

Through a Glass Darkly: Contemporary Korean Catholic Portrayals of Paul Yun Jichung*

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Korean Catholics are proud of their martyrs and are actively seeking to have more beatified and canonized. The most recent such ceremony took place in 2014, with the beatification of Paul Yun Jichung and his 123 companions. Many Catholic leaders believe that these martyrs serve as inspirations not only for the faithful but for all Koreans. To hold them up as examples, the stories of these martyrs are told in a variety of ways—through Masses and homilies, articles, comic books, shrines, and YouTube videos. However, to serve as good examples, their stories must be historically accurate (fictional martyrs would not teach much and would not knowingly be beatified or canonized), authentically Catholic (or else they would not be good examples from a Catholic perspective), and engaging (so that people will be moved to follow their example). However, tensions within and between these categories can make telling these stories very difficult. At the same time, understanding how these stories are told can reveal much about the Korean Catholic Church, particularly the values it holds and hopes will transform Korean society. This paper will therefore explore how Korean Catholic sources have sought to present Paul Yun Jichung (1759–1791). Yun’s case is particularly significant in that it includes aspects that non-Catholics might find strange or alienating—for instance, his burning of his family’s ancestor tablets and the miracles Catholics claim were worked through his blood—introducing additional tensions that must be navigated.

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