

Loyalty song

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April 12, 2015



While I'm familiar with most of them, there are a small number of songs in the Unification *Holy Songs* book that I had never sung. Today there is only one that I do not know (Suffering Jesus), but there was a time when song number 39 was a mystery to me. The Korean title of the song had no meaning for me - *Tan Shim Ga* – although the short length of the song fascinated me. But nothing prepared me for the first time I heard the song while I was attending a workshop in the training centre in Cheong Pyeong, Korea.

For those unfamiliar with the Chung Pyung training centre, most of the workshops centre around singing sessions during which one claps enthusiastically in order to offer devotion that can purify one's spiritual state. The idea is that spirits hanging around me will be shaken loose and taken away by the angels present at the training centre. Accepting this may require a suspension of disbelief, but hang in for a moment, because the main point I'm trying to make is about this rather obscure song. Towards the end of one of the singing sessions the singing and clapping becomes increasingly frantic, led by the accelerating rhythm of a beating drum. Finally, once the singing sessions concludes, virtual silence is only broken by the sound of hundreds of devotees inhaling and exhaling heavily to catch their breath. After a short moment to catch our breath, the worship leaders introduce a short verse of a song to conclude. Recently I've heard the word 'alleluia' sung repeatedly to the tune of 'Amazing Grace'. But the first time I participated in one of these singing sessions, the final song was Tan Shim Ga. And it was an overwhelming experience!

The powerful harmonic minor key of the a capella melody, coupled with the slow rhythmic thudding of a bass drum, created a sense of awe in me. The first 2 lines of the song are sung in a low register, with a powerful 3rd line reaching higher up the scale, with a 4th line that resembles yet resolves the first two lines. As a fan of passionate rock music, I felt that this song could justifiably be sung as the slow, dramatic piece in the middle or at the end of a rock gig. My impression of the melody is that it is inconsolably sad, something to sing while crying. Hearing this song for the first time, I didn't realise it was part of the *Holy Songs* book. It almost immediately became one of my favourite songs in the book.

However, I must admit it doesn't suit all occasions. I've only once ever asked for this song to be sung in the context of a worship service. I was worried about what the members of the congregation would think about such a short song with a sad melody, but it turned out that one of the members that day had had a startling revelation through this song. Evidently it has the power to move the spirit world.

The lyrics of the song are contained in one verse:

*Although my body perishes
And yet one thousand times dies
My bones become ashes
Even my soul vanishes
Still all my love and all my heart
Unchanging remain with you
My everlasting loyalty
Unchanging remain with you.*



Translated from the original Korean, the last lines should actually be identical to each other. In the English version I get the feeling that the nuanced meaning of the Korean words has been split into two separate English clauses. I'd like to learn the Korean language, which would allow me to analyse the original text more closely, but even in English this song is clearly about loyalty. Loyalty is one of the highest virtues in Korean culture, and this song expresses the kind of undying loyalty that wouldn't be inhibited by not having a body, or not even having a soul! That's hardcore loyalty! Loyalty is not as virtuous in Europe as it might have been centuries ago. These

days it is usually expressed in the form of a supermarket loyalty card. In the Western free-market, in which loyalties switch easily based on the customer's appetite for an even better product or better service, the loyalty card entices the customer to remain loyal to the retailer; the onus, then, is on the provider to attract loyalty. This song, however, puts the singer in the position to pledge loyalty. No explanation is given for this determined resolution, but with dry ice and a rock band behind you, I'm sure it would be quite convincing.

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