal life* and *salvation from sin* (John 17:3). However, Jesus’ teaching does not mean that we should ignore earthly life and long only for eternity in heaven. We humans are flesh-and-blood beings, and our lives on earth are very important. Abundant life on earth is demonstrated by the attributes of “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Christian leaders must additionally ensure continual enrichment of their followers rather than temporary gratification alone; they must not only give bread to hungry persons but also teach them how to obtain their own sustenance. It is easy to give a fish, but it is more difficult to help others become self-reliant by teaching them how to catch a fish for themselves.

In this study we will focus on Mariella and Raymond Provost’s orphan ministry and education projects as well as their relationships with other individuals and institutions within the Christian community. We will examine not only their methods of serving and attitudes toward Koreans but also the broader spiritual and social implications of their leadership.

ORPHAN MINISTRY OF RAYMOND AND MARIELLA PROVOST

Raymond Provost (1919-1997) studied theology in the United States at Princeton Theological Seminary and was sent to Korea as a missionary in 1948 by the American Northern Presbyterian Church (Park, 2014). As part of his mission work he taught English and chemistry at Yonsei University, where he developed a strong passion for raising future leaders through education. His wife, Mariella

(1923-2014), was the youngest daughter of John V. N. Talmage (1884-1964), a first-generation missionary sent to Korea by the American Southern Presbyterian Church. She was born in Gwangju, South Korea, and grew up with children from the Jeonnam region. When she returned to Korea after graduating from the College of Nursing at Queen’s University in Charlotte, North Carolina, she ministered in Jeonju, Jeollabuk-do. During the Korean War, Mariella met and married Raymond Provost and relocated her mission field to Gyeongsang Province, where he was working. There the couple collaborated with World Vision, a non-profit relief organization that helped thousands of orphans and war widows who had lost their husbands on the front lines of battle. There were countless orphans who were helped by this couple specifically, and we will discuss a few examples below.

Pastor Dong-seong Cho

Dong-sung Cho was an orphan who came to South Korea alone to escape the war in North Korea when he was 11 years old (Provost, 2013: 183-185). Following his arrival in South Korea he spent 18 months living a miserable life as a beggar. Fortunately, he made his way to an orphanage run by a local church in Daegu. There Cho met Missionary Raymond, who helped him finish secondary school. Cho then went to the United States and, with the help of the Raymond family, studied theology and became a pastor. When he returned to Korea, he married an orphan girl from a background similar to his own and started a family. He and his wife have settled in Florida, USA, and are helping Koreans who immigrate there.

Pastor Gap-yong Pak

Kap-yong Pak was born in a mountainous area of Korea. His mother passed away early in his life and his father remarried shortly thereafter. When Pak contracted smallpox and became blind his stepmother persuaded his father to take him to the city of Jeonju and throw him away, declaring him useless. Pak met the Provost couple at the government orphanage where the police had taken him following the abandonment. The couple taught the hymn

"Jesus Loves Me" to the orphans at this orphanage, and it was the first time Pak had ever heard of someone who loved him. He began to love Jesus, who loved an abandoned blind man in the Bible--just like Pak--with all his heart. His greatest source of happiness became going to church to worship and sing praises. The Provosts sent Pak to a school for the disabled so that he could read the Bible in Braille and sing hymns, and later they helped him further his education by sending him to a seminary so that he could become a pastor. In addition, they introduced him to a strong Christian woman who would become his wife and they have since then built a church amongst the disabled. Mariella once testified:

I went to Taegu and attended Pak's church during one of my visits back to Korea after Ray and I had returned to the States. The church was in one room on the third floor with no elevator. There were several pews. It was a moving experience for me to see Pak preaching from Braille notes, listening to the choir who sang from Braille hymnals; and watching blind deacons pick up the offering. As I sat there among Pak's special congregation, my mind kept going back to how God had blessed so many through a little blind boy who had been thrown away because he was of no value to his parents (Provost, 2013: 190).

Pastor Ki-dae Kim

Ki-dae Kim, a disabled orphan with polio, lived in an orphanage in Pohang. Since he could not walk he could not go to school. After she learned of his condition Mariella collected donations from her supporters in the United States to send Kim to World Vision Hospital for several surgeries and subsequent treatment. With her help Kim later graduated from Gyeongju Moon Wha High School, which Raymond was running at that time. He then went through seminary and devoted himself to the ministry and welfare of the disabled (Provost, 2013: 193-195).

Bong-kwon Lee, Chairman of Seohee Construction

Bong-kwon Lee was born in Pyongyang in 1945, the only son in a wealthy family. When

North Korea became communist following its liberation from Japan, Lee's Christian family fled to South Korea in search of religious freedom. However, since his grandmother was unable to come to South Korea his father went north himself to bring her. Then the Korean war broke out and there was no news from his father, who was supposed to return within three months. Lee thus became the head of the household at a young age. He was old enough to go to an elementary school, but he had to work hard farming to support the family. Because he attended a church, however, he was different from the other farming children. Through the church Lee learned how to read and write Korean, but he was not satisfied with this level of knowledge. His mother could not allow her son's enthusiasm for education to be wasted. She eventually visited Mariella to ask her to take responsibility for her son's education, saying that she was ill and unable to care for him. Mariella sent Lee's mother to a hospital in Daegu for treatment while Raymond sent Lee to live in Moon Hwa School's dormitory to finish his high school education. Lee then went on to successfully complete his university education in Pohang as a scholarship student (Provost, 2013: 197-198). He is currently head of Seohee Construction and is working hard at a local housing association project. His company avoids competition from large corporations and seeks markets with relatively low costs and risk, particularly in the construction of churches, hospitals, schools, and broadcasting stations. He has personally contributed to development funds at several universities to improve the educational environment of students and to create scholarships for North Korean defectors. In 2012 Lee donated 100 million won to the Gyeongbuk Social Welfare Community Chest because, as he says, the ultimate goal of company management is to contribute to society beyond the simple realization of profits (Lee, 2020). As their influence grows, today's companies are expected to actively participate in solving social issues such as quality of life and environmental problems. The idea is that businesses give back to the society that contributes to their growth rather than using their successes only for the benefit of specific individuals and companies. By prioritizing

right management that adheres to honesty and proper principles and actively participating in solving social problems a company becomes increasingly respected by society. Since April 2005, Lee's company has been working in Pohang and Gwangyang Province to lend courage and hope to neighbors in need and to practice "sharing management." It has also actively engaged in the "Repair the House of Love" project. Lee sees these actions as a means of repaying the kindness of all who have supported him throughout the years and is further motivated by the example of Raymond and Mariella Provost. He remembers the grace of God that paved the way for him to study during the most difficult time of his life and, as a result, has planned to help boys and girls who should continue their studies and develop their talents despite poor conditions (Lee, 2020).

EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY OF RAYMOND AND MARIELLA PROVOST

In 1960, the Provost couple went to Daechon Beach to take a break from the hot and humid summer climate. Representatives of Gyeongdong Presbytery approached them and asked if they could run a school in Gyeongju. This school was connected to the Korean Presbyterian Church's Kyungdong Presbytery and was about to close. After receiving such an unexpected request, Raymond sent the representatives away so that he could consider and pray about the matter. However, the representatives returned a few days later and tried to persuade him more aggressively. Raymond concluded that their motives were valid and decided to take over the school. As we have mentioned, Raymond had previously taught English at Yonsei University. While there, he felt the need for the development of a new educational system. This new system would not be like the traditional infusion-type education in Korea. Instead, it would be a democratic education in which teachers and students would communicate and learn from each other. This kind of education was beginning to take shape in the metropolitan area centering on Seoul, but education in the rural areas was still very poor. Raymond's earlier desire to transform the system grew

into a conviction that this school should be used to train leaders suitable for the new era, and as a result the couple soon moved their ministry from Daegu to Gyeongju to take it over. It became a prestigious Christian school, today still known as Gyeongju Moon Wha School.

There were a number of difficulties in taking over the school. First of all, an enormous amount of money was needed to support it. It was also challenging to find the people who could manage the school's finances and the teachers who would teach the students. However, a gift of \$1,000 from a Presbyterian church in San Diego, California, greatly encouraged the Provosts and motivated them to begin a fundraising campaign that would actively approach American donors. In addition, forty-five Korean Presbyterian churches under the Gyeongdong Presbytery contributed to its sponsorship. At least 100 students were needed to run the school, and after the Provosts invited the orphans they had helped in the Pohang area to enroll if they were able there were about 50. However, by the time the school opened in October 1960 with Missionary Raymond as its principal 250 students were registered. While teaching the Ministry of Education's regular curriculum the school freely held worship services and conducted Bible classes. Above all, it provided an excellent educational opportunity to rural boys and girls in difficult circumstances. Once the school's operation was stable, Missionary Raymond handed over the principalship to Elder Young-nae Choi, who had been his student at Yonsei University in 1948. Before doing so, the two became co-workers so that the transition of management would be smooth. Choi did not disappoint the Provost couple's expectations. The school grew and developed into a prestigious institution with more than 1,500 students. As of 2019, Moon Hwa Middle School had graduated 17,417 students and Moon Hwa High School had produced 20,787 graduates (Park, 2014). In 1965 Raymond returned to the United States, where he became the senior pastor of the Church of Straits in Machinaw, Michigan. While serving in the American church the Provosts created the Korea Scholarship Foundation, a non-profit organization for Korean students in need.

In doing so they continued to help poor and needy Koreans until they retired to Black Mountain, North Carolina.

As a result of his service and educational activities, the Korean government awarded Raymond the Moran Order of the National Merit on September 29, 1982 (Jeong, 2020: 95). Missionary Raymond passed away in February 1997 in Black Mountain, North Carolina, USA. As he had requested in his will, his ashes were buried in a garden behind Gyeongju Moon Hwa High School, the place he loved deeply and served passionately. Missionary Mariella died on April 15, 2014 in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

An inscription on Raymond's tomb reads:

Here is a man who dedicated his life to practicing the love of Christ for Korea, a foreign land. He is missionary Raymond Provost. Immediately after [Korean] liberation [from Japan], he set foot on this earth as a young soldier in a time of indescribably difficult and turbulent times. He deeply realized God's mission and studied theology at Princeton, then became a missionary and returned to Korea. His missionary and educational work for Kyungdong Presbytery and Moon Hwa School started from this time, and until February 18, 1997, when God called, this activity never stopped. In particular, his constant fundraising campaign and scholarship work for our [school] became the cornerstone of today's Moon Hwa School. The things that opened the way for students testify to all of this . . . His heart was always filled with nostalgia for Gyeongju and passionate love for our Moon Hwa School, but while living on this earth, he left nothing for himself other than traces of love. He truly became the eternal supporter and teacher of the Moon Hwa School, teaching us all personally the wisdom of putting the love of Christ into practice. Accordingly, the Moon Hwa School and the Gyeongdong Presbytery of the Korean Presbyterian Church were opened to honor his love and devotion that transcends borders by providing a home in a warm place, a garden of culture that he could not forget in his dream, by fulfilling his wish to be buried in Korean soil. This monument is erected on a significant

day for the 52nd anniversary (Jeong, 2020: 95).

PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY

We will now examine the Provost's partnership in ministry more closely, focusing specifically on their collaboration with the family of Billy Graham, the greatest revivalist of the 20th century (Choi, 2020). When Pastor Graham visited Korea during the Korean War he asked Missionary Raymond to accompany him as a guide and photographer. After learning that Pastor Graham was especially interested in the early-morning prayers that took place in Korean churches, Raymond brought him to a refugee church in a mountainous area. The early-morning prayers took place in a poor structure with only a temporarily-covered roof. When the Korean believers arrived on the January morning when Pastor Graham visited they knelt down on the temporary rug and prayed aloud for themselves and for the nation. Upon witnessing this gathering he was greatly moved, realizing that prayer such as this was the spiritual source of the Yeouido meeting, the largest meeting in his entire ministry. Pastor Graham would later repay the kindness of Raymond and other missionaries sent to Korea through the American Southern Presbyterian Church by helping to establish a spiritual retreat and place of rejuvenation for its retired missionaries called Montreat. Located in Black Mountain, North Carolina, its name is an abbreviation of 'Mountain and Retreat,' signifying rest in the mountain. Pastor Graham was also able to visit North Korea in 1992 thanks to the fact that his wife had attended Pyongyang Foreign School (with Mariella Provost) in the early 1930s. While there he met President Il-sung Kim and received a warm welcome. His second visit to North Korea the following year helped establish the Eugene Bell Foundation later, which opened a door in helping to treat North Korean tuberculosis patients.

IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR LEADERSHIP

Overcoming Alienation

From a Christian standpoint, the fundamental human problem begins with alienation.

Genesis 3 in the *Old Testament* of the Bible describes the root of this alienation as a fracture in the relationship between humans and God. God created human beings and gave them the privilege of managing this world so that they could live fulfilling and happy lives. However, this privilege was contingent on their obedience to God—namely by not eating the fruit that God had forbidden them to consume. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, sought equality with God by consuming this fruit and thus disobeying God's command. The Bible defines this wrongful desire for the position of God as sin. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, God and humans were alienated from each other. Alienation and conflict also began to occur between humans. The purpose of Jesus' work and death on the cross was to resolve the alienation that humans could never fix themselves. Applying the death of Jesus to our own lives means taking up the cross daily and dying to ourselves. Those who maturely practice this form of death are truly followers of Jesus and have the qualifications to be called leaders.

Raymond and Mariella Provost can therefore be called leaders because of their continual "death" to themselves. Raymond was a missionary sent to Korea by the American Northern Presbyterian Church while Mariella was sent from the American Southern Presbyterian Church. Although both were sent to Korea from the same country and under the name "Presbyterian Church," the denominations to which they belonged were distinct politically, socially and theologically (Jeong, 2021). Historically, the Northern Presbyterian Church was politically and religiously open-minded while economically supporting urban-centered industrialization. During the American Civil War (1861-1865) it also participated in Lincoln's abolition of slavery. At that time northern regions needed a lot of labor to support their rapid urbanization and industrialization, but high volumes of immigrants from Europe meant that slave labor was unnecessary. The agricultural society of the southern United States, however, was more conservative. The existence of white society was in jeopardy without slave labor. These conflicts and distinctions between the northern and southern United States still have

not been completely resolved (Jeong, 2021). However, even though Raymond and Mariella were sent to Korea by these two distinct traditions they did not bring American issues to Korea. By understanding and loving each other, they resolved theological, political, and social problems faced by the United States while serving on the mission field.

Also deserving of attention is the early mission place of Mariella. She was born and raised in Gwangju, Korea, and spent her childhood with Korean friends. She studied secondary education at Pyongyang Foreign School with children of missionaries working in Korea (Choi, 2014). Mariella then went to the United States to study nursing at Queen's University in North Carolina. She became a registered nurse after completing a five-year course involving two years of theoretical education and three years of practical hospital training. Then, in order to be a missionary, she completed a one-year general assembly course at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia--part of the American Southern Presbyterian Church that would later send her to Korea. She began her ministry in Korea as a nurse at Jeonju Jesus Hospital with her sister Janet, who was also born and raised in Gwangju, South Jeolla Province. Although Mariella was a white American woman she was immersed in Jeolla culture and thought due to having been raised in and later serving in the same region. However, after marrying Raymond she joined his ministry in the Gyeongsang area. Korea has historically had a very uncomfortable relationship between the Gyeongsang and Jeolla regions. The conflict escalated when the Silla Kingdom in the Gyeongsang region unified the Baekje Kingdom in the Jeolla region by military force in the 7th century. The tension has still not completely disappeared. Suddenly Mariella was faced with the need to "kill" her Jeolla identity in order to become a friend and co-worker to the people of the Gyeongsang region. With humility and gentleness she erased this identity and served the people of the Gyeongsang region well, a powerful symbol of overcoming the alienation between these two regions. Her example provides hope for the possibility of South and North Korea someday forsaking each other's differences and achieving unification based on

mutual trust and forgiveness.

Disciplinary Leadership

Raymond and Mariella devoted their lives to helping Korean orphans and youth in the politically and economically unstable conditions during and after the Korean War. Since they could not help everyone in need at once, an appropriate method of training had to be adopted to develop more leaders. Although this training method took a lot of time and economic resources to build, in the end it bore a lot of fruit. Based on Jesus' training of the 12 disciples, it created leaders such as the previously-mentioned Pastor Gap-yong Pak and Chairman Bong-gwan Lee, who helped those experiencing suffering similar to their own. Raymond's image of a good leader was further reflected in the selection of a successor for his school ministry. If good successors are not selected, institutions-- kingdoms, governments, companies, and schools, for example--are doomed to disappear. Therefore, it is essential to develop people who will eventually lead the institution well. Raymond took over the dying Moon Hwa School and brought it to a position of stability through excellent management. Later, as he had greatly desired, he successfully passed its leadership to the former student from Yonsei University that he had trained. This pupil, Choi, worked alongside Raymond at the school as his boss and friend for a long time before taking it over. Although in the past it was said that bosses cannot be friends, this theory has recently been challenged:

The old school of leadership will tell you that leaders and bosses can't be friends because it may lead to favoritism. The new school of leadership says there is a way to be friends without compromising relationships or undermining alliances. Leadership is all about relationships—the connections we make, the friendships we create. So how can friendship and leadership coexist? In fact, the two types of relationships have more in common than you'd expect. Here are some of the shared traits: **Altruism.** Like friendship, true leadership involves selflessness and concern for the well-being of another. It may mean putting your people ahead of yourself, looking out for the

other person, or acting in a way that benefits another. It comes down to bringing out the best in those you lead and befriend. **Loyalty.** Both friendship and leadership are about devotion. Allegiance and faithfulness call for us to be steadfast and dependable. Loyalty requires responsibility and commitment. **Honesty.** Like friendship, true leadership having integrity, encouraging others to speak up and tell their truth. It means expecting leaders to be honest and frank (although never unkind) with their feedback and communication. When we are able to communicate honestly, we are holding up a mirror to each other that makes for the best leadership and friendship. **Trust.** Like friendship, true leadership trust means having confidence in each other, the faith that if anything goes wrong you will be there for each other, and the certainty that no matter how much you err or fail you will never be left behind. Trust in leadership and friendship gives us someone to rely on. **Reciprocity.** Like friendship, true leadership is a give and take. It reflects the practice of sharing and exchanging, knowing how to give and take with generosity. **Compassion.** Both friendship and leadership bring concerns about the suffering of others. It's an attitude that calls us to reach out when there needs to be a listening ear and to be open when there needs to be understanding—all with sympathy, warmth, and kindness. Great leadership involves respect and great friendship involves tenderness; both open our hearts to others (Daskal, 2021).

Leadership in Connection with Other Leaders

Raymond and Mariella had a deep and personal relationship with the family of Billy Graham, the greatest revivalist of the 20th century. Although it could be said that their relationship began because Mariella was a peer of Pastor Graham's wife while attending Pyongyang Foreign School, the Provost's wonderful personalities are likely what enabled its deeper development. Raymond introduced Pastor Graham to Korean Christians who eagerly maintained the practice of early-morning prayer, and after clearly witnessing the importance of prayer in their lives he was more thoroughly prepared for his revival ministry. Eventually Pastor Graham's

interest in and affection for the Korean people enabled him to go to North Korea, and, with the permission of the North Korean ruler Il-sung Kim, help establish the Eugene Bell Foundation so that medical work could be carried out between the two nations.

Universally Valid Leadership

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) of Nazi Germany was once enthusiastically supported by the German people. However, his leadership lacked a universally valid philosophy of human well-being (Dobry, 2006). Under the absurd delusion that Germany would rule the world and essentially create heaven on earth, Hitler left a deep scar on human history. Today the German people, let alone the rest of the world, do not respect or love him. Raymond and Mariella, on the other hand, have been loved and respected by both Korean Christians and Korean citizens in general. This is because the couple loved the Korean people more than most Koreans themselves did at the time. When a boy was abandoned by his family because he was blind and seemingly useless, the couple took him in, educated him as if he were their own son, and helped make him into a good pastor. They helped a lonely boy in an orphanage who could not walk by sending him to a hospital to be treated. The boy then went on to lead a wonderful and happy life. To these Korean orphans, the Provosts were mentors and like genuine parents. Furthermore, Raymond's life was so highly praised that he received the highest medal from the South Korean government. The reason that Missionary Raymond was so respected by the government was not because he was favored as a Christian leader but because he had dedicated himself to the universal value and dignity of humankind by serving the poor and needy (Kim & Chung, 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2021; Go et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

In this study we have investigated the true image of a leader, focusing on an American missionary couple who devotedly worked in South Korea in the mid-20th century. As Christians, they discovered and followed the rich spiritual legacy of the life of Jesus. They

rejoiced in discovering the spirituality of Koreans who prayed earnestly every day without despair, even as Korean society was being ravaged by the Korean War. However, they did not overlook the importance of concrete social reform. Raymond and Mariella made every effort to train Korean leaders who would lead their society despite the difficulties of the time. Because of their dedication, a significant number of leaders was developed in the Gyeongsang region. Even though the leaders they mentored have not made revolutionary changes in all areas of Korean politics, society, or religion, the ministry of Raymond and Mariella should not be underestimated. As a result of their leadership, many Korean lives have been lived more fully. If this kind of peace-loving, dedicated leadership is continually practiced in Korea and in other areas of the world, human life will be more abundant and meaningful across all times and places.

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