

Missions to Korea: A Brief Summary

Samuel Hugh Moffett

Koreans themselves were the first effective evangelists to their own country. Earlier foreign missions, both Catholic and Protestant, left no lasting results, notably those of De Cespedes, a Jesuit chaplain (1592), Karl Gutzlaff, a German pietist (1832), and R.J. Thomas, a Welsh Congregationalist, who was martyred in Pyongyang in 1866. There is no proof in history that the more ancient Nestorian missions from Persia which reached China as early as 635 AD ever had contact with Korea.

The Catholic Century (1784-1884)

Catholicism took root in Korea only after a Confucian scholar, Yi Seung-Hoon, sought out Catholic missionaries in Peking and was baptized as Peter Lee to carry the gospel back to his homeland in 1784, ten years before a missionary was able to penetrate the "Hermit Kingdom". He had been sent by a group of friends who had discovered a copy of a book by Matthew Ricci, the great 17th century Jesuit missionary to China. Yi only imperfectly understood the faith he had embraced but passed it on with zeal.

Ten years later, in 1794, the bishop in Peking sent a Chinese priest, James Chu, to better instruct the growing church. He was the first foreign missionary in Korea. It is true that one foreign priest, De Cespedes, had come briefly in the 16th century but De Cespedes was not, strictly speaking, a missionary to Koreans. He was a chaplain with the invading Japanese troops of Hideyoshi. Among Chu's early followers were members of one of the most famous Confucian families in the land, the Chung family of Kwangju, in Kyonggi province. Chung Ta-San, a leader of the Silhak school, and his younger brother, Chung Yak-Jong, were both attracted to the new faith. But Confucian conservatives denounced it as treasonable. In the persecution of 1801 both James Chu and Chung Yak-Jong suffered martyrdom. There is no convincing evidence that the more famous older brother ever actually became a Christian.

Still no western priest had reached Korea as a missionary. The first was Father Pierre Maubant who crossed the Yalu and crawled secretly into the city of Euiju through a sewer drain in the wall in 1835. Father Maubant was martyred in 1839. The last great persecution was in 1866 under the Regent, the Tae-won-gun, when perhaps as many as two thousand Catholic believers died for the faith. But despite almost a hundred years of harassment and persecution, in 1882 when Korea finally began to open its doors to the outer world there may have been as many as 17,000 Catholics in Korea.

Protestant Beginnings (1832-1893)

As with the Catholics so also with the Protestants. It was a Korean merchant, Suh (or So) Sang-Yun, converted by Scottish missionaries in Manchuria, who gathered the first group of Protestant believers together in his home village a whole year before the first resident Protestant missionaries were able to enter the country. Earlier, in 1832, a German

missionary to China, the Rev. Karl Gutzlaff, had explored some of Korea's western islands. And in 1865, the Rev. Robert J. Thomas, a Welsh Congregationalist was the first to attempt an extended Protestant mission in Korea. He came that year for a month, learned a little of the language, and returned the next year on the ill-fated General Sherman which was attacked, burned and all aboard killed at Pyongyang. It is said that he managed to hand some Chinese Scriptures to the man who killed him.

But neither of these early attempts produced permanent results. Suh Sang-Yun was the pioneer Protestant evangelist. He had helped John Ross and John Macintyre in Manchuria translate Scripture portions into Korean, and then in 1883 brought the Scriptures at considerable risk into Korea. His own home in the Ongjin peninsula was the first Protestant "house church" in the land.

The first resident Protestant foreign missionary came a year later, in 1884. He was Horace Allen, M.D., a Presbyterian physician who transferred from China to Seoul, Korea, in September of that year. His medical skill saved the life of a royal prince and though public evangelism was still prohibited he received as his reward permission to open a hospital in 1885 (now Severance Hospital), the first legally recognized Christian institution in Korea.

The first Protestant clergymen followed soon after, arriving in April 1885; Horace G. Underwood, a Presbyterian, and Henry G. Appenzeller, a Methodist. Underwood performed the first baptism of a Korean inside Korea in 1886 and organized the first Protestant church (now Saemoonan Church) in 1887, in Seoul. A few weeks later Appenzeller held the first Methodist public service in what is now the Chungdong Church. He had already organized Korea's first Christian school, Paichai Academy, in 1886. It numbered among its early students Syngman Rhee, later to become the first president of the Republic of Korea. A dramatic Chris-

tian breakthrough was the opening of Korea's first school for girls, Ewha Academy, by the Methodist, Mrs. Scranton, in 1887.

But though the treaty ports had thus been opened to the gospel, the interior was still closed to missionary residence until Samuel A. Moffett moved permanently into North Korea in 1892-3. Pyongyang soon became the center of Christian expansion.

The Rise of the Korean Church (1894-1910)

It was up in the northeast, beginning about 1895, that Protestant church growth in Korea began a spectacular advance unmatched in the Christian world of that time. It reached a climax in the Great Korean Revival of 1907-08. The number of Protestant adherents in Korea leaped from a couple of hundred in 1890 to 50,000 in 1905 and to more than 200,000 in 1909. Communicant membership, of course, was much lower, for admission standards were very strict usually requiring a year or more of supervised preparation for new converts.

What made the Korean church grow? Some attribute it to the crumbling of Korean political and social institutions in this period. Japanese military influence supplanted the Chinese. Queen Min was murdered. The 500-year-old Yi dynasty fell, and Korea became a colony. As the old foundations disintegrated, confidence in Korea's old religions, Confucianism and Buddhism, waned and the more primitive native faiths began to lose prestige. To many Koreans it seemed that the time was ripe for a faith that promised solid hope and eternal foundations.

Some turned to the new faith not as much for personal comfort as for hope of national renewal. Christian schools were culturally revolutionary and different. They were the first to enroll girls and to introduce exciting new fields of western learning such as mathematics and science, music, and even athletics.

Also important was the adoption by Presbyterians of a successful missionary strategy for church planting, the Nevius, or "three-self" plan, which called for self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating leadership of an autonomous national church. It began with emphasis on Bible study for all believers in widely organized Bible classes. In 1901 the first seminary was organized in Pyongyang for specialized training for the ministry.

The beginnings of church organization in Korea were emphatically ecumenical, and this too contributed to the early growth. The four different Presbyterian missions (northern and southern U.S.A., Australian and Canadian) agreed to drop their home-base divisions and join together to form only one Presbyterian church in Korea. For this purpose, as early as 1889 they established a missionary organization of inter-mission cooperation that came to be called the Presbyterian Council. It was to function in a limited way as a temporary "mission church" which quite purposefully chose not to call itself a denomination, waiting for the day when the growing Korean community of Christians could form a nation-wide Korean church.

By 1892 enthusiasm for missionary cooperation over-leaped confessional boundaries and brought Methodists and Presbyterians into a comity agreement to divide the peninsula into non-competitive geographical spheres of influence. And as early as 1889 the missions had pooled their talents and resources for literary and translation work and had formed the Korean Religious Tract Society (now the Korean Christian Literature Society). In schools and hospitals, as well, Protestant missionary cooperation overcame denominational barriers, as when Presbyterians welcomed Methodist participation in the foundation of Union Christian College (Soongsil, now Soongjun University) in 1905, the first school in Korea to grant college degrees. Severance Medical Hospital, formed in 1904 as an outgrowth of Dr.

Allen's Royal Hospital, and Chosen Christian College (1915), were both ecumenically cooperative ventures and are now combined as Yonsei University.

The high tide to union was the year 1905-6 when Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, preparing for the establishment of "one Korean National Church, to be called the Church of Christ in Korea," brought the six major missions then at work in Korea into a General Council of Evangelical Missions to aim toward the formation of a single national Protestant denomination. It was a goal never realized, but friendly cooperation continued among the separate denominations that began to form from that time on.

In 1907 when the Presbyterian seminary graduated its first class of seven men, and for the first time the number of Korean ministers and elders outnumbered the missionaries, the mission turned over the church to the Koreans and together they formed a united, independent Korean Presbyterian Church. The new church courteously elected a missionary, S.A. Moffett, founder and president of the seminary, as the first moderator of the first Presbytery.

Meanwhile other Protestant missions had entered Korea in the wake of the pioneering northern Presbyterians and Methodists: Australian Presbyterians (1889), Independent Baptists (1889), the Church of England (1890), southern Presbyterians, U.S. (1892), Southern Methodists, U.S. (1896), Canadian Presbyterians (1898), and Seventh Day Adventists (1903). In 1907 Ernest A. Kilbourne and the Charles Cowmans of the Oriental Missionary Society (now OMS International) came to Korea for evangelistic meetings out of which grew Korea's third largest Protestant denomination, the Korean Evangelical Church. The Salvation Army entered in 1908.

But more than anything else it was the great revival of 1907-08 that capped the climax of that early church growth.

The outstanding leader was the Presbyterian evangelist and Bible teacher, the Rev. Kil Sun-Ju, who had just been ordained as one of the first seven Korean ministers. It was a cleansing, uniting revival. People confessed past sins and made right old wrongs and reached out across denominational divisions. As Koreans said afterward to the missionaries, "Some of you go back to John Calvin, and some of you to John Wesley, but we can go back no farther than 1907 when we first really knew the Lord Jesus Christ." Both missionaries and Koreans gave primary credit for growth in the church to the work of the Holy Spirit, to faithful study of the Bible and to the evangelistic enthusiasm of Korean laymen and laywomen as the cutting edge of Christian outreach.

The Years of Pressure (1910-1960)

For a while, however, after the final Japanese annexation in 1910, constant government harassment slowed the growth of the church perceptibly. A trumped-up conspiracy trial in 1912 tried to implicate the foreign missionaries and jailed scores of Korean Christians, including the Korean nobleman and Methodist educator, Yun Tchi-Ho. The Church was one structure that the Japanese could not control. Political pressure did affect its numerical growth. But its inner life and organization strengthened and its popularity and prestige in the nation as a whole was greatly advanced.

The Presbyterians who had formed an autonomous Korean presbytery in 1907, added other presbyteries and organized a General Assembly in 1912, electing Horace G. Underwood, the pioneer Presbyterian clergyman in Korea as the first Assembly moderator. Northern Methodists formed a Korea Conference in 1908, and the Southern Methodists in 1918, but it was not until 1930 that the two conferences became independently Korean and united as the Korean Methodist Church "genuinely Christian, truly Methodist

and really Korean." In the next year, 1931, the Korean Methodists, under their first Korean bishop, Ryang Ju-Sam, were the first to ordain women to the ministry in Korea, beginning with fourteen American missionaries.

In 1912 the General Council of Evangelical Missions in Korea enlarged its function of avoiding unseemly denominational competition and changed its name to the Federal Council of Protestant Evangelical Missions. As more Korean denominations were organized, the Federal Council of Churches and Missions was formed in 1919, changing its name again in 1929 to the National Christian Council (NCC), and eventually to the Korea National Council of Churches (KNCC), thus narrowing membership to national church denominations and excluding missions and parachurch organizations.

But the imposition of Japanese colonial rule seriously checked Christian advance in the peninsula. Its first effects were felt in the Christian schools. The teaching of religion and the Bible was increasingly limited by the government. In 1919 Korean patriotism and Christian passion for freedom combined to touch off one of the most moving non-violent mass demonstrations for national independence in modern times. Of the 33 men who signed the Korean Declaration of Independence, 16 were Christians. This was almost half of the total, though only 3% of the country was then Christian.

Again in the 1930's the church felt the hard hand of Japanese colonial pressures. In an effort to bind the empire into a fighting force for the conquest of all Asia, the Japanese tried to force the national religion, Shinto worship, on all subjects of the emperor. When Christians objected they were severely punished, sometimes martyred. All missionaries were forced out by the end of 1941.

Koreans greeted the defeat of Japan and the liberation of their country in 1945 with delirious joy. But their rejoicing was cut short by the arbitrary division of the peninsula,

north and south, and the pulverizing communist invasion of 1950. In the north the church was wiped out or driven underground. In the south church growth once again soared upward. But the 1950s was a decade of tragic church division. Perhaps as a result of the military and social instability of those troubled times almost every major Korean Protestant denomination was racked by schisms.

Post-War Recovery (1960-)

But through divisions, wars and persecutions the Korean churches have never lost their capacity to witness and to grow. From the beginning Korean Christians have been reaching out in mission, first to their own people, and then to the world. One of the first seven Koreans ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1907 was sent as a missionary to Cheju Island, and missions to Siberia (1909), Japan (1909) and Manchuria (1910) followed. Then the Methodists in 1910 and the Presbyterians in 1912 undertook Korean missions to the Chinese in China. After World War II the whole world became a mission field for Korea's churches as their missionaries spread from Thailand to Ethiopia and from Arabia to Los Angeles.

The world Christian mission is now fully a two-way movement in Korea. As Korea sent out its own missionaries, new foreign mission groups entered Korea after the war in great numbers: Southern Baptists, the Evangelical Alliance Mission, a number of Pentecostal bodies, Nazarenes, Missouri Lutherans and many others. The 1984 Prayer Calendar of Missions in Korea lists 56 different Protestant missions at work in the southern part of the peninsula.

Meanwhile the growth of the Korean church never ceases to amaze observers of the world Christian mission. In every decade since 1940 the Protestant community has come close to doubling its membership. In 1940 there were only 370,000

Protestant adherents reported. In 1981 the Ministry of Culture and Information reported 9,076,000 Korean Christians (7,637,000 Protestants and 1,439,000 Roman Catholics). If heterodox groups like the Unification Church and the Olive Tree Cult are excluded, the Protestant figure is nearer 6,800,000.

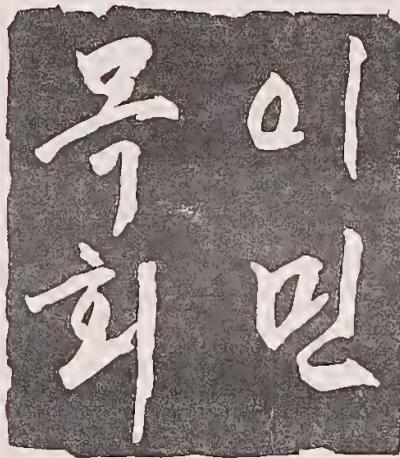
But whatever the actual number of Korean Christians may be, rapid growth creates new problems. Will Korea's Christians be able to survive the temptations of internal affluence and power as they have stood so bravely under external persecution? If their history under God is any guide, they will. But this much, at least is without doubt; they stand as one of the largest and strongest Christian communities in the third world. So much the more demanding are their responsibilities in Christian life and mission.

Samuel Hugh Moffett
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머 리 말

지금부터 약15년전부터 재미한인이민교회는 범이민자수와 더불어 급성장하기 시작하였다. 이민교회 초창기에는 물론 지난 15년의 급성장기간동안 이민교회는 놀라게 많은 이민들에게 복음선교 뿐만 아니라 문화적 사회적 봉사를 해왔다. 이러한 이민교회의 큰 업적과 봉사사업은 많은 목사님들과 성도님들의 막대한 희생적 노력과 헌신이 없었으면 불가능하였을 것이다. 그리고 이민교회를 오늘까지 각별히 돌보시고 키워주신 전능하신 하나님께 감사와 찬송을 드려야 마땅할줄안다.

이제 이민교회는 근 15년성장기간을 지내온 결과 여러면으로 정리와 반성의 시기에 들어섰다고 볼 수 있다. 성숙한 교회로서 특히 미국장로교단과 한가족이 된 우리교회들은 하나님께서 우리에게 주신 주님의 몸된 교회로서의 사명이 무엇이며 어떻게 그 사명완수에 임하여야 할 것인가? 라는 질문을 해박야될 시기가 왔다고 믿는다.

한국문화와 미국문화의 사이에 놓인 우리의 특수 상황속에서 그리스도의 제자들로서 우리에게 주어진 소명이 무엇인가를 생각할때가 왔다는 말이다. 우리에게는 많은 중대하며 긴 급한 과제가 있다. 코리안-아메리칸의 상황 속에서의 크리스찬의 삶의 의미는 무엇인가? 우리는 코리안-아메리칸 장로교인으로서 어떻게 우리의 교단의 선교사업에 동참하며 공헌할 것인가? 우리는 어떻게 우리의 2세들을 위한 목회를 좀더 효과적으로 할 수 있을까? 이러한 과제들이 우리를 도전하고 있다.

이민교회가 코리안-아메리칸 이라는 특수상황에서 또한 장로교회로서 우리의 사명에 충실하기 위하여서는 온 성도들