

Mission in Christ's Way? The Responses of the Korean Churches to the Korean War

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Summary:

The article examines the ideological and socially religious approaches and positions of North Korean and South Korean Christian organizations regarding the Korean War and the missionary impact of these positions. It examines how the Christian Churches on both sides of Korea justified, each one with their own theological arguments, their position on the communist and capitalist regimes that divided Korea during and after the Korean War.

Keywords:

Korean War, NKCA, Christian mission, persecution, martyrdom.

Koreans commemorate the seventh anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War on 25th of June 1950. Byung-uk Chang criticized Korean theologians: "I am shocked that there is not a single 'confession of faith' or theological reflections on the Korean War. I expected there would be some critical statement of the Christian position on the war".² This could be something of an overstatement. However, it is true that we can hardly find any theological works on the issue.

The Korean conflict brought about a tragic internecine war on the peninsula, which also intensified the international conflict. More tonnage in bombs was dropped on Korea than on the whole of Europe in the Second World War, reducing the entire peninsula to ashes. The Korean War resulted in 220,000 South Korean, over 600,000

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² Byung-uk Jang, *6.25 Gongsan Namchim kwa Kyohoe*, (The Korean War and Church), Seoul, Hankuk Kyoyuk Gongsas, 1983, p.1.

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North Korean, 1,000,000 Chinese, 140,000 American, and over 16,000 other UN military casualties.³

It should be also remembered that the Korean War killed millions of civilians. There were 1,000,000 South Korean and 3,000,000 North Korean estimated civilian casualties.⁴ About 100,000 civilians were listed as “killed or missing” in the South⁵ and 1,200,000 in the North.⁶ That means that, including soldiers, over one sixth of the whole Korean population, which was about thirty million in 1950, were killed during the war. In addition to this, ten million people became separated from their own closest family members, and have remained unable to meet each other from the end of this war until now.⁷ During the war, 43% of Korea’s industrial facilities were destroyed and 33% of its homes devastated.⁸

Although some outstanding research has been published since Chang’s criticism,⁹ it is still difficult to find studies of Christianity in North Korea during the Korean War. Therefore, in this essay, we will examine both North and South Korean Christian approaches to the war, and its missiological impacts.

The War and the North Korean Churches

Cooperation: The Response of NKCA

During the Korean War, Christians in North Korea became sharply divided due to the ideological confrontation. As the war developed, they were forced to choose one

³ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Macropedia, vol. 10: Knowledge in Depth, London, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1978, p.513.

⁴ *Ibid.* For more detail statistics, see, D. Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, New York, St. Martin’s, 1964, pp.460-461.

⁵ D. Rees calculates 117,000. *Ibid.*, p.460.

⁶ *The Hankyoreh*, 25th June 2001, reported this figure quoting from Russian secret military documents of the Korean War.

⁷ Man-kil Kang, *Kocheo Ssun Hankuk Hyundaesa*, (The Revised Modern History of Korea), Seoul, Chanjak kwa Bipyungsa, 1994, p.226.

⁸ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 10, 513.

⁹ See, Chi-joon Noh, “Influences of the Korean War on Korean Religion”, Korea Society of Sociology ed., *Hankuk Junjaeng kwa Sahoe Byundong*, (The Korean War and Social Changes), Seoul, Pulbit, 1992, pp.223-259; In-chul Kang, “The Role of Religion in the Development of Anti-Communism during the Korean War”, *Ibid.*, pp.182-222; Jung-min Suh, “The Korean War and Christianity”, in Soo-il Choi ed., *Hinyun Shinhak kwa Tongil Hinyub Undong*, (Jubilee Theology and Jubilee Runification Movement), Chonan, Institute for Korean Theology, 1995, pp.396-419; Joong-hyun Choi, “The Korean War and Messianic Groups: Two Cases in Contrast”, PhD Thesis, Syracuse University, 1993; Heung-soo Kim, *A Study of the Korean War and This-Worldly Blessings in the Christian Churches*, Seoul, IKCH, 1999.

of the two systems, or ideologies, for survival. Under the Communists, northern churches were at first forced to demonstrate their patriotism. Later, when the Allied army entered the North, they needed to prove that their cooperation with the Communists was not their real intention. In this situation, two extreme positions on the war developed as the Christians in the North divided into pro-North Korean Christian Association (NKCA) which is pro-communist and anti-NKCA groups, the latter being former Anti-Japanese conservative Christians under the Japanese occupation.

From the beginning, the NKCA was highly supportive of the “national liberation war against American colonists”. The NKCA organized a series of Christian rallies expressing Christian support for the war, with prayers for the victory of the North Korean army. For instance, on 30th June 1950, the “Wonsan Christian Indignation Meeting” expressing anger against the USA was held at the Wonsan First Presbyterian Church. It adopted a statement that called for “Christian Support for Victory in the Just War.”¹⁰ The Christian Pastors Indignation Meeting in Pyongyang was held “ecumenically” on 15th August. The meeting, in which most of the leaders of all the denominations participated, announced an appeal saying:

Dearly beloved brethren, all Christians and pastors in North Korea!

We sincerely appeal to brothers to defend divine doctrine and justice, and to protect peace, freedom, reunification and the independence of the fatherland as follows:

- Let all churches hold worship to God for the complete victory of our wise and brave people’s army in the just and holy war for driving out the American imperialists.

- Let us pray for the prosperity of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which secures religious freedom for Christians and a fully, happy and peaceful life for us.

- Let us pray for the just judgment of God upon Rhee Syngman and his followers, who are the murderers and invaders in this civil war.

- Let us pray for the just judgment of God upon the American imperialists, who indiscriminately bomb our cities, villages and even our holy sanctuaries.

This war is a just and holy war to secure the reunification, independence, freedom and peace of the fatherland against the invaders.¹¹

¹⁰ *The Nodong Shinmoon*, 15th August 1950.

¹¹ “Appeal to All Patriotic Christians and the Religious”, 5th August 1950, The Christian Pastors Indignation Meeting in Pyongyang. This appeal was signed by thirty-six denominational leaders including Rev. Yang-uk Kang (Chairperson of the Central Committee, NKCA), Rt. Rev. Ik-doo Kim (Moderator, Presbyterian Church), Rev. Jin-koo Lee (Vice-Chairperson, Methodist Church).

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Here, the war is justified as a just and holy war. Although the NKCA believed that the South opened the general invasion, it was a high-sounding political appeal, which adopted the Communist slogans uncritically, ignoring the fact that the North also had responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities. Their declaration of holy war was certainly an over-justification of the war. The statement was an uncritical endorsement of the Communist political line rather than a serious theological reflection.

The NKCA went on further to support the Communists, suggesting a "Prayer Day for Eradicating the Invader American Imperialists and Traitor Syngman Rhee's Conspirators" on 13th August. The official organ of the Korean Workers Party (KWP) reported: "All over the country, a worship for victory was held in churches expressing a truly patriotic heart."¹² Furthermore, some of the NKCA leaders gave donations for providing weapons for the army, and encouraged laypeople to participate in the donations.¹³ For instance, Rt. Rev. Ik-doo Kim, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and Chairperson of the NKCA, donated 100,000 Won for this purpose.¹⁴

This cooperation was a sign of the fact that the NKCA leaders' understanding of the war was similar to that of the Communists. The NKCA had been born out of a criticism of pro-Japanese and petit-bourgeois Protestantism in North Korea. It had supported the establishment of the Communist state and its policies, such as land reform. Therefore, the NKCA's cooperation with the Communists was not something new. However, this is not enough to explain why the NKCA, a Christian association, eagerly supported the war. Here is a quotation, which shows their understanding of the war:

The invasion of our fatherland and the satanic barbarous acts of American imperialists have provoked the anger of all people in North Korea. It has completely removed any remnant of Christian respect for the Americans, who introduced the Gospel to Korea. Koreans had never hurt the Americans before. However, now American imperialists have sent their troops to the fatherland, and the troops are destroying our peaceful cities and villages. They have even massively killed unarmed women, infants and elderly people. The air force of, a so-called Christian country, America, bombs cities on Sunday, the Sabbath. They killed Christians who were at worship by bombing churches. We cannot forgive them. We, Christians, must rise for the reunification and independence of the fatherland based on our patriotism, in response to the appeal of our great leader, Kim Il-sung.¹⁵

¹² *The Nodong Shinmoon*, 15th August 1950.

¹³ See, "Appeal to All Patriotic Christians and the Religious", 5th August 1950.

¹⁴ *The Nodong Shinmoon*, 7th August 1950.

¹⁵ "The Speech of Rev. Sung-hoon Kwon", in *Ibid.*

The NKCA leaders clearly did not think of the war as a civil war. They regarded it as a just war to preserve the independence of Korea against American colonialism. Based on this understanding, it was possible for them to support the war as an expression of Christian patriotism.

However, their stance emphasized a one-side interpretation of the Korean War. Even though the war had some characteristics of a “proxy war” by superpowers, it was certainly provoked by Koreans themselves as a civil war. When we think about this characteristic, it was necessary for the NKCA to emphasize peace and reconciliation as a Christian church before justifying the war. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find any such efforts on the part of NKCA.

The NKCA had originally intended the renewal of Protestant Christianity in North Korea in the Communist context. However, renewal should not have meant uncritical assimilation of Communist policy. Although Rhee certainly did cooperate with pro-Japanese and US troops to kill many civilians, the NKCA should have considered its justification of the war more carefully because secular powers often use religious authority for their political purposes. As a result, the NKCA failed to receive widespread support within Protestant Christianity in North Korea. Consequently, the majority of northern Christians welcomed and supported the Allied army when they rolled back the northern advance.

The NKCA’s support for the war was an emotional approach, based on ideological sympathy and diplomatic self-interest, rather than theological reasoning. The NKCA’s cooperation with the Communists during the war was therefore carried on without support from below, continuing the inadequate leadership style that had already prevailed in the attempted renewal during the pre-war period. Even some of the NKCA leaders who had themselves signed the appeal, chose to move to the South, or remain there, when the situation changed.¹⁶

“Exodus”: The Response of Majority

From the beginning of the war, according to Eun-kyun Hwang, the majority of Christians in North Korea, who had maintained their anti-Communist position, waited for the coming of “the angel of salvation, the US army”.¹⁷ The Allied army finally did roll back occupy most of the North Korean region in October 1950. When the Allied army entered Pyongyang, Christians in North Korea seemed “to re-experience the

¹⁶ See, Kwang-soo Kim, *Bukhan Kyohoe Tamgusa*, (A History of Christianity in North Korea), Seoul, Christian Literature Press, 1994, p.247.

¹⁷ Eun-kyoon Hwang, “Liberation and Churches in Pyongyang”, *Christian World*, vol. 1, 1957; reprinted in Heung-soo Kim ed., *A History of North Korean Church since 1945*, pp.328-331.

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rejoicing of the liberation from the Japanese".¹⁸ On 29th October, the Welcoming Service For the Allied Army was held at the Seomoonbak Church, gathering 3,000 Christians.¹⁹ This was the same church in which, earlier on, a victory service for the North Korean army had been held. The difference this time was that it was now the US army that was being welcomed as a "salvation army".²⁰

Hweui Sunwoo, a former South Korean intelligence officer in Pyongyang, described the atmosphere as follows:

The Christians in Pyongyang, who recovered freedom of faith, thanked God for giving them the second liberation by sending the Allied army. They organized a Great Revival Prayer Meeting to glorify the name of God on this occasion.²¹

It was indeed a moment of great joy for those Christians who had suffered under the Communists. However, there was not the same feeling among the majority of non-Christian civilians, most of whom were peasants. Young-sup Kang, chairperson of the Korean Christian Federation, says:

The vast majority of North Koreans hated the US army because many of them had lost their family members by the indiscriminate bombing of the US air force. However, Christians praised the US troops like a crusade of divinely liberating soldiers. It was shameful for me to say, "I am a Christian".²²

Furthermore, one thousand workers from the Christian Placation Unit came with the Allied Army up to North Korea for propaganda activity aimed at pro-Communist working class people. This unit was organized by the Korean Christian National Relief Association, cooperating with the Department of Defense.²³ This group of workers was led by anti-Communist pastors who had fled to the South in order to avoid persecution before the war, having failed to gain power through setting up Christian political parties. These pastors included Eun-kyun Hwang, Kyung-jik Han, Hang-rok Cho and Won-ryong Kang and others.²⁴ Most of the group were also members of

¹⁸ Dae-sun Park, "My Experience of the Korean War", *The Christian Newspaper*, 21st June 1969.

¹⁹ H. A. Rhodes and A. Campbell, *History of the Korean Mission, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1935-1959*, New York, Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1965, p.100.

²⁰ H. E. Fey, "A Great Church in Seoul", *The Christian Century*, 30th January 1951, 1058.

²¹ Hweui Sunwoo, *Nodaji*, (A Bonanza), vol.3, Seoul, Dongseo Munhwasa, 1986, p.176.

²² Interview with Rev. Young-sup Kang, 13th December 2000, Fukuoka, Japan.

²³ A. D. Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea*, Seoul, CLS, 1971, pp.247-249.

²⁴ See, Heung-soo Kim, *A Study of the Korean War and This-Worldly Blessings in the Christian Churches*, pp.60-63; Yong-bock Kim, *Hankuk Sahoe wa Kidokyo*, (Korean

Seobuk Chunnyun Dan, or North West Youth League, an extreme right wing Christian anti-Communist organization. Soon afterwards, the Christian Placation Unit developed into *Chiandae* or the Civilian Security Guard in North Korea. Most of these voluntary guards were sons of former Christian landlords in North Korea, and were very hostile towards the Communists, and especially towards those peasants who had occupied their land. There is no doubt that “many Christian young people in the guard were involved in investigating and executing the Communists.”²⁵

This pro-South and pro-American attitudes of many northern Christians also brought persecution as the North Korean army retreated.²⁶ During the retreat, the Communist troops executed a number of Protestant leaders. Young-bihn Lee says, “At that time the Communists considered Christians as pro-American, and even as US intelligence agents”.²⁷ According to Kwang-soo Kim, 156 Protestant leaders were “martyred”, most of them in October 1950.²⁸ Although the executions were not the intention of Kim Il-sung, they had a crucial effect in increasing Christian hostility towards the Communists.

Consequently, when Chinese troops intervened and the Allied army retreated again, a large number of northern Christians, particularly the leaders, were in difficulty. They would not stay any longer in the North because they feared the reaction of the Communists. Heung-soo Kim illustrates:

When the prayer meeting for the Allied army was continuing, Chinese troops started to roll back the Allies. It was inevitable for the pastors in North Korea to flee towards the south because the Allied army was defeated by the Chinese troops. It proved that the placation work was impatient, and failed due to the changes of war situation. Most Christians could not stay any longer in North Korea because they welcomed and supported the enemy of North Korea, the Allied army.²⁹

Society and Christianity), Seoul, Hankuk Kidokyo Munhwa Yonkuso, 1984, pp.281-282.

²⁵ IKCH ed., *Bukhan Kyohoe Sa*, (A History of the North Korean Church), Seoul, IKCH, 1996, p.422.

²⁶ These executions mostly took place in September and October during the retreat of the Second Corps of the North Korean Army, commanded by General Mu Jung.

²⁷ Young-bihn Lee and Soon-hwan Kim, *Tongil kwa Kidokyo*, (Reunification and Christianity), Seoul, Konan Hamkke, 1994, p.107.

²⁸ See, Kwang-soo Kim, Op. Cit., pp.235-266. According to his statistics, 123 were Presbyterian, 25 Methodist and 8 Holiness Church leaders.

²⁹ Heung-soo Kim, *A Study of the Korean War and This-Worldly Blessings in the Christian Churches*, p.62.

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In the end, a majority of the northern Christians fled to the South with the support of the US troops.³⁰ It is difficult to estimate how many Protestant Christians fled to the South. Before the Korean War, there were about 2,000 churches, 200,000 Christians, 410 pastors, 498 evangelists and 2,142 elders in Protestant Christianity in North Korea.³¹ According to the statistics of Ki-Jun Koh, after the war only about 20 ordained pastors and 50,000 Christians were left.³²

The Christians who fled call this event an “exodus”, under the guidance of God.³³ Whether it was indeed an “exodus” or merely an evacuation, Dong-kun Hong criticizes what happened, claiming that “the evacuation of the pastors is an ethical issue, because they left behind a quarter of their congregations in the North”.³⁴ Byung-uk Chang also criticizes the silence of theologians on this point. He wonders how the shepherds could evacuate to the South while leaving their sheep in the North.³⁵ On the other hand, the NKCA leaders also failed to cultivate Christianity in the Communist context, because only about 20 ordained members of NKCA chose to stay the North.

The Remnants

Most northern Christians evacuated to the south in January 1951, when the Allied army retreated. The battle line stabilized in spring, and the truce talks began in

³⁰ In Pyongyang, special trains for Christians were organized by the Allied army. In Hamhung, Concerning 40,000 Christians fled to the South on US warships. See, Kwang-soo Kim, *Op. Cit.*, pp.264-266.

³¹ KWP, *Chosun Junang Nyungam*, (Yearbook of North Korea), Pyongyang, KWP Press, 1949, p.13, Ministry of Reunification Archival no. 488. C.f., Ki-jun Koh, the former general secretary of the KCF reported that there were 1,473 Protestant churches and 117,000 Christians in North Korea before the war. These statistics could be those of NKCA member churches. See, Ki-jun Koh, “Socialism and Christianity”, manuscript, Dialogue on the *Juche* Idea and the Reunification of the Fatherland among the Christians in the North and in Overseas and the North Korean Scholars, 3rd November 1981, Vienna, Austria, 4. N.B., The author follows the North Korean governmental statistics in this article.

³² E. Weingartner, “Confidential Report: CCIA/WCC Delegation to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, 9-16 November 1987.”

³³ Kwang-soo Kim, *Op. Cit.*, p.266.

³⁴ Dong-kun Hong, *Miwan eui Kuihyang Ilki*, (The Uncompleted Diary of Homecoming), Seoul, Hanul, 1988, p.234.

³⁵ C.f. When East and West Germany divided, most pastors in Communist East Germany remained for their congregations, See, K. Barth and J. Hamel, *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land*, New York, Association Press, 1959; G. Baum, *The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1996, pp.25-44.

July 1951. With the beginning of the talks, the war came to a state of lull. From this point onwards, it was almost impossible for the Christians to evacuate to the South.

In contrast to the flight of the majority of the pastors from North Korea, it is useful to cite two outstanding stories of those who kept their ministry in the North. A female evangelist in Pyongyang, Soon-hyo Kim, who was missionary to China before the war, said, “All the people are going down to the South, but I will go up to my home church to die for my sheep”. She was invited to the Second Shineuijoo Presbyterian Church, whose senior male pastor had fled even before the war. She was killed in the Spring of 1951, because she refused to cooperate with the Communists.³⁶ Kwang-soo Kim remembers several extraordinary stories of pastors who did not evacuate to the South, in order to continue their ministry in the North, and were finally executed by the Communists.³⁷

Hence, in addition to the diplomatic and emotional approach of the NKCA, and in contrast to that approach, there was also an evangelistic approach among of the Christian remnants in North Korea. These pastors had the same understanding of Communism as Christians who evacuated, but they chose to be in the North due to their strong evangelistic zeal. However, most these remnants were executed because they refused to support the Communists during the war.³⁸

Our second example is Pung-woon Lee, a Methodist pastor in a rural village, who realized that the church should serve the poor, and thus become an authentic church in the Communist context. Based on this understanding, he devoted himself to building up a local collective farming community for the poor peasants. When he died in 1960, the Communists in his region built a monument in remembrance of his contribution for the peasants.³⁹

Unfortunately, except for the monument, there is no record of his work. However, in him we can find a new paradigm for a Christian approach to the Communist context. His was a people-centered approach, in contrast to the evangelistic approach of conservative pastors and the diplomatic approach of the NKCA. However, it is difficult to find other cases of the people-centered approach in this period. This indicates that this approach was not popular within the NKCA.

For the majority of the Christian remnants in the Communist “Babylon”, North Korea, a long and suffering pilgrimage awaited for them. During the Korean War, 408 clergy members, including evangelists, were executed by the Communists, and 1,373

³⁶ Kwang-soo Kim, *Op. Cit.*, pp.249.

³⁷ See, Kwang-soo Kim, *Ibid.*, pp.248-259.

³⁸ See, Yang-sun Kim, *Hankuk Kidokyo Haebang Shibnyunsa* (A Decade History of the Liberation of the Korean Church), Seoul, Christian Literature Press, 1956, p. 90.

³⁹ Young-bihn Lee and Sun-hwan Kim, *Op. Cit.*, pp.95-109.

churches burned down.⁴⁰ The 50,000 remaining Christians had to face the Communist reaction and social hostility, without pastors, and without spiritual shelters, or sanctuaries. Moreover, many of them were women. According to Dong-kun Hong, in many cases, only fathers and sons evacuated to the South “to preserve their family name”, while women (wives and mothers) and daughters were left behind.⁴¹

During the Korean War, northern churches were divided those that were between pro-Communist and those that were pro-capitalist. Depending on their ideological preferences, they cooperated either with the North or with the South, and finally chose one of the two Koreas. In the North, the NKCA represented the cooperation paradigm between church and state, while the others represented the opposition paradigm. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find any ecclesiastical efforts towards peace and reconciliation for the whole of Korea during the war, instead, the Christians were fully involved in the divisions that were tearing the country apart, some of them taking one side and others the other.

The War and the Southern Churches

Christian Support for the War

From the establishment of Syngman Rhee's regime in the South, Protestant Christians were highly supportive of him. Rhee had been an exile in the USA during the Japanese colonial period. Therefore, he had little political background in Korea compared to other political leaders who had led the independence struggle in Korea and in China. To overcome this disadvantage, he allied with pro-Japanese,⁴² American⁴³ and Christian political powers. He combined these three different groups under the slogan of anti-Communism.

⁴⁰ Yong-bock Kim, *Messiah and Minjung*, 186.

⁴¹ Interview with Rev. Dr. Dong-kun Hong, Lecturer, Kim Il Sung University, 13th April 2001, Los Angeles.

⁴² When the majority of Korean people asked the removal of the Japanese legacy, he claimed that it was not necessary because it was time to fight with Communism. In accordance with his claim, the Pro-Japanese justified themselves as national security guards against the Communists and threatened whom maintained purging them by branding them as a mere tool of Communists. Kun-ho Song et al., *Haebang Jeonhusa eui Insik*, (A Recognition of History Before and After Liberation), vol. 1, Seoul, Hankilsa, 1979, p.25.

⁴³ The USA considered him as pro-American future Korean president at the end of Japanese colonialism. See, R. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960*, Seoul, Pamun Books, 1979. “On his return he managed to gain considerable political power, aided by certain sectors of American occupation forces”. S. MacCune, *Korea: Land of Broken Calm*, Princeton, D. van Nostrand Company, 1966, p.101.

Syngman Rhee (1876-1965) was born in an impoverished royal family. During his studies in a mission school, he became a Christian. Later, he was educated in America with the support of Methodist missionaries. Rhee obtained a BA (international law) at George Washington University and a MA (politics) at Harvard. In 1910, he was then awarded a PhD in politics at Princeton University. He was the first Korean PhD student in America. After his PhD, he also studied theology (MDiv) at Princeton Theological Seminary. Rhee said that he would return to Korea to spread the Gospel after his study and indeed, when he did come home it was as a teacher at Seoul YMCA, and as a Methodist missionary.⁴⁴

In 1919, he was elected as the first president of Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in Shanghai. However, Rhee was expelled from the KPG in 1925 for embezzlement agreeing to the superpowers having trusteeship over Korea. Thereafter, he lost his leadership of the independence movement and returned to America. When Korea was liberated, he came with the US army, and was later elected as the first president of South Korea with the support of the USA Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK). He was finally expelled in 1960 due to the April Revolution, when he evacuated to Hawaii.⁴⁵

Rhee was one of most favoured political leaders among the Christians in Korea because he was an elder of the Methodist church, and he regarded Christianity as “a state religion of Korea”.⁴⁶ In fact, he often expressed his intention of proclaiming Christianity as a state religion based on his evangelistic and fundamentalistic faith. He believed that through Christianization, Korea could become as modernized, wealthy and enlightened as America.⁴⁷ Such intentions found favour with the Christian leaders. Rhodes and Campbell describe the relationship between Rhee and the Protestant leaders as “cordial and cooperative relationship”.⁴⁸ However, Rhee did not put his idea of making Christianity a state religion because, as a practical politician, he necessary also had to consider the other religions present in the multi-religious Korean society. His religious ideas are nevertheless worth examining.

⁴⁴ Concerning his early history, see, R. C. Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee*, Tokyo, Tuttle, 1960.

⁴⁵ Concerning his political life, see, R. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, Greenwood Publication Group, 1973.

⁴⁶ Concerning his religious idea, see, In-chul Kang, “Church and State under the USAMGIK and Syngman Rhee Regime”, in K. Oh et. al., *Church and State*, Inchon, Inchon Catholic University Press, 1997, pp.625-640.

⁴⁷ In-chul Kang, *Hankuk Kidok Kyohoe wa Kukga, Simin Sahoe, 1945-1960*, (Korean Christian Churches, State and Civil Society, 1945-1960), Seoul, IKCH, 1996, p.162.

⁴⁸ Rhodes and Campbell, *Op. Cit.*, vol. 2, p.381.

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In Rhee's notion of Christianity as a state religion, his religious, political and personal motives were mixed. Firstly, he saw himself as a messianic figure; God had chosen him as president to evangelize Korean people.⁴⁹ Secondly, he wanted to strengthen his links with American missionaries and the US government by promoting this idea of Christianity as a state religion. Lastly, he tried to make alliance with the Christians to grasp political power because of the educational background and nationalist tradition of the Christians, which ordinary people respected.

Christians had also been deeply involved in the original establishment of a separate South Korean state. In 1946, of fifty Koreans who were in official positions in the South Korean government, 35 were professing Christians, and of the ninety members of the Korean Interim Legislative Assembly, the number of professing Christians was 21, including seven ordained ministers. In the first South Korean National Assembly, of 190 members, the number of Christians is reported to have been about fifty, of whom thirteen were ordained ministers. The vice president was Rev. Tai-young Ham, a Presbyterian minister.⁵⁰

The Christians welcomed not only Rhee's notion of a state religion but also his anti-Communist stance because "to their fundamentalistic faith, Communism was based upon an unchangeable atheistic stance".⁵¹ The Christians went on further to support Rhee's reunification policy, *Bukjin Tongil* or Reunification by Invasion of the North. According to Wi-jo Kang, for the Christians, "it was unthinkable to sit and negotiate with the Communist 'devils' of the North" for the reunification.⁵²

The Protestant leaders who had fled before the war, after the policy of entering into political competition with the Communists in the North had failed, played a decisive role in spreading such ideas. Eun-kyun Hwang, the former leader of a Christian party in the North, stirred up the Christians in the South: "Atheist Bolsheviks are eradicating Christians in the North". "We must fight for freedom of faith and all Christians must rise to defeat the Communists!"⁵³ The Christians who had fled at that time were nevertheless committed to a religious justification of Rhee's reunification policy.

⁴⁹ O. F. Nolde described him, "Rhee gave the impression of being an ardent Christian but also somewhat of a patriarch with a messianic complex", "Confidential", WCC Executive Committee, August 1953, Appendix 6, 2; Nolde stated further that Rhee often justified his political action by citing the Bible. See, O. F. Nolde, "Confidential Memorandum", July 1953, 7.

⁵⁰ Rhodes and Campbell, *Ibid.*, pp.379-380.

⁵¹ Kwang-sun Suh, *The Korean Minjung in Christ*, p.57.

⁵² Wi-jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea*, p.78.

⁵³ Eun-kyoon Hwang, "The 38th Parallel and Christian Youth", in *Buheung*, (The Revival), vol. 8, 1948, pp.3-4.

This assimilation paradigm between church and state in the South continued during the Korean War. The South Korean Christian support for the war was strong and broad. On 30th July 1950, the Protestant churches organized the Korean Christian National Relief Association. This began work in Taegu and Pusan and then extended its work to some 30 other centres, cooperating with the government's departments of Defense and Social Welfare.⁵⁴ In addition to relief work, propaganda, mobilization and placation were also the main activities of this organization. Heung-soo Kim states that "the most important task of the Association was mobilizing Christian young men and sending them to the battle line".⁵⁵ It seems true that the Association was not merely for relief work. For example, in August 1950, the Association mobilized about 3,000 Christian young men and in October, sent about 1,000 Christian Placation Unit workers to the North.⁵⁶

Just as the NKCA justified the war as a holy war against American imperialists, so too the southern churches presented it as a crusade war against the "Red Devils", the Communists. On 28th September 1950, when Seoul was recaptured, the churches organized a worship for victory, inviting Rhee and MacArthur. In this worship, the church leaders defined the war as a "crusade war" and called for a roll back further into the North.⁵⁷ The leaders thought that it would be impossible to cultivate Christianity in a Marxist land. Therefore, the roll back was given a religious justification. It was presented as necessary in order to transform the northern society and ensure religious freedom.

However, this expectation was not achieved, because the Allied army had to retreat again within a few months. A re-evacuation to the South was carried on due to the retreat. Some twenty thousand Christians and a thousand pastors were evacuated by the US army with the support of American missionaries to Cheju island.⁵⁸ This evacuation meant that lay people in the South were left without pastors, and they therefore had the same kind of experience as lay people in the North. Won-ryong Kang stated that one day most pastors disappeared without notice from their

⁵⁴ Concerning the association, see, A. D. Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea*, pp.247-295.

⁵⁵ Heung-soo Kim, *Op. Cit.*, p.60.

⁵⁶ In-chul Kang, "Church and State under the USAMGIK and Syngman Rhee Regime", *Op. Cit.*, p.634.

⁵⁷ MacArthur said on this occasion that he is fighting with "Grace of God" and winning with the "Guidance of God". See, In-seo Kim, *Mangmyung Noin Rhee Syng Man Baksa rul Byunhoham*, (A Defense for An Elderly Exile, Dr. Syngman Rhee), Seoul, Dokhak Hyuphoe Chulpansa, 1963, p.85.

⁵⁸ A. D. Clark, *Op. Cit.*, p.248.

congregations. Again, he raised the ethical issue of ministry during the war: how could pastors evacuate while their congregations remained behind?⁵⁹

Demonstrations against the Truce Talks

By the spring of 1951, the Allies realized that victory was impossible in the immediate future. The truce talks began in July 1951. However, Rhee was not happy about opening these peace talks because he believed that defeating Communism was the only way of unifying Korea. Instead of the truce talk, Rhee introduced his own schemes: "1) March to the Yalu, 2) all foreign troops leave, 3) separate ROK military action, 4) 90 day limit on political conference with commitment by the US to start fighting".⁶⁰ O.F. Nolde, the director of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), bitterly criticized Rhee's schemes after meeting with him, saying that it seemed as if he wanted "to commit national suicide".⁶¹

However, Southern Christians continuously supported Rhee on the issue of the cease-fire. Even before the truce talks started, the Christians had sent a message to the Secretary General of UN, to the President of US and to the General Commander of the Allied army insisting that "there must not be a cease-fire until the final victory".⁶² This Christian anti-truce stance was strengthened when the talks began. On 4th December 1952, the Special Committee of Korean Ministers from all the mainline churches in Korea, including the Roman Catholic Church, held an anti-truce demonstration and sent a letter to US the President-elect D. Eisenhower, who maintained the truce, saying:

We earnestly desire that you will do all possible to bring the war in Korea to a successful and speedy close, effecting at the same time the unification of our entire country.⁶³

Of course, this bringing the war to a "close" was supposed to be accomplished by defeating the Communists, not by a cease-fire. Already millions of civilians and soldiers had been killed because of this war, but the ministers still asked Eisenhower to re-expand the war. Eisenhower, however, refused, and ensured that the cease-fire and the truce talks went ahead.

When the truce talks were rapidly developing in June 1953, a series of Christian anti-truce demonstrations were organized in most major cities in South Korea.⁶⁴ On

⁵⁹ Won-ryong Kang, *Binduleseo*, pp.339-342.

⁶⁰ O. F. Nolde, "Confidential Memorandum", July 1953, 9.

⁶¹ Nolde, *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶² "Message to the Secretary General of UN, the President of US and General Commander of the Allied Army", Korean Christian Conference, 27th December 1950.

⁶³ "From the Special Committee of Korean Christian Ministers to His Excellency, President-elect of the United States of America General Dwight D. Eisenhower", 4th December 1952, Archival no. Korea-67, Division of Foreign Missions, NCCCUSA.

15th June, the southern churches made a statement to the world churches in English, saying:

Yet, unreasonable as it may seem to the unenlightened, the whole population of Korea and her government are opposed to the now proposed cease-fire...Any attempt at compromise with them can be linked to an attempt at forcing Christ to compromise with the devil during His forty days in the wilderness...1. (It is) Not by appeasing but by subduing the Communists can Korea have unification...3. The UN can restore justice and righteousness in the world only by nullifying Communism.⁶⁵

The Korean version⁶⁶ of the statement was even more hostile to the cease-fire. It stated, "The Christians must not reconcile with the Communists" because "they are devils who cannot repent forever".⁶⁷ The Christians also express their disappointment with Eisenhower because of his efforts for the truce.⁶⁸ It seems that an anti-Communism ideology overwhelmed the issue of the cease-fire in 1953 within the southern churches.

One major cause of this phenomenon was the uncritical relationship between church and state in South Korea. For instance, there was a rumour that the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) received financial support from the government in organizing the above demonstrations. The General Secretary of NCCCK recognized that he received such support from a Christian member of the National Assembly.⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, these demonstrations were organized under the instigation of Rhee, who needed a strengthened anti-Communist drive for maintaining his political power after the war. This would help him to avoid any possible criticism from his political opponents, who accused him of responsibility for the expansion of the war and for its consequences. Nolde points out that Rhee designated the Day of National Prayer on 4th July 1953. This was a high point of the Christian anti-truce demonstrations.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ In Seoul, 7,000 Christians gathered on 14th, and in Pusan, 10,000 crowded on 15th June 1953. The rally was also held in Inchon, Chungju, Kwangju and Taegu. See, Heung-soo Kim, *Op. Cit.*, p.63.

⁶⁵ "A Statement of Korea Christians", The Christian Conference for Saving Country, 15th June 1953.

⁶⁶ The statement was made in Korean as well for a domestic propaganda purpose.

⁶⁷ The Korean version is taken from Yang-sun Kim, *Op. Cit.*, pp.140-143.

⁶⁸ See, "From Korean Christians to His Excellency, President Dwight D. Eisenhower", 15th June 1953 in Yang-sun Kim, *Ibid.*, pp.142-143

⁶⁹ *The Kidokongbo*, 22nd and 29th June 1953.

⁷⁰ O. F. Nolde, "Confidential Memorandum", July 1953, 8. N.B., Nolde met Rhee at 11:30 a.m. on 3rd July 1953.

Mission in Christ's Way? The Responses of the Korean Churches to the Korean War

The Christian anti-truce stance in the South strengthened the Communists' hostility to Christianity in the North. The southern Christians thought that in the red North, "neither churches nor missions can continue,"⁷¹ and put all the blame wholly on the Communists. Their own anti-truce activities, however, were themselves one of the causes of the hostility the Communists would show towards the northern Christians.

Just War and Anti-Communist Ideology

It is possible for Christian churches to support a just war. The doctrine of *justum bellum* or just war constitutes the dominant teaching of the mainline churches concerning war.⁷² Even though the notion of "just war" originated before,⁷³ in Christian theology, both Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas established it as a part of Christian doctrine. Based upon Augustine's view of war,⁷⁴ Aquinas argued that a war is justified when three basic, necessary conditions were met: 1) the war was prosecuted by a lawful authority; 2) the war was undertaken with just cause and means; 3) the war was undertaken with right intention.⁷⁵ In the middle ages, the idea of holy war (crusade) developed under the authority of the church, not the state as such. The aim of a "just war" was for the secular power to preserve justice, but the goal of a crusade was to uphold, preserve and expand the dominion of the Christian church.⁷⁶

⁷¹ "From H. Namkung to Dr. Decker", cablegram, 26th January 1950. Rev. Dr. H. Namkung was general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea.

⁷² On the other hand, pacifism is a controversial tradition in Christian theology. Pacifism has always been a minority tradition in Christian history. Figures who followed it include Francis of Assisi, and the left wing of the reformation e.g. the Mennonites, the Anabaptists and the Quakers in the 17th Century. Concerning pacifism, see, D. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation*, New York, Abingdon; J. H. Yoder, *Nevertheless: A Meditation on the Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism*, Scottdale, Herald Press, 1971; D. A. Drombrowski, *Christian Pacifism*, Temple University Press, 1991.

⁷³ It is traceable back to the classical teaching of Cicero. See, C. Villa-Vincencio, "Just War", *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement*, p.552.

⁷⁴ For Augustine, for a war to be just, it must be fought for the right reasons, and it must be waged under rightful authority. See, R. A. McCormick, "Morality of War", *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967, p.803.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, II, Q, Article 1, tr. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Westminster, Christian Classics, 1981.

⁷⁶ R. S. Hoyt and S. Chodorow, *Europe in Middle Ages*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976, pp.319-320.

During the reformation period, the doctrine of just war developed in two ways. Jean Calvin took the first cautious step towards allowing for a just revolution.⁷⁷ John Knox went further, allowing people's rebellion against tyrannies.⁷⁸ Based on the reformation tradition, the just war doctrine, which had been "written from perspective of the dominant classes", was "re-written from the poor and oppressed" as a theology of just revolution in modern Christianity.⁷⁹ On the other hand, Hugo Grotius, a 16th Century Dutch Protestant, developed a secularized just war theory by emphasizing the role of international law in providing just criteria.⁸⁰ After Grotius, just war theory was widely recognized in the international arena at the end of the World War II.⁸¹

However, just war theory has been abused over the years to legitimate unjust wars by secular powers.⁸² Moreover, modern warfare is total war, which brings mass destruction and indiscriminate civilian casualties. In the times of Augustine and Aquinas, war was in a smaller scale and the causes were clear, but modern wars are more complex, and it is much more difficult to judge where and whether they are just. Therefore, WCC in Amsterdam in 1948 identified three possible positions that Christians might take towards a modern war, without reaching a larger consensus: 1) limited participation in a particular circumstance, 2) fulfilling a Christian duty to defend the law by force, and 3) refusing all kinds of military service (pacifism).⁸³

In this context, when the modern churches support modern wars, this should only be done after careful consideration of the nature of secular political power. In particular, when the churches become involved not only in spiritual and charitable support but also give direct support, such as providing arms and encouraging mobilization, they must do so from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Every

⁷⁷ See, L. H. Hunt ed., *Calvinism and the Political Order*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1966.

⁷⁸ See, K. Ross, *Presbyterian Theology and Participatory Democracy*, Edinburgh, St. Andrews Press, 1993.

⁷⁹ C. Villa-Vincencio, *Op. Cit.*, p.553

⁸⁰ For Grotius, a war is just if three basic criteria were met: 1) a danger faced by the nation is immediate; 2) the force used is necessary to adequately defend the nation's interest; and 3) the use of force is proportionate to the threatened danger. See, J. D. Tooke, *The Just War in Aquinas and Grotius*, London, SPCK, 1965.

⁸¹ The notion of just war in the Nuremberg Charter and the UN Charter were based on the idea of Aquinas and Grotius.

⁸² Concerning the criticisms on just war theory, see, P. Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?*, North California, Duke University Press, 1961; M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust War: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, New York, Basic Books, 1977; J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994

⁸³ C. Villa-Vincencio, *Op. Cit.*, p.553.

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war can bring about an abnormal situation, reason being overcome by hostility. Therefore, caring and healing the hurts of the war and assisting human beings to recover the "image of God" must be a distinctive mission of churches in modern wars.

However, when Korea fought under the name of reunification, most of the Korean churches failed to demonstrate such a distinctive Christian identity. Christian antipathy to the Communists was developed as an ideology during the war. Here is a quotation from a statement of the Korean CCIA, which shows the way in which the southern Christian understanding of the war was dominated by an anti-Communist perspective:

Communism means sin. Therefore, no appeasement can be allowed, we must stand firm to expel it. If we treat the Communist as we do our enemies, and love them, it is nothing but the same as if we loved the devil and try ourselves in vain, to make it (*sic*, him) repent...Commission (*sic*, Communism) is worse than war itself and sure to bring more disaster...we ask you again to join with us to form the (*sic*, a) crusade to undertake our full responsibilities till Communism is wiped out of the world.⁸⁴

Here, the leaders of the South Korean churches regarded the Communists as satanic and therefore outside the realm of divine salvation. "A sinner may rather easily repent but not the Communists."⁸⁵ For them, the Communists were unforgivable devils, who were outside the Grace of Christ. The statement went on further, "Appeasement with Communism is irreligious, unjust, and against all moral principles."⁸⁶ Therefore, they understood the Korean War as a crusade to wipe out the devils, the Communists. Based upon this understanding, the southern churches rejected the cease-fire and called for re-opening the war. This statement shows how strongly the churches had become captive to an anti-Communist ideology, even after the armistice that brought the Korean War to an end.

Conclusion

Both the Korean churches in the North and in the South justified the Korean War as a just war. However, as we studied, the NKCA supported the war and proclaimed the just war without proper theological argument. On the other hand, the southern Christians justified the war on the basis of their anti-Communism, rather than on any more developed or deeper theological reasoning. Hatred against each other overwhelmed. Perhaps both churches could justify their positions based on their

⁸⁴ Korea Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, The Statement to the Second Full Meeting of the CCIA at the Chicago University, 1954.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

experiences of hostilities. However, certainly it ought not to be an option to solve the problem of the Korean division by a war, but through reconciliation.

Hwaha (和解), reconciliation in Korean means to solve conflicts peacefully. But it also says that there is no peace without reconciliation. Peace means to be reconciled and restored relationship in the concept of *hwaha*. Therefore, all the destroyed “relationship” by the Korean division and the following war should be recovered and rebuilt in our commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Korean War. In other words, peace that has been destroyed by the division should be re-established, or a relationship should be renewed. Here the focus falls on the prefix “re”, which means “again”. The biblical vision of reconciliation is “to be reunified” or “to be one again” with God, people and creation. The underlying notion is that of beginning anew, unconditionally, even eschatologically. *Hwaha* as reconciliation has the sense of living together, maintaining peace in renewed and reconciled community. Therefore, reunification becomes aim of reconciliation. Indded it is mission in Christ’s way in the divided Korean context.