

The Korean War (1950-1953) and Christianity: Pro-American Activities of the Christian Churches and the North Korean Reactions

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On June 25, 1950, war broke out between North Korea and South Korea, a country that had been divided since 1945. As soon as the war started, each side declared that the other had attacked first, and that its subsequent actions were primarily defensive. The United Nations Security Council branded North Korea as the aggressor and authorized armed intervention to repel them. In this emergency situation, the Korea National Christian Council cabled to the International Missionary Council (IMC) asking for immediate help from the United States. In two weeks, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) approved the police action of the United Nations. Churches in the Western nations considered it imperative to support the United Nations in its effort to maintain international order. Churches in Eastern Europe and China, however, considered the action of the United Nations as an attempt to oppose the liberation of Asian peoples.

※ This paper was presented in Dongsoon Im and Mija Im Colloquium of Korean Christianity, UCLA, USA, May 11, 2010 and includes some material previously published in the Korean language in Kim Heung Soo, "The Korean War and the World Council of Churches, 1950-1953," *Christianity and History in Korea* (February 2001), 107-144.

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This paper explores how and why the Western European and North American churches, their missionaries, and the Korean churches supported the South Korean government, the United States, and the United Nations during the Korean War. Due to the pro-American stance of the Christian churches the Communist regime of North Korea regarded Christianity as an anti-patriotic religion. Because of this belief, the North Korean regime intensified its anti-religious campaigns, and tried to wipe out Christians in the post-bellum period. Thus, the Korean War deepened the conflict between the Marxist regime and Christian churches, and brought about the transformation of North Korean churches into house churches.

The Korean War and World Council of Churches

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches convened on July 8-15 in Toronto, Canada, two weeks after the Korean War started. The Korean situation was not on the originally circulated agenda, as the meeting had already been scheduled before the outbreak of hostilities. Prior to the Central Committee session, the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) met on July 3 to 5. The CCIA, a joint agency of the WCC and the IMC, had prepared a statement on the Korean question and submitted it to the Central Committee. The draft for the statement of the CCIA was written by Rev. Richard M. Fagley of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCC) and Bishop Oxnam of the United Methodist Church.¹⁾ The draft was sent to the WCC Central Committee, where Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Niemöller of West Germany were asked to rework the draft. To the majority of the Central Committee members from the West, the issue appeared to be straightforward: The North Koreans were aggressors. The United Nations Commission in Korea had already come to the conclusion that an act of aggression had been committed by the North.²⁾ The Security Council of the

1) "Richard M. Fagley's letter to Hans-Jürgen Benedict," Kim Heung Soo ed., *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War* (Seoul: The Institute for Korean Church History, 2003), 27. Later Fagley worked as co-director of the National Council of Churches of Christ Department of International Justice and Goodwill.

2) On the report of the United Nations Commission in Korea, see Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean Decision* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 205-206.

United Nations had decided to meet this aggression with a police measure. Hence, there was general agreement that if the World Council of Churches were to make a statement on Korea, it should speak up for the maintenance of the principles of world order.³⁾

When the CCIA and the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches discussed issues raised by the Korean War, major importance was attached to first-hand reports of the United Nations Commission on the Korean situation as a means of verifying North Korean aggression. It was on the basis of reports from this Commission, the “most objective witness available,” that the Central Committee adopted a “Statement on the Korean Situation and World Order” for its 160 member Churches in forty-five countries, commending the United Nations for its prompt decision to meet the aggression, and for authorizing the police action.

An act of aggression has been committed. The United Nations Commission in Korea, the most objective witness available, asserts that “all evidence points to a calculated, coordinated attack prepared and launched with secrecy” by the North Korean troops.

Armed attack as an instrument of national policy is wrong. We therefore commend the United Nations, an instrument of world order, for its prompt decision to meet this aggression and for authorizing a police measure which every member nation should support.⁴⁾

The most important emphasis in the document was its commending of the action of the United Nations as an instrument of world order in resisting the aggression in Korea. During the debate the most controversial point was whether the churches could commend the use of force for the defense of world order. Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Niemoeller defended the conception of a police measure in Korea.⁵⁾ The pacifist position, one of three possible attitudes defined by the Amsterdam assembly of the World

3) W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1973), 220.

4) World Council of Churches, “Statement on the Korean Situation and World Order,” *Minutes and Reports of the Third Meeting of Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Toronto, 9-15 July 1950*, 91-92.

5) *Ibid.*, 27.

Council of Churches, received little support in the statement.

The statement was adopted overwhelmingly by a vote of 45 to 2. The vote was taken in the absence of representatives from the churches in Eastern Europe, who were not able to take part in the Central Committee meeting as a result of failing to obtain entry visas to Canada. Hence, the Western European and American voice on the police action dominated both the CCIA executive committee and the WCC Central Committee.

The Central Committee stated its conviction that the Korean situation “need not be the beginning of a general war.” It warned that “We must not regard world-wide conflict as inevitable.” The Central Committee also condemned methods of modern warfare and declared that they “involve a use of force and destruction of life on so terrible a scale as to imperil the very basis on which law and civilization can exist.” The Committee said that it was imperative “that they should be banned by international agreement and we welcome every sincere proposal to this end.” However, the so-called “Stockholm Appeal” issued in March 1950 by the World Committee of Partisans of Peace,⁶⁾ which demanded the immediate outlawing just of atomic weapons, without effective international inspection and continuous control, “must be regarded as a strategy of propaganda rather than a genuine peace proposal.”

As mentioned above, two members of the Central Committee did not agree with the Toronto statement because they were conscientiously opposed to the use of armed forces. However, this was not the end of the debate on the Korean War. The Toronto statement was bitterly criticized by some members of the World Council of Churches, especially by the churches in Eastern Europe and China. The churches in the Soviet Union protested against “American aggression in Korea,” but did not mention the Toronto statement directly. At that time the Russian Orthodox Church was

6) The World Committee of Partisans for Peace was established in Paris in April 1949 with 2,200 delegates from 72 countries attending. Many delegates were refused visas by the French government, and a simultaneous congress was held in Prague. Rev. Kim Chang Jun and two other North Korean delegates attended the congress held in Prague. In March 1950 the Committee met in Stockholm and launched the Stockholm Appeal calling for a ban of the atom bomb. The World Committee adopted its present title, World Peace Council, in 1950. It had been alleged to be a front organization of Communist parties due to the funding of the council by the Soviet bloc.

not a member of the World Council of Churches. The Toronto statement warning that the Stockholm Peace Appeal was not “a genuine peace proposal” intensified the criticism.

A few weeks after the Toronto meeting, the Hungarian Church Press published an open letter to W. A. Visser’t Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, signed by Bishop Albert Bereczky of the Reformed Church in Hungary⁷⁾ In his letter, Bereczky, a member of the Central Committee, pointed out that the Central Committee had been quite wrong in its judgment on the acceptance of the UN Commission’s report as an objective statement of fact. Bishop J. Peter of the Hungarian Reformed Church also criticized the World Council resolution, claiming that it supported the real aggressors in Korea.⁸⁾ The concern of Hungarian churches for the Korean situation was not limited to Protestant churches. Catholic priests also passed a resolution, in August 1950, promising their support in the [North Korean] fight for peace, and condemning “the war-mongering imperialists” and their actions in Korea.

The Toronto statement on the Korean situation was also criticized by Joseph L. Hromadka, Dean of the Comenius Faculty in Prague, and Viktor Hajek, a Synodal Senior of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. They were disturbed by the fact that “the World Council of Churches identified itself, self-assuredly, with one side.”⁹⁾ Later Hromadka’s letter entitled “A Voice from the Other Side” appeared in *Christianity and Crisis* in a revised form.¹⁰⁾ Hromadka, a member of the Central Committee,

7) Extracts from Bishop Bereczky’s open letter can be found in “Hungarian Bishops on Church-State Relations and International Affairs,” *Christianity and Crisis*, October 16, 1950, 136.

8) “Bishop Peter at World Peace Council,” *The Protestant*, April-May-June 1951, 6.

9) “Dear Friend,” Joseph L. Hromadka and Viktor Hajek’s letter to W.A. Visser’t Hooft,,” Kim, ed., *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 180-184. This letter was written by Hromadka after he discussed the matter with Hajek. Shortly before writing this letter to the General Secretary of World Council of Churches, Hromadka had written to the United Nations Security Council to protest against the United Nations’ police action in Korea as a “fatal decision” and accused America of aggression. *Christian Century*, December 20, 1950, 1535.

10) Josef L. Hromadka, “A Voice from the Other Side,” *Christianity and Crisis*,

repeated that the World Council of Churches identified itself with one group of great power, backed its military action, and encouraged all UN members to participate in it. According to Hromadka, the most perilous aspect of the present situation was the assumption, obviously motivating the Toronto statement, that the real *bête noire* was communism and its diabolic incarnation in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁾ Convinced that Western civilization was a spent force in world history, Hromadka believed that the revolution in China in 1948-1949, the Korean War, and the cease-fire in Vietnam were evidence of a major historical development.¹²⁾ Therefore, the World Council's approval of the United Nations action in Korea represented a yielding to the mood of one side of the world, which was a spent force.

The Chinese Church's response to the Toronto statement was more severe. Since October 1950, Chinese soldiers had been fighting against American soldiers and other UN troops in Korea. In this situation, the Chinese Churches in a conference of 151 leaders held on April 16-21, 1951 issued a statement, "United Declaration of the Delegates of Chinese Christian Churches and Church Institutions." It stated that the Toronto statement "distorts truth," and that "the World Council is the tool of Wall Street, and of that instigator of the Korean War, Dulles."¹³⁾ Shortly after the conference, T. C. Chao (趙紫宸), Dean of the School of Religion, Yenching University, resigned from his position as one of the six presidents of the World Council of Churches on April 28, 1951. Chao thought that the World Council of Churches had been used as a tool of American imperialism, and felt that, as a loyal citizen of the People's Republic, he could no longer be identified with the organization.¹⁴⁾

March 19, 1951, 27-30.

11) Ibid., 28.

12) Josef L. Hromadka, "From the Reformation to Tomorrow," in Milan Opocensky, ed., *From the Reformation to Tomorrow. In Memory and Appreciation of Josef L. Hromadka (1889-1969)* (Geneva, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1999), 16-26.

13) Wallace C. Merwin and Francis P. Jones, *Documents of the Three-Self Movement. Source Materials for the Study of the Protestant Church in Communist China* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1963), 41.

14) T. C. Chao, "Dear Presidents," Kim, ed., *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 235.

The Korean War and American Churches

Immediately upon hearing the news of the Korean War, Han Kyongjik, the pastor of Yongnak Church in Seoul, and Namgung Hyok, the General Secretary of the Korean National Christian Council (KNCC), decided that the KNCC should wire President Harry S. Truman, General Douglas MacArthur, and the IMC in New York requesting immediate assistance.¹⁵⁾ In the morning of June 26 (American time), Charles W. Ranson of the IMC received a telegram from the KNCC saying “Large invading forces are pressing around us. Begging immediate help from USA. Use your best influence.”¹⁶⁾

Charles W. Ranson replied at once to the KNCC that the IMC had shared the telegram with the Foreign Missions Conference of North America (FMC) and the CCIA. And on the same day, an emergency meeting on Korea was called at the office of the FMC in New York City with the board secretaries from various denominations and church organizations with interests in the Korean situation. At the meeting, these representatives decided to support the missionaries who had volunteered to remain in Korea and, responding to the Korean appeal, sent telegrams to Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, urging the US government to make every effort to settle the Korean conflict by diplomatic means and support the measures already taken by the United Nations.¹⁷⁾

Judgment on the Korean situation of various denominations and church organizations was clear and unequivocal. North Korean aggression had been proved and had to be resisted. On July 6, the Federal Council of Churches expressed gratitude that the United Nations had responded with “prompt and vigorous action.”¹⁸⁾ The Federal Council’s statement issued in

15) Letter from Rev. Kyung-chik Han, 12 August 1950, cited in Yin Allison Haga, “An Overlooked Dimension of the Korean War: The Role of Christianity and American Missionaries in the Rise of Korean Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism, and Eventual Civil War, 1884-1953,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The College of William and Mary in Virginia (2007), 305.

16) Telegram from Namgung and C.Y. Hwang, Kim, ed., *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 2.

17) Letter from Rowland M. Cross, June 27 1959. Ibid., 3.

18) The National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) came into official existence on November 30, 1950 as a replacement for and an extension of the FCC.

the name of President John S. Stamm and General Secretary Samuel McCrea Cavert termed the attack on Korea “a most direct challenge to the authority of the United Nations as an instrument for the maintenance of international peace and security.” The new Republic of Korea was a ward of the United Nations - born under its supervision and being helped by its agencies toward economic and political growth. Thus, the statement assumed that it was the United Nations, through the Republic of Korea, that had been attacked on June 25.¹⁹⁾ The Executive Committee of the FCC endorsed this statement in New York on September 19, 1950. The Executive Committee also adopted a message for World Order Day of October 22 saying that “Communist leaders, in seeking world domination, appear ready to risk the catastrophe of another general war to achieve their ends. In Eastern Europe and now in Asia the expansive thrust of communism imperils the peace.”²⁰⁾

The United Nations action in Korea received FCC and Protestant support because it was carried out “legally” under the United Nations and because the United Nations itself was regarded as the essential first step towards a system of world order. Most denominations took a position similar to that of the FCC. They commended the U.N. action in Korea. This American voice stood behind the CCIA executive committee and the WCC Central Committee meetings on the Korean situation. American churches had the largest number of commissioners including John Foster Dulles, one of the most influential leaders, and O. Frederick Nolde, the Director of the CCIA. Dulles exercised powerful leadership in the ecumenical movement from the 1940s and was one of the main speakers in the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948.²¹⁾ He attended the Toronto meeting shortly after having visited Korea from June 18 to the outbreak of

19) “The Korean Situation and the United Nations,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, September, 1950, 21.

20) “A Message for World Order Day,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, October 1950, 18.

21) Dulles participated in the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State in 1937. When the CCIA was established in 1946, Dulles influenced the election of the Chairman and the appointment of the Director. Jooseop Keum, “Remnants and Renewal: A History of Protestant Christianity in North Korea, with Special Reference to Issues of Church and State, 1945-1994,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh (2002), 184-185.

the war as the US special envoy to Korea and as a UN Field Observer. Thus, Dulles was the only person at the Toronto meeting who could provide a detailed description of the war. At that time, the US Government needed a strong moral justification for the police action in Korea because the Security Council of the United Nations had decided upon the police action without Soviet approval. In this situation, Dulles wanted to utilize the World Council of Churches to justify Truman's police action through the Toronto statement.²²⁾ It thus appears that the Chinese churches' criticism that "the World Council is the tool of Wall Street, and of that instigator of the Korean War, Dulles"²³⁾ rose from this.

American churches approved either expressly or implicitly of the police action in Korea. There were, however, a few dissenting opinions. Two Korean retired pastors in the United States, Hyun Soon and Hwang Sa Yong, appealed to American Christians in July 1950 that "U.S. intervention is unjust because the war is a civil war" of the Korean people to reunite their divided country.²⁴⁾ The most vigorous criticism of the Toronto statement and the American participation in the Korean War came from the *Protestant* published by Kenneth Leslie. He referred to America as the "aggressor" and claimed that the whole conflict was a "Dulles baby, the work of Wall Street evangelist John Foster Dulles." Leslie's acrid attacks against the World Council of Churches and its leadership continued in nearly every issue of the *Protestant*. According to Leslie, "It[the Korean War] was a revolution, the same revolution that has been proceeding all over Asia and in parts of Europe." It was, in his opinion, not an invasion.²⁵⁾

Doubt on the police action was also raised by other church magazines. The *Social Questions Bulletin* of the Methodist Federation for Social Action also contended that the UN flag or World Council of Churches could not justify or sanction mass murder, and that the activities of the UN troops

22) Keum, "Remnants and Renewal: A History of Protestant Christianity in North Korea, with Special Reference to Issues of Church and State, 1945-1994," 183-188.

23) Merwin and Jones, 41.

24) "Appeal To American Christians," *Korea Independence*, July 19, 1950. See also "An Appeal to the American People from Koreans in North America," *Protestant*, July-August-September, 1950, 28-30.

25) "Common Sense about Korea," *The Protestant*, July-August-September, 1950, 3.

were beyond the scope of a police measure.²⁶⁾ *Fellowship*, a bulletin of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, also maintained that what was happening in Korea was not a “police action,” but a continuation of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union in that all available weapons were being used, and that roads, railroads, villages, and non-combatants were being bombed.²⁷⁾ As seen above, *The Protestant, Fellowship, Social Questions Bulletin*, and *the Churchman* held different thinking from the mainline denominations or the FCC on the Korean War and the Toronto Statement. They all asked for the resolution of the Korean War through negotiation and mediation.

American churches also showed interest in the Stockholm Peace Appeal issued in March 1950 by the World Committee of Partisans of Peace. A statement, issued by the FCC, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Synagogue Council of America, Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders on August 2, declared that aggressive policies and actual aggression revealed in the invasion of Korea constitute the “greatest menace to world peace” and termed the Stockholm Peace Appeal “spurious” and “camouflage.” The joint statement warned the American people to be on guard lest they be misled by the Stockholm Peace Appeal being circulated by Communist and pro-Communist groups.²⁸⁾

With the justification of the police action in Korea, the American churches were involved in relief work from the early stage of the war. Although the Korean churches formed a basic structure for relief operations, they did not have money or goods to carry out relief activities. American church leaders were the first group to answer requests related to relief activities of the churches and missionaries in Korea. On October 19, 1950, the American church leaders held a meeting in New York City to discuss relief work in Korea with representatives from the World Council of Churches, Foreign Missions Conference, IMC, and Church World Service.

26) H. F. W., “Behind the Headlines,” *Social Questions Bulletin* (November, 1950), 36; H. F. W., “Behind the Headlines,” *Social Questions Bulletin* (April 1951), 14.

27) Norman Hill and Doniver A. Lund, *If the Churches Want World Peace* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 70. Alfred Hassler, “Cops in Korea,” *Fellowship* (September 1950), 4-8.

28) “Stockholm Appeal ‘Camouflage’ says Interfaith Group,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, September 1950, 15.

It was recognized in the meeting that “the need for relief in Korea was extremely urgent,” and that “Christian concern must find expression in an organized effort for Christian relief in Korea.”²⁹⁾ Drives for cash donations and clothing began from November by many denominations.

In the February of 1951, Father Edward Swanstrom of the Catholic Relief Service and Rev. Henry Appenzeller, the new director of the Church World Service, came to Korea. The Church World Service, a department of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, had been conducting relief and rehabilitation programs in Korea since 1948. During the Korean War, it carried out a more extensive relief program for refugees and other war victims in connection with the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Relief, the Christian Rural Overseas Program, and the Heiper Project. By 1952, influential church-related relief organizations including the Church World Service and Catholic Relief Service were carrying out relief activities in South Korea. The purposes for supporting relief through the Church World Service were to express Christian love by service to those in need, to help Koreans build a new Korea, and to strengthen the ties of friendship between the people of Korea and the American people.³⁰⁾ From this time, Korea began to replace China and Japan as the primary recipient of American paternalism in East Asia.³¹⁾

The Korean War and Korean Churches

As soon as church leaders in Seoul received news of the North Korean invasion, they declared June 27 a special day of prayer,³²⁾ and prayed for the victory of the South. But with the fall of Seoul on June 28, pastors and congregations fled to Taejeon. In Taejeon, on July 3, Protestant workers of

29) C. W. Ranson, “Korean Relief,” Kim ed., *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 136-137.

30) Arnold B. Vaught, “Relief and Rehabilitation,” Report to Korea Planning Conference, October 13, 14, 1953. CCIA Country Files: Asia-Korea 1953-1973, Library of World Council of Churches.

31) Haga, “An Overlooked Dimension of the Korean War: The Role of Christianity and American Missionaries in the Rise of Korean Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism, and Eventual Civil War, 1884-1953”, 340.

32) Letter from Rev. Kyung Jik Han, August 12, 1950, quoted in *ibid.*, 322.

every denomination formed the Korean Christian National Relief Association (*Kidokkyo Kugukhae*) for relief work. This association began its work in Taegu and Pusan, with branches in about thirty South Korean cities, cooperating with the departments of Defense and Social Welfare in maintaining local order, administering relief, broadcasting, and recruiting volunteer soldiers. About 2,500 young Christians were recruited for volunteer service and trained for battle.³³⁾ After the recovery of September 28, the Korean Christian National Relief Association sent people into the occupied regions of North Korea for placation work.

As UN troops marched into North Korea and occupied Pyongyang on October 19, "the people were never more open and never as appreciative to America and the U.N."³⁴⁾ American missionaries, especially those who had worked in the North before World War II, and Korean church leaders followed behind. Following the 5th Air Force's northward advancement, Lt.(Doctor) Howard Moffett was the first missionary to arrive in Pyongyang. A few days later, Lt. Richard Underwood, Rev. Harold Voelkel (Civilian Chaplain), and Rev. William Shaw (Civilian Chaplain), also arrived with the UN troops. Next, other civilian missionaries came, including Edward Adams, Harry Hills, Archibald Campbell, and Francis Kinsler, with five Korean refugee pastors, Yun Ha Yong, Han Kyung Jik, Yi In Sik, Kim Yang Sun, and Yu Haw Jun.³⁵⁾

The missionaries and refugee church leaders were welcomed by North Korean Christians. A special service was held on October 29 at the Seomunbak Church.³⁶⁾ The atmosphere of the place was "magnetic, release after the tension of the Japanese war years and the Communist oppression."³⁷⁾ Revival meetings were held in different locations with the support of the US

33) On the Christian volunteer army, Kim Byung Sub, "Days of Crusade Volunteer Army," *Kyohoe Yeonhap Sinbo*, July 8, 1984; Lee Jong Bae, "Christian Volunteer Army 'Crusade' and I," *Saemunan* (June 2002), 18-20.

34) A confidential letter from Chaplain Harold Voelkel, October 29, 1950, Kim, ed., *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 147.

35) *Ibid.*, 145.

36) H.A. Rhodes and A. Campbell, *History of the Korea Mission Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Volume II, 1935-1959* (New York: Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations, The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1964), 100-103.

37) A confidential letter from Chaplain Harold Voelkel, October 29, 1950, 146.

Chaplains Office. These parties entered North Korea in an effort to stabilize the Christians of the occupied regions and to lend assistance to the UN occupation of North Korea. The US troops welcomed the help of the missionaries and Korean Christians in the administration of the occupied regions, as they proved a valuable asset to the occupation forces. Missionary chaplains served as a link both between the native population and the troops, and between the American public and the Korean people. Although many people were shying away from the Americans because of frequent guerilla attacks,³⁸⁾ the Christian community in the North remained the most loyal supporter of the UN occupation. Especially Christians in Pyongyang proved eager and supportive.³⁹⁾

The occupation period was short, however, and the missionaries could do little for the North Korean churches. Chinese “volunteers” had crossed the Yalu River. On December 3, the 8th Army began a full retreat from Pyongyang. The sudden reversal of the Korean War disappointed many pro-American and anti-Communist Koreans, especially those who had actively collaborated with the United Nations. The Christian population was particularly at risk since they had worked closely with UN occupation forces. Most Christians could not stay any longer in North Korea because they had welcomed and supported the enemy of North Korea, the South Korean army and the UN troops. In the end, many Christians in the North fled to the South with the help of the US troops. There is, however, no solid data available on how many Christians were actually evacuated from North Korea at this time. Shortly before the war, according to Ko Ki Jun, the former general secretary of the Korean Christian Federation, there were 117,000 Christians in the North.⁴⁰⁾ Lee Young Bin and Kang In Chul maintained that about 20 ordained pastors and 50,000 Christians were left after the war.⁴¹⁾ In the end, the activities of impatient missionaries and their

38) Donald N. Clark, *Living Dangerously in Korea. The Western Experience 1900-1950* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2003), 387.

39) Haga, “An Overlooked Dimension of the Korean War: The Role of Christianity and American Missionaries in the Rise of Korean Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism, and Eventual Civil War, 1884-1953,” 379.

40) Ko Ki Jun, “Socialism and Christianity,” *Dialogue Material between North and Overseas Christians for the Unification of Homeland*] (1982). Korean language.

41) Kang In Chul, “The Root of Fled Christianity: The Revolution and Christianity in North Korea after Liberation,” *Yoksa Bipyung* (Summer, 1992), 134-135.

pro-South Korea activities which ignored the changes in the war situation failed. These supportive activities became decisive proofs for the North Korean government to oppose and suppress Christianity during and after the war. Before the Korean War, churches in the North had close relations with the bourgeois class; during the war they then supported South Korea and the UN troops. These attitudes are pointed out in North Korea and South Korea alike as one of the reasons leading to suffering and suppression of the North Korean churches.⁴²⁾

The stance of Korean churches toward the Korean War was also founded in truce talks, which began in July 1951. President Rhee Syngman was not pleased about opening these peace talks because he believed that defeating communism was the only way of unifying Korea. South Korean churches supported Rhee on the issue of the cease-fire, and their anti-truce stance was expressed in an Anti-truce Christian Rally held in Pusan in July 1951. As the truce talks were rapidly developing in June 1953, Christian anti-truce demonstrations were organized in most major cities in South Korea and the relevant parties issued statements. The main reason for the anti-truce attitude was that if an armistice treaty were reached at the 38th parallel, Korea would be forever divided, and it would not be possible to check the spread of communism in Asia and throughout the whole world.⁴³⁾ The statements which were sent to the world churches and President Dwight David Eisenhower said that "the whole population of Korea and her government are opposed to the now proposed cease-fire," and "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," and that "communism is the devil who cannot repent forever."⁴⁴⁾ For Korean

Korean language.

42) Ko Ki Jun, "Socialism and Christianity," 65; Han Chul Ha, "Glory and Shame of the Korean Churches," *Kidokgosasang* (August 1968), 24; Min kyungbae, *Church and Nationality* (Daehankidokkyo Chulpansa, 1981), 450. Korean language.

43) "Truce Reargument and Our Attitude," *Kidokkongbo*, April 20 and "The 38th parallel and opposition of cease-fire," *Ibid.*, January 21, 1952.

44) Kim Yang Sun, *History of the Korean Church in the Ten years since Liberation* (Seoul: Presbyterian Church of Korea, 1956), 140-141. Korean language. See also "A Statement of Korea Christians," *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 346-347.

church leaders, the Communists were unforgivable devils. Therefore, they understood the Korean War as a crusade to wipe out these devils. Based on this understanding, the South Korean churches rejected the cease-fire and desired to continue the war until the victory was achieved by the UN troops. In this atmosphere, it was not easy to voice other sentiments outside of those providing its justification.

President Rhee realized that American Christians were at odds with Korean Christians over the truce issue. President Trumann relieved MacArthur who sought to expand the war and bring in the Chinese Nationalists under his command on April 11, 1951. The opinion of the NCCC in the United States and many liberal Protestant church leaders sided with the President and supported his stand on limited warfare. O. Frederick Nolde, Director of the CCIA, met with President Rhee on July 3 to inform the South Korean President that the opinion of Western churches favored an armistice.⁴⁵⁾ Rhee's opinion of liberal Christian institutions, such as the NCCC and the World Council of Churches, turned sour. Unfortunately, from 1951 he proved susceptible to Carl MacIntire's anti-communist propaganda, which denounced the World Council of Churches as a pro-Communist organization⁴⁶⁾ and mobilized Korean Christians to support his stance. Hoping to liberate the North, many missionaries to Korea appreciated MacArthur's tough stance against compromise and sympathized with the South Korean desire to unify the country.

North Korean Reactions to the Christian Churches

The truce was concluded on July 27, 1953. While all the Korean people suffered from the war, whole areas of North Korea had been devastated by war, and this resulted in widespread "war-weariness."⁴⁷⁾ Along with this war-weariness, hostility towards the USA increased. The destruction and

45) On Nolde's visit to Korea, see "Report of O. Frederick Nolde's Visit to Korea" and "Dr. Nolde Speaking on His Trip to Korea," *Documents of the WCC Library: The Korean War*, 365-380, 383-384.

46) Charles August Sauer, *Methodists in Korea 1930-1960* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society, 1973), 222-223.

47) Glenn D. Paige and Dong Jun Lee, "The Post-War Politics of Communist Korea," R. A. Scalapino ed., *North Korea Today* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 18.

loss of lives by massive U.S. air raids during the war planted a burning hatred of Americans in North Korean minds. This hatred was reflected in Kim Il Sung's speeches, too.

The U.S. robbers have reduced our towns and villages to ashes and are slaughtering our people en masse. The American missionaries who once behaved themselves as "apostles of God" in Korea are now bringing pregnant women together by scores and shooting them all at once with carbines, and are running over children with tanks. The "gentleman of Wall Street" who used to boast arrogantly of the "Goddess of Liberty" to the world, now carry Korean girls stripped naked in cars and tanks, perpetrating all kinds of outrages and atrocities against them which surpass all human imagination.⁴⁸⁾

Terrible atrocities were committed on both sides, and in North Korea they were used to arouse anti-American sentiment. Even American missionaries and their works were understood in mood of anti-American sentiment. According to Kim Il Sung, "The United States had sent to our country missionaries under the mantle of religion long ago to build churches in many places and disseminate Christianity and ideas of U.S. worship, and made preparations over tens of years to dominate Korea some day." Kim set forth the idea that Christianity had come to Korea as the forerunner of imperialism and this was an insidious trick of the United States to establish its influence in Korea under the cloak of religion.⁴⁹⁾ Therefore Christianity naturally became the object of contempt and ridicule in post-war North Korea. In addition to having cooperated with US troops during the occupation, Christians in the North organized the so-called "peace maintenance corps" with anti-communist groups to attack the North Korean soldiers. This gave the North Korean government its best opportunity to wipe out Christianity in North Korea. Retaliation against participants in "peace maintenance corps" and the people whose families or relatives had escaped to the South must have been harsh, though Kim Il Sung appealed to the cadres of the Labor Party to treat them generously.

48) Kim Il Sung, *Selected Works*, Vol. III (Pyongyang: Korean Worker's Party Press, 1954), 245. Korean language.

49) Ibid.

In this situation, some of the Christians who stayed in the North lost their faith and the remaining faithful were forced to worship alone or in small scattered groups. House churches or unorganized small congregations became the *modus operandi* of Christian faith in this situation. The Korean Christian Federation was now the sole official church organization in North Korea. This does not mean that collisions between the state and Christians came to an end. The ideological conflict with Kim Il Sung's regime continued among the remaining Christians in the North until up to the late 1950s. Underground Christian groups in Yongchun, Bakchun, and Wonsan were subject to accusations by the police, and executed or sent to work in the mines. For example, the police accused Rev. Lee Man Wha and ten other leaders of organizing a boycott of a general election to elect representatives of the Second Supreme People's Assembly in August 1957. One year later Kim Il Sung made mention of Lee as a man who opposed Party and Nation.⁵⁰⁾ There was also systematic social discrimination towards Christians. In May 1957, the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party adopted a document "On the Struggle of the Whole Party and Whole People with Anti-Revolutionaries" which allowed the government to classify North Korean civilians into three categories: basic class, agitated class, and hostile class.⁵¹⁾ Collaborators with the United States or South Korea during the war and religionists were classified in the hostile class. In this situation, it was not easy for Christians to openly profess and exercise their religious beliefs.

This kind of discrimination towards religionists in general and Christians in particular finally developed into an anti-religious campaign through literature, movies, and the performing arts. In 1959, the Korean Workers' Party and other organizations in Pyongyang published booklets for anti-religious propaganda. *Urinun Wae Jongkyo rul Bandae Hanunga?* (Why Do We Oppose Religion?), representative of the booklets, based its critique of religion on the Marxist-Leninist theory of religion: religion is

50) Kim Il Sung, "For the Accomplishment of Our Party's Judicial Policy," Suh Dae Sook ed., *A Study of North Korean Literature: Literature and Bibliographical Introduction* Vol. 6 [Society, Law] (Seoul: Kyungnam University Institute for Far Eastern Studies, 2004), 368-369. Korean language.

51) Suh Jae Jin, "Class Structure and Class Conflict of North Korean Society," Society of North Korean Studies, ed., *North Korean Society* (Seoul: Kyungin Publishing Co., 2006), 81-82. Korean language.

unscientific and the opium of the people, weakening revolutionary desire with its non-scientific fantasy aimed towards the next world. The booklet was, however, very different from other Marxist texts in that it criticized Christianity based on the North Korean experience of the war. It said, "It is no wonder that a great number of our patriots were buried alive and massacred by cutting off the limbs by 'holy,' 'God's army,'" that is, the US army, during the war.⁵²⁾ It continued to cite Kim Il Sung's speeches saying that "the American missionaries who once behaved themselves as 'apostles of God' in Korea are now bringing pregnant women together by scores and shooting them all at once with carbines, and are running over children with tanks," and concluded that Christianity had been a tool of American imperialism in Korea. These findings of Christian support for South Korea and the US during the war were reflected in the proposal of the religious policy. *Urinun Wae Jongkyo rul Bandae hanunga?* which grouped religious people into those who supported the policy of the party and the system and wanted the victory of their revolution, and those who were some bad religious reactionaries attempting anti-revolutionary plots, hindering their march and destroying their socialist construction. For the former, it recommended persuading them to give up their religious beliefs through continuous education. For the latter, severe punishment was needed. They felt that in doing so, "we can remove the root of religious remnants in us and construct brilliant socialism and communism more productively."⁵³⁾

The anti-religious campaign in this period was propelled by social antipathy towards Christians and governmental suppression. Pro-Communist Christians in this period were doubted and even the Korean Christian Federation, the umbrella organization of North Korean churches, was daunted by the anti-religious campaign. For example, before 1958, the Korean Christian Federation had regularly appeared in the reports on the United Front. However, from 1958, there was not a single mention of their activities.⁵⁴⁾

52) Jung Ha-Chul, "Why Do We Oppose Religion?," 352. Kim Heung Soo, ed., *A History of the North Korean Church since 1945* (Seoul: Dasangeulbang, 1992), Korean language.

53) Ibid., 360.

54) Keum, "Remnants and Renewal: A History of Protestant Christianity in North Korea, with Special Reference to Issues of Church and State, 1945-1994," 224.

If we shift our concern from anti-religious campaigns to the religious life of North Korean Christians themselves, we find that underground churches called “house churches” emerged during and after the Korean War.⁵⁵⁾ According to statements by the late Rev. Ko Gi Jun of the (North) Korean Christian Federation in 1981, there were 1473 churches and some 117,000 Christians in North Korea shortly before the Korean War. After the breakout of the war, between the Inchon Landing on September 15 and the fall of Pyongyang on October 19, the retreating North Korean armies killed church leaders who remained in the North, Rev. Kim Ik Du and Rev. Park Sang Soon, for example. The North Korean government suspected that they might collaborate with the UN troops. A pastor who came from North Korea in July 1952 reported that the churches in the city had been destroyed and the churches in rural areas had been used as propaganda places, and that only elders and deacons in groups of five to six believers had been meeting privately for prayer.⁵⁶⁾ This was the beginning of house churches. Thus, during and after the war, those Christians left in North continued bearing witness to their Christian faith individually or through the small house churches as “‘stump’ (Isaiah 6:13) faith- communities.”⁵⁷⁾

55) On the existence of house churches in North Korean society see Kim Heung Soo and Ryu Dae Young, *Religion in North Korea: A New Understanding* (Seoul: Dasanggeulbang, 2002), 193-201. Korean language.

56) “Actual Condition of North Korea since Large Scale Big Bombing,” *Kidokgongbo*, September 15, 1952. Korean language.

57) Shin Pyeong Gil, an ex-officer of the Korean Workers’ Party, the ruling party of North Korea, reported that house churches had continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁸⁾ During these two decades, the anti-religious propaganda was at its height. In 1968, however, worship in house churches was allowed in the case of some parents of party leaders. Two hundred house churches were approved in select areas (Sonchon, Jeongju, Nampo, Sinchon, and Jaeryong) where Christianity had been quite active before the war. See Shin Pyeong Gil, “The Process of the Labor Party’s Anti-Religious Policies,” *North Korea* (July 1995), 59. Korean language. Among these believers and members of house churches, some who lived in Pyongyang as well as some who used to practice their faith long ago seem to have joined Pongsu church, which was built in Pyongyang in 1988.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper we examined the role of Christian churches during the Korean War and found that the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and American churches took a pro-South Korean, pro-American, and pro-UN position on the Korean War. According to Hromadka, this stand was taken owing to the anti-Communist stance of American churches, and it motivated the Toronto statement. Although the World Council of Churches maintained that it had not identified itself with any bloc of nations and had no such intention, the Toronto statement was criticized as having identified itself with one group of world powers or as echoing the voice of the United States.

Second, the pro-South Korean, pro-American, and pro-UN position of Western European and American churches was related to their legal approach to the Korean War. Some critics thought that order and law rather than justice were regarded as being of paramount importance in the Toronto statement and in the Korean War, even when the latter was taken into account. In fact, the statement emphasized the fact of the aggression. For Albert Bereczky and Joseph Hromadka, fighting in Korea was a revolution against a tyrannical police government, the same revolution that had been taking place all over Asia and in parts of Europe. It was not an invasion but a revolutionary war of the Korean people to reunite their divided country. They saw the Korean situation from the perspective of great changes which had taken place in their own country, and regarded war as a way to justice.

The stance of Korean churches on the Korean War and on the truce was based on their strong anti-Communism. This conflict of the Christians and Marxist-Leninists in Korea dates from the 1920s. The conflict had been exacerbated since August 15, 1945 as the two movements began to transfer their struggle against Japan to direct confrontation with each other in the process of their new nation building. When Kim Il Sung's socialist government came into power in September 1948, he invited the Christians to cooperate in socialist nation building. Some people in the churches welcomed socialism and were actively involved in the nation building. But the Christian population was the strongest anti-Communist force in North Korea, and it clashed with the Communist land reform and boycotted the general election that took place in 1946. The Communist-Christian confrontation became a war within a war during the Korean War. As a

result, Christians in the North welcomed the UN forces during the occupation period. Christian support for South Korea and the UN troops helped isolate Christians from North Korean society and intensify the anti-Christian campaign in North Korea after the war. In this situation, churches disappeared or were replaced by house churches.

Abstract

On June 25, 1950, war broke out between North Korea and South Korea. This paper explores how and why the Western European and North American churches, their missionaries, and the Korean churches supported the South Korean government, the United States, and the United Nations during the Korean War. Christian churches in the Western nations considered it imperative to support the United Nations in its effort to maintain international order. Churches in Eastern Europe and China, however, considered the action of the United Nations as an attempt to oppose the liberation of Asian peoples.

Due to the pro-American stance of the Christian churches the Communist regime of North Korea regarded Christianity as an anti-patriotic religion. Because of this belief, the North Korean regime intensified its anti-religious campaigns, and tried to wipe out Christians in the post-bellum period. Thus, the Korean War deepened the conflict between Marxist regime and Christian churches, and brought about an anti-religious campaign in North Korea and the transformation of North Korean churches into house churches.

Key Words

The Korean War, World Council of Churches (WCC), Toronto Statement, American Churches, Korean Churches, Kim Il Sung, (North) Korean Christian Federation, House Churches.

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