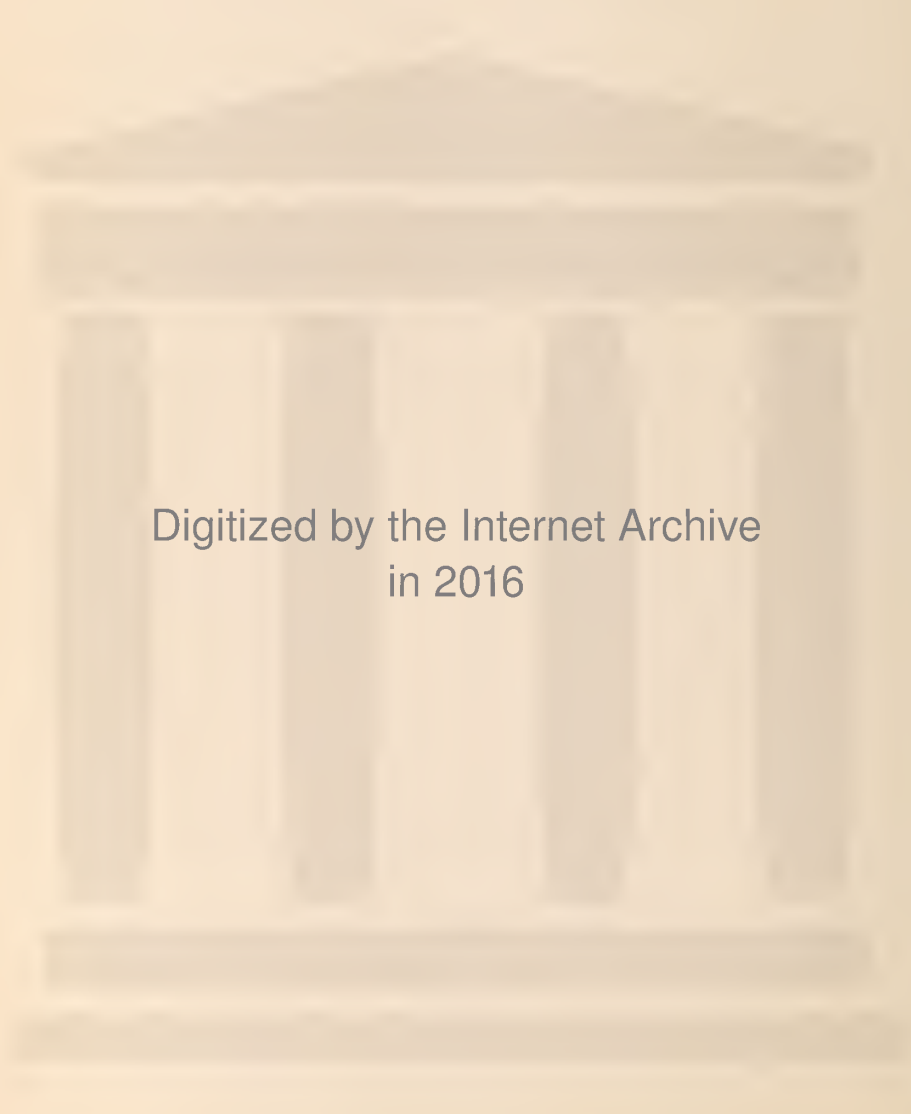


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"The Church in Korea"

- by Samuel Hugh Moffett



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The Church in Korea

SAMUEL HUGH MOFFETT

When one writes about the church in Korea the temptation is strong to begin with statistics. They can be so impressive.

Statistics of church growth, for example. The Protestant community has doubled in every decade since 1940, and is still out-pacing the nation's population growth four to one (that is, a church growth rate of just under 10% annually compared to population growth of 2.2%). Roman Catholics since 1960, after a long period of comparatively slow growth, are now increasing at an even sharper percentage ratio than Protestants.

Or statistics of church membership. The government lists over four million Koreans as Christian, including some marginal cults not recognized by the churches. This is 13% of the population, a remarkably high percentage for Asia where the over-all ratio is only 3%.

Dip into almost any area of the national life, and startling Christian statistics come tumbling out. One-third of the men in the Korean armed forces are said to be Christian. Korea has the largest women's college in the world, a Christian college. Korea has more theological students than any other country in Asia, Africa or Latin America—perhaps more than any other country in the world outside the United States. The capital city, Seoul, has over 1500 Protestant churches.

There are other religions in Korea, of course. Buddhism, for example, claims to have even more followers than Christianity: 7,200,000 as compared with 4,300,000 Christians reported in the 1973 *Korea Annual*. But its claims are a little hollow despite evidences of some revival in recent years. All spot checks and samplings indicate that Christianity is the largest organized religious force in Korea today. What the statistics do not show, however, is the continuing power of a primitive animism (Shamanism) among the masses of the people (over 60%) who claim to have no religion.

There is a darker side to the statistics of Korean Christianity also. Closer examination of the swelling figures reveals the tragic facts of division and schism. Major denominational distinctions existed before, imported from the West, but only since the Korea War, during the decade of division from 1950 to 1960, have the Korean denominations themselves become so splintered, as the chart below will show. There are:

| | | | |
|-------------------------|------|-----------|---------------|
| 14 Presbyterian bodies | with | 1,536,000 | constituents. |
| 1 Roman Catholic church | " | 800,000 | " |
| 3 Methodist bodies | " | 327,000 | " |
| 2 Holiness bodies | " | 254,000 | " |

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| | | | |
|--------------------------------|------|--------|---------------|
| 3 Baptist bodies | with | 63,000 | constituents. |
| 6 Pentecostal groups | " | 60,000 | " |
| 1 Anglican Church in Korea | " | 30,000 | " |
| 2 Seventh Day Adventist bodies | " | 28,000 | " |
| 1 Salvation Army | " | 25,000 | " |

But the statistics of church schism notwithstanding, the raw data of Korean church growth and membership suggest something of the bursting vitality of a church so young that the first Korean Protestant to receive infant baptism died only last year.

The first Christians in Korea were Japanese. Some estimate that as many as 18,000 of the soldiers in Hideyoshi's invading armies were Catholic converts under such Catholic lords as "the chivalrous Christian *daimyo*" Konishi Yukinaga, who captured Seoul and Pyongyang. Such an introducing of the faith to Korea was not of a kind best calculated to win Korean converts, but it did at least bring the first Western missionary to touch Korean soil, the Jesuit Father Gregorio de Cespedes, who came briefly and ineffectively as chaplain with the Japanese armies in 1593.

Catholicism came to stay only when the Koreans themselves brought it in from China two hundred years later. The first Korean was baptized in Peking in 1784, returning to propagate the faith in his homeland. Missionary priests of the Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris followed, beginning in 1836, despite a government ban on the propagation of foreign religions. The church was decimated by great waves of persecution in 1801, 1839, 1846 and 1866. Nevertheless, at the end of "the Catholic century" in 1884 there were some 17,500 Roman Catholics in the country.

In that same year the first resident Protestant missionary, Dr. Horace Allen, M.D., reached Korea. He was not, however, the first to introduce Protestantism. This was done, as in the case of Catholicism earlier, by the Koreans. Eight years before Allen opened Korea to Protestant work, in 1876 a small group of Koreans had been converted by Scottish Presbyterians in Manchuria. They helped the missionaries with the first Korean translation of the New Testament, beginning with the publication of Matthew in 1881. As other gospels were published the Korean converts began crossing the Yalu to distribute the Scriptures secretly in Korea. One of them, So Sang-Yun, returned to his native village not far north of Seoul, converted most of the families, and gathered together a worshiping congregation of almost a hundred people a whole year before the first Protestant missionary arrived in 1884.

Early Protestant mission history was dominated by the Presbyterians and Methodists, and these are still the largest denominations. Methodists tended to emphasize education, and Presbyterians evangelism and church planting. Presbyterian strategy was shaped around the so-called Nevius Method, stressing church-wide Christian education in Bible classes for the entire church membership, and sturdy self-reliance for the young church—self-government, self-propagation and self-support. But to contrast the two denominations too sharply is to oversimplify and distort. Methodist evangelists spearheaded the nation-wide evangelistic crusade of 1909-10, the Million Movement. And Presbyterians, too, pioneered in education, as in Soongsil Col-

lege (now Soongjun University), and Yonsei University.

A strong strain of evangelical revivalism has been a marked feature of Korea's Protestant churches. The great Korean revival which reached its climax in 1907 was a spiritual explosion charged with "extraordinary manifestations of power." It touched off a massive ingathering of believers that increased the membership of the churches fourfold in five years, from 1903 to 1908.

In the same period new mission groups entering the country, such as the Salvation Army and the Oriental Missionary Society (which founded Korea's third largest denomination, the Holiness Church) reënforced the evangelistic and pietistic character of Korean Protestantism. Evangelism has been at the root of its rapid growth. In general, although mass evangelism has been effectively practiced in Korea, the major cutting edge of growth has been individual witness by lay Christians, and the natural channel of growth has been the family. The influence and witness of relatives is most often mentioned by new church members as the most important factor in their conversion.

The pietism of the Korean church, though it is too often tarnished with the kind of legalistic other-worldliness which that once-respectable word now connotes, has its strengths as well as its weaknesses. Protestants for the most part do not drink or smoke. This does lead some into misplaced pride and—what is far more dangerous—obscures for others the basis of Christian salvation. But at least it produces healthier Christians, and leaves them with more money to support the church, which they do with amazing zeal. The deeper strength of pietism, however, is spiritual. Nurtured by prayer, and supported by unwavering convictions, Korea's Christians have time and again found inner resources of spiritual power to meet, to endure and to survive some of the most intensive persecutions of modern times, first under the Japanese militarists and then under the communists.

But the same conservative pietism, it is charged, has also made Korean Christianity narrow and lacking in social concern. The criticism is only partly justified. On the one hand it is true that the Korean church rarely produces searching theological resolutions and sweeping manifestos on social and political issues. This probably indicates a lack of serious evangelical emphasis on social justice and the social implications of the gospel.

Nevertheless, the history of Korean Christianity is surprisingly full of political protest, social revolution and evangelical demonstration. The church's pervasive involvement in the Korean independence movement's protest against colonial injustices was denounced by the Japanese as suicidally radical. The Rev. Kiel Sun-Ju was more than Korea's foremost evangelist. He was also an organizer of the 1919 independence demonstrations and principal Christian signator of the Korean Declaration of Independence, for which he spent two years in jail. Of the 33 signers, 16 were Christians at a time when only 3% of the country was Christian.

The Christian educational revolution in Korea not only introduced modern education to the country, it was the opening wedge in the liberation of Korean women from the centuries-long impositions of Confucian tradition. Out of Korea's first school for women, started by the Methodists in 1886, has grown today's Ewha Women's University which ranks along with the co-educational Yonsei University, founded by Presbyterians, among the four most prestigious

schools in the country. This favored inner circle is now broadening to include a fifth school, the Jesuits' Sogang University.

There are today 11 Protestant colleges and universities, 85 Protestant high schools, 79 middle schools and innumerable Christian primary schools, all legally recognized as private schools but subject to Ministry of Education curriculum requirements. The most recent controversial issue in the Christian educational system is a proposal of the Ministry to forbid the teaching of Bible and religion in the private schools. A strong protest by the churches to the president himself may reverse the decision.

The medical revolution in Korea was also Christian. The first Protestant mission institution was a hospital, the gift of a grateful king to Dr. Allen, the first missionary, for saving a royal prince's life. Today there are 21 Protestant hospitals in operation and many smaller clinics. For years the only medical education in the country was at Severance's Medical College which grew out of Dr. Allen's first hospital. As late as 1954 the Korean government reported that more than a third of all Korea's licensed physicians were Severance graduates. Christian hospitals strongly emphasize family planning, supporting one of the most successful birth control programs in Asia outside Japan. Population increase is down to 2.2%, with a target of 2%. In 1961 it was 2.9%. Another Christian emphasis is rural medical service, as in the satellite-clinic plan of the Taegu Presbyterian Hospital, the village health program of the Chonju Medical Center, and the island experiment in low-cost medicine and community health program on Kojedo. But still only 6.5% of the rural population ever gets modern medical treatment, and the ever-increasing "brain drain" of Korean doctors and nurses to the U.S. and West Germany aggravates the situation.

Christian impact in the fine arts has been no less pervasive. Christians rescued from oblivion the Korean alphabet, key to the country's native culture. The publication of the Bible in *hangul* (the Korean alphabet) rather than in Chinese characters was the beginning of an indigenously Korean literary renaissance in which Christian novelists, poets and artists have played a part out of all proportion to their ratio in the population. The national anthem was written by a Christian. In Seoul last year a Korean Christian opera, *Esther*, played to packed houses in the city's largest auditorium. A Korean best-seller this year has been a book written in Korean for Koreans by a Western missionary, *Persimmons, Winter and Koreans* by Edward Poitras, who takes a sympathetically critical look at the country as seen through occidental eyes. The best-known translator and interpreter of classical Korean literature into Western languages is another missionary, the Anglican bishop of Taejon, the Rt. Rev. Richard Rutt.

When national independence was regained in 1945, Korean Christianity found itself confronted with far more complex problems of political responsibility than it had ever faced before. For the first time, Christians in Korea possessed political power.

Three of the first four presidents of the Republic have been Christians, and Christians have been prominent both in Cabinet posts and the parliamentary National Assembly. Their record, however, in national political life has been understandably mixed. It was considerably blemished by evidences of corruption in the later years of the Syngman Rhee regime. But history is clearing that doughty freedom-fighter and father-figure of many of the charges against him.

Older churches and more Christian cultures than Korea's have yet to solve satisfactorily all the problems of the Christian's involvement in politics, and non-Christian governments have been even less successful in combatting corruption. Intense biblical and theological study of the basic principles of Christian participation in government is a pressing need in the Korean church.

A related problem is that of the Christian in the military. Here the embarrassment is more of success than of failure. A Christian chaplains' corps in a non-Christian country would seem to be an anomaly, but Korea's armed forces have had an official Department of Chaplains since 1950. It was exclusively Christian until 1969 when a handful of Buddhist chaplains was belatedly added. At the end of 1972 there were 305 Protestant chaplains, 47 Catholics and 19 Buddhists. Since 1970, in what was probably an effort to use religion as an anti-communist morale-builder, the Korean government encouraged an "entire army make believer" movement which opened the door to an evangelistic campaign so successful that there have been mass baptisms of over 3,000 servicemen at a time. In two years more than 50,000 baptisms have been recorded, and the percentage of Christians in service has jumped from an estimated 16% five years ago to 33% today.

The pace and political background of the crusade have raised serious questions, but with few exceptions the instruction by the chaplains has been positively Christian, not negatively anti-communist, conversions have seemed to be real, and active follow-up continues as the draftees return to take important roles in their village churches.

Of considerable concern recently has been the role of the Christian *under* government as distinct from that of the Christian *in* government. It is a far more difficult problem than when the government was foreign and Japanese. Then Christian opposition could be nationally automatic. Opposition is no longer so easy. Now that the government is their own, the Korean Christian's concern for justice, protest against corruption, and defense of freedom sometimes conflict agonizingly with his patriotism, loyalty and obedience to the recognized powers of the state. A further deterrent to hasty protest is the deep hunger in the peninsula after years of savage troubles for stability and security and continued economic progress.

Nevertheless, when protests have had to be made, there have been Christians to make them. Sometimes it has been done by official statements, more often by silence which is in itself difficult, and sometimes by demonstrations. The Korean National Council of Churches has courageously championed freedom of the press. The most effective and decisive protest against municipal injustices was a demonstration led by a Christian pastor in one of the capital's worst satellite slum areas. It forced the city to make reforms and has revitalized a dead and forgotten resettlement ghetto into a pioneering model of suburban self-development, much of it organized around the church, such as home industry projects, Christian social service programs for street peddlers and bus girls, and day care for the children of working mothers.

A major drain on Korean church membership is the siren call of the cults. More than 240 "new religions" have been counted, and some of the largest are aggressively proselyting, semi-Christian sects like the 700,000-member (claimed) Olive Tree Church which combines faith healing with a thriving industrial complex built on believers-labor, or the 300,000-member

Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (*Tongil-kyo*) which worships a nationalistically Korean Messiah but has established "families" of foreigners as well in Japan and the United States.

The counter-thrust of the ecumenical movement is sadly weak by comparison. The Korean N.C.C. no longer represents a majority even of the established denominations, and Geneva's one-sided political and social pronouncements have not commended the W.C.C. to the Korean Christian mind. In one area, however, real progress has been registered. Relations between Korean Catholics and Protestants have never been better. For years the missions of both confessions have been coordinating their relief and much of their social service activities through the Korea Association of Voluntary Agencies. More recently they have cooperated in a joint new translation of the Bible. The New Testament has already been published, and the Old Testament is scheduled for completion in 1974.

The deepest division of all in Korea is the abyss that sunders north from south. Despite the dramatic resumption of dialogue between North and South Korea in 1972 for the first time since the Korea War, prospects for reconciliation are, humanly speaking, very dim. The Red Cross talks confirmed that there is, apparently, no organized church left in North Korea. Once the north was the center for Korea's greatest concentration of Christians. Communist persecution of the church, however, has been more severe than in either China or Russia. Asked by a South Korean reporter what was left of Christianity in the north, the Rev. Kang Ryang-Uk, whose close kinship to Premier Kim Il-Sung perhaps explains his survival as both a Christian minister and a high communist official, said that he knew of no church buildings or Christian meetings.

Nevertheless, undeterred by calamities and divisions and problems that would cripple lesser churches, Korea's buoyant Christians continue to multiply and spread. They support over forty Korean Protestant foreign missionaries (including wives), and six Catholic. Most are in Asia, but they have also sent missionaries to lands as distant as Ethiopia and Brazil. It may well be, as some Korean Christians are already saying, that if the missionary enthusiasm of the West declines, the little country of Korea will have the vitality and faith to take up the continuing challenge of world evangelization.

A final note about books on Korean Christianity may be in order, though only a few of many worthwhile volumes can be mentioned. The best comprehensive survey is Allen D. Clark's revised *History of the Church in Korea* (Seoul: Korean Christian Literature Society, 1971) which adds an analysis of the current situation and biographies of outstanding Korean Christians to his earlier work. The classic and irreplaceable record of the early period of Protestant missions is L. G. Paik's *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea 1832-1910* (Seoul: Yonsei University, 1971, a reprint of the 1929 edition). A less definitive but more inclusive survey of the Catholic church is J. C. Kim and J. J. Chung, *Catholic Korea: Yesterday and Now* (Seoul: Catholic Korea Publ. Co., 1964).

On specific, more limited subjects the following are important: Roy Shearer's *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), a documented history and analysis; "The New Religions of Korea", *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic*

Society (Seoul: vol. 43, 1967), which includes chapters on the Olive Tree Movement and the *Tongil-kyo*; and W. N. Blair's *Gold in Korea* (Topeka: H. M. Ives, 1957, 3rd ed.) which contains first-hand reports of the great revival of 1907-08, and of the Shinto shrine issue.

PRAYER

I and my age are barren
Of prayer, impotent, dumb
Under heaven, knowing too well
The why, how, when and where,
But speechless in God's face
And presence; my age and I.

Like the athirst Christ, crossed,
Lacking wine, blood, to ask
Grace, or to praise, love, bless;
Tongue cracked, palate near burst,
Saliva slackened, and throat
Parched in the dust black noon;

Like the mariner, albatrossed
In tropics, sea-marooned
On his salt and endless island
Lacking wit, will, words, cursed
On the pitch hot deck, with dry
Lips dead, denying, denied,
Dying.

O water snakes,
Pity us in your beauty.
Move in our hearts some love
And spirit of praise, that we may
Drink deeply of your motion
And feel the blessed rain.
Move gently for our sakes;
Quicken our dry hearts; open
The way to God again.

Simon Baynes

Religious Policy and the Church in China

DONALD E. MACINNIS

Although the open practice of religion in China apparently ceased during the period of peak intensity of the Cultural Revolution beginning in August, 1966, there is no evidence that China's leaders made organized religion a particular target during that three-year ideological struggle. Religion is not mentioned in the 16-point *Decision* of the Central Committee which launched the Cultural Revolution in August, 1966; nor has Chairman Mao or any other leader spoken of religion in subsequent communiqués and directives. One concludes that China's religious believers, by 1966, were seen to be either thoroughly absorbed in the collective tasks of socialist nation-building, or too insignificant in numbers or influence to pose any challenge.

The Cultural Revolution, however, was far more than a political campaign or power struggle. The first of the 16 points in the 1966 *Decision* began: "The current great proletarian cultural revolution is a great revolution that touches people to their very souls. . . ." The goal was a massive shift in psycho-historical perceptions, a virtual spiritual conversion of China's millions. It appears that China's youth, mobilized into militant groups of Red Guards across the nation, over-responded to the summons to attack the remnant traces of bourgeois feudalism—the "four olds": old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. In a widespread and indiscriminate assault on every remaining sector of pre-revolutionary culture, Buddhist temples, Moslem mosques and Christian churches were closed by roving Red Guard groups. Religious scriptures and objects of all kinds were seized and destroyed, and clergy and believers were harassed. It is only in the past two or three years that visitors have seen Buddhist temples and monasteries, mosques and a few Christian churches once again open for use by believers.

Under the united front policy, which enlisted all social, cultural and ethnic minority groups in joint endeavor toward common national goals, China's leaders have held consistently to a stated policy of freedom of religions belief within the context of patriotic service in socialist nation-building. The deputy director of the United Front Work Department in 1958 said:

Ideological differences on the question of God are intolerable. The policy on freedom of religious belief tolerates such differences and facilitates the correct handling of such contradictions among the people. The policy on freedom of religious belief, therefore, is a long-term basic policy of the Chinese Communist Party and the state to cope with the religious problem.

However, religious believers, like all other citizens of China, are expected to participate fully in the nation's tasks:

The author served the Methodist Church in university teaching in China and Taiwan before coming to be the first director of the China Program/NCCCCUSA and editor of *China Notes*. He is the author of *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China: A Documentary History*, New York: MacMillan Co., 1972, and is presently working on a second book for Macmillan, *The Maoist Vision for New Man and New Society*.

