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Guest Editorial

In the Midst of Suffering is Prosperity Theology Scriptural?

Thousands of Christians around the world are facing persecution, suffering and death for their faith in Jesus Christ. What is the biblical perspective on Christian suffering? On the other hand, many pastors are preaching prosperity theology, i.e. that the more you give to God, the more spiritual and material blessings you receive from God. Does God always bring physical and material blessings to those who earnestly seek him? What is the relationship between prosperity theology and the theology of suffering? Is prosperity theology truly scriptural?

Approximately 50 theologians, including ten renowned theologians from six continents, met at the Korean Center for World Missions (Torch Center) in Seoul, Korea, September 28—October 1, 1994 to discuss the theological issues on the subject. Seven major papers were presented by both Korean and international evangelical theologians. This consultation was co-sponsored by the WEF Theological Commission and the Korean Evangelical Theological Society. The drafting committee of the consultation provided a *Statement on Prosperity and Theology of Suffering* which was discussed and finally adopted.

Dr. David Sang Bok Kim, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Asian Center for Theological Studies and Missions (ACTS) and executive director of the Torch Center, challenged the theologians not only to criticize bad theology, but also to strive to construct an evangelical theology of prosperity and suffering which would be able to guide Christians in their daily lives.

Dr. Young Hoon Lee, Director of International Theological Institute which belongs to Rev. David Cho's Youido Full Gospel Church, known as one of the churches in Korea which promotes prosperity theology, in his paper *Biblical Teaching in Prosperity Theology* stressed that the Old Testament puts much emphasis on material prosperity while the New Testament emphasizes spiritual prosperity. Dr. Lee said that since prosperity and success accompany those who serve God, a minister must teach his congregation correctly on how to serve God in order to receive his prosperity and success; nevertheless, prosperity and success should never be put ahead of God. [p. 4](#)

Dr. Ward Gasque, Dean of Ontario Theological Seminary, in his paper, *A Critique of Prosperity Theology in the New Testament* challenged the prosperity theologians on the grounds that this contemporary prosperity theology is 'based on the misinterpretation of specific texts of Scripture'. Quite contrary to prosperity theologians, he pointed out that the majority of faithful Christians in the world have been and are poor. He labelled prosperity theology as being fundamentally anthropocentric.

On the theology of suffering, a paper was presented by Dr. Se Yoon Kim, Professor of New Testament at the Presbyterian Seminary (Chongshin) in Seoul. Three case study papers on Christian suffering were also presented by the following theologians: *Suffering*

in Latin America by Dr. Pedro Arana of Peru; *Suffering in Eastern Europe* by Dr. Peter Kuzmic of Croatia; and *Christians Suffering in North Korea* by Dr. Sung Tae Kim of Korea.

Rev. Rene Daidanso of Chad, Africa, Associate General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), made an oral presentation on the sufferings and poverty of many Africans due to natural calamities.

I welcome this issue of ERT which is devoted to this important issue.

Bong Rin Ro p. 5

Statement on Prosperity Theology and Theology of Suffering

INTRODUCTION

This statement seeks to summarize the substance of a discussion held at the Korean Center for World Missions (Torch Center) in Seoul, Korea, 28 September–1 October 1994, under the joint sponsorship of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Korea Evangelical Theological Society. Our consultation involved approximately 50 representatives of the two groups, in addition to a lively group of postgraduate students, many of whom are already theological educators in Asia and Africa. Participants hailed from Australia, Canada, Germany, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Uganda, and the USA.

Seoul seemed to be a very appropriate setting for such a consultation. The Korean Church, having passed through the fires of intense persecution and suffering during the first part of this century, has become quite prosperous and is rapidly becoming one of the dominant sending churches in the world Christian mission. The beautiful and bountifully equipped facilities of the Torch Center where we stayed are a visible witness to the dedication of many newly affluent Korean Christians to the cause of the gospel. The warmth of the hospitality, the commitment of brothers and sisters in Christ, and the breadth of the vision of the Korean church was a source of encouragement to all who participated.

I. PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

A. Definition

A distinction should be made between ‘prosperity theology’ and the biblical teaching on prosperity. The former expression refers to a contemporary theological teaching which stresses that God always blesses his people materially, with wealth and health, as well as spiritually when they have a positive faith and are obedient to him. It is a teaching that is found frequently, though not exclusively, in some charismatic and pentecostal circles, where it is also frequently criticized. The accent is not placed on the stewardship of the wealth that God has given to a person, but rather on understanding the biblical concepts of faith, prayer, and blessing, and the consequences of this teaching for one’s daily life. A p. 6 biblical theology of prosperity, on the other hand, would emphasize the