



THE SOUNDING MEGAPHONE

Issue 5, March 2018



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Hello and welcome to another issue of the Sounding Megaphone. North Korea has been in the news very much this last year and I would like to give some background history to the country and the situation and threat that North Korea poses. I will also discuss a less talked about country, Eritrea. God bless you. Shawn Stevens

Visit our website freedomandsocialorder.com.

P. O. Box 933,
Lynden, WA 98264,
U. S. A.

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THE HISTORY AND STATE OF NORTH KOREA

It is the Hermit Kingdom, a country of mass poverty and prison camps. North Korea has a rather ominous history and presence in the world community. However, ancient Korea was very different from the modern North Korea that we know today. There was significant Christian missionary activity in this region with some of its beginnings difficult to trace. What was the earliest Christian contact in Korea? A few records, and some circumstantial evidence, suggest Nestorian missionaries may have been active there in the 7th century A.D. We have reports from much later that tell of Christian converts among those whom Japan took prisoner when it invaded Korea in 1592. Christian books were later carried into Korea from Japan and appear to have had some influence. In 1784, a Korean man named Peter Lee, who had been converted by Jesuits in China, came back to Korea and his coming seems to have started a hundred years of Catholic expansion in Korea. However, Catholics were greatly persecuted in Korea, as well, and, in a ten-year period, over four hundred Catholics were martyred for their faith. In 1898, the Catholic Church had 40,000 members in Korea.

The early 19th century would see the beginning of Protestant expansion in Korea. Through a strange set of circumstances, a great opening came for Protestant missionaries. In 1884, a violent uprising against members of the Korean court resulted in a number of the king's counsellors being killed and the queen's nephew being badly wounded. Royal officials called to the Christian, Dr. Horace N. Allen, for help. Dr. Allen nursed the young prince back to health and, subsequently, was promoted to become the official physician to the Korean royal court. Through this favourable position, Dr. Allen was able to assist many Protestant missionaries into the country. The Protestant Church grew in

Korea, but not without difficulties. It was not culturally acceptable to become a Christian and converts were viciously criticized, usually disinherited and, sometimes, even stoned. However, there were good days ahead for the Church in Korea. Beginning in October of 1901, a revival broke out in Korea. Pockets of revival led to *The Great Pyongyang Revival of 1907*. Incredible accounts tell of God's moving among believers and of the Church experiencing explosive growth. In the span of only a few months the Presbyterian Church mushroomed from 14,509 members to 73,847 members. The Methodists expanded from 12,791 members to 24,244 members. From 1885, a very small number of Christians had grown to 50,000 (by 1905) and, by 1909, had grown to four times that number.

Although the Church was seeing great victories, difficult days were ahead. The country of Japan annexed Korea in 1910. The Japanese government immediately began interfering with the Church and began instructing it about what it should teach its people. The Church was expected to support the new Japanese government and even elements of Shinto religion. This led to a mixed response. Some Christian institutions chose to close their doors rather than to compromise their faith. Others, sadly, made a compromise. Great persecutions swept the country in the years leading up to World War II. In these years, more than 200 churches were closed, 2,000 Christians imprisoned and fifty pastors were tortured.

The end of World War II brought the liberation of Korea from Japan. This was a great moment for the Church and it is estimated that 20,000 Christians were released from captivity, many of them only days before they would have been executed. Also, at the end of the war, the Korean peninsula had been split in two at the 38th parallel. The American army occupied the southern half of the country and the Russians occupied the North. The public was told that plans had been made to establish a unified Korean nation with the occupying countries

withdrawing their forces. This, however, did not occur. The Russians immediately set up a man claiming to be Kim Il Sung as the communist leader for Northern Korea. Kim Il Sung was an aged war hero who was much loved in Korea. News spread of his appointment and 60,000 people turned out to welcome this leader. However, the crowd witnessed a much younger man standing in his place who only spoke a crude Korean and needed help with his speeches. In reality, this imposter was Kim Sung Joo. The new government launched a land reform act which took excess property away from wealthy landowners. Christians were declared to be “anti-revolutionary,” “anti-people” and “anti-nationalists.” The government seized all property belonging to religious organizations. The communist government immediately began implementing rigid controls on the Church. The communists found it increasingly difficult to break the will of Christians and to control their activities. By 1950, they began a policy of extermination. Many Christians fled for their lives as they were hunted down.

Another significant development in 1950 was the outbreak of the Korean War. Northern Korea decided to annex Southern Korea and sent troops across the 38th parallel. United Nations forces, which included many American troops, immediately came to South Korea's defence. The communists completely underestimated their opponents. The North Korean army, which numbered 95,000, was cut down to 22,000 men. Northern Korean forces retreated to their border.

After the war, the Northern Korean government launched an initiative to eradicate Christians from the country. All church buildings were now used for other purposes or were reduced to rubble. From 1953 to 1972, no Christian activities were allowed in North Korea. Anyone found to profess faith in Jesus Christ was executed or made to serve a year of hard labor in coal mines or labor camps. In 1958, an ally of Kim Il Sung (Kim Sung Yoo) wrote that all Christians had been captured and that the only way of changing their behaviour was to execute

them. Many Koreans were executed for simply owning a Bible. Today, owning a Bible in North Korea can result in being sentenced to fifteen years in the labor camps.

There are horrifying stories telling of the communist dealings with Christians in North Korea. One sad story tells of children in school being told by their teachers to go home and look for a black, nicely-bound book that their parents may have hidden in their home. If the children found such a book, they were to bring it to their teachers. One nine-year old girl, finding a Bible at home, brought it to school and proudly and obediently gave it to her teacher. That day marked the last day that she ever saw her parents. Despite the government's efforts to eradicate the Church, the Christian Church has gone underground in North Korea. It is impossible to get accurate statistics of their numbers. Many have been caught and been executed publicly for their faith.

If the North Korean government rejects Christian faith, what religion does it promote? Most people are completely unaware of something that the North Koreans call “Juche.” However, everyone in North Korea knows about *Juche*. In fact, it is a religion of emperor worship. The government of North Korea mandates its citizens to follow Juche. Even though most people have never heard of Juche, Juche, because North Korea's population is over twenty million, is reported by the government to have a following of over twenty million. This makes it a larger religion than what is called present-day orthodox Judaism. Juche teaches that North Korea's emperor is divine, immortal, worthy of worship, power, honor, glory and even prayer. Juche also teaches that the country of North Korea is Paradise on Earth and that other countries, such as South Korea, are miserable places to live in.

What is the economic condition in North Korea today? Reports coming out of North Korea shock most people's imagination. It is hard to overstate the extremity of economic

devastation that North Koreans live with daily. In 1998, the United Nations reported that two-thirds of North Korea's children suffer from stunted growth and that 16% of children under the age of six are "acutely malnourished." As many as five million of North Korea's population of twenty-four million may have starved to death. This means that 21% of the population is believed to have died from starvation. In one North Korean mining town, between January 1995 and June 1998, 19% of the town's population had starved to death. One out of five persons fled the town in search of food. There are reports of entire families committing suicide, rather than choosing to slowly starve to death. There are even shocking stories of parents who have killed and eaten their own children. There has been request after request by desperate North Korean citizens for outside help.

The North Korean government blames severe conditions on natural disasters and imperialist forces keeping their country down. However, the government's own actions are very suspect in the midst of such desperate conditions. North Korea's government spends an enormous amount of money maintaining the world's fifth largest standing army. In the 1990s, when many of his own troops started dying of starvation, Kim Jong Il sent his troops into rural farming areas authorizing them to seize food for themselves. At this time, efforts were also made to drive many farmers off of their farms into the cities where they were easier to be monitored and controlled. The country's entire population became dependent upon a government system of rationing which could not even begin to work with anything less than maximum crop output. Some farmer's markets were shut down and even some who were peddling food were arrested. Even some outside foreign aid was rejected for fear that the government would frown upon receiving this kind of help. In the town of Musan, the government cracked the secret black market sale of rice. When the population threatened to rebel, they were blamed for being anti-government and 200 persons were arrested. Twelve of these were

publicly executed. According to the report of certain refugees, 50% of the city's 130,000 population either died or fled. Perhaps the worst starvation is within the prison camps, which hold thousands of prisoners who work long and strenuous days on little or no food. The average life-expectancy of those in prison camps is only five years and it is believed that a million Koreans have died in these camps. One visitor to North Korea reported the following horrific scene:

I walked down the road in this one village where dead bodies were on the side of the road. I saw a hungry boy eating one of the bodies but then a policeman also saw him, and pulling out his revolver, he shot the boy in the head. It was the first but not the last person I saw shot for cannibalism in North Korea. 2

Much concern has arisen over North Korea's nuclear weapons program. In 1994, the North Korean government signed the *Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty* but withdrew participation in 2003. In 2006, they announced that they had successfully tested a nuclear bomb. An earthquake of 4.3 on the Richter scale in North Korea coincided with the date for the test and has substantiated their claim. North Korean president, Kim Jong Il died in 2011 of a heart attack. He has been succeeded by his son Kim Jong Un. North Korea has now agreed to stop nuclear testing, long-range missile launching and enrichment activities at the Yongbyon nuclear complex in exchange for food aid. However, the situation has changed again and North Korea has threatened South Korea and the United States that it is readying its nuclear weapons for an attack against them. The world waits to see if this new change of leadership will make good on its promise and bring a friendlier face to North Korea.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES :

1. P. Todd Nettleton, *North Korea : Good News Reaches the Hermit Kingdom* (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Co., 2008), 56.
2. Ibid., 58-59.

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ERITREA – HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

In May of 2002, Eritrea's government officially banned all Christian groups that did not belong to state-recognized Churches. This ruling has resulted in massive persecution against Christians in that country. Since that time, Eritrea has imprisoned several thousand Christians. There are many, incarcerated in 2002, who have not yet appeared before a court. This year (2011), in a short two-month period, ninety believers have been arrested and only six of these have been released. In May of 2011, sixty-four Christians were arrested. Reports say that there are Christians being kept at both a police station and Mitire Prison. This military prison is known for its harsh living conditions and torture. Prisoners in this open-air, desert prison are exposed to poisonous snakes. Prisoners are made to participate in forced labor and they receive very little sustenance. The prison is not equipped with medical facilities. (“Eritrea Arrests Continue.” July 29, 2011 <http://www.persecution.com>)

Because of the on-going arrests of Christians, many are fleeing across Eritrea's border, into Egypt, in hopes of escaping to Israel. Many Christian refugees die, attempting the nine-hundred mile journey through Egypt and others are gunned down as they cross the Egypt-Israeli border. In Egypt, Muslims frequently abduct these migrant Christians and hold them hostage for a \$20,000 ransom. Hostages who are not fortunate enough to have the bail money raised are often killed. Many others who avoid being abducted by human traffickers are jailed by Egyptian authorities. There are currently 500 to 600 Eritrean prisoners in Egyptian jails. In jail, refugees suffer torture, sexual abuse and beatings. Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo has said; “The suffering of our brothers and sisters from Eritrea is unimaginable.” (“Eritrea Unimaginable Suffering.” <http://www.persecution.com>)

One 2017 report from Open Doors tells of over 40 Christians who were caught worshiping in secret. They were arrested and one of them tells of after serving two years of regular prison was

then sent to Eritrea's infamous Mai Serwa prison where he and others were imprisoned together in a shipping container with 30 other people and only given one 10 minute washroom break per day.

What is Canada's involvement in the country of Eritrea? While Canada has supported certain limited sanctions against Eritrea Canada has greatly increased its trade with Eritrea. Two-way merchandise Trade between them leapt from \$2.9 million in 2010 to over \$160 million in 2013. Most of this increase is in the trade of gold and silver as Eritrea is Canada's largest source of gold in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is reported that Eritrean government has a 40% stake in Vancouver based Nevsun Resources Bisha mine. Canadian trade greatly benefits Eritrea. In 2016 Canadian imports from Eritrea totalled \$13,502,661 but our exports to them was only \$325,050. The Canadian government has officially said; "Canada remains concerned about Eritrea's human rights situation, particularly with regard to the respect for democracy and the rule of law, the imprisonment or ill treatment of political opposition and journalists, and the protection of civil liberties." ("Canada-Eritrea Relations" www.canadainternational.gc.ca/sudan_south_sudan-soudan_soudan_du_sud/eritrea-erythree.aspx?lang=eng&view=d By quoting this document I am not claiming that the Canadian Government endorses my article,

It is time for Canada's concern over Eritrea's human rights violations to be raised a notch and for strong diplomatic measures to be used in bringing change. This situation in Eritrea is utterly unacceptable and against the values of Canadians. Canadians do not want our country to compromise its values and do business with nations that openly practice this kind of cruelty upon minorities. By doing business with Eritrea, on some level, we are condoning their actions or, at least, looking the other way. It is time to send a clear message to the government of Eritrea that we will not do business with, or give aid to, a government that is this oppressive towards

innocent people, unless they are willing to change and to allow full religious freedom and release those prisoners whom they have detained for simply being a part of an unregistered Church.

Once again, Canadians do not want to look the other way. Canadians want our government to pressure governments like Eritrea to respect human rights and freedoms. Write to your local member of parliament and to Canada's foreign affairs minister and express your desire to see change in Eritrea and in Canada's relationship with it.

Shawn Stevens

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