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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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innocent. The Christian leader asked him in what part of the town that was and if he had talked to the pastor of his church. There was no answer; it was then that Mallea formed in his mind the image of an accuser who had come to visit him in prison.

In reference to the phenomenon of subversion, he said the society and the government must make the care for children a priority. He believes that the majority of subversives are children abandoned or who never knew who their parents were and grew up marginalised and filled with resentment. He stated that a society is well founded when it takes care of its children who are the reality today and not just tomorrow. He added that the well-being of the family must also be a part of that care.

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**Rev. Pedro Arana Quiroz is Executive Secretary of the Bible Society of Peru. p. 88**

## **Suffering in North Korea**

**Sung Tae Kim**

The historical philosophers E. H. Carr and Collingwood name the events which bring epochal changes and influences greatly to human life as Historical Events. The drastic collapse of Communism which had been controlling about 40% of the world's population in the late 20th century is indeed a Historical Event. Herbert Butterfield, the Christian historian-philosopher, explained that such historical events are divine works of God which happen under the sovereignty of God.

I intend to focus on the situation we are in today from the perspective of the mission of the church. It is inevitable that the series of changes happening in Eastern Europe, the former USSR and in China today will also bring changes in North Korea. The variables that acted to change the communist countries will also act as the variables of change in North Korea. I firmly believe that God is the supreme ruler of history and is working according to his will in today's series of visible events; also that his kingdom is growing rapidly in spite of the fact that North Korea is a firmly closed society.

The situation of the churches in North Korea that I am intending to include is general in its extent. Although the information is collected from personal interviews and participant observations I will not identify the sources for the sake of the safety of the people involved.

### **I. THE FORMATION AND EXPANSION OF NORTH KOREAN CHURCHES**

In 1874, John Ross, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary, who was working in the area of Sandong, went to Dandong which is situated on the border of China and North Korea with the vision to evangelize Korea. At the time he met a young man called Lee Eung Chan, who was in a state of despair after having failed in the trading business, he witnessed to him, and led him to Christ. Then John Ross employed five Korean young men to translate the Chinese Bible into Korean and all five men were converted to Christ. In 1882, the gospels of Luke and John were translated into Korean **p. 89** for the first time and in 1887 the new Bible 'Holy Scripture of Jesus' which was called the 'Ross Version' was published. In the process of distribution a young man called Kim Chong Sung sold hundreds of Bibles in his

home town, many people were converted and accepted Christ as their Saviour. In 1884 John Ross baptized 75 Korean converts.

Seo Sang Ryon, Back Hong Jun, Lee Sung Ha, the assistants to John Ross, crossed over the border to Korea many times passing over the dangerous line of demarcation between China and Korea. There were three routes which were used to distribute the Bibles at this time. The first, although small, was through Manchuria. In the second they were assessed by a German, Mullendorf, who was working as a customs inspector at the area of Incheon. Here John Ross sent 6,000 Bibles to Seo Sang Ryon by ship. In the third they were helped by the Japanese, who were cooperating with the British and Foreign Bible Society, centred on Yokohama.

These efforts gave rise to the formation of the first church, So Rae Church. The Korean people organized this church themselves in the form of a house church. In 1885 Underwood, who had come from Japan, met Seo Sang Ryon in Seoul and heard the news that there were about twenty Christians converted throughout Manchuria who were thirsty for the Word of God. Eventually, these people became the founding members of the first Korean Presbyterian Church, Sae Moon An church, opened in 1887.

In 1887, Underwood began itinerant evangelism. With the guidance of Seo Sang Ryon, Underwood met the religious leaders in what is now North Korea. In 1892 he married his bride, whom he had met in Korea as an itinerant preacher. From the district of Eyuju, he took 33 people across the Yalu River into DanDong, China for baptism.

I have visited the areas in China where these early Korean Christians left their mark. It is surprising and a cause of thanksgiving that people of God are still living and praising God there, and that these churches are more like early Korean churches than ours today in serving God.

In 1894, a missionary, Samuel Moffet, settled down at Pyungyang and established a mission station. As a result of his devoted efforts many churches were established around Pyungyang. Seven pastors graduated from the Seminary at Pyungyang to form a single presbytery in 1907. In 1912, other presbyteries such as Hwanghe, South Pyungnam, North Pyungnam, South Hamkyung, North Hamkyung were born in North Korea and the result was the establishing of the first General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church. In 1910, after the Japanese annexation of Korea, many farmers lost their lands and were forcibly moved into Manchuria by the political movement of Japanese militarists who dreamed of making Asia a Japanese colony. At the time, the North Korea church was the leader in missions. Not only ministers and preachers but also Bible women were sent out. As a result, four presbyteries were established in Gando, Manchuria. In 1925 there were 500,000 Korean inhabitants and about 200 churches among these. Of these churches, p. 90 about 80 were Presbyterian with a membership of 10,000. In 1930, the Japanese militarists who were responsible for the War of Manchuria made a fierce attack on China, and persecuted the church and the patriotic Korean Christians in Manchuria.

The Christians had also to face the difficulties caused by the communist guerrillas who were prevalent around Manchuria. Since then, the Manchurian church has started to produce martyrs. First was Pastor Han Kyung Hee, a Presbyterian pastor. In 1918 North Assembly Presbyterian missionaries started working in today's Tonghwa and became martyrs there in the 1930s. Hunt also, who was known as Han Bu Sun in Korean, worked in the area of Harbin and was imprisoned by the Japanese. However the churches in Manchuria prayed wholeheartedly. Preachers and Korean church leaders such as Pastor Kil Sun Ju and Kim Ik Du visited Manchuria and encouraged the Christians with the Word of God.

Once when I was travelling in China I met an old woman who had studied at a Bible School established by the first PCUSA mission in Manchuria in the 1920s. She was very

old but could remember her past clearly, moreover, she was ministering to the underground Christians in North Korea. The work done by our God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit through his people has never been in vain, no matter how difficult the situations. As Jesus has claimed, no dark power will overcome Christ's power. The trials of North Korean churches were bearing fruit in several places in Manchuria and these fruits were being used to serve the North Korean Christians.

## **II. THE SUFFERINGS OF NORTH KOREAN CHURCHES FROM 1945**

On August 15, 1945, Korea was liberated from the thirty-six-year long Japanese occupation. However, a tragic event occurred. Soviet Russia occupied Korea north of the 38th parallel as a result of the Yalta and Potzdam Summits.

In 1941 Stalin chose Kim IL Sung, who was taking refuge in Russia from the Japanese, as the puppet ruler of their satellite state. Kim IL Sung, with the support of the Russian Army, ignored the advice of the National Preparation Committee, led by elder Cho Man Sik, and obeyed Russia's order to establish a communist government. In the process of communization in North Korea, Kim IL Sung purged many who were considered to be his enemies. He and Russia most feared the North Korean churches. In 1945, Yoon Ha Young and Han Kyung Jik organized the Christian Socialist Party. Eventually this led to the famous Sin Eyu Ju student uprising in November 16 1945. Kim IL Sung formed the Chosun Christian Federation in 1949 to take over the North Korean churches and began persecuting church leaders through it. Many Christians fought fiercely against the communists and suffered difficulties or lost their lives. Between 1945 and 1950 there was a big revival in North Korea. Although there were few shepherds the churches were full of people and the air was filled with cries of repentance, prayer for the future of the country and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

During the Korean war about [p. 91](#) three million North Korean refugees moved to South Korea. Among these were many Christians and these began planting churches across South Korea. In the 1950s the number of North Korean Christians was about two-thirds of the total number of Christians. From a reliable source I heard a touching story that many Christians in North Korea stayed in that country during the war in order to preserve the churches and help the people.

For five years after the Korean war the North Korean government, with the help of the Soviet Union, started to rebuild the country. According to the sources I collected, the government did not have a mind to search out and pressure the Christians. Many Christians were active in secret. However after 1958, under the name of a massive search programme, the Central Communist Party started to classify people into three large groups and fifty-six different levels. As a result of this search many Christians were exposed and were killed or sent to concentration camps for the rest of their lives.

Since 1980 the exposed underground churches include those at places such as Sineyuju, Kangge, Hambuk, Hamnam, Pyungbuk and Hwanghe. In spite of the fact that churches are restricted and controlled, North Koreans are fighting hard to expand the kingdom of God.

## **III. THE CHOSUN CHRISTIAN FEDERATION AS A TOOL OF THE MARXISTS**

During the Korean War the Chosun Christian Federation was used to help build the communist country and penetrate the South Korean churches. After 1958, when the five

year economic plan had been fulfilled, the Federation was disbanded. Mr. Kang Yang Euk who was the president of the Federation died in 1987.

The sudden reappearance of the Chosun Christian Federation in 1972 was for the purpose of influencing the churches in South Korea, in the Agreement of the North—South Adjustment Committee. At the time some churches were deeply involved in anti-government movements and the North Korean government wanted to use the Chosun Christian Federation as a tool for the United Front Strategy.

In 1979, the leader of the Chosun Christian Federation attended the Christian Conference held in Vienna, Austria. Kim Hae Jun who was in Canada at the time also attended the conference. On September 5, 1984 Ko Ki Jun, Kim Bong Rok, Kim He Sik, Kang Nam Hyung and others represented the Chosun Christian Federation at the International Church Affairs Conference held in Glion, Switzerland. These conferences were sponsored by the World Council of Churches.

In 1989, and subsequently in 1990, Kim Duj Ryoung and Ko Ki Jun visited the USA at the invitation of the National Christian Council of the USA. Recently the leaders of the Chosun Christian Federation attended the Far East Justice-Peace Conference held in Tozanso and had fellowship with the Korean leaders of an organization under the auspices of Han Ki Chong.

From these facts I would like to point out two things. First it is clear [p. 92](#) that the WCC has been promoting ideological talks between Christians and Marxists since 1960, especially in East European communist countries. The WCC sponsored Peace Movement was clearly based on Liberation Theology, and the conflict between the haves and the have-nots. Such developments played into the hands of the Marxist governments. The North Korean Communists think that these various international conferences affiliated with the WCC can be used to enhance the promotion of North Korean policies and the international revolutionary movement.

Second, the Chosun Christian Federation is deeply influenced by the ideology of Kim IL Sung and the Labour Party. In the international conferences sponsored by the WCC the North Korean leaders have been strong advocates of the removal of the atomic bomb from South Korea, the unification of Korea and the withdrawal of the United States Army from South Korea. The leaders of the Chosun Christian Federation are used to promote the political policies of the North Korean government. Kang Young Sup is the chairman of the Chosun Christian Federation, while the son of Kang Yang Euk is a member of the Unification Committee affiliated with the Highest People's Congress and Ko Ki Jun who is the chief secretary of the same organization is a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Can we say that these men are true Christians or not?

In 1976 the North Korean Labour Party published a booklet called 'Revolution of South Korea and Unification Strategy', based on the Principal thought of Kim IL Sung. This booklet gives Kim IL Sung's guide on how North Korea should enhance the South Korea Revolutionary Movement through the unification strategy by using the religious force in South Korea which advocates the thought of secular 'Missio Dei' and Minjung theology.

In 1989 there was a plan to hold a large evangelistic crusade in Pyongyang under the agreement of two parties, one mainly the ministers of Korean-American churches in the US and the other the Chosun Christian Federation. This plan failed as the leaders from the US realized the ulterior motive of North Korea as they visited there a number of times.

North Korea tries to introduce the principal thoughts of Kim IL Sung into the North Korean official church. But I strongly assert that although it may be possible to attempt to engraft the principal thoughts of Kim IL Sung into Christianity theoretically and ideologically, there is no common denominator between them in origin, essence and history.

## IV. SIGNS OF CHANGE AND MISSION STRATEGIES

When we consider the various factors in the North Korean situation, changes are inevitable. The changes in traditionally friendly countries have also brought about some changes directly or indirectly in North Korea. The closed and self-justified economic system within North Korea has led to a situation where the country cannot continue any longer without contacts with the outside world.

I anticipate changes in North Korea in three ways and propose [p. 93](#) appropriate missions strategies for each. First, the possibility of a massive refugee problem and the risk of civil war due to the drastic collapse of North Korea.

Second, the possibility of war and drastic revolutionary change. The North Korean government is blaming the US and South Korean governments for its problems and deluding North Korean people and by so doing, creating a civil war situation.

Third, there is the possibility of gradual change within North Korea and active exchange with the outside world. North Korea has been studying the possibility of change within their country and devising a plan to revive their economy and at the same time maintain their current government power system for as long as possible. Recently, North Korea has amended the constitution and distinguished religion from superstitious belief. However, it is promoting an anti-bourgeoisie movement across North Korea and strengthening its ideological stance.

Further, it is supervizing the village movements and has started an intensive classification of people with different ideologies. This is seen in areas such as Najin, Sunbong, Sabyul and Chungjin. From watching the process of their open-door policy, I expect that North Korea will gradually open the door for the economy to survive and at the same time for the North Korean government to maintain its current ideology and power system. If North Korea's open-door policy becomes as successful as that of China, then the supervision mentioned above will be extended to other areas.

Personally I am praying for the third situation described above to take place. In the event of it happening I would propose the following missions strategy.

Firstly, we should work for the increase of public exchange with the Chosun Christian Federation. The open-door economic policy of North Korea will surely take a soft policy in the aspect of religion and they will allow a certain amount of increased freedom in the United Front strategy. I think that these signs are already in progress.

Secondly, we should establish direct and indirect strategical measures for missions in the expectation of North Korea's increased opendoor policy. As there are more contacts with North Korea in both domestic and foreign affairs, the South Korean churches will have more chances to evangelize the people of North Korea. I have been told that there are many being converted through contacts with outside people.

Thirdly, we should help North Korean Christians to encourage reform within themselves and to enhance the efforts of the underground churches. This is not impossible. If the churches all over North Korea become more active and the influence of Christians increase, then the upheaval or reform which took place in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union will also take place in North Korea. Although the names of specific locations of churches cannot be revealed to the public for the safety of the missions strategy and for the people involved, more underground churches are being identified all over North Korea. And [p. 94](#) in spite of the extreme control and stringency the churches are growing continuously.

We in the South Korean church should pray for the people of North Korea with specific prayer topics and identify with their difficulties. I hope that special missions

organizations will be more active and pray that these missions organizations will work wisely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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