

RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



September/October 1988

From the Director's Desk

KOREA: A New Target for the Church Left

For many years the NCC foreign policy bureaucracy has been firmly in the grasp of a leftist ideology -- an ideology which is characterized by a knee-jerk, negative reaction to American foreign policy, a presumption that socialism is more just than capitalism, and a moral crick-in-the-neck which allows serious criticism only to be leveled at those regimes which are right-of-center.

The latest case is Korea, now a special focus of the mainline bureaucracies. The testimony of an NCC "expert" on Korea before a House committee this past May, as you will learn from the following IRD special report, was so unbalanced and silly that even liberal Democrats on the committee were dismayed.

Using church resources and time, church staffers have written materials and orchestrated resolutions reflecting a view of the Korean situation which few who fought in the Korean War will recognize. Absent is any strong sense of what that U.N.-sanctioned defensive effort was all about or what the differences between North and South Korea were then or are now.

When the IRD learned that Korea was to be a major new target for NCC interventions, we assigned Alan Wisdom, our Research Director, to do a thorough study of the policies being pushed and the assumptions which drive them. The following special double issue of *Religion and Democracy* is devoted to sharing those findings with you.

What stands in the way of Korean reunification, according to the ideological church pundits, is quite predictably the presence of American troops. In reaching this conclusion, the NCC has deliberately ignored or attacked the witness of the majority of Christians in Korea, in order to focus on those minority radical voices with which it agrees. In addition, the church materials are extremely gentle, even laudatory at spots, in their treatment of North Korea. The brutal North Korea known to historians is mysteriously absent.

The NCC bureaucracy has frequently responded to criticism by bitterly protesting that those who question its policies are nothing more than right-wing "anti-communists" who blindly salute the American flag.

But this is not what the debate is about. There has never been any question that national self-criticism is a legitimate and necessary part of citizenship. The debate is

about whether we can balance self-criticism with a discerning endorsement of good uses of American power.

Has American power mainly been deployed in ways that support the cause of freedom and justice, or has it been mainly a force for evil? Sadly, many church staffers, and some leaders, seem to believe the latter.

When the Rev. Dr. Arie Brouwer gave his acceptance speech in November 1984 following his election as General Secretary of the NCC, he made a deeply personal observation upon his own brother's death in the Korean War. "I thought then that my brother Ed had died in the cause of freedom. Later I learned that the Korean War was probably a mistake, the result of a breakdown in communication between the two superpowers."

That there have been breakdowns in communication is indisputable. But to maintain that miscommunication is the main cause of the conflict between North and South Korea, or between non-democratic nations and aspiring democracies, is a tragic misreading of history.

The issues which are at stake in our world, and with which Christian citizens must responsibly grapple, are real issues which have to do with justice, freedom, and religious liberty. Those who seek to speak in our name have all too frequently failed to understand that, or they have had a view of justice which minimizes the importance of freedom. And when freedom has been sacrificed, with the silence or approval of the church Left, it has been injustice, rather than justice, which has emerged dominant.

Our purpose is to question the wisdom, not the intentions, of those whose views have shaped the resolutions and policies on Korea.

If you appreciate the careful scholarship which has gone into the research and analysis of this report, please do support the work of the IRD with a generous contribution. Your gift will make possible the continuation and expansion of the work we do on your behalf.

Kent Hill
Executive Director

Religious Liberty Alert

Is There a Church in North Korea?

Until several years ago, the answer to the above question was anyone's guess. So closed was Kim Il Sung's regime, and so pitilessly had it extinguished all public evidence of religion, that Western experts could not determine whether there were any Christians left in North Korea. Now we know that at least some believers have kept their faith through 40 years of hostile communist rule. But the size and nature of the North Korean church remain unclear.

The first clue came in 1984, when the World Council of Churches received an invitation to send a delegation to North Korea as guests of the "Korean Christian Federation." In that visit and subsequent meetings between Christian Federation officials and international ecumenical groups, the organization has claimed to consist of some 10,000 Protestants in 500 house churches. (A Catholic Association, with 2,000 members, was announced in Pyongyang last June.)

Federation leaders, in their statements, have hewed strictly to the government propaganda line. They assert that they enjoy complete religious liberty. When asked to explain the absence of church buildings and the small number of Christians in North Korea, they blame U.S. bombing during the Korean War for supposedly annihilating whole congregations gathered in their churches.

World and National Council of Churches officials, in reports on their visits to North Korea, seem to take the Christian Federation at its word. They have not publicly raised questions about whether the religious freedom permitted in North Korea might be less than total. Nor have they intimated that there might be North Korean Christians not represented by the federation. Dwain Epps of the NCC explained that his delegation "had jointly decided not to do anything which might divert us from the goal" of pursuing reunification efforts in cooperation with the Christian Federation.

Open Doors, an evangelical group ministering to persecuted Christians worldwide, takes a different tack. It speculates that there may be many more Christians in North Korea than the 10,000 reported by the federation. It bases this hypothesis on three considerations:

(1) *The historical experience of persecuted churches.* Elsewhere in the world -- for example in China during the Cultural Revolution -- churches thought to have been crushed by fierce persecution have later emerged from the underground stronger than ever. North Korea had hun-

dreds of thousands of Christians prior to the communist takeover, and by no means all fled southward.

(2) *The nature of the Christian Federation.* Open Doors calls it "a state-controlled umbrella organization . . . created in an attempt to absorb existing Christian churches." It interprets the federation's founding as a "government admission that their atheism campaign has failed," signaling "the existence of a significant Christian

"Pray that the government will open the churches. Pray for us. I am severely persecuted now because my neighbors know I am a believer."

movement inside North Korea." Many Christians in that movement might not trust themselves to an organization linked to the state so long hostile to their faith.

(3) *Reports from Christians of Korean origin living in Chinese Manchuria.* Some of these have been permitted to visit relatives across the border in North Korea, and they bring back stories of small church groups meeting secretly in rural areas.

Some Catholic observers are less sanguine. A missionary priest who has visited North Korea several times recently told the *National Catholic Register* (Aug. 21, 1988) that he accepts the government estimate of only 2,000 Catholics in the country. He said that younger people with whom he talked had "no concept of priest" or other religious notions. He saw this ignorance as indicating the success of communist indoctrination in interrupting the transmission of the faith between generations. A Korean priest who visited his family in Pyongyang in 1984 recounted an especially sad incident. When he offered to celebrate a mass in his hotel room in memory of his pious parents, his family tearfully begged him not to.

However many Christians there may be in North Korea, they must still live under great anxiety. Open Doors printed part of a letter from a North Korean Christian to a relative in China:

Pray that the government will open the churches. Pray for us. I am severely persecuted now because my neighbors know I am a believer. How wonderful it was to worship with you and listen to the preaching. Soon the Lord will be on earth again and we will all be together.

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IRD Special Report

KOREA

As Democracy, Economy, Faith Advance in South, U.S. Churches Push Reunification with North

When the Olympic torch comes this month to Seoul, it will inaugurate far more than a sporting event. For the South Korean hosts, these Summer Games will represent a sort of grand national coming-out party. And indeed Seoul, with the rest of South Korea, has much to show the world: a booming economy, a newly-installed democratic government, and -- not least -- a growing, vital Christian church.

The transformation of South Korea in recent years has been quite astonishing. The gross national product has skyrocketed, from \$87 per person in 1961 to \$2,870 per person last year. A 1987 newspaper poll revealed that almost 70 percent of South Koreans now consider themselves "middle class." The government, dominated for decades by an authoritarian military, is now the product of free elections. Furthermore, power is split between a president and a legislative majority of opposing political camps. In this new climate of pluralism, debates and demonstrations are often vigorous.

As striking as the advent of Korean democracy and prosperity may be, perhaps we should see deeper significance in the shift of religious faith. In a nation where a century ago only a few thousand confessed the name of Christ, today over ten million -- 25 percent of the population -- claim him as Lord. Nor is this church growth merely statistical. Korean Christians are characterized by an intense faith, expressed in Bible-study cells and prayer vigils, in the building of educational and charitable institutions, and lately in the sending of missionaries to other countries.

Many U.S. Christians will feel especially heartened by these changes in South Korea, knowing that we helped to make them possible. It was American missionaries who planted the first Protestant churches in Korea. When the North Korean communists invaded in 1950, American soldiers fought and died in defense of South Korean freedom. And U.S. foreign aid contributed to sparking the economic boom.

But gratitude for Korean progress is not the mood in Korea '88: *The Bigger Picture*, a briefing book for journalists covering the Olympics, prepared by the North American Coalition for Human Rights in Korea. Instead the coalition, principally backed by our mainline Protestant denominations, presents a "bigger picture" of exceptional gloom. Curiously, the Korean churches are not discussed in the book. South Korea's economic and political gains are briefly acknowledged; however, Korea

'88 quickly moves to undercut any boasting:

If we're getting so modern and advanced, say the south Korean people, then why do we still have Third World-style military-dominated government that regularly denies internationally accepted human,

economic, and civilpolitical rights?... If we've become so well-off, then why are so many important economic sacrifices still extracted from the bottom half of the force? Why isn't everyone benefitting from the tremendous growth?... If we south Koreans have become so advanced and so self-confident, then why do we continue to be taught only to fear and hate north Korea?

The book takes an equally dim view of the U.S. role in Korea:

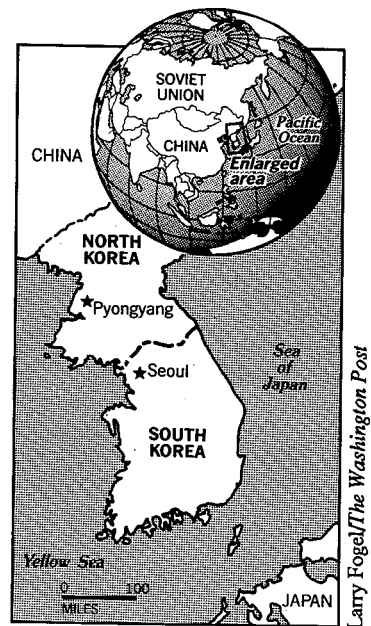
The U.S. is increasingly coming to symbolize everything that runs against the grain of Korean nationalism. For many Koreans, "American interests" means treating Korea as a Cold War pawn; it means political manipulation and economic subservience; it means military dependency under an "occupying army"; it means exploiting Korean people to serve needs of people on Wall Street and in the Pentagon; and worse than any of those things, it means a prolonged if not permanent division of the Korean homeland.

This last phrase may explain the dark perspective. The North American Coalition seems to have become so fixated on the unfortunate division of Korea that it sees only shadows over all that has been achieved in the South:

This is the central tragedy of modern-day Korea. All the other tragedies on the Korean peninsula today -- the denial of human rights, the breaking of people's wills and spirits, the haughty self-righteousness of authoritarian rulers, the blaming and the vilification, the barbed wire and nuclear weapons, ... -- all these follow from the central tragedy: the division of Korea into north and south.

Among the supporters of the coalition are: the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, the U.S. Catholic Conference, and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. Moreover, these religious bodies do not simply subsidize the coalition.

(Korea, continued on page 4)



A Prisoner of Conscience

The advent of a freely-elected government in South Korea has had considerable impact on the human rights situation. Within the past year the South Korean government has released over 400 political prisoners and restored civil rights to more than 4,000 former political prisoners. Yet the securing of human rights is rarely an overnight accomplishment. According to Amnesty International, there remain more than 600 political prisoners in South Korean jails.

Some of these prisoners were convicted of espionage or violent acts which would be crimes in any nation. Many of them, however, have been detained simply for their views or their associations. They were sentenced under broad national security laws which prohibit, for instance, any expression which echoes North Korean propaganda or which might cause social unrest.

One example of a South Korean adopted as an Amnesty prisoner of conscience will illustrate the continuing abuses of human rights. Here is Amnesty's description:

"Lee Tae-bok, aged 37, was arrested in June 1981 and is serving a 20-year prison sentence on charges of being the leader of two 'anti-state' groups, one made up of students, the other of workers. A graduate of Kookmin University in Seoul, Lee Tae-bok owned a small publishing house, *Kwangminsa*, which specialized in social sciences and in labour and economic issues. The authorities accused him of being a 'home-grown communist.' At his trial he rejected this accusation and withdrew a confession which he said he made under torture and in which he had admitted being a communist."

You may write on behalf of Lee Tae Bok to:

Embassy of the Republic of Korea
2320 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Amnesty International has not been able to adopt prisoners of conscience in North Korea, because of a lack of information. The communist government keeps secret almost every detail about the workings of its judicial system. Nevertheless, Amnesty has received reports of large numbers of political prisoners in North Korea. Criticisms of the regime are punished by imprisonment, harsh "corrective labor," or execution.

You may write your own church leaders asking that when they visit Pyongyang, they insist that the government there be more open about, and more respectful of, the human rights of its citizens.

Many of them have recently made pronouncements of their own on Korea. And as those pronouncements often reflect the same obsession -- reunification -- and the same attitudes -- hostility to South Korea and the United States -- it does appear that the coalition stands at the center of a coordinated church campaign on Korea.

"A Real Disservice"

North American Coalition publications have remarkably little to say directly about the northern half of the Korean peninsula. But Dorothy Ogle, the National Council of Churches' "Associate Director for Education and Advocacy on Korea Peace and Reunification," has shown no such reticence. Testifying in May before the House Asian Affairs Subcommittee, she sketched a relatively benign impression of the communist regime in the North:

North Korea is a controlled society. There is a "correct policy" for everything and I did not hear differing opinions expressed openly [during a 1984 visit]. North Koreans did not appear unhappy to me. Their little girls sing, "We live in paradise and everyone in the world is envious of us." I am convinced that they believe it. They have had no opportunity to see how others live. (But) though north Korea is a fiercely independent state with a philosophy of self-reliance, there are many indications that they would like to open up.

Ogle told of how "north Koreans are proud of their beautiful cities, schools, health care facilities, apartments, irrigation projects, dams and locks" and fear a U.S. attack which might destroy these. In this gentle light Ogle portrayed a country which, by contrast, London's respected *Economist* magazine called "probably the world's most closed, Stalinist society," where the "army remains well equipped [as] its economy staggers on."

The NCC official also gave a favorable evaluation of North Korean proposals for reunification -- which would first require withdrawal of the 40,000 U.S. troops keeping the peace under U.N. auspices, next proceed to military reductions and political federation, and only then grant South Korean requests for family visits, exchange of mail, and trade. In reply to her own rhetorical question about the North Koreans' sincerity, Ogle gave assurance: "Of course they are sincere." Citing a speech by the North Korean dictator, she commented, "Kim Il Sung's comprehensive peace message has set forth some reasonable principles for peace." By contrast, Ogle did doubt the sincerity of South Korean President Roh Tae Woo. She called U.S. policy "a major obstacle to the success of bilateral talks" between North and South.

Statements such as these were hard to stomach even for liberal Democrats on the House subcommittee. Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) called Ogle's testimony "a real disservice" and told her, "I frankly found so much of your remarks out of what is currently the range of thinking or discussion in this country." Subcommittee chairman Stephen Solarz (D-NY), responding to Ogle's sympathetic presentation of the demands of South Korean radicals, exclaimed, "These demands seem to come straight out of Pyongyang [the North Korean capital]."

The NCC Sets a Wayward Policy

Outrageous though Ogle's northward tilt might seem, she was not speaking entirely on her own account. Much of what she said was based on a National Council of Churches policy statement on "Peace and the Reunification of Korea" (November 1986). The NCC statement does not openly praise North Korea; however, it does take care never to compare it unfavorably to the South. A semblance of North/South moral equivalence is delicately preserved against any facts which might serve to commend the South or impugn the North.

The NCC document labels the governments in Pyongyang and Seoul as "two increasingly hostile and heavily armed states." Their armed forces are depicted as equal

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threats to peace. The demilitarized zone separating the two armies is called "this global fault line [along which] the abrasive edges of the two great ideological systems grind against each other." Nowhere is there any moral distinction drawn between those "two ideological systems," democratic capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. Nor is there a sense that North Korean forces are geared for attack, whereas the South Koreans are prepared only for self-defense.

Amazingly, the NCC statement even manages to gloss over the concrete proof of Kim Il Sung's aggressive intentions: his invasion of the South in 1950. Although several allusions are made to the Korean War, never is it clarified who started it. Consider this NCC exercise in verbal evasion: "Thus hopes [in the late 1940s] that the division would rapidly give way to a reunified country were dashed, and tensions grew, culminating in the terrible Korean War between 1950 and 1953."

Likewise, the NCC tiptoes around a discussion of the communist regime's suppression of the Christian faith:

However, after liberation from the Japanese, the Church in the North was decimated by social upheaval and war. Many Christians left because of the fear of life in a Communist society; thousands were killed by the violent tactics employed during the Korean War, especially the saturation bombing [by U.S. planes]; among those who stayed, the experience of the participation of [U.S. and South Korean] Christians in the war against them spread disillusionment; and many Christians left the Church under the pressure of a rigorously organized society.

Note, as in Ogle's testimony, the awkward euphemism for "totalitarian," and the strained attempt to shift blame onto the United States.

Indeed, blaming the United States appears to be the main point of the NCC statement. A concluding section volunteers the following confession of sin:

We are deeply conscious of the roles our nation's government, and military and economic interests, have played in creating, maintaining and deepening the division of Korea. ... The churches too have much to confess. Korea has suffered from the uncritical acceptance by many in our churches and nation of the virulent anti-communism which gripped our society hard in the 1950s and has kept it in its grasp to varying degrees ever since. Many Christians not only acquiesced to the division of Korea after World War II, but provided theological and ideological justification for it.

There is no other passage suggesting appropriate confessions for North Korea, the Soviet Union, or China.

The NCC's proposals for promoting reunification certainly come closer to Pyongyang's position than to Seoul's. The 1987 policy statement urges the U.S. government: "to refrain from hostile and inflammatory rhetoric about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea [North Korea]"; "to extricate itself from its commanding role in R.O.K. [South Korean] military affairs and its dominance over the political and economic life of the nation"; and to carry out "a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea," as part of a multilateral military reduction. No appeal is made for North Korea to respect such basic human rights as freedom of religion, freedom of communication, and freedom of movement.



A South Korean soldier stands guard along the "Demilitarized Zone" (DMZ) separating the two halves of Korea. The threat from 838,000 North Korean troops -- more than 75 percent of them within 50 miles of the DMZ -- makes South Korea's security a continuing concern.

The Rest of the Choir: Variations on a Theme

Denominations within the ecumenical council have also spoken on Korea, often in similar tones. The Episcopal Church, at its General Convention this July, did the simplest thing. It flatly endorsed the NCC statement, after virtually no debate. Some observers wondered whether more than a dozen of the over 1,000 bishops and deputies had actually read the document they blessed.

At the 1986 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a resolution was adopted on "Reconciliation and Reunification in Korea." The Presbyterian assembly offered "prayers of repentance for the complicity of our own nation . . . in helping to create and perpetuate the tragic division and conflict that have beset the people of Korea." The resolution placed North and South Korea on the same moral plane. It referred, for example, to "two antagonistic societies," subject to "tensions exacerbated in the South by fear of invasion and in the North by fear of the United States' nuclear presence." The assembly noted past "harsh suppression of religion" in North Korea, but expressed "hope that there



This is a poster now being distributed by the church-backed North American Coalition for Human Rights in Korea. It illustrates the coalition's strategy of using the Seoul Olympics as an occasion to condemn the South Korean hosts. But the concern raised is genuine; there are still some reports of South Korean police torturing prisoners.

may be growing tolerance of religion in the North." While calling for "a phased reduction of United States military forces" under a regional peace treaty, it also urged humanitarian steps such as family reunification and regular phone and mail links between North and South.

As the United Methodist General Conference convened this May, it seemed likely to fall in line with the ecclesiastical trend on Korea. The UM Board of Global Ministries had churned out a proposed resolution, resembling the NCC statement, on "Peace, Justice, and Reunification of Korea." But the caucus of Korean-American Methodists, disturbed at being excluded from the drafting process, organized to amend the resolution. The success of their efforts resulted in a resolution which stands as the most forthright, judicious U.S. church contribution to the discussion on Korean reunification. For example, the UM statement draws a sharp distinction between the progress of democracy in North and South Korea:

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, people's struggle for human rights and political freedom is completely repressed and there is no sign of improvement at this time. In the Republic of Korea, the political situation has been much improved with the constitutional change and the direct presidential election. However, there still exist elements of political repression.

The resolution sets forth, too, the necessary connection between freedom and reunification, stressing "the importance of open social institutions, including freedom for press, political, academic, religious, and cultural activities, in order to build a strong, unified Korea."

Flawed Resources

Unfortunately, U.S. Christians seeking more details on Korea cannot count on church-produced materials of the same discernment as the UM resolution. Besides the reports of the North American Coalition for Human Rights in Korea -- generally accurate, but unbalanced -- the most widely available resource is a 1984 NCC mission study book. Entitled *Fire Beneath the Frost: The Struggles of the Korean People and Church*, it was edited by Peggy Billings, the head (until October) of United Methodist missions overseas.

Fire Beneath the Frost, like the later NCC policy statement, is notable for the topics it skirts. In the 89-page book, there is only *one* brief reference to "the communist persecution and purge of Christians in the north" -- and that in the midst of a passage damning refugees from the North for their subsequent "blind" anti-communism! The conflict of 1950-1953 is treated as a "civil war," so as to avoid branding North Korea the aggressor.

If the NCC study does have a target for denunciation, it is not the North Korean communists but -- strangely -- the majority of South Korean Christians. These are condemned as "fundamentalists" -- "self-righteous," "intolerant," and deficient in "commitment to defend the minjung [people] from political oppression and economic exploitation." Worst of all, they are anti-communist:

To these "Christian-McCarthyists," the governmental policy of anti-communism is the main business of government. Communism and socialism are always wrong and bad while capitalism is always good and right. They preach that God unequivocally and unconditionally favors capitalism over against any other ideology and system. Such a bias not only distorts the biblical truth; it also helps perpetuate the division of the Korean peninsula.

Far from rejoicing at church growth in South Korea, *Fire Beneath the Frost* deems it "problematic."

Last year the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) published a more scholarly study, comparing the two Korean governments and assessing the prospects for reunification. Regrettably, *Two Koreas -- One Future?* demonstrates that fuller documentation does not guarantee sounder judgment. The AFSC policy statement at the end of the book recommends a far rasher step than did the NCC: the immediate, unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. This sudden move is required, according to the AFSC, because:

U.S. troops are in Korea because of perceived U.S. security interests, not for the defense of South Korea or in the interests of the Korean people. Removal of the U.S. troops from the peninsula would prevent their being drawn instantly into any new conflict.

In other words, if the North Korean army marched south again, the AFSC wants U.S. troops out of its way. The AFSC statement opts, too, for an odd kind of moral equivalence between North and South Korea, with an evenly positive view of the two antagonists: "Knowledge about both sides may begin to create awareness that each side in the Korean division has had substantial success in building a viable society."



A North Korean tunnel under the DMZ. During the 1970s South Korean and U.S. troops discovered three such tunnels, apparently designed to facilitate a possible invasion from the North. Seismic readings indicate continued North Korean work on other tunnels not yet located.

The supporting essays in *Two Koreas*, however, frequently do lean northward. Despite many estimates placing personal income in the South at double or more than in the North, the essay on economics, by John Halliday, refuses to say which regime has delivered more goods to its people. But Halliday does claim that in the North income is distributed more equally, women are accorded greater opportunities, and "the achievement in agriculture is impressive." The essay on politics, by Gregory Henderson, even finds an attractive side to the dictator Kim Il Sung:

North Koreans apparently admired Kim's composure under bombardment and reversal [during the Korean War], and his determined planning; his initiatives in invading the South were concealed from most of his citizens. He became his despairing nation's sole hope. He has since become the world's senior living national leader, the sole source of the North's government, law, and salvation cult.

Yet the most extreme of the AFSC essays is the "Korean Perspective" supplied by Kyungmo Chung. Chung rants against what he regards as South Korea's subservience to Japan. For deliverance from this dependence, Chung turns -- perversely -- to a system which has subjected its victims to far greater oppression:

The question then is whether Korea must await the driving force of Asian communism to achieve its aspiration of becoming again a united nation. China, Vietnam and Korea all fought against imperialism, which subjugated them to colonial humiliation. They have heard Marxism and Leninism preach the evils of imperialism. But they have seen that Asian communism is not a carbon copy of Soviet communism and that their historic experience is different from the conditions that produced Marxism or Leninism.... If U.S. citizens had realized the truth of Asian pragmatism they

might not have felt compelled to fight the Chinese, Vietnamese, and North Koreans, squandering millions of human lives and exhausting their own economic resources.

Apparently, Chung wishes that in 1950 we had allowed Kim Il Sung to complete his conquest.

Questionable Assumptions

The focus of all this recent U.S. church activity on Korea has been, obviously, reunification. The NCC mission study and statement and testimony before Congress, the denominational resolutions, the materials put out by the North American Coalition and the Friends Service Committee -- all dwell heavily on the urgency of bringing the people of North and South Korea together again. And indeed reunification is the universally expressed desire of Koreans, North and South.

The more difficult questions concern how best to pursue the goal of reunification. Many of our churches' pronouncements on Korea rely on a set of assumptions -- occasionally stated, often perhaps unconscious -- which need to be re-examined:

***Political division is the greatest evil, the source of all other evils, on the Korean peninsula today.** Are not poverty, dictatorship, and the denial of human rights evils as great as an unnatural border? And might not these other evils be just as oppressive in a united Korea -- more so if it were ruled from Pyongyang?

But is anti-communism necessarily a sin? Might it not simply be a sober judgment, reached after tasting the bitter fruits of communism?

***The United States bears principal responsibility for the division of Korea.** Does not the Soviet Union bear at least an equal responsibility? And what of the United Nations, which authorized the first South Korean government and mandated the U.S.-led defense of it? Moreover, if the alternative to division was to leave the entire peninsula to the Soviets and their communist proteges, can we fault U.S. officials for agreeing to a *de facto* split of Korea?

***We must confess anti-communism as the fundamental sin which maintains the division.** But is anti-communism necessarily a sin? Might it not simply be a sober judgment, reached after tasting the bitter fruits of communism? After considering the works of Kim Il Sung's hands, what sensible person could be other than anti-communist?

***The withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea is a necessary first step toward reunification.** Is withdrawal wise, though, if it might endanger South Korean security, tempting a new attack from the North? And what if the South Korean people do not want a troop withdrawal? According to *The Washington Post* (June 21, 1988), among South Koreans "only the militants and dissidents, accepting the North Korean line that the U.S. troops are the prime obstacle to reunification, want the soldiers withdrawn." Even Dorothy Ogle of the NCC admitted: "I don't believe that the majority of the [South Korean] people would like the forces withdrawn unilaterally."

***In the interest of reconciliation, all criticism of North Korea**

should be muted. The communist regime may even be praised on occasion. Where its misdeeds are undeniable, these should be equated with the sins of the South. But does reconciliation require that we ignore injustice, or blur distinctions between degrees of injustice? Does it not rather require that we face all problems honestly, and in proportion? If church publications aim criticism at injustices in South Korea, is there not even more cause to target the political repression, religious persecution, economic stagnation, and militarism in North Korea? Should not church statements mention the fact that it was North Korea which attacked in 1950, and that today North Korea deploys 40 percent more soldiers, 175 percent more tanks, 55 percent more artillery, and 60 percent more aircraft than does the South?

***On the other hand, when South Koreans fail to match our ideals of democracy and Christian social concern, they should be criticized unsparingly.** But should not our criticism be tempered by the realization that it has effect only because many South Koreans do share our democratic and Christian aspirations? And should we not give them fair credit for their political, economic, and religious accomplishments?

Which Way to Reconciliation? _____

If these assumptions are so shaky, why then do so many U.S. religious bodies hold to them? The problem is not that church activists do not know the vices of North Korea, the virtues of South Korea, or the rationale for U.S. policy. Their circumlocutions too often betray an aware-



Catholic Cardinal Kim Sou Hwan (right) meets in May 1987 with Roh Tae Woo, now the President of South Korea. Cardinal Kim was widely respected as a mediator during last year's constitutional crisis. He called upon the government to allow direct presidential elections, which it did in December.

ness of facts which do not fit their presuppositions. Perhaps, though, they cling to those presuppositions because they consider them the only available framework for attaining reunification. Since North Korea is not changing its attitude, they may reason, we must change ours first. We must repent of our anti-communism, cease taking sides with South Korea and against the North, and maybe then the North will begin to soften its ways.

The above is one -- highly dubious -- scenario for reunification. But there are several others. One is the solution attempted by Kim Il Sung in 1950: a forcible incorporation of the South under the Pyongyang dictator-

"...Resisting communism is possible only when democracy makes steady progress in South Korea and stabilizes the political scene, demonstrating with the support and unity of the people the superiority of democracy over communism."

-- Kim Dae Jung

ship. Some observers fear that the approach commonly advocated by mainline U.S. churches might make this grim outcome likelier than the rosy one they imagine.

A more cautious strategy was outlined by Ralph Clough of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, speaking at the same hearing as Dorothy Ogle:

Political unification of the Korean peninsula must be regarded as a long-term goal. Hostility between the two Koreas is so intense and their political systems so different that hope for early unification is unrealistic, despite the strong desire of individual Koreans throughout the peninsula for a unified country. It is not unrealistic, however, to anticipate an end to the total lack of intercourse that now prevails between the Koreas. Trade, travel, mail delivery and cultural exchanges would be highly desirable as a way of diminishing distrust, improving understanding between the peoples of the two parts of Korea and paving the way for eventual serious negotiations on political unification.

Kim Dae Jung, generally considered the most liberal of South Korean opposition party leaders, argues for another long-term strategy. In a letter written in 1982, while

imprisoned for his dissent, Kim stressed building up a strong democracy in the South, so as to push the North toward a more open system:

The south-north confrontation is an ideological confrontation between communism and democracy. Accordingly, the common interest shared by Korea, the United States, and Japan in resisting communism is possible only when democracy makes steady progress in South Korea and stabilizes the political scene, demonstrating with the support and unity of the people the superiority of democracy over communism.

Clough and Kim make points which our churches would do well to hear. Perhaps our involvement in Korea should be directed toward encouraging those developments in South Korea -- the growth of democracy, the economy, and particularly the Christian faith -- which bind it to our deepest values, while doing what little we can to prod greater openness in North Korea. But to adopt this approach would require the churches to recognize the moral difference between North and South Korea, and to drop their insistence on the rapid reunification of the two. They would have to identify with South Korea, rather than disowning it and striking a false pose of neutrality between South and North. A necessary element of this identification is the commitment to keep U.S. troops in the South, as long as South Koreans desire their presence.

There are some church statements and programs which might fit well into a longer-term strategy of reunification. The United Methodist General Conference resolution certainly accords well with such an approach. So too might the Presbyterian General Assembly's offer to facilitate humanitarian contacts between North and South Korea, as well as the North American Coalition's work on specific human rights cases in the South.

But church groups need to press with equal vigor for human rights in North Korea. For, given the recent changes in other communist countries, we may have grounds to hope someday for a relaxation of political, economic, and religious repression there too. Until that day comes, however, talk of Korean reunification ought to be tempered by a realistic caution. It is precisely that quality which has been missing from most mainline analyses of Korea.

-- Alan Wisdom

Mark Your Calendars!!!

IRD is sponsoring an all-day conference on November 17, 1988 entitled "Christian Teaching and the Just Resort to Violence." The conference will examine how the classic "just war" tradition offers a foundation for addressing contemporary revolutionary violence. There will be case studies on Nicaragua and South Africa. Please watch your mail for more information or call the IRD office (202/393-3200) for details as available.

Who Do Our Churches Support in Korea?

The authors of mainline U.S. church statements on Korea are well aware that their views would not find wide favor among Korean Christians. Denouncing South Korea categorically, ignoring or praising North Korea, and urging withdrawal of U.S. troops does not play well in Seoul. The National Council of Churches' mission study, *Fire Beneath the Frost*, admits as much: "Any suggestion that the majority of the Korean churches have been actively engaged in the struggle for justice and human rights [as defined by the NCC] would be misleading."

Yet U.S. church activists often claim they are merely echoing what they hear from "the church in Korea." Which church do they mean? Principally, it seems, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK).

The NCKK is an association of six Korean denominations -- Methodist, Anglican, Salvation Army, Evangelical, and two Presbyterian bodies -- which mostly sprang from the work of mainline U.S. Protestant missionaries earlier this century. Its member churches include less than one third of South Korea's ten million Christians.

In her controversial congressional testimony, Dorothy Ogle of the U.S. NCC referred repeatedly to the NCKK. She quoted a "Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reconciliation and Peace," issued by the Korean council this February. And this Korean church statement served her purposes well, for it reflects many of the same arguments espoused in the earlier U.S. NCC statement.

The NCKK declaration assumes the moral equivalence of North and South Korea. The Korean War was simply "a tragic internecine war" in which Christians were killed by both sides. The situation since then is, according to the NCKK, a case of absolutely parallel oppressions:

The prolongation of this division [of Korea] has led to abuses of human rights in both systems in the name of security and ideology, thus we have seen the repression of the freedoms of speech, press, assembly and association The educational systems and propaganda of north and south share in mutual vilification, each setting the two systems in competition in order to weaken and destroy the other, always perceived as the most hated enemy.

One finds here no hint here that democracy in the South has opened up new freedoms and led to bids for reconciliation with the North. Instead the NCKK proceeds to confess the "sin" of supporting South Korean self-defense.

Division has led to war, yet we Christians have committed the sin of endorsing the reinforcement of troops and further rearmament with the newest and most powerful weapons in the name of preventing another war.... We Christians confess to having sinned during the course of this subjugation [to 'outside powers'] by abandoning our sense of national

pride and betraying our people through forfeiting our spirit of national independence.... We confess that Christians of the south especially have sinned by making a virtual religious idol out of anti-communist ideology....

Minjung Theology:

"Unifying God and Revolution"

This NCKK perspective did not emerge from a void; rather it flows from a particular narrow stream of thought within the Korean churches. In the 1970s a small circle of U.S. and European-trained academics proclaimed a radical new "minjung (people's) theology." Minjung theology is often described as a Korean variant of liberation theology, although it does not proclaim the same commitment to Marxist analysis found in the Latin American model. The U.S. NCC's *Fire Beneath the Frost*, while conceding minjung theology's unpopularity in Korea, nevertheless embraces it -- for transparently political reasons:

This theology from the situation, though presently lacking in influence in Korea, could be the starting point for a truly Korean theology. Admitting bias, this book examines "minjung" theology from the assumption that it could become a starting point for changes in Korea.

In an anthology (*Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, 1983), the overtly political focus of minjung theology becomes clear. "The subject matter of minjung theology is not Jesus but the minjung (the people)," insists Suh Nam Dong, a former professor at Yonsei University. He defines the theology's mission as "to unify God (spiritual renewal) and revolution (structural renewal) concretely," so as to "suggest the direction along which the people's rights movement should go."



Student protestors, armed with sticks, take over two South Korean military vehicles. This incident occurred last May in the city of Kwangju, during an opposition campaign for direct presidential elections. Much smaller groups of radical students continue to hold violent demonstrations in favor of reunification and against the U.S. troop presence.

To accomplish this mission, Suh says, minjung theology seeks to overthrow "dogmatic theology." Christian symbols must be rescued from their traditional religious meanings. Instead, biblical figures must be politicized as Suh attempts here:

In terms of the minjung, Moses was a heroic leader. But Jesus was a resister who kept company with the minjung... Actually, if we use the term "revolution" for Jesus, we must recognize the fact that the style of his revolution is different from that of Moses. In the case of the Exodus, the revolution occurred only once at a historical point, while the event of the Crucifixion-Resurrection was aimed at permanent revolution. In the case of a one-time revolution, the minjung are the objects of salvation (salvation from outside). In the case of permanent revolution, the minjung become the subjects of salvation (self-reliant salvation).

More orthodox theologians might have difficulty finding a term other than "heresy" to describe this portrait of our Savior as Maoist.

"A few younger pastors and some church leaders do follow minjung theology, but most Korean churches do not accept it."

-- Rev Chung Yung Hwan

For its adherents, though, minjung theology has been far more than an intellectual excursion. It has inspired much agitation for change in South Korea. As minjung exponents have won posts within the NCKK over the past 15 years, they have established or sheltered an entire network of political pressure groups under church auspices. These include student and community associations, labor unions, and organizations devoted to protecting human rights or promoting unification. Together they form a nucleus of radical opposition to government policies, a perpetual source of demonstrations, strikes, and other "conscientizing" activities.

During the dictatorships of Gens. Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, these church-related groups were often lonely, courageous voices of protest. They raised valid complaints about the conditions of factory workers, farmers, and political prisoners, and they made just demands for greater democracy. As a result, some church leaders and workers suffered imprisonment and torture.

Yet now that South Korea has entered the democratic path, the confrontational tactics of the radical dissidents arouse more legitimate worries. Even leftist student leaders acknowledge that the South Korean middle class does not trust their current agenda: rapid reunification.

There is concern, too, about whether it is right to turn the Church into the headquarters of a partisan movement. Some of the church-related pressure groups have been diverted from their original spiritual purposes. Minjung theologian Suh Kwang Sun David relates, for instance, how the Urban Industrial Mission shifted from evangelizing workers to unionizing them, and how the Korean Student Christian Federation was transformed from a Bible-study fellowship to a "model" of campus political activism. Since U.S. church monies and missionaries have

played an important role in both the Urban Industrial Mission and the Student Christian Federation, American Christians might well consider whether they bear some responsibility for this politicization.

Where are the Real Radicals? _____

In fact, one may wonder whether in some cases the original radicals might not have come from our churches, with Korean Christians being the objects of American-induced radicalization. Certainly, if the NCKK's statement on reunification is compared to that of the U.S. NCC, the Korean document appears more moderate in several respects. The NCKK mentions that "Christians in north Korea have endured suffering and death in their confrontation with the north Korean communist regime" -- a far franker recognition of history than has been heard from our NCC. The Korean council specifies that any reunification arrangement must "provide the maximum protection of human liberty and dignity," with guarantees of freedom of speech and other human rights in both halves of the peninsula. Likewise, it calls for withdrawal of U.S. troops only when "a verifiable state of mutual trust is restored between north and south Korea, and there are international guarantees of peace and security to the entire Korean peninsula." By contrast, no such strong caveats qualify the U.S. NCC's advocacy of reunification.

Some Korean minjung theologians also condemn communism in phrases which are almost taboo in U.S. mainline circles. Suh Kwang Sun David draws this lesson from the experiences of North Korean Christians: "As communist persecution increased [after 1945] from harassment to arrest and detention without proper trials, and even to murder, Korean Christians came to realize that Communism is no ideology for the oppressed. It is just another way of oppressing the oppressed." Kim Yong Bock labels communism in the North a false "political messianism," "imposed from the outside by the Soviet Union, against the popular will of the Korean people." Suh and Kim would also denounce capitalism; nevertheless, their genuine ideological even-handedness looks much more moderate than the typical U.S. church posture.

How much support does the NCKK line have within South Korea? Not much, by all accounts. Members of NCKK churches comprise only 30 percent of the nation's Christians, and even they do not necessarily concur with the council's politics. Victor Hsu of the U.S. NCC told Religious News Service (June 3, 1988) that there is substantial resistance within NCKK denominations to its position on reunification. The Rev. Chung Yung Hwan, the former pastor of a Presbyterian church in Taegu, Korea, now ministering in Woodside, NY, says of the largest branch within the Korean council: "Almost all of the Korean Presbyterian churches are very conservative. A few younger pastors and some church leaders do follow minjung theology, but most Korean churches do not accept it."

Why, then, has the radical line won such undeserved acceptance among mainline U.S. church officials?

The Other Korean Christians

U.S. church statements do not often refer to Korean Christians other than a small minority -- the minjung theology advocates whom our mainline denominations support. And when they do speak of other Korean Christians -- the vast majority -- it is with scorn. The 1984 NCC mission study branded most Korean Protestants as "fundamentalists," "anti-people oriented, anti-nationalistic (or pseudo-nationalistic) and anti-democratic." Rarely do our churches cite these other Christians in their own words. Perhaps if they did, we all might learn a good deal more about Korean Christianity.

The Korea Evangelical Fellowship represents the sort of people the NCC would call "fundamentalist." Recently the fellowship belied that stereotype, issuing a landmark paper on "Human Rights in Korea." In the paper, the fellowship asserted that its first priority remained "to initiate a widespread Bible-based evangelical movement and a holy lifestyle in the Korean Church." Nevertheless, it added: "We Christians should help actualize the Christian ideal of life in our given situation by actively engaging ourselves in political, social, and economic activities. We are to renew our vision of Christianity as having ... a historical and culture transforming dimension." But the evangelical organization distinguished this approach from minjung theology: "It is wrong to politicize Christianity by reducing it to civil religion or nationalism in order to use it as a driving force in politics or social movements." It also warned, "Change by violence or revolution should never be repeated again."

The Rev. Peter Sun is a United Methodist minister, the pastor of a Korean-speaking church in Bethesda, MD, and the former head of the UM Korean caucus. He would resent being tagged a fundamentalist. Instead he feels his views accord with those of most Koreans in mainline churches, either here or in Korea. Sun accepts that the Church will sometimes speak on political matters, but

wants it to judge carefully in doing so. He contends, in an interview with the IRD, that sufficient care has often not been taken in the church campaign for Korean reunification:

There are people who, when they visit North Korea, act like guests, but when they visit South Korea, they act as if they are in their own home. They never call Kim Il Sung a dictator, but when they come to South Korea, they say: "Look here! This is a military dictatorship!" I think they should measure both North Korea and South Korea with the same yardstick.

Sun led the successful effort to amend the United Methodist General Conference resolution on Korea.

Cardinal Kim Sou Hwan, the spiritual leader of Korea's two million Catholics, has been almost completely overlooked in U.S. mainline statements. In Korea, however, Cardinal Kim has influence beyond the numbers of his flock. He is widely respected as a voice for justice and reconciliation, willing to criticize the government but also eager to build common ground between all political factions. In a 1986 sermon the cardinal spoke out against the ruling party:

... if they use politics to threaten the right to life of poor city dwellers, poor laborers and farmers and to override their human rights, nobody can support this kind of government.... This unjust politics causes immorality and injustice in this society and makes our future quite dark. In direct proportion to that it results in the increase of the extremely violent students who cry revolution.

On the other hand, a 1987 sermon advised the students:

I do not mean that we should physically fight the government, and I cannot agree to stage demonstrations that can endanger the overall security of the nation. As I have said before, I am in total disagreement with the young students who would raise a revolution.... As all dissident students must recognize true love of the nation, I sincerely ask them to return to democracy based on humanity and freedom.

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