



## Darakbang Evangelization Movement in South Korea is Heretical According to Liberal Theologians and Religious Pluralists Perspectives

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to examine the theological perspective used by theologians of South Korean churches who regard the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement (DEM) as a heresy. The problem is that Korean evangelical missionaries in Indonesia and some Indonesian evangelical theologians without conducting their own research are eager to spread the bad news that Darakbang is a heresy. Based on the content analysis method, it was found that DEM was decided by Korean churches to be a heresy based on the perspective of liberal theology and religious pluralism. They do not recognise the inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Jesus, the remnant, the redemptive mission, angelology, satanology and the occult, let alone the worldwide evangelism that Darakbang emphasises, just as Evangelicals and/or Reformed teach. Embarrassingly, some Korean theologians and/or missionaries and Indonesian evangelical theologians use the research results of South Korean liberal and pluralist theologians that are not objective as a weapon to pass judgement on the evangelical and/or Reformed DEM. This paper is an input for evangelical theologians to conduct their own research on the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement from a Reformed and/or evangelical perspective.

**Keywords:** *Darakbang Evangelization Movement; Heretical; Liberal Theologian; Religious Pluralist*

### **Introduction**

Liberal theology and religious pluralism are two streams of Christian theology that emerged in the late modern era. Both reconstruct Christian theology by rejecting orthodox or traditional Christian theology, so that they become another religion that is no longer Christian. (John Gresham Machen, 1974: ix; Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2009:678). Liberal theology is an openness to the results of modern intellectual enquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of reason and individual experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; and its favouring of moral concepts of redemption; and its commitment to making Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people. (Dorrien, 2001: xxiii). Kevin Deyoung lists seven characteristics of liberal theology, namely: (1). True religion is not based on external authority. (2). Christianity is a movement of social reconstruction. (3). Christianity must be credible and relevant. (4). Truth can only be known through changing symbols and forms. (5). Theological controversy is about language, not about truth. (6). The historical accuracy of biblical facts and events is not important, as long as we encounter Jesus within the

pages of the Bible. (7). True religion is the way of Christ, not certain doctrines about Christ (Deyoung, 2017). Thus, it is true that liberal theology is no longer Christianity. R. Albert Mohler Jr. also states that theological liberalism is not Christinity (R. Albert Mohler Jr, 2020).

Religious pluralism is a position that rejects the uniqueness or finality or defining claims of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Pinnock understands the term pluralism as "The position that denies the finality of Jesus Christ and that all other religions have the same way of salvation to God" (Stevri, 2023:659-674). The pluralists' argument builds on the work of liberal theologians. The presupposition of liberal theology is recognised by pluralists that the gospels do not correspond to the historical Jesus. All history is the revelation of God and the history of God's salvation for all (Stevri, 2009: 111-134). From this presupposition, religious pluralists scrutinise the Bible with redaction criticism and conclude that there is a discontinuity between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith, the Gospels are irrelevant testimonies for today. Furthermore, the Bible is understood in terms of anthropology, sociology and psychology; even with canonical criticism they recognise other sources besides the Bible; the text is subject to context; and interpretation is oriented towards social criticism.(Stevri, 2009: 111-134). From the presupposition and interpretation, the result of the pluralist study is the rejection of the authority of the Bible, considered as an ordinary book, not the word of God. Jesus Christ is considered to be just an ordinary man with good morals, who was appointed by God to be one of the ways. All people of any religion are God's people, therefore evangelism is not in the sense of making believers believe in Christ (Nettles, 2024). Based on the results of such pluralist research, religious pluralism is indeed no longer a Christian religion.

Knowing and recognising that both liberal theology and religious pluralism are harmful to Christianity, and that liberal theology is not Christian in the first place, it is no wonder that they are so fundamentally opposed to Reformed and/or evangelical theology (David Wenham, 2008). In general, the theology in many churches and schools of theology has been lost (Ells, 2004: 5). Instead of liberal theology making Christianity relevant, credible, beneficial, and humane, it loses the core of Christianity and cannot actually address the problems of the modern world (Deyoung, 2017). Even R. Albert Mohler Jr. asserts: "We need to realise that theological liberalism is a message of theological death. And there were people who saw this when the liberals first started teaching and preaching - orthodox Christians who understood that theological liberalism was not a new form of Christianity; it was an entirely new religion claiming to be Christianity" (R. Albert Mohler Jr, 2020). Liberal theology has been heavily criticised by progressive Christianity. The thinking and demands of the church today have gone beyond liberal theology (Keith, 2023). Even with the change of era from modern to postmodern, liberal theology has ended or more precisely has died along with the end of the modern worldview which is replaced by a postmodern worldview (David F. Well, 2013: 351; Keith, 2023). But even though liberal theologians have died and stopped conducting and producing research, the research results of past liberal theologians are still referred to by contemporary theologians (Stevri I. Lumintang, 2017: 186-188). Not a few evangelical theologians still use the research results of liberal theologians, because indeed evangelical theology was in a stagnant state at the beginning of this postmodern era (Stevri P. N. I. Lumintang and Benjamin F. Intan, 2022).

In fact, without doing their own research, almost all South Korean missionaries serving in Indonesia are eager to proclaim that the Darakbang Evangelism Movement is a heresy. At the climax, they organised a seminar by inviting a Korean speaker named Tark Ji Il. The theme of the seminar was "Darakbang is a Cult" on 29 February 2024 at Sandol Church, a Korean church in Jakarta (*Seminar Sehari Dari Prof. Tark Ji Il Khusus Para Misionaris Korea Selatan Di Indonesia, Di Gereja Sandol Jakarta Selatan Pada Jumat, 29 Februari 2024*). Tark Ji Il is the editor of the book titled 이단 바로 알기(Heretical Teachings in Brief). This book was translated into Indonesian and widely disseminated so that it not only influenced many pastors and theology lecturers, but also caused unrest and uproar (Tark Ji Il, 2024). The uproar was caused because neither the book nor the seminar speaker (the book's editor) could point out a single heretical doctrine of the Darakbang Evangelism Movement. Nevertheless, the

verbal testimonies of Korean missionaries and the dissemination of the book did not stop. As a result, a number of church pastors and lecturers "jumped on the bandwagon" to judge the Darakbang Evangelism Movement as a heresy, but without conducting their own research. The leaders of twelve theological higher education institutions and associations held a seminar entitled Special Webinar for Theological Lecturers and Church Leaders: Indonesia's Emergency in Danger of Darakbang Heresy on March 22, 2024 (*Flyer Special Webinar Bagi Para Dosen Teologi Dan Pemimpin Gereja: Darurat Indonesia Dalam Bahasa Bidat Darakbang Pada 22 Maret 2024 Diselenggarakan Oleh STT Presbyterian Medan, STT Pelita Kebenaran Medan, STT Misi William Carey Medan, STT Trinity Parapat*). Finally, after the seminar there was an uproar among the leaders of educational institutions and churches in Indonesia, because the speakers could not point out a single doctrine that was considered heretical, and on the other hand, the Korean missionaries remained silent.

In response to the issue of accusations of heresy against individual leaders and the institutions they lead, both in South Korea and Indonesia, several articles have appeared. There is newspaper writing about Darakbang, but even that is written not by theologians but by journalists, political issues not because of heresy, but because of Darakbang's evangelistic movement in China (Wangli, 2021; Lee, 2021). and the subjective testimony of former Darakbang members who left out of bitterness (No Name, 2024) A theologian named Nayong Hwa Kim wrote several titles namely *The Attic Evangelists are Biblical, Atticism is Biblical, the Upper Room Transmission is Biblical* in the Korean Christian Daily, which contained responses to the accusations against Darakbang (Nayong Hwa Kim, 2023). Yong Wha Na, a systematic theologian with a Reformed theological stance defended the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement objectively with a paper entitled *The Theological Position of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement* (Yong Wha Na, 2011: 87-139). Another book written by a publisher named Kwang-sik Yoon with the book title *A Correct Understanding of the Darakbang Evangelism Movement: Darakbang Evangelism is Biblical*. The book is a collection of articles that have been published in Korean Christian Today (Hanguk Kidokilbo). The book begins with Darakbang's confession of faith and then continues with Kwang-su Ryu's answers to questions and accusations from the South Korean Council of Churches (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 1-141).

From all the literature review in the preceding paragraphs, there is a gap in the literature, namely that not a single article on the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement has been written and published in international and national (Indonesian) journals, and none has questioned the theological paradigm or perspective as a measure used by South Korean church leaders in examining and convicting the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement as heresy. That is why this article is urgent and important to study as an attempt to answer the research question: Is it true that the Darakbang Evangelism Movement is judged based on liberal theology and religious pluralism? Starting from the answer to this question, the purpose of this article is to discover the perspective of liberal theology and religious pluralism used by the leaders of South Korean churches who judge and declare Darakbang a heresy. By knowing the perspective of liberal theology and religious pluralism used by those who judge and condemn Darakbang as a heresy, Korean evangelical missionaries in Indonesia and evangelical theologians as lecturers of theological colleges in Indonesia can conduct their own research on the Darakbang Evangelism Movement based on Reformed and/or evangelical perspectives.

## **Method**

To achieve the purpose of this research, the author uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method (Chad Nelson and Robert H. Woods, R.H., 2011: 109-110). The content analysis method is a research technique by drawing conclusions based on the analysis of text or literature content in a written and systematic manner (Stevri & Danik, 2016: 114; K. Krippendorff, 2004). In this case, the researcher analysed the content of the literature of Korean church theologians who assess and condemn the Darakbang Evangelization Movement as heretical. Specifically, this research looks at the congruence

of perspectives in the form of presuppositions and views of liberal and religious pluralist theologians regarding the Darakbang (Elo. S. Kaariainen, M., Kanste, O., Polkki T., Utriainen, K., n.d. 2014). The steps of content analysis research are as follows: selecting texts that are relevant to the purpose of this research and then finding the message of the texts regarding the theological reasons of those both institutional and personal who judge and condemn Darakbang as a heresy and the theological answers from the Darakbang Evangelization Movement (DEM), especially from Ryu Gwang-soo as the founder and president of DEM (Chad Nelson and Robert H. Woods, R.H., 2011: 109). Furthermore, the researcher used two types of categories to classify the units of analysis, namely the similarities between liberal theology and religious pluralism, and Darakbang's theological arguments based on Reformed and/or Evangelical traditions. From this method, the author came up with the main ideas expressed in the following findings and discussion.

## ***Findings and Discussion***

### **1. Background and Definition of Western Liberal Theology and Its Influence in South Korea**

Throughout the modern era, Western theologians have been stimulated to scrutinise biblical sources with historical criticism, pioneered and developed by Liberal theologians. Influenced by the paradigm of modern science, which asserts that everything that is not scientific is pseudo-knowledge, myths and false news (Peters, 2018), from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, liberal theological studies with a modern scientific paradigm emerged (Stevri & Intan, 2022; J.D. Douglas, 1989: 228). They liberated man from faith-based, spiritualised thinking and tried to follow the pattern of modern man who is able to use his reason in biblical research. The early liberal theologians were: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and Adolf Von Harnack (1851-1921) (Packer, 1988). They plus Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth were influenced by these new developments in science and tried to adapt to the paradigms of modern science, especially regarding historical criticism (Zachhuber, 2013). From this historical criticism, the source theory of the Pentateuch was born by Jean Astruc (1684-1766) with his two-source theory; and J.G. Eichhorn (1752-1827) put forward the two-source theory of J (Jehovah) and E (Elohim). In 1853, Hupfield suggested that the Pentateuch came from four sources (Priestly, Elohist, Jahwehistic, Deuteronomistic). This source theory reached its heyday through K.H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen with their work entitled *The Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis* (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2004: 172). As a result, Jesus is no longer seen as the orthodox faith sees him but only in terms of his benefits to humanity and moral ethics. With Higher Criticism, liberal theologians only see Jesus as a moral and useful human being. They discard the essence of Christian faith, namely the divinity and supernatural nature of Jesus, as Albrecht Ritschel (1822-1889) thought (Pierard, 1987: 954; Lumintang, 2021: 57). They discard the spiritual and supernatural aspects of faith.

Liberalism in theology or liberal theology is not a legitimate form of Christianity, but a religion distinct from Christianity (John Gresham Machen, 1974: ix). In other words, liberal theology is not Christian theology. For, liberal theologians seek to reinterpret the symbols of Christianity by creating a progressive religious alternative to atheistic rationalism and a theology based on external authority (Garie Dorrien, 2013). Liberal theology is therefore open to the results of modern intellectual enquiry, the natural and social sciences; upholding the authority of reason and individual experience in accordance with the spirit of the enlightenment. The motto of the enlightenment era was "have the ability to use your own reason" (Brown, 1987: 196-202). Its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life. As such, it strongly favours moral (social) concepts of redemption; and seeks to make Christianity socially relevant to modern people (Hoffecker, 2024). Liberal theology is often identified with modern theology because it is formulated according to and for the modern world and society (Alan G. Padgett, 2003: 3). According to Andrew Hoffecker, liberal theology is rooted in a modern worldview with secular theories of knowledge and the church's participation in society by abandoning orthodox or traditional faith (Hoffecker, 2024).

Liberal theologians seek to adapt Christianity to the context of modern society by stripping away the elements of the Orthodox faith that are the foundation of true Christianity (Lane, 1996: 196). That is why evangelical and/or Reformed theologians are so eager to fight and reject liberal theology.

During the past modern era, liberal theology spread in many countries including South Korea. Churches in South Korea are classified into two groups, namely ethical (national) or Minjung churches with its liberal theology for its socio-political struggle; and evangelical and/or Reformed and Pentecostal churches centred on spiritual struggle including evangelism (Song, 2019: 41-68). The South and North Korean unification movement from the liberal theological camp of South Korean churches resulted in divisions and debates on anti-communism and social responsibility of churches in South Korea, while the conservative churches' movement emphasising evangelism reinforced anti-communism among the South Korean population and hindered Christian discourse for Korean peace and reconciliation (Song, 2019: 104-128). In other words, in Korea there are two patterns of church movements: the socio-political movement championed by theologians and churches that tend to embrace liberal and contemporary theology, and the spiritual-evangelical movement championed by evangelical and/or Reformed theologians and churches, and Pentecostals. Ilmok Kim analysed the relationship between salvation and social justice in Minjung Theology and found that: "Minjung Theology, however, fails to recognise that the source of social evils lies in the human heart, and, thus, to grasp the 'whoneness' of salvation" (I. Kim, 2008). Yong Wha Na, a Reformed theologian states that Minjung Theology is a liberal theological view of the suffering Korean people as an assimilation of Marxism and the Bible (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2004: 389; Yong Wha Na, 2011). In his dissertation, Yong Wha Na states that Minjung Theology's salvation and method are liberation theology models of liberation (Yong Wha Na, 2011) (Na, 1988: 213-230). In other words, churches in South Korea have polarised into two major conflicting groups: churches with a social gospel that emphasises the social responsibility of the church, and churches with a gospel that emphasises spiritual service and world evangelism.

## **2. Similarities of South Korean Liberal Theology and Religious Pluralism Views that Contradict Evangelical and/or Reformed Theology**

From what has been said before, it is reaffirmed that liberal theology rejects the foundation of the Christian faith. Thomas J. Nettles concludes that liberal theology is not Christianity, but rather completely different from Christianity (Nettles, 2024) His conclusion is based on his assessment of liberal theology as follows: Firstly, liberal theology imitates the vocabulary of orthodox Christianity but is actually incompatible with biblical Christianity and lacks the substance of biblical faith. Secondly, liberal theology is incompatible with the biblical doctrine of authority, rejecting the Bible as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, liberal theology claims that the divinity of Christ is irrelevant and meaningless to the modern human mind. Fourthly, human sin must be seen as something separate from our individual will and/or consent to social injustice. Man, in Adam, did not fall from his original goodness, but merely failed to overcome the selfish desires and passions that were already within him. Thus they do not recognise original sin, hereditary sin, atonement and forgiveness of sins nor do they recognise the relationship between sin and Satan. Fifthly, Jesus' death was not for the sake of our redemption, but rather not to be intimidated by these evil social forces. This is the theology for the social Gospel of the liberals. For them, the traditional (orthodox) view is actually irrelevant to the needs of modern man (Nettles, 2024). Starting from the five views of liberal theology, liberal theologians are very much at odds with evangelical and/or reformed theology. R. Albert Mohler Jr. said: "the role liberal theology plays in leading people away from saving, biblical faith" (R. Albert Mohler Jr, 2020).

All the views of liberal theologians expressed earlier are actually the same as those of religious pluralists. The research results of liberal theologians have provided a "breath of fresh air" for the freedom of pluralists (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2004: 96). Indeed, both liberal theologians and pluralists reject the confessions of the am church regarding the Bible, the deity of Jesus, redemption and the role of the church. Liberal theology and religious pluralism are dangerous because they strip the Christian faith of its

foundation and replace it with another foundation. At the end of the book entitled *Grey Theology: Religious Pluralism* (2004), the author reveals the dangers of religious pluralism, namely (1). Rejecting the Bible as the final revelation of God. (2). Rejecting the uniqueness and finality of Christ. (3). Rejecting the church as an agent or instrument of God's mission in the world. (4). Rejecting the proclamation of the gospel and the mission of redeeming sinners. (5). Rejecting the existence of all religions in the world. Liberal theology is dead, and religious pluralism is being destroyed along with the Tower of Babel and the utopian dream of liberals and pluralists is buried (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2004: 674-692). Religious pluralism has become a major agenda of the world including the church, and churches in Korea are no exception. Kwangsuk Yoo and Dong-Uhn Suh recognised the need for a strong, relational, and non-relativistic model represented by covenant pluralism in South Korea (Kwangsuk Yoo & Dong-Uhn Suh, 2020: 1-10). Herman Emma's research revealed that South Koreans use more elements of religious plurality in popuer media (Emma, 2022). Moonjang Lee proposes to develop and present an authentic form of Korean theology in the multi-religious context of Korea (M. Lee, 2023).

Furthermore, liberal theology and religious pluralism correspond to the secularism of modern society which is more scientific and less religious (J. P. Moreland, 2003: 307). Modern scientific truth requires that it be objective, rational, universal and empirical (provable and measurable) as liberal theologians strive for; (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2015: 3-4) and continued with subjective, local and communal truths championed by religious pluralists. Scientists influence the world community by abandoning sacred values to become secular, as practised by countries that claim to be secular states (S. I. Lumintang, 2003: 8). The ideas of the intellectual elite with their secularised minds do not allow even a small space for God in the world of science. For them, faith and religion are a throwback to civilisation or contrary to progress. Therefore, secularists or modernists make fun of people of faith (religion). For them to progress, one must be faithless (Johnson, 2012: 16). In keeping with this spirit of modernism, both liberal and secularist theologians reject the spiritual, the supernatural and the eternal. This means that liberal theology cannot possibly speak of the spirit world, such as the work of Angels for believers, Satanic spirits or powers of darkness, and exorcism. Likewise, in light of the five denials of the foundational beliefs of evangelical and/or Reformed Christianity stated in the preceding paragraphs, liberal theology is certainly not interested in talking about repentance, sanctification, forgiveness of sins, and evangelism. Gresham Machen argues that churches in the modern era dominated by liberal theologians cannot possibly call sinners to repentance through evangelism. Modern preachers do not talk about evangelism and the conversion of sinners, but rather preach ethical (moral) values only (Machen, 2018: 76). They understand Jesus Christ as a good and useful person in terms of morality only.

### **3. Korean Churches Judge the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement as Heresi, and then Declare it is Not Heresi: Inconsistency and Shame!**

It was initially the Busan Presbyterian of the General Assembly that declared Darakbang a heresy in 1991. Korean Presbyterian churches that joined in judging Darakbang as a heresy were Koshin, Hapdong and Tonghap (Yong Wha Na, 2011) The Koshin and Hapdong churches are seen as more conservative, while Tonghap is seen as progressive. Indeed, the theological outlook of the Hapdong church is Reformed evangelical, while Tonghap is more open. Most Koshin and Hapdong theologians follow Calvin's teachings and sharply criticise Barth's theology, whereas Tonghap theologians are more likely to refer to Barth than Calvin (Yu, 2019: 314). One of the theologians from Tonghap was Myung Young Kim. He was negative towards John Calvin's theology (Yu, 2019). In 1996, the Hapdong and Tonghap Presbyterian churches declared that Darakbang is a heresy. In 1997 the Harim Church of the Masan Presbytery of the Koryu Presbyterian Churches in Korea made materials concluding that the theology of Rev. Kwang-su Ryu is a non-reformed, exorcistic theology (Yong Wha Na, 2011: 107). In 1998, the Korean Methodist church also judged Darakbang and declared it a heresy (Yong Wha Na, 2011: 105). Presbyterian churches in South Korea number 286 denominations. Out of hundreds of church denominations, only 6 (six) denominations judge Darakbang (Esther Lee, 2019; Younghwan Park, 2024).

On 25 February 2011, the Heresy Countermeasures Committee of the Reformed General Assembly led by Song-su Kim concluded that based on biblical and doctrinal stances, Darakbang cannot be classified as a heresy. It added that Darakbang is fundamentally different from the Berean spirit (ghost) theory (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 12). And on 6 April 2011, the General Assembly Theological Committee led by Yong-Hwa Na held a discussion regarding the controversy surrounding Ryu Kwang-su of the Evangelism Assembly (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 14). On 16 April 2011, the Korea Presbyterian Church (Reformed) General Assembly Theological Committee stated that Hyung-Ryong Park's objection was his misunderstanding of the revelation of God in Ryu Kwang-su's teaching (Yong Wha Na, 2011: 32). On 19 September 2012, the Reformed General Council petitioned the Korean Council of Churches (CCK) for theological verification of Darakbang evangelism stating that Darakbang evangelism has no heretical attributes (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 36).

On 1 November 2012, Darakbang was again verified by the CCK specifically by the Committee for Countering Cults and Heresies and the Theological Expert Committee for Countering Cults. On 28 December 2012, the conclusion was that: "the report of CCK's Committee of Experts on Countering Cults that designated Pastor Kwang-su Ryu as a cult is not supported based on the verification results" (Yong Wha Na, 2011: 34). The Christian Council of Korea (CCK) adopted this conclusion and ruled that Darakbang is not a heresy. This result was published in Christian Newspapers on 4 January 2013. In 2013, and on 14 January 2013 the Executive Committee of the CCK reported that "No heresy in Pastor Kwang-su Ryu's case and resolves to lift charges of heresy (Yong Wha Na, 2011: 48). The latest criticism comes from two (usually: unnamed) professors from Yeungnam Theological University and Daejeon Theological University (Presbyterian Tonghap). They were commissioned by the Special Amnesty Committee, and they criticised Darakbang: (1). Darakbang is anti-biblical and anti-reform movement because it emphasises evangelistic phenomena and evidence rather than the redemptive message of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection; (2). Darakbang emphasises John 3:8 where the world is a battleground between God and Satan; (3). Darakbang emphasises evangelism as the key to all problems, not biblical and reformational; (4). Payment (atonement) to Satan; and (5). Authority binds Satan and mobilises Angels (J.-H. Lee, 2016: 169-171). Unfortunately the Special Amnesty Committee's conclusion that these five criticisms are unfounded and Kwang-su Ryu's response is more than acceptable (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 2011: 87-89; Yong Wha Na, 2011).

Throughout its history, the Darakbang Evangelization Movement has been continuously judged and declared a heresy, but after repeated assessments, it has also been repeatedly declared not a heresy. The accusations of the anti-Darakbang Korean churches are unobjective, unfounded and unfair allegations. They reveal the Korean churches' inconsistency with research and the truth. This is truly shameful. It is even more shameful that, after the 2013 final judgement that Darakbang is not a heresy, the judgemental Korean churches made no public statement on social media or in writing regarding the removal of the heresy label on Darakbang. This is the dishonesty of the Korean churches. The stigma of Darakbang as a heresy is not removed, but rather left by the accusing churches. This is Satan's way of hindering evangelism, which is Darakbang's main emphasis. Therefore, it is true what Kwang-su Ryu himself said that: "I believe there were political reasons and false accusations" (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 2011; Yong Wha Na, 2011: 52) Similarly, Jun-gon Kim, former Director of Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) in Korea said that: "This issue is not a religious issue, but a political issue. Regarding the judgement that the Darakbang Evangelism movement is a heresy, personally, I think this is a call for repentance across the church in all denominations" (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 2011; Yong Wha Na, 2011: 132). In other words, the Darakbang movement is seen as a way for God to call the churches to repent and evangelise worldwide as the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement did.

#### 4. The Korean Churches' Accusation of the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement as Heresy, and Darakbang's Response

The Darakbang Evangelisation Movement was condemned as heresy by nine (9) Korean church denominations after they: Firstly, conducted research into Kwang-su Ryu's training materials and sermons; (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 87-89, 2011; Na, 1988: 106). Secondly, accepting the testimony of a former member of the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement anonymously (not openly/honestly) regarding the meaning of the name Darakbang, the emphasis on evangelism and the emphasis on the message that Jesus is the Christ (No Name, n.d.-b). Other former Darakbang members' testimonies are also anonymous (not open/honest) regarding prayer, mobilising Angel armies. They also shared that Darakbang often states about the churches in Korea, that about 98% have gone astray, without the gospel, quenching the Holy Spirit. They testified that Darakbang states that all Darakbang members are agents of evangelism; (No Name, 2010). The International Korea Christian Coalition against Heresy (IKCCAH) from Korea, USA and Europe convicted Darakbang as a heresy by referring to the decision of nine (9) Korean churches as heresy. They are offended that Darakbang claims to be a tool of preaching the gospel for 2000 years. They accuse Darakbang of heresy because for them Darakbang's teachings regarding the office of Christ, the teaching that Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit; mobilising angels, binding demons, the sins of the ancestors, atoning to demons, the theory of remnants who will be left behind in the last days, are all false (No Name, n.d.-a). In addition to these, research into Darakbang has intensified due to the criticism of theologians, including Yongkyu Park, a lecturer at Chongnam Theological Seminary who wrote "Criticising the Attic Evangelism Movement"; Han Chang-Deok, a member of the Han Kyoyeon Basuwi wrote "Attic, Why Isn't It Heresy?"; Basu Wee Lee of KCCC wrote "Rebuttal to the Attic Study Report" (Nayong Hwa Kim, 2023).

In addition to the allegations made above, it is worth emphasising the allegations of the anti-Darakbang side as collected by Yong Wha Na are: (1). The theology of the Darakbang movement is accused of being connected to Beroean teachings on demonology, salvation, the local church; in other words, the theology characteristic of Ryu is Satanic theology, or exorcistic theology, and is not centred on God, and goes against reformed theology. (2). Darakbang is accused of claiming the existence of other revelations besides the Bible, rejecting the perfection and inspiration of the Bible. (3). The characteristics of Darakbang's Trinity doctrine are regarded as modalistic monotheism; (4). The humanity of Jesus Christ is not complete; (5). The assertion that God saves from sin and the snares of Satan; (6). The Darakbang view of Satan is a heresy; (7). The teaching of accepting Jesus who gives authority to God's children and restores God's blessings that were once taken away by Satan; (8). The incarnation of Jesus is the same as being indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and (9). Jesus Christ is the only final solution to life's problems (Nayong Hwa Kim, 2023).

Semua penghakiman dan vonis yang dikemukakan oleh gereja-gereja Korea dengan theolog Korea serta koalisi Kristen Korea hanyalah tuduhan semata. Pada tanggal 16 April 2011, Yong Wha Na, seorang theolog sistematika (Reformed) sebagai ketua Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) Theology Committee of the Reformed General Assembly, setelah mengadakan kajian terhadap semua tuduhan dan tanggapan dari Darakbang, maka mereka memutuskan bahwa: "criticism by the Theology Departement of the Koryu Presbyterian Churches in Korea against Rev. Ryu cannot be assessed to be appropriate, judging from the material which that theology department used for the sake of its investigation and decision" (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 2011; 136; Yong Wha Na, 2011). In addition, Yong Wha Na and her committee stated that the church's criticism by quoting Hyungryong Park's writings on the end of revelation, gifts and signs, or the teaching of the cessation of gifts and revelation of God is a misunderstanding that can lead to a distortion of the works of God that realistically appear in the context of the pastoral and mission fields (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 2011: 83; Yong Wha Na, 2011).



In addition to the Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) Theology Committee of the Reformed General Assembly stating that all accusations against Darakbang are inaccurate and out of context, Darakbang itself states that the accusations of the theory of atonement (payment) to Satan, the theory of double revelation and the existence of other revelations, and the notions of darakbang and remnant are all misunderstandings on the part of the accuser (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 92-95). They do not understand what Darakbang actually teaches. In fact, much has been written criticising the Darakbang, but without citing the source and name of the author. Darakbang does not emphasise re-acceptance of the Lord Jesus, must understand the context; salvation is not divided into five steps, does not adhere to modalistic Trinitarianism, does not teach another incarnation, does not conflate sin and Satan, never studied in cults such as Berean, binding and casting out demons by the power of Christ; does not emphasise only one of the works of Christ; ethical living is not emphasised to obtain salvation but after being saved; Darakbang does not teach about the spirits of the dead; and Darakbang never claims to be the only church in the last days (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 92-126).

### **5. The influence of Liberal Theology and Religious Pluralism in Korean Churches that declare the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement a Heresy**

A theologian who was very influential in the religious pluralism movement in South Korea was Yong-mo Yu (1890-1981). He advocated a syncretistic conception of God, and proposed a spiritual renewal between religions. This is religious pluralism (C. Kim, 2014). Yong-mo Yu was influenced by a Japanese pluralist named Uchimura Kanzo. He was a defender of religious pluralism in Japan (Jun, n.d.). Keduanya menganjurkan pluralisme agama, dengan mengatakan bahwa tidak ada agama yang dapat mengklaim kebenaran mutlak dan superioritas untuk prinsip-prinsipnya dan karena itu pun mereka menolak perbandingan agama. Karena itu, mereka melarang keras penginjilan tradisional, Yesus satu-satu jalan keselamatan. Sebelumnya, theologia liberal berkembang di Korea sejak tahun 1930-an. Walaupun gereja-gereja Presbyterian Korea sangat konservatif, namun ada beberapa theolog yang terpengaruh theologia liberal. Kim Jae Joon adalah salah satu theolog gereja Presbyterian yang sangat liberal. Ia menolak innerensi Alkitab. Kendatipun demikian, menurut Kwon Kyongho gereja Methodist lebih liberal dan terbuka yang memberikan reaksi terhadap konservatif, seperti Chung Kyung Ok.(Jun, n.d.)

One of the church denominations that joined in judging Darakbang as a heresy was the Korean Methodist Church in 1998 (*Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Reformed) and The Darakbang Evangelism Movement*, 2011: 105; Yong Wha Na, 2011). Two Korean Methodist church theologians who have strongly defended religious pluralism are Dr Sun-Hwan Byun and Dr Jung-Soo Hong. They have been influenced by Samartha, Pannikar, Knitter, Hick and Yagi to reject the finality of Christ (Jun, 1998: 55-56). In this case, the heresy group is judging and extolling the heresy of churches that do not favour religious pluralism. Besides these two Methodist theologians, there is also a woman theologian of the Methodist church named Hyun-Kyung Chung championing religious pluralism. She delivered a speech entitled "Come Holy Spirit - Renew All Creation", at the WCC General Assembly in Canberra from 7-20 February 1991. He equated the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit with the "spirits" of Korean culture and religion, which the churches condemn as evil spirits (Jun, 1998: 56). Such a view was challenged by the evangelical Methodists. Thus, there were two conflicting groups in the Methodist church. Ho Jin Jun states that although Presbyterian theologians are more conservative than Methodists, there have been debates among Presbyterian theologians. The youth of Youngnak Presbyterian Church invited Kyung-Jae Kim, a professor of theology of religious pluralism from Hanshin University to discuss the topic "What is the theology of religious pluralism?" Kyung-Jae Kim emphasised that his assumption that other religions already have their own Christs without any biblical support (Jun, 1998: 57).

While the World Council of Churches is not an adherent of liberal theology and religious pluralism, there are many liberal theologians and adherents of religious pluralism in the Council. Similarly, the churches of the Korean Presbyterian Church's Tonghap denomination maintain their affiliation with the World Council of Churches and the Korean National Council of Churches and allow a

relatively broad (open) theological position (Jeong, 2007: 125). Not surprisingly, the author has heard many times at Darakbang evangelistic conferences and trainings, both Ryu Kwangs-su (the founder of Darakbang) and Shin Hyun-kwan, the Chairman of the Operating Committee of DK237RUTC, often state that many churches in Korea affiliated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) have lost the gospel, no longer doing evangelism, but only doing social efforts for people who are suffering outwardly. According to Ryu Kwang-su: "A church that does not evangelise is considered a satanic church. He also stated that 98% of Korean churches have been taken captive by Satan (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023: 30). This statement further enraged many leaders of Korean churches. Indeed, the adherents of religious pluralism not only do not evangelise but they forbid evangelism. In Shin Hyun-kwan's writing, salvation according to the WCC is no longer the salvation of man from sin and the consequences of sin, but physical salvation, in accordance with the theme of the World Mission Conference (WMC) "Salvation Today" in Bangkok in 1973 (Hyun-kwan, 2024: 11). The meaning of salvation is narrowed down to struggles over social issues, dehumanisation, economic justice, human dignity and solidarity (J.C. Hoekendijk, 1972:49-54; Rodger C. Bassham, 1879:97). Five years earlier, the 4th WCC Council in Uppsala in 1968 saw a paradigm shift in God's mission from God through the church to the world, to God to the world and the church (Ken Gnanakan, 1997:30). Since then, the WCC's paradigm has become stronger in championing religious pluralism.

As stated earlier that the Tonghap Presbyterian denomination is more liberal or progressive than the Hapdong Presbyterian, it is not surprising that the questions of the Tonghap General Assembly are similar to those of the theologians of religious pluralism. Pluralists reject exclusive Christianity and evangelism that emphasises believing in the sense of accepting the Lord Jesus as revealed in the following three questions from Tonghap Presbyterian to Darakbang:

*Firstly*, the Christian's hope is the kingdom of heaven. Darakbang is the place that gives this true hope." is claimed. Does Darakbang use the terms gospel and salvation as the same meaning?" *Secondly*, you are not saved by believing in Jesus, you are saved by accepting Jesus. Accepting the truth that 'the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil' is acceptance, and teaching this is the true gospel. *Thirdly*, Darakbang is the only one who remain at the end of time, insisting on the so-called 'remnant' ideology and criticizing the existing churches, and has an exclusive view of the church that the Korean church is taking issue with (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023:85-86).

All these objections and/or questions were answered by Kwang-su Ryu with answers based on evangelical Reformed theology, so there was no counter-response, and the Special Amnesty Committee even stated that Presbyterian Tonghap's criticisms were based on false accusations (Kwang-sik Yoon, 2023:87). In other words, religious pluralism dislikes the exclusive church (remnant), the finality of Christ as saviour, and evangelism (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2004: 674-678). Liberal theology is not interested in the spiritual world, let alone the spirits of Satan that characterise the ministry of Reformed and/or Evangelical churches.

## **6. Analysis: Tark Ji Il's book entitled 이단 바로 알기 (Identifying Cults in Christianity) from the Perspective of Liberal Theology and Religious Pluralism, Shallow and Full of Lies**

Since the beginning of 2024, Christian theological colleges in Indonesia have been abuzz with debates over one-sided allegations about the South Korean Darakbang Evangelization Movement and its partners in Indonesia. Very irresponsibly, South Korean missionaries in Indonesia followed by some lecturers at Theological Colleges and Pastors have jumped on the bandwagon of the heresy of the organisation called Darakbang Evangelization Movement in South Korea and some leaders of Theological Higher Education institutions in Indonesia who work with Darakbang. They themselves have not done any research on Darakbang but have only read and disseminated a book written by Tark Ji Il, a liberal and pluralist theologian from South Korea, yet they are the ones most eager to debunk the heresy

of both Darakbang and those who collaborate with it. The book is entitled 이단 바로 알기: Knowing Heresies in Christianity, apart from the liberal and religious pluralism perspectives, also contains a very superficial study, full of provocative lies, especially regarding the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement.

Is it true that Tark-Ji Il has a background in liberal theology and religious pluralism? Indeed, Tark-Ji Il is a professor recognised as an expert on heresy at Busan Presbyterian University, South Korea. He completed his Master of Arts degree from the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) USA, based on the Catholic theological tradition that supports ecumenical movements, religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue (Graduate Theological Seminary, n.d.). He later completed his Master of Divinity from San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS). SFTS is a founding member of the Graduate Theological Union, a consortium of Protestant and Catholic theological schools in San Francisco. SFTS master's students can study world religions and faith traditions with more than 200 faculty in Protestantism and Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Jainism, as well as interdisciplinary topics such as art and religion or theology and science. As such, SFTS strongly values religious pluralism (interfaith) (San Francisco Theological Seminary, n.d.). He also completed his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) from the University of Toronto, (Tark, 1964) Tark Ji Il was influenced by his educational background which was certainly not evangelical, in stark contrast to the Korean missionaries in Indonesia who invited him to speak at seminars and spread his book widely and enthusiastically. As such, Tark Ji Il is very much influenced by his educational background which is certainly not evangelical, in fundamental contrast to the Korean missionaries in Indonesia who invite him as a speaker at seminars and spread his book widely and vigorously.

What is the evidence that Tark-Ji Il is inclined towards liberal theology and religious pluralism? He included the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement as one of the heretical groups in the book in which he and Kim Jung Soo served as editors (Tark Ji Il, 2024: 26-39). Chapter two of the book discusses the World Evangelism Movement (Darakbang), without naming the author. However, based on other sources, the writing seems to be from Yong Kyu Park, a lecturer at Chongshin University or Esther Lee, as what is in this book is the same as what Esther Lee published in *hdjongkyo* (Esther Lee, 2019). The first point the author makes about Darakbang in the book is that "The movement has turned Christians into agents of the Darakbang evangelistic movement, and the training organised has warped Christians into a false soteriology" (Tark Ji Il, 2024: 34). This is a false accusation because it is not based on Darakbang's sources (no citations) and again faults Darakbang's ecclesiology and soteriology, but without sources and without discussing it. What is wrong with Darakbang's ecclesiology and soteriology? Just empty accusations. It seems that religious pluralism has taken hold of the author of this book, which favours less evangelism and more social relations between neighbours. Liberal theologians and religious pluralists are not only not interested in evangelism, they forbid the church to evangelise, because they do not recognise the finality of Christ, the finality of soteriology and the finality of the church as the agent of evangelistic mission for redemption (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2004: 674-678).

Why does the "aura" and "atmosphere" of liberal theology and religious pluralism so strongly dominate the "room" of Tark-Ji Il's book? The second point of contention in the book edited by Tark-Ji Il is demonology. The book refers to Yong Kyu Park of Chongshin University's critique in his journal "A Critique of Kwang Su Ryu's Darakbang Evangelism Movement" (published in *Theological Review*, Spring 2005 issue). In the journal Professor Park says that Kwang Su Ryu is influenced by Ki Dong Kim's demonology and he interprets salvation history as a battle with Satan" and "his interpretation of the Bible and salvation history is based on a demonology similar to Ki Dong Kim's interpretation of the Berea Bible"(Tark Ji Il, 2024: 35). They accuse the Darakbang ministry of emphasising experientialism, demonology and exorcism. It appears that the author of the article in Tark-Ji Il's book is not familiar with the spirit world, especially with the exorcism ministry of Jesus Christ Himself and which has become a hallmark of the ministry of evangelical churches worldwide (Tark Ji Il, 2024: 35-36). Liberal theologians do not deal with the Bible's teaching on demonic spirits. They do not believe in it because it is supernatural, which is unknown to the modern world, scientists and liberal theologians. Regarding the

relationship between Satan, sin and spirits (ghosts), it is a misunderstanding and by Yong Wha Na (Chairman of Presbyterian Churches in Korea and chairman of the Theology Committee of the Reformed General Assembly) it cannot be judged correctly, because of the inappropriate material as well. We should judge the heresy or soundness of a church's teachings on doctrine, confession of faith, not on pastoral training materials, discipleship and evangelism.

Why does the "aura of lies" so strongly dominate the "space" easily readable in Tark-Ji Il's book? What is at issue is not the "core beliefs" of Christianity, but the unique community, pastoral, missional and ministerial nature of Darakbang. Almost all church organisations and mission agencies have unique organisational, community, pastoral, missional, and ministerial features. It seems that the Korean churches including the accusers, not to mention Tark-Ji Il, are simply making things up and pushing their pre-conceived notions that have already been propagated. Because after Darakbang was repeatedly assessed and decided not to be a heresy, no one including the coalition of Korean churches withdrew the heresy label on Darakbang publicly through the mass media. They take issue with everything from Darakbang's name to its various outlets such as Remnant, Remnant Unity Training Centre (RUTC), World Mission Meetings, Education and social welfare activities and OMC (Tark Ji Il, 2024, 36-37). None of this should be questioned and used as an excuse to dismiss Darakbang as a heresy. This is the work of fools. Because heresy is about core beliefs and immoral ways of life. That is why Tark-Ji Il's book is so superficial and provocative and full of lies.

Again, why is the "aura of lies" so strong in the "room" of Tark-Ji Il's book because it is easily readable? What they take issue with is not Darakbang's main concern. Actually, liberal theologians do not like subjective studies, in accordance with the spirit of modern science, but the writing edited by Tark-Ji Il is very subjective, contrary to his academic background. He should have written his own research on Darakbang. Darakbang's main concerns are summarised by the following statements: Jesus is the Christ, only the gospel and only world evangelism. It is no wonder that Tark-Ji Il has not learnt about Darakbang and from Darakbang, and has only heard the words of others who are sentimental and even anti-Darakbang, yet has written about Darakbang. This is a shameful act. I, the author of this article, have been learning about the gospel and evangelism formulated by Darakbang since 2017. I have been to ten Darakbang study events, trainings and conferences, and I have yet to find any heretical teachings and ways of life in Darakbang. This paper is one of the results of the author's first-hand learning about Darakbang and from Darakbang.

Why is this book superficially researched, dishonest, false and full of lies? Once again, this second chapter, especially the one on Darakbang, has no author. The entire second chapter of this book does not refer to a single book written by Kwang-su Ryu and/or Darakbang. This book is dishonest. It is more accurately a book of unsubstantiated allegations, and it is the book most favoured by Satan. Not a single quote and source is present. Unfortunately, many evangelical missionaries are spreading this book among many church pastors and theology lecturers in Indonesia. Satan is very happy with missionaries who distribute books containing lies about chapter two. Why is this book a tool of Satan? Because the accusation of heresy in Darakbang does not deal with the core Christian doctrine on which it is judged. The book is a complete fabrication, highly subjective to the author. The author repeatedly states that the Darakbang is heretical, but without evidence from Darakbang sources.

At the suggestion of Korean missionaries in Indonesia, Tark Ji Il was invited by twelve leaders on behalf of their respective Theological Higher Education institutions as a webinar speaker. The webinar was entitled Special Webinar for theologians and Church leaders, Emergency! Indonesia in Danger of Darakbang Heresy. It turned out that the webinar was very disappointing to many participants and even the twelve organising institutions, because it turned out that the speaker could not provide basic things and evidence that Darakbang was a heresy. The speaker only informed the attitude of most (not all) Korean churches that are hurt by Darakbang's perceived loss of the gospel, including churches led by liberal theologians, religious pluralists and the New Age Movement. Usually theologians who teach at

theological colleges and become church leaders who have been exposed to liberal theology and religious pluralism, not only do not evangelise but they prohibit Christians from evangelising to people who are already religious.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings presented in the discussion of this article, Presbyterians are the largest church denomination in South Korea, and Presbyterian churches can be classified into two theological streams, namely evangelical or conservative reformed theology, and non-evangelical or liberal reformed theology. Hapdong Presbyterian represents Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian churches (conservative) and Tonghap Presbyterian represents non-evangelical Reformed Presbyterian churches (liberal). Due to the influence of Western theology, the nationalistic spirit of Korean churches, and the demands of the social context of Korean society as well as the fact of the plurality of religions in Korea, the theologians of Korean churches have become open to, and partly influenced by, liberal theology and religious pluralism. Besides the Tonghap Presbyterian Church, which is open to liberal theology and religious pluralism, there are also Methodist and Baptist churches. These churches are at the forefront of judging and condemning Darakbang Evangelisation as heresy. In addition to the open (liberal) attitude of the churches, and after examining the theological educational background and theological views of the theologians who criticised Darakbang, also because of the points of thought criticised in Darakbang, it was the influence of liberal theology and religious pluralism that influenced the Darakbang Evangelization Movement to be criticised and convicted as heresy.

In addition to being criticised and convicted as a heresy from the perspective of liberal theology and religious pluralism, Darakbang continues to be considered a heresy even though it has been repeatedly studied and declared doctrinally and biblically not a heresy, but because of accusations, lies and political interests, the heresy label is still attached to Darakbang. The heresy label is an accusation and a lie because without studying Darakbang from Darakbang himself; criticism of Darakbang, does not use sources directly from Darakbang, writings that judge Darakbang do not include sources (quotations), and even if they use writings from Darakbang, they are not in context. In addition, the standard by which Christian core beliefs should be measured is not used. Finally, knowing that the perspective of liberal theology and religious pluralism, as well as the heresy label are mere accusations, lies and politicisation, the Korean evangelical missionaries in Indonesia and the lecturers of theological colleges in Indonesia should be able to conduct their own research on the Darakbang Evangelism Movement based on a Reformed and/or evangelical perspective. Not a single research result has yet been produced by both Korean evangelical missionaries in Indonesia and Indonesian evangelical theology lecturers on the Darakbang Evangelisation Movement. Therefore, this article stimulates such research. To label an evangelistic movement as heresy without objectively ascertaining it through research, let alone just jumping on the bandwagon of judgement and accusation is a crime, and it is also the work of Satan. The most important work of Satan is to hinder evangelism. Because that is the absolute will of God and the absolute duty of the church.

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