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Korean and Japanese Church Relations After 1945: The Path to Reconciliation⁽¹⁾

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1. Introduction

On August 15, 1945, the day of Japan's surrender that ended World War II, Japan and Korea faced historic turning points. For the Japanese, it was *haisenbi* (Day of Defeat); for the Koreans it was *gwangbogjeol* (Liberation Day). From opposing departure points, on that day both countries embarked on a journey toward becoming fully democratic nations.

Today, Korea and Japan are the only democratic countries in Northeast Asia. But although both nations instituted many reforms following the war, they did not establish diplomatic relations with each other until twenty years had passed. The treaty Japan and Korea then signed in 1965 normalizing diplomatic relations lacked any hint of reflection or repentance on the part of the Japanese regarding their treatment of the Korean people during Japan's thirty-six year occupation of Korea. The Korean government's overly conciliatory negotiations insulted and enraged many Koreans, who believed they had suffered too much under Japanese rule to be bought off by the economic assistance the treaty would provide. Theologically liberal and moderate Korean Christians "organized a campaign to block negotiations leading toward diplomatic relations with Japan."⁽²⁾ Their protest led to soul-searching and repentance on the part of the church in Japan, which up to that point had not taken into account the suffering of the Koreans, and much less the complicity of the Japanese church in causing this suffering. With Japanese repentance, Korean

churches came to accept Japanese churches as brothers and sisters in Christ and as partners in missions.

This paper will discuss why it took twenty years for the Japanese and Korean churches to begin to relate to each other, and the path that led to their reconciliation. It will then consider some of the fruits and challenges experienced by Japanese and Korean churches in a process of reconciliation that continues today.

Any attempt to discuss the reconciliation between the churches in Korea and Japan needs to take into account the nature of the church groups and denominations in each nation. This paper focuses mainly on relations between the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) and three major denominations in Korea: the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK); the much larger Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK); and the Korean Methodist Church.

The Kyodan, whose membership edged up to 200,000 by the 1970s, slowly began losing members from the mid-1990s, and stands now at 180,000, less than a third of the 670,000 Protestants in Japan. The Kyodan was divided for many years between one faction that emphasized social action and another that tended to shy away from political issues and focused more exclusively on ecclesiastical matters. The more liberal and social action-oriented Japanese churches and their leaders took much of the first initiative in reaching out to their politically active Korean counterparts, who were mainly, but not exclusively, in the PROK. The PROK, with 300,000 members now, has always been a small minority among Korean Protestants. Leaders in the PROK have a reputation for being theologically liberal and politically active. The lay members, however, are generally more conservative, and often frown upon their pastors' activism. As a result, along with some of the pastors, members of organizations like the Korean Student Christian Federation and the YMCA have taken the lead in the political action efforts of the PROK.⁽³⁾

The PCK, the parent church from which the PROK broke off in 1954, now has about 2,800,000 members. Although it chafed some under the

Korean military dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s, the PCK chose for the most part to steer clear of politics. Instead, under the leadership of Han Kyung-chik, the PCK worked for spiritual revival and the conversion of individuals. By taking the path of non-confrontation with the government, the PCK gained the freedom to work within the military, the police force, hospitals, and other government-related institutions. Phenomenal church growth resulted. Military chaplains in the 1970s, for example, sometimes baptized thousands of the conscripted soldiers in a single day.⁽⁴⁾ The PCK also gained members as it rallied for mass crusades led by evangelists like Billy Graham in 1973 and Bill Bright in 1974. From the latter half of the 1980s, the PCK has become more involved in social-political issues. The Korean Methodist Church, with about 1,500,000 members, also emphasized evangelism over social activism during the 1970s and 1980s, but began taking stronger stands on social issues from the late 1980s.

The Korean denominations discussed here account for just over half of the Protestants in Korea. The remaining denominations have typically been more conservative politically and theologically. Chung-shin Park, in *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (2003) discusses the bitter rivalries and opposing political viewpoints, and the increasing fragmentation, along with impressive growth statistics, that have historically characterized the Protestant denominations in Korea. Having briefly introduced the Protestant groups in Japan and Korea that we will focus on in this paper, we examine now the path that led to their reconciliation after 1945.

2. A Country So Close Yet So Far

“So close yet so far” is an expression used often in both Korea and Japan to refer to the fact that the two countries, although geographically close, have lacked normal relations. This expression applies well to relations between the Japanese and Korean churches in the years following World War II.

Korean Christians greeted the end of Japanese rule with an explosive

release of pent-up rage. Before nightfall on the day of their liberation, Christians in Pyongyang, known for its Christian fervor as “the Jerusalem of the East,” had torched the city’s Shinto Shrine. Throughout Korea 1,141 shrines, hated symbols of Japanese oppression and religious persecution, soon met a similar fate.⁽⁵⁾

The Japanese rulers and their police enforcers went home. But bitterness toward the Japanese people smoldered on in the Koreans’ hearts. Koreans had lived for thirty-six years (1910–1945) under a Japanese police state and had suffered greatly. Treated as slaves, they had been disposable parts of the Japanese war machine. They had been driven off their land and forced to fend for themselves in the harsh Manchurian hinterlands. They had been commanded to produce rice for Japanese tables while they struggled to survive. They had worked as laborers, soldiers, and sexual slaves (in Japanese and Korean, the euphemistic “comfort women”). They had been forbidden to speak Korean and had had to give up their Korean names for Japanese names.

From early in their occupation, Japan had worked to undermine and weaken any resistance to its rule, particularly by corrupting the morals of young Korean men. It brought in Japanese prostitutes and established a system of regulated brothels; sold opium freely to the Koreans while threatening Japanese who partook with loss of citizenship; and introduced card games for gambling, all to preoccupy and addict the youth.⁽⁶⁾

The Japanese had particularly feared the church in Korea. The church had provided the leadership for the March First Korean Independence Movement of 1919; even after the Japanese soldiers savagely crushed this uprising, the church continued to grow. It stood as a symbol of nationalism, and functioned as a place where Koreans could freely gather to discuss matters, including their grievances with the colonial authorities.

Although a few prewar Japanese Christians had served the Koreans and earned their respect, other Japanese Christian leaders had worked with the Japanese government to subdue Korean Christians and to subvert their faith. Tomita Mitsuru, head of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyokai (the leading

prewar Japanese denomination) and of the Kyodan when it was formed in 1941, travelled to Pyongyang in 1938 with a mission: to persuade Korean Christians that bowing at shrines was a civil, not a religious act. In an all-night meeting between Tomita and a group of Korean pastors, leading Korean pastor Ju Gi-cheul stood firmly on scripture and against Tomita. The ever-vigilant Japanese special police soon after arrested Ju for daring to speak against shrine worship. Through the years of deprivation and excruciating torture that followed, Ju refused to compromise his position. He died in prison in 1944.⁽⁷⁾ Under such pressure from the Japanese special police, the great majority of Korean Christians were bullied into bowing. Fifty church leaders, however, like Ju, chose to accept the ultimate penalty rather than to bow. Another 2000 “living martyrs,” those who had refused to bow and were incarcerated, were freed from prison torture chambers on Liberation Day.⁽⁸⁾

Korean-Japanese relations would not easily be restored. Knowing this, Korean Christian leader Kim Jae-joon suggested a five-year moratorium on relations with the Japanese—underestimating by a power of four the years that would actually be needed before the two churches could sit together again.⁽⁹⁾ Having been so badly burned, most Koreans did not want to see a Japanese face.

Japanese Christians, caught up in the pain of their own defeat and devastation, knew little of the Korean Christians’ wartime plight and postwar bitterness. Like the Koreans, Japanese Christians had been coopted by the militarists into obeisance to the Imperial cult. Some had willingly played the role of patriots; others had cooperated under compulsion.

They responded to the war’s end in various ways. World-renowned social activist and evangelist Kagawa Toyohiko saw defeat as a chance for a new, peaceful beginning. He reflected on the causes for Japan’s defeat, listing as one Japan’s lack of religious education and sensitivity, shown in Japan’s forcing Korean pastors to make Japanese god shelves (*kamidana*).⁽¹⁰⁾

On the whole, however, Moderator Tomita Mitsuru and the Kyodan leadership concerned itself less with the countries of Asia than with their American conquerors and occupiers.⁽¹¹⁾ For Japanese Christians, Korea and Korean Christians were at best peripheral concerns. On the other hand, American Christian leaders were actively seeking to make connections with Japanese Christians. Four delegates from the American church visited Japan in the fall of 1945 and apologized profusely to the Japanese Christians for the devastation wrecked by American bombings. As they embraced the American churchmen in the rubble that had been Tokyo, the Japanese Christians exclaimed again and again, “This is the happiest day of my life.” The war was over. One of the American delegates exuded in describing this happy reunion: “A triumph of Christian love...rose above nationality and washed out the past in tears of forgiveness.” This was “possible only between brothers whose return signalizes the restoration of a family tie which was never broken.”⁽¹²⁾ Two months after the war, America and Japan had reconciled. With the encouragement of General Douglas MacArthur, American missionaries soon arrived in Japan both to evangelize and to provide practical relief for the beleaguered Japanese.

The Japanese Christians, however, were apparently in no frame of mind to extend the joy they experienced over renewed ties with American Christians to the Korean Christians. Nor could they follow the American example and come forth with apologies for wrongs suffered by Koreans at the hands of the Japanese—and the Japanese church. Two decades passed; nothing happened. Japanese and Korean Christians remained out of fellowship and out of touch. This disconnect showed itself in 1959 in the matter of the repatriation of Koreans from Japan to North Korea.

When the war ended, 2.4 million Koreans were living on Japanese soil. 670,000 had been forcefully moved to Japan between 1938 and 1945. Although most Koreans returned to their ancestral homelands by 1946, about 650,000 remained in Japan.⁽¹³⁾ The Japanese government saw these Koreans as an added burden. They claimed the Koreans used scarce resources, committed more than their share of crimes, and sided with the

communists. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru wanted them out, and the sooner the better. The great majority had come from South Korea, but to the Japanese authorities, whether they were sent back to North or South Korea did not matter.

Following the Korean War, North Korea invited the Koreans in Japan to come to its socialist “paradise,” promising them free education and medical care.⁽¹⁴⁾ Many took the bait. From December 1959 to 1984, a total of 93,340 Japanese Koreans returned to North Korea through the Japanese Red Cross.⁽¹⁵⁾ Waiting there was not a workers’ paradise, but hard labor and great deprivation.⁽¹⁶⁾

South Koreans, well aware of what was happening in North Korea, protested the repatriation of their fellows to the North. South Korean Christians spoke out as well. They knew the North Korean government persecuted Christians, destroyed their churches, and squelched religious freedom. A headline for an editorial in the PCK’s newspaper *Kidok Gongbo* loudly declared, “The Church also Opposes the Deportation of Koreans to the North” and called for the Japanese church to take up the cause of the repatriates being led into captivity: “Japanese churches should not sit and watch. We expect them to act with good conscience for humanity and justice, as they are faced with the government’s decision to send free citizens to the Communist bloc.”⁽¹⁷⁾

Japanese Christians, however, had no way to hear these protests and pleas. Adding to the blanket of silence, many in the Kyodan, leaning to the political left, lacked the realism to see through the propaganda to the dire realities of North Korea. The Kyodan Times blithely remarked, “We Japanese Christians hope that this [repatriation] is carried out without trouble and as smoothly as possible.”⁽¹⁸⁾ Lacking vital connection with the church in Korea, Japanese Christians accepted without question their nation’s repatriation policy.

3. The Path to Reconciliation

In the 1960s, Korean and Japanese Christians began to mend ties. Leaders in the Japanese church visited and established contact with their Korean counterparts. They began to take interest in the Koreans' struggles. They came to realize more clearly the bitterness Koreans felt towards their former colonizers. Finally, in 1967, the Moderator of the Kyodan confessed the complicity of the wartime Japanese church in oppressing Korean Christians. This section traces these steps toward reconciliation.

In 1960, the Korean student-led April Revolution sent the corrupt President Syngman Rhee packing for exile in Hawaii.⁽¹⁹⁾ The *Kyodan Times* looked positively at this event, seeing it as a turning point for freedom in Korea. However, the same editorial showed its utter ignorance of the Korean mindset in interpreting Rhee's departure as giving Koreans "liberation even greater" than they had experienced in their release from Japanese rule. Korean Christians likened August 15, 1945 to the Jewish exodus from bondage in Egypt and as the "day of greatest joy in the twentieth century." The editorial concluded with a prayer for the breaking down of the wall between Japan and Korea and for Japanese and Korean churches to link hands for the evangelism of Asia.⁽²⁰⁾ Until the Japanese church could see and confess its role in erecting this wall, the well-intended prayer would remain unanswered.

It would take a new generation of Japanese Christian leaders, typified by Suzuki Masahisa and Omura Isamu, to bring about this transformation. Suzuki learned firsthand of Japanese prejudice towards Koreans when he spoke at retreats for Korean Christian youth living in Japan. He learned firsthand from these fellow Christians, for example, that few Japanese landlords would consider renting to Koreans. Feeling the Koreans' pain saddened Suzuki and made him angry at this Japanese mentality.⁽²¹⁾

When Major General Park Chung-hee seized power in Korea in a

May 1961 military coup, Suzuki prayed that Korean Christians could stand through this crisis as “watchmen” for their nation.⁽²²⁾ He believed that the Koreans were “neighbors.” He stated, “the coup took place in a neighbor country with which we have the deepest relationship.” Suzuki did not just call Korea a neighbor, but dedicated his life to breaking down the wall separating the two nations’ churches. And as Suzuki knew, change required open, honest communication.

Although attempts at Japanese and Korean interchurch exchanges had been made in the 1950s, not until 1962 did a delegation from the Kyodan actually meet with Korean church leaders.⁽²³⁾ A *Kidok Gongbo* editorial commenting on the exchange noted the potential for good relations to develop: “Historically and geographically, the people of Korea and Japan should have the closest of relationships.” But it also recalled that “the invasions in the past, stemming from the delusions of world domination of Japanese imperialists and militarists, have wrought the greatest of sufferings on the Korean people.”⁽²⁴⁾ These injustices and injuries loomed large in the Korean consciousness in any contemplation of reconciliation with Japan. The Japanese church representatives’ sincere apologies and dialogue with the Korean church, however, demonstrated the potential for people of faith to achieve what the Japanese and Korean governments had failed to do. “As the politicians of Korea and Japan cannot achieve the peace and harmony that we so long for, is it not time for the two countries’ Christians to show more faith and love, and contribute to diplomatic normalization?”⁽²⁵⁾

As a matter of fact, Japanese and Korean politicians were already at work after Park seized power, discussing terms for diplomatic normalization in a series of meetings called the Japan-Korea Conferences. The American government was pushing its Japanese and Korean allies to form a united front in Northeast Asia because America was deepening its involvement in Southeast Asia with the Vietnam War. On the Korean side, President Park wanted foreign capital from Japan to jump-start his country’s stalled economy. The meetings moved forward apace, and in June

1965, Japan and the Republic of Korea signed the Treaty on Basic Relations restoring diplomatic relations the two nations. The treaty committed Japan to providing Korea with \$800 million in grants and soft loans—so long as these were not called reparations.⁽²⁶⁾ The treaty made no mention of a Japanese apology for the past.⁽²⁷⁾

These proceedings, however, rankled liberal and moderate Korean Christian leaders. The Korean National Council of Churches (KNCC) began a movement in 1964 against the treaty's ratification, criticizing Korea's overly conciliatory tone and recoiling at Japan's arrogance.⁽²⁸⁾

As soon as the treaty was signed, Han Kyung-chik called a "Prayer Meeting to Save the Country." In a "Manifesto by the Christian Committee to Save the Country," Han and 240 fellow pastors called for Japan's repentance as a prerequisite for the reconciliation between the two countries. They declared, "For truthful reconciliation, we need to repent of the sins of the past, and promise our mutual service and cooperation based on good will."⁽²⁹⁾

The Korean Christian leaders saw in the treaty specters of a past too painful to forget. "Japan's attitude towards Korea is nothing less than that of the strong against the weak, a blatant neo-colonialist stance to expropriate benefits only for itself." The treaty "would only intensify conflicts and animosity, not friendship, between the Koreans and the Japanese."⁽³⁰⁾ Many believed that the treaty reflected Japan's plans for an economic invasion of their country.

The journal *Christian Thought*, in articles on the Japan-Korea Conferences, pointed out a "fundamental psychological problem...in the undercurrent of the numerous difficult problems regarding the diplomatic normalization of Korea and Japan...lack of trust."⁽³¹⁾ This long-standing Korean sentiment towards Japan stemmed from pain inflicted, promises broken, and expectations betrayed—the experience of Koreans during the thirty-six years of Japanese occupation. Nationalist sentiment against Japan intensified, as diplomatic normalization was force-fed to the nation before the psychological scars had healed.

Meanwhile, a Korean pastor implicated Japanese Christians for “not truly repenting before God’s judgment...They...avoid remembering what their country has done to the Asian race or thinking of how to wash away their sins. Japanese Christians only show cheap sympathy [towards Koreans].”⁽³²⁾

These Korean Christian protests caused the Japanese church to look more deeply into the problems that divided the two nations. Japanese Christians began to realize that the fundamental barrier between Korea and Japan was psychological, stemming from a deep bitterness (*han*) held by the Koreans towards the Japanese.

How could the church overcome these psychological barriers of Japanese prejudice and Korean bitterness? The 50th Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea in September 1965 would provide a forum. The Moderator of the Kyodan, Omura Isamu, attended the conference. He knew there was “fierce opposition in Korea, especially among Christians to the ratification of the Korea-Japan Treaty...opposition stemming from the indelible psychological scar caused by Japan’s past brutalities.”⁽³³⁾

PROK theologian and leader Kim Jae-joon had invited Omura to attend the Assembly. But while Omura waited in the meeting for his turn to speak, the mere presence of this Japanese Christian caused intense, prolonged debate to break out among the Korean representatives. They finally voted, but only narrowly, to allow Omura to address them. As he stood at the podium in the tension-packed room, Omura spoke of his own “agony” at the horrible mistakes, the political oppression, and the abuse of human rights that had marked Japan’s rule over Korea. As a representative of the Kyodan, he expressed deep regret over and repented of these wrongdoings. Furthermore, Omura apologized for negligence in “so far not making any effort towards solidarity” and pledged that the Kyodan would reach out to the Korean church so that together they could “carry out the Great Commission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁽³⁴⁾

While Omura made no specific reference to the sins of the Japanese church, his visit and apology opened the door for deepened relationships

with the Korean Christians. They understood his message as “genuine repentance for sins committed over the thirty-six years [of Japanese colonialism]” and a step on the “path to reconciliation.”⁽³⁵⁾ Returning to Japan, Omura reflected on his experience with Christians in Korea. “The great problem in Korean-Japanese relationships is this: Japanese people do not know Korean people very well. They do not know how Koreans feel, and that is the problem.”⁽³⁶⁾ Omura called this a “problem of the heart.”⁽³⁷⁾

Some within the Kyodan questioned the purpose of Omura’s visit to Korea, wondering, “what exactly he apologized for?”⁽³⁸⁾ Omura responded, “To work for reconciliation between Japan and Korea that will bring us beyond the current unfortunate relationship is the obvious responsibility for one who follows God. Quoting Matthew 5:23–24, he continued, “The Japanese church apologizes and repents for the political and humanitarian sins committed in the past by Japan. It also recognizes itself as representing the Japanese people in this apology. I believe that this is a debt that the Japanese church must repay, a duty it must fulfill.”⁽³⁹⁾ Omura preached on how, through fellowship with Korean Christians, he had come to see himself as a “perpetrator,” rather than “victim” of the war. “Japanese Christians used to have something akin to a victim mentality with respect to the Japanese government and its militarists, but they were wrong. Their own country did wrong. As it invaded other countries during the war, were we not also the perpetrators? The church, as much as the country, is a perpetrator.”⁽⁴⁰⁾ He continued, “The crimes that our country committed were the churches’ crimes as well. I confess with full honesty. This is what everyone in Japanese churches should take as his own responsibility.”⁽⁴¹⁾

Suzuki Masahisa accepted this responsibility when he succeeded Omura as Moderator of the Kyodan. On March 26, 1967, in the “Kyodan Confession of Wartime Responsibility,” Suzuki formally repented on behalf of the Japanese churches that had cooperated with Japanese militarists during World War II and asked the forgiveness of the churches in Asia. The Confession read, “Indeed, even as our country committed sin, so we too as a church committed the same sin... Now, with deep pain in our hearts,

we confess our sin and ask the Lord for forgiveness. We also seek the forgiveness of the peoples of all nations, particularly in Asia.”⁽⁴²⁾

Suzuki’s public confession satisfied the Korean Christians and opened the way for the representatives of the Kyodan and three major Protestant denominations in Korea to meet in July of 1967 to write a proposal for a mutual Mission Agreement.⁽⁴³⁾ The churches ratified this agreement the following year, as they committed themselves to “look back on the painful history of both their countries, and stand on the gospel of reconciliation, seeking new and deepened fellowship as friends in the Lord.” This would imply 1) active involvement in missions, 2) the creation of offices to facilitate communication, 3) the exchange of materials related to mission, and 4) cooperation in the spirit of ecumenicity.

Chairman of the General Assembly of the PROK, Kang Won-yong, invited Suzuki to Korea to address the annual meeting in September 1967. Introducing the Japanese Moderator, Kang told the delegates that he had asked Suzuki to “speak because the Korean church...had a special responsibility for Asia, making the establishment of a good relationship between Korea and Japan a task of the utmost urgency...I dared to ask him to speak his heart sincerely so that we can know what is really happening in the Japanese churches.”⁽⁴⁴⁾

4. Reconciliation After 1967

Suzuki returned from this trip to Korea in a state of exhaustion, suffering from the cancer that would take his life in 1969, but satisfied that he had accomplished his task. As though taking up his mantle, Suzuki’s own Nishikatamachi Church in Tokyo covenanted in 1975 with First (Cheil) Church in Seoul to study, walk, and pray together as sister churches. Thirty years later, these two churches published a 700-page Korean-Japanese bilingual book recalling their shared journey. Their reconciliation at times required great struggle. A Korean prayed frankly at a joint service in 2007, “Looking back on the thirty years, there were times where

in our hard-heartedness we did not want to accept this relationship, to use the word ‘sister’” to refer to the Japanese church.”⁽⁴⁵⁾ Regular joint retreats and prayer and study sessions, however, helped these churches to understand and model reconciliation. In 2006, they recommitted themselves to “strive to understand correctly and to educate others in Korean-Japanese history.”⁽⁴⁶⁾

Park Hyeong-kyu, pastor of the First Church in Seoul, was also one of the key leaders of the Korean democracy movement. After Park Chung-hee seized dictatorial powers and silenced all opposition in the early 1970s, Park Hyeong-kyu publicly denounced the president’s actions as unconstitutional and inhumane and appealed to Christians of the world to speak out on behalf of the oppressed proponents of freedom in Korea. Arrested as he led a protest following a 1973 Easter Service, Park Hyeong-kyu was released, then arrested and imprisoned three more times over the next six years.⁽⁴⁷⁾

After his first imprisonment, Park appealed to his Japanese Christian friends for help. The Japanese then formed a committee that raised nearly 10,000 dollars from members of 280 Japanese churches to place a full-page ad in the May 5, 1974 *New York Times*. The ad called on American Christians to support Park Hyeong-kyu and others being persecuted for their stand for democracy and human rights in Korea. It summarized an official American study deploring the state of affairs in Korea and insisting that the American government immediately stop funding the Park regime. The ad so disturbed the Korean government that they countered it the next month with their own full-page ad in the *New York Times*.⁽⁴⁸⁾

In 1973, the Kyodan appointed Sawa Masahiko (1939–1989) as its first official missionary to Korea.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Sawa had visited Korea and studied the language prior to his appointment and saw himself as a “bridge” between the two countries. He lived in Korea “not to teach the Korean Christians, but to think, pray, and walk together with them.”⁽⁵⁰⁾

The Korean government deported Sawa in 1979 after he preached that the church should decide matters listening to the word of the Bible rather than to governmental authorities.⁽⁵¹⁾ However, when Sawa died in

1989 at the age of 50, he had left his mark on the lives of his students and colleagues, and as a scholar of Korean history. Korean leaders commended Sawa as a “pioneer...one who learned the language, loved the culture, and lived in the midst of the Korean people.” “Seeking the path of redemption” and painfully aware the “dirty hand of Japan”⁽⁵²⁾ in Asia, Sawa sought “to love, understand, and be a good friend to the Korean people.”⁽⁵³⁾

Japanese Christian leaders not affiliated with the Kyodan also worked for reconciliation with Korea. Pastor Oyama Reiji described his calling to this work in 1956: “while I was reading Matthew 5:23–24...the Lord showed me I was to start a movement to apologize for our sins.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ I know during the over one hundred years of its modern history Japan has trampled on the people of Asia, leaving them with bitter enmity towards the Japanese people.”⁽⁵⁵⁾ Oyama went first to the Philippines, where he knew “the Filipinos hated the Japanese...because of the war-time cruelty of the Japanese soldiers.” Oyama felt the Lord had called him: “I am sending you to go and wash the feet of the Filipino people...and to attempt a reconciliation by the Love of God.”⁽⁵⁶⁾

Oyama continued to follow his calling to work for reconciliation with Korea. In October 1965 he visited Cheamni Church, located in a village outside of Seoul. The church had a traumatic past. On April 15, 1919, Japanese soldiers had herded the men of the village into the church, killed them, and then burned both the church and the village. Deeply grieved to learn of the soldiers’ cruelty, Oyama committed himself to finding some way to demonstrate Japanese repentance to the villagers. Seeing that the church building was old and dilapidated, he formed a committee of 200 Japanese Christians and collected about 30,000 dollars to rebuild the church. On April 15, 1969, the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre, Oyama joined with church officials and some of the people of Cheamni Church in a ceremony to start the rebuilding project. Villagers who had lost family members in the 1919 massacre, however, cried out their opposition to accepting Japanese money even while the ceremony was proceeding. Only the intervention of higher-level church officials

and the promise that the building project would include a museum to commemorate the victims made it possible for the rebuilding to proceed. The passage of fifty years had not dissipated the grief and emotional poison of the tragic event. What was lost could never be restored. Commending Oyama and the Japanese Christians for their efforts, however, Han Kyung-chik called the rebuilding of Cheamni Church “a sign of hope for reconciliation between the Korean and Japanese people.”⁽⁵⁷⁾

For a period after the Japanese-Korean reconciliation and Mission Agreement, the PCK, along with other denominations, regarded Japan as its most important mission field.⁽⁵⁸⁾ They sent missionaries to work both among the Koreans living in Japan and the Japanese themselves. These missionaries have found the Japanese soil far less fruitful than that in Korea, making work frustrating at times. Still, as of 2012, 1438 missionaries from 87 Korean missions organizations were serving in a variety of ministries.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Following the March 11, 2011 earthquake, Korean churches have been increasing their commitment to mission in Japan.

Korean mission in Japan takes many forms. In the Amagasaki flophouse district of Osaka, for example, a Korean church serves rice balls and miso soup to as many as 200 unemployed, homeless men each week. About forty have become believers. Churches from four Korean denominations are located in Amagasaki, and other Korean groups support the work of Japanese churches serving the aging homeless population there.⁽⁶⁰⁾

There are limits to reconciliation; unresolved issues continue to divide Korea and Japan at a political level. Some government-approved Japanese history textbooks, for example delete references to the Japanese invasion and occupation of Korea. In the case of Korean women who were forced to serve the Japanese army as so-called “comfort women,” apologies made by some Japanese politicians are contradicted or retracted by the pronouncements of others. The two nations both claim ownership of Dokdo/Takeshima Island in the sea between Korea and Japan. All these issues trace their roots to differing understandings about the historical relations between Japan and Korea.

Cheil Church and Nishikatamachi Church, their partnership now spanning nearly four decades, model a commitment to honest and joint examination of the historical relations between Korea and Japan. Japanese politicians, however, have wavered in their understanding of these historical problems. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in 2007 and again in 2013 aroused the ire of Koreans with his contention that the use of the word “invasion” to describe Japan’s prewar treatment of Korea “had not been agreed upon academically or internationally.”⁽⁶¹⁾ Rebuttals instantly filled the front pages of the major Korean newspapers. Abe’s nationalism has drawn criticism from government leaders around the world. On these political issues, however, virtually all of the Japanese Christian leaders stand in solidarity with Korean Christians.⁽⁶²⁾ Pronouncements of the tiny Japanese church turn few heads.

5. Conclusion

For the two decades following the end of World War II, Japanese and Korean Christians had almost no fellowship. This lack of connection left the Japanese church in the dark about many things, not the least of which was South Korean Christians’ opposition to repatriating Koreans who had been living in Japan to communist North Korea. In the early 1960s, Japanese Christians began to visit Korea and meet with church leaders there. A step towards a reconciliation breakthrough came in 1965 when Japanese Christians finally acknowledged the main reason behind South Korean church leaders’ protest against the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan: the agreement, no matter how economically fortuitous it may have been for the Koreans, lacked any hint of an apology from Japan for its brutal colonization of Korea.

In short, the church in Japan had taken a “sympathetic” stance toward their Korean brethren, viewing both themselves and the Koreans as victims of Japanese militarism and imperialism. The Japanese Christians were very reluctant to face the truth of their complicity with the Japanese

government, particularly during the period of enforced shrine worship from 1938-1945. The Copernican change came about in 1967 when the Kyodan finally, definitively, and publicly confessed Japanese Christians' sins toward the Korean Christians. The Korean churches accepted this repentance, opening the path to reconciliation. As a result, the Kyodan and three prominent Korean denominations signed a mission agreement.⁽⁶³⁾

From that time, there was mutual cooperation. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Japanese Christians supported their Korean counterparts in their struggle against Korea's military dictatorship. Korean churches have made Japan the focus of their mission efforts, working both independently and in partnership with Japanese churches to evangelize the hard-to-reach population. Churches in both nations have sought to live out reconciliation in sister church relationships.

Returning from a Centennial celebration of the Reformed Churches in Korea in May 2013, the head of the Japan Evangelical Alliance stated that "no barriers to fellowship" now existed between the Korean and Japanese churches.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The people of both nations get along, and economics relations work smoothly. Only in the political realm, however, do tensions build and tempers tend to flare whenever a Japanese leader with neo-nationalist fervor and lack of historical understanding comes into power. This has happened with Abe Shinzo back at the helm.

The Japanese church is a tiny minority within Japanese society. It wields little electoral power and lacks influence over its nation's politics. However, by standing in union with the Korean church that now so favors Japan, and by together serving "the least of these" in Japan's hierarchal society, it is hoped that an irrefutable message of Christian love and reconciliation will shake this island kingdom. The Korean church, the church that Japanese imperialism could not crush, strengthened through sufferings and blessed with growth, today witnesses to the entire world the biblical vision of spears made into plowshares, the dream of sisters and brothers once estranged now sitting at the table of fellowship. This transformation began with conversation, continued with confession, and

now moves forward in shared mission.

The reconciliation of the Japanese and Korean churches has not been the exclusive domain of one denomination or theological outlook. Moderate and conservative churches can thank more the liberal Christians for their initiative in reaching out and courage in resisting government tyranny. Liberals can thank the more conservative Christians for extending the kingdom of God through revivals and direct evangelism. In both Korea and Japan, denominations once rent asunder by theological and other differences are learning the magic of shared conversation and pulpit exchanges.⁽⁶⁵⁾ In a world crying out for healing, other churches too can surely find ample common cause, and like the churches of Japan and Korea, move forward step by step in the way of reconciliation.

Endnotes

- (1) This paper revises and greatly expands an essay published by Mansong Ko “Japanese and Korean Church Relations from 1945 to 1967: The Path to Reconciliation.” in Atsuyoshi Fujiwara and Brian Byrd (eds.) *Theology of Japan, Vol. 6: Post-disaster Theology from Japan* (Saitama, Japan: Seigakuin University Press, 2013), 102–122.
- (2) Chung-shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 89.
- (3) *Ibid.*, 193–99.
- (4) Hae-jung Lee, *Han Kyung-chik Ui Gidokgyo jeok geon-guk ron* (Han Kyung-chik’ Christian approach to nation-building) (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2011), 207. From 1971 to 1974, 96,000 soldiers (including the author, Mansong Ko) were baptized at the mass baptismal services. When their term of duty was over, returned to spread the Christian faith in their homes, schools, and workplaces.
- (5) Yoshio Morita, *Chōsen Shūsenno Kiroku* (Record of the end of World War II) (Tokyo: Gennando, 1986), 108.
- (6) In-soo Kim, *Ju Gi-cheul: The Life of Reverend Soyang Ju Gi-cheul, Lamb of Jesus* (Seoul: PCTS Press, 2008), 47–50.
- (7) *Ibid.*, 156.

- (8) One of these men, Lee Won-yong, on the brink of death at his release, later became the head of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK). He had the 1938 General Assembly decision to participate in shrine worship officially retracted in the 1954 PCK General Assembly meeting.
- (9) Jae-joon Kim, *Kim Jae-joon Jeojakjib* (The Works of Jae-joon Kim) (Seoul: Hanshin University, 1971), 2: 34, 35. Kim, liberal theologian and key leader in the PROK, received his theological education at Japan's Aoyama Gakuin and at Princeton Theological Seminary.
- (10) Kagawa Toyohiko, *Shinseikatsu e no douhyou* (Guide to New Life) June, 1946 in *Kagawa Toyohiko Zenshu* (The Collected Works of Kagawa Toyohiko), Tomio Muto ed. (Tokyo: Kirisuto Shimbunsha, 1964), 13: 31, 37).
- (11) See, for example, *Kimata Bin Sengo Nikki* (The End of War Diary of Bin Kimata) *Kagawa Toyohiko Kenkyu* 57 (Feb 27, 2011): 45–73.
- (12) “Envoys of Reconciliation,” *The Christian Century* (December 12, 1945): 1377.
- (13) Masaru Tonomura, *Chōsenjin Kyōsei Renkō* (Koreans forced to return against their will) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2012), 15–16, 28.
- (14) *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 26, 2012, Culture Section.
- (15) Soji Takasaki, *Kikoku undo to wa nandattanoka* (What was the return home campaign?) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2005), 46.
- (16) Cf. Haruki Wada, *Kitachōsen Gendaishi* (Modern History of North Korea) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2012), 98.
- (17) *Kidok Gongbo*, March 2, 1959.
- (18) *Kyodan Times*, September 12, 1959.
- (19) President Syngman Rhee (1875–1965) had long enjoyed the favor of the Korean church. His resort to massive fraud in an attempt to win the elections of March 15, 1960, however, sparked demonstrations that led to his demise. In April, protests against the rigged election spread across the nation, and clashes between the police and student and other demonstrators left more than one hundred dead in Seoul alone. Rhee declared martial law, but when university professors joined in the demonstrations, he resigned.
- (20) *Kyodan Times*, May 7, 1960.
- (21) Masahisa Suzuki, *Suzuki Masahisa Chosakushū* (The Works of Suzuki Masahisa 3) (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1980), Appendix 1–2.
- (22) *Kyodan Times*, June 3, 1961.
- (23) *Kyodan Times*, March 3, 1962.
- (24) *Kidok Gongbo*, May 14, 1962.
- (25) *Ibid.*
- (26) Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 321.

- (27) *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 26, 2012.
- (28) The KCCC consisted of six major denominations, and represented around half of Korean Protestants. The more conservative denominations, however, supported the Korean government *carte blanche* and labeled all opposition as communist and unchristian.
- (29) “Sekai Kyokai Nyūs” (News of the World Church), *Kyodan Times*, September 18, 1965, 4.
- (30) Ibid.
- (31) “Hanil Munjeneun Ma-eum-ui Munje” (Problems between Korea and Japan are Psychological), *Gidoggyo Sasang* (Christian Thought) (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea), June 1965: 8.
- (32) Kan-seok Kim, “Gyohoe-wa Hanil Munje” (The Church and the Problem of Korea and Japan), Ibid., June 1964: 5.
- (33) “Kankoku Kyōkai ni Wabiru” (Apology to the Korean Churches), *Kyodan Times*, 18 December 18, 1965, 3.
- (34) *Kyodan Times*, October 2, 1965, 3.
- (35) *Newsletter of PROK*, November 1, 1965, 10.
- (36) Isamu Omura, *Omura Isamu Sekkyōshū* (Omura Isamu’s Sermons) (Tokyo: Asagaya Church, 1992), 286.
- (37) Ibid.
- (38) *Kyodan Times*, December 18, 1965, 3.
- (39) Ibid. Matthew 5:23–24: “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.”
- (40) Omura, *Omura Isamu Sekkyōshū*, 286.
- (41) Ibid., 200.
- (42) <http://uccj-e.org/confession> (accessed 3 April 2012).
- (43) *Dai-15-kai Nihon Kiristo Kyodan Sōkai Hōkokusho* (The Report of the 15th Kyodan General Assembly) (Tokyo: Kyodan, 1968), 31–2. The Mission Agreement, which was written in Tokyo, was approved by all of the denominations at their annual meetings the following year.
- (44) *Kyodan Times*, November 18, 1967, 6.
- (45) “Kaiho e no junrei” (Pilgrimage to Liberation) *Kanan wo mezashite tomoni 30 nen* (Together Towards Canaan, 30 Years) (Seoul: Cheil Church and Nishikatamachi Church Editorial Committee Joint Publication, 2007), 1.
- (46) Ibid., 338–42. Joint statement made by the churches in 2006.
- (47) Hyeong-kyu Park, *Rojō no Shinkō* (My Beliefs are on the Road) (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 2010).

- (48) *Ibid.*, 250. The government ad insisted that Koreans enjoyed religious freedom.
- (49) Masahiko Sawa, *Minami-Kitachōsen Kirisutokyō Shiron* (The History of Christianity in South and North Korea) (Tokyo: UCCJ, 1982), 4.
- (50) Koji Moriyama, “Sawa Masahikoui saeng-ae-wa hagmun” (The Life and Thought of Sawa Masahiko) *Hanguk-gidogyowa Yeogsa 9* (Korean Christianity and History 9) (1998): 16.
- (51) Sawa, *Minami-Kitachōsen*, 4.
- (52) Masahiko Sawa, *Kankoku to Nihon no aida de* (Between Korea and Japan) (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1993), 59.
- (53) *Ibid.*, 280–1.
- (54) The same verse of scripture that informed Kyodan Moderator Omura.
- (55) Reiji Oyama, *Kurisuchan no wakai to icchi* (Christian Reconciliation and Unity) (Tokyo: Jibikiami, 2007), 4, 44.
- (56) Reiji Oyama, “My Testimony,” *Japan Christian Quarterly* (October 1959): 269–70.
- (57) Eun-seop Kim (ed.), *Kyung-chik Han Collection* CD-ROM (Seoul: Kyung-chik Han Foundation, 2010), 6: 456 (English Version).
- (58) Bang-hyun Shin, “70 Nyondae ihu hangug gyohoeui saegyeseongyo Hoegowa Jeonmang,” (World mission of the church in Korea since the 1970s: Retrospect and Prospect) *Gyohoe wa Sinhag* (Church and Theology) (Autumn 2007): 23.
- (59) Kiho Park, “Missionary Movement of the Korean Church,” *International Congress of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches: Revival and Unity of Reformed Churches* (Seoul: Chongshin University, 2013), 124–26. This is out of a total of 24,742 Korean missionaries serving worldwide.
- (60) “Amagasaki kara tengoku wo aogu” (Looking up to heaven from Amagasaki) *Asahi Shimbun*, February 25, 2013, 14.
- (61) “Kankoku kakushi ichimen hanpatsu” (Protests on the Front Page of All Korean Newspapers) *Asahi Shimbun* (April 24, 2013 evening edition) 2.
- (62) *Nohsei Ando interview*, May 12, 2013 (Ando heads the Japan Evangelical Association).
- (63) Cf. <http://www.pck.or.kr/> (accessed 18 May 2012); <http://www.prok.org/new.php> (accessed 18 May 2012); http://www.kmcweb.or.kr/new_eng/index.html (accessed 18 May 2012).
- (64) *Nohsei Ando interview*.
- (65) Following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, International post-disaster symposiums and church networking meetings in Japan have brought the various factions of the church together in the common cause of rebuilding the nation and establishing the church. In Korea, PCK pulpit exchanges with the long estranged, more conservative, and slightly larger General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (GAPCK) evidence this trend.