iLab Assignment One


The article I selected for this assignment was written by Mr. Peter Choe, associated with the “Resource Center for Ethnic Youth and Young Adult Evangelization,” and deals with the Korean-American Catholic population in the United States. In order to agree with the text, it is important to first consult some of the facts that the author cites in the opening of his article: there are roughly one million Koreans in the United States and of these there are 7-8% who identify themselves as Roman Catholics. In short, though most Korean-Americans affiliate with Protestant/Evangelical Christian faiths, a sizeable portion nonetheless identify themselves as Catholic. Furthermore Illinois hosts a sizeable Korean-American population and, vicariously, a significant minority of Korean Catholics.

This population is relevant to the discussion of Korean America for several reasons: obviously given the large Korean population on campus, it would follow that there are many Catholics in their number, but more importantly, because of the information that Korean Catholics “have been subject to criticism because of their unwillingness to mingle with other communities.” Indeed the very usage of language throughout the article is implicit in this fact, in that it carries a tone of factual detachment, almost of writing of a minority community within a minority community. It would seem that Korean Catholics are detached not only from their immigrant community at large by reason of religion, but their very faith itself, as so many of their religious leaders come not from communities in the United States but the Church in Korea. This theme is often repeated within the article, with mention of how (Korean) Church building in America is
lay-dominated, allowing for priests to be brought in from the “homeland” and the Mass given “all in the mother tongue.” Thus, the Korean American Catholic community is described in language that presents itself as both significant in understanding the Korean diaspora, but also of a highly isolated and unique population.

This seems almost contradictory, that so ostensibly set-apart and removed a community could be so important, but the fact is that within the Church, “devotional activities and Catholic movements are widely practiced by Koreans.” Essentially, though said Korean Americans may be isolated from both the traditional Catholic community at large, within their Churches they are highly active. They maintain strong involvements with such organizations as the Legion of Mary and Charismatic Renewal, while simultaneously managing to be detached from the American Catholic population as a whole. It is this seeming conundrum within the Korean American Catholic community that I find highly fascinating and would like to research even more in depth.

As a practicing Roman Catholic myself, I have found almost an exact 180 degrees set of circumstances within the mainstream Catholic Church, in that while it is more open and accessible (through the adoption of English and sometimes Spanish masses) than the Korean Catholic Church, lay involvement among members is generally much less active. The situation then is one of a larger, more lackadaisical (American) Catholic population versus a smaller, more driven (Korean American) Catholic population. It is my wish to study and research the interactions (if any) between these two groups and explore whatever commonalities or differences that may be present. Furthermore, I would like to examine the Korean Catholic community on campus more in-depth and attempt to relate my own position as a Catholic to their experience(s) at large.