

Re-examining North Korea Missions: A Background Study for a Church Planting Movement

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David Lee
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Introduction

A. Title and Definition of Terms

This thesis is entitled “Re-examining North Korea Missions: A Background Study for a Church Planting Movement.” This thesis is presented as a background study for a “church planting movement” in North Korea. A church planting movement is a rapid and exponential multiplication of indigenous churches within a population segment (people, city or country). A church planting movement implies the rapid growth, expansion and multiplication of churches until a whole people has access to the gospel. Church planting movements are characterized by local initiative, discipleship, mentoring of leaders, families and homogenous groups coming to faith in Christ, the establishing of local churches and their expansion to begin more churches.¹

B. Purpose of Research

The main argument of this thesis is that the failure of current mission efforts in North Korea to successfully overcome present obstacles mandate a change in mission strategy. The writer thus proposes a cooperative mission strategy focused on church planting in North Korea. The reasons for such an argument are stated in the following paragraphs.

First, North Korea remains as one of the least reached countries in the world. After the wave of communism consumed North Korea at the end of World War II, the

¹ Avery T. Willis, Jr., “Vision 2001: Creating the Future,” International Mission Board, Overseas Operations, Xerox, n.d., p. 4.

prospering Christian community in the country was totally devastated by government persecution. The Kim Il Sung regime destroyed churches, executed pastors, and imprisoned thousands upon thousands of Christians. As a result, the only existing church in North Korea, besides two government-controlled churches used for propaganda, is the underground church made up of believers who worship and keep their faith in secret. Even after forty years of mission efforts, almost an entire country of 22 million people are dying without ever hearing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Second, current mission efforts have not been able to break the Church's apathy toward North Korea missions. Most groups involved in North Korea missions are working independently of each other with overlapping ideas, visions, and resources. As a result, this overlap of resources causes much waste and inefficiency. Mission agencies are able to mobilize only a small number of people for North Korea mission work while the rest of the Church remains indifferent and uninformed of the situation in North Korea. In fact, the average Christian at church has little or even no knowledge of how he can participate in North Korea missions.

Third, many mission efforts have settled for feeding only the physical hunger of the North Korean people. A large majority of recent mission efforts to North Korea have been centered on humanitarian aid to stave off starvation. These humanitarian efforts claim they are laying the groundwork for a positive response later, but they have yet to open the door for the gospel or for the building up of the North Korean church—and there is no guarantee that they will. The greatest priority in North Korea missions ought to be to plant a contextualized and self-propagating church that will lead to the evangelization of the country.

C. Research Background

This thesis is a product of many factors that have encouraged the writer to research North Korea. First, by coming to South Korea to study in seminary, the writer was able to be in closer proximity to North Korea than if he would have remained in the United States. Since the writer was born and raised in America, location, cultural, and language barriers prevented him from gaining much access to information about North Korea. However, by learning the Korean language and culture, and by being only a few hours away from the 38th parallel, he was able to gain interest and access to greater resources regarding North Korea.

Also, news of the immense physical and spiritual hunger in North Korea gave incentive for the writer to know more about the situation in North Korea. He was shocked and appalled to find out that up to 15% of the total population has starved to death, according to some sources.² However, the writer was more shocked to discover that most people were not aware of the seriousness of the famine. He was reminded of the Holocaust of Nazi Germany, where the whole world watched and denied participation as millions of Jews died. In North Korea, people are not only denied food, but also denied the Word of God. Millions of people are starving spiritually. The North Korea famine might turn out to be one of the greatest catastrophes of this century. The writer ultimately hopes that this thesis will aid in the formation of a comprehensive and effective mission strategy for North Korea.

² “3.5 Million Allegedly Died of Famine In North Korea,” JoongAng Ilbo, September 28, 1998, http://english.joongang.co.kr/jnews/jnews/asp?n_id=19980928006 (1 Oct 1998).

4. Research Method

The technical research method followed in this thesis is as follows. First, the writer researched available books, magazines, journals, and theses regarding North Korea and North Korea missions. Resources available at the Unification Ministry's North Korea Resource Center were especially helpful. Second, the writer utilized the internet in gaining access to articles and current information about North Korea. Most of the primary source material on Kim Jong Il and Juche were from the internet. Third, the writer visited mission organizations, symposiums and training seminars on North Korea missions.

The writer does acknowledge the limits of this paper. First, this thesis is limited by the scope of research done by the writer. Very little is known about North Korea, and what is known is not often published. The writer found it difficult to find many papers and resources dedicated to North Korea missions strategy. Second, this thesis is not a step-by-step "recipe" book on how to plant churches in North Korea. Rather, it approaches the task of North Korea missions in a broad manner, focusing on the role of the Church and mission agencies in their unified approach.

The logical method followed in this thesis is as follows. The overall question the writer will answer is, "What is the most effective strategy for North Korea missions?" Chapter 1 explores the obstacles to mission work North Korea. It addresses the question, "Why is missions in North Korea so difficult?" Chapter 2 examines current mission efforts to see how well they are overcoming the obstacles mentioned in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 asks and answers, "How are current mission efforts doing?" Chapter 3

presents a strategy for church planting in North Korea, while addressing, “What is the best strategy for North Korea missions?”

Chapter 1:

Obstacles to Mission Work in North Korea

What makes North Korea one of the most difficult places in the world to do mission work? This is the core question of this chapter. In an attempt to answer this question, the writer will examine access into North Korea, Juche Ideology, the famine, and uncertainty of change as key obstacles inhibiting current mission work. We need to understand the reasons why North Korea is one of the most unreached places in the world if we want to have a realistic chance of sharing the gospel light to this country. The contents in this chapter will help answer the overall question, “What is the most effective missions strategy for North Korea missions?”

A. Access into North Korea

One of the major factors, if not the greatest, inhibiting mission work in North Korea is that missionaries are not officially allowed to enter the country. Even if they enter secretly, they are hindered if not completely prevented from propagating Christianity. The government’s concept of religion and Christianity, government surveillance, and propaganda play key roles in blocking access of mission efforts into North Korea.

1. Concept of Religion and Christianity

The North Korean government strongly discourages all organized activity except that

which serves the interests of the State.³ In fact, many would agree that in North Korea the official religion is the cult of Kim Il Sung. In North Korea the leader is like God. Hwang Jang Yop, defected North Korean Party secretary for ideological affairs, says, “At the end of the day the ‘Leader’ is the source of life of the individual. Because he lives, they live. He is like God, or like the sun. The people really believe that...”⁴

When Kim Il Sung passed away in 1994, the personality cult of Kim Il Sung was passed on to his son Kim Jong Il. Initially, many foreign observers speculated that in this transition North Korea would collapse because Kim Jong Il did not have the same charisma as his father, Kim Il Sung. However, this proved not to be true as Kim Jong Il took over his father’s position as divine leader of the country. One of the reasons that made this transition of power between father and son possible was the nature of the personality cult in North Korea. While in communist countries the personality cult would revolve around the leader himself, in North Korea the personality cult revolves around the family of Kim Il Sung.⁵ Kim Il Sung is the divine father and all his family members are divine also. Thus, when Kim Jong Il took over leadership of North Korea, he was able to take full advantage of the divine legitimacy he inherited from his father. In fact, it can be said that Kim Il Sung is not dead, but rather is personified in the form of Kim Jong Il. The North Korean newspaper, *Minju Josun*, reported, “Comrade Kim Jong Il, who has led our Republic to victory and prosperity and who has throughout personified the great

³ U.S. Department of State, Democratic People's Rep. of Korea Human Rights Practices, 1995 (March 1996), <ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/usefuldocs/dprkhumanrights95> (1 Oct. 1998).

⁴ "Running Against History: Defector Sees Kim's Regime as Increasingly Brittle," Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 161, No. 42, 15 Oct. 1998, http://www.feer.com/Restricted/index_p4.html (16 Oct. 1998).

⁵ A Handbook on North Korea (Seoul: Naewoe Press, 1996), p. 21.

leader's ideas, leadership traits, and loft virtues, is today's President Kim Il Sung."⁶

In North Korea freedom of religion does not exist. Everybody is required to follow the law of the state to absolutely worship Kim Jong Il. Quoting from the *Minju Josun*, "All our functionaries and working people should absolutely worship Comrade Kim Jong Il, entirely entrust their destiny to the general, and loyally uphold the idea and leadership of the general."⁷ The role of Kim Jong Il is not simply that of a leader or president. Rather, he demands absolute worship, as if he were God himself. Also, he invites the total laying down of one's destiny before him, meaning one should commit his entire life to Kim Jong Il.

The North Korean government views Christianity as a threat to its very existence. In the government's eyes, any allegiance pledged to another "god" besides Kim Jong Il, is allegiance that is taken away from the Kim Jong Il regime. Furthermore, Christianity in North Korea has been associated with foreign imperialism.⁸ Christianity, successfully propagated by American Protestant missionaries in the late 1800s, is viewed by the North Korea regime as a cover-up by foreign powers to infiltrate and seize control of the country.

2. Persecution of the Church

The North Korean government's persecution of the church also makes it difficult to

⁶ "The Might of Our Republic, Where All The People Have Rallied As One Around Comrade Kim Jong Il, Is Invincible," *Minju josun* (Pyongyang), 5 Oct. 5 1997, <http://www.kimsoft.com/1997/minju10.htm> (20 Oct. 1998).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Michael Breen, "A Challenge to a God with 'Word of God': Graham Takes Crusade to Pyongyang," *The Washington Times*, 26 Jan. 1994, p. A1.

enter the country to do mission work. As a result of the government's antagonistic view of Christianity, the North Korean regime has sought to completely eliminate Christianity in the country. North Korea, however, does maintain an appearance of toleration towards Christianity by showcasing a Christian Association and two churches, one Protestant and one Catholic, in Pyongyang. Defector Hwang Jang Yop paints the picture of religious freedom in North Korea:

Although, officially, freedom of religion exists, and is theoretically guaranteed by law, we don't even have a real church. Two churches were built for the World Youth Games in 1986 in Pyongyang but only for public-relations purposes. Those that really go there are state-ordered "believers." If someone really wanted to attend church, or declared allegiance to it, he would be shot within five minutes. The people should only believe in Kim Jong Il.⁹

North Korea used to be a dynamic Christian center with a sprouting church before Kim Il Sung took power. Until 1950, according to some estimates, there were 2,850 churches, 700 pastors, and 300,000 Christians in North Korea.¹⁰ Michael Breen describes, "In 1946, when Mr. Kim... took power, the North Korea capital of Pyongyang rang with church bells. Known among Asian Christians as the Jerusalem of the East, it was the center of Presbyterian resistance to Japanese imperialism in the first half of the century."¹¹ Today, North Korea is a spiritual wilderness where the only church worship services are completely done in secret.

Due to the intense persecution of Christians by the North Korean government over the years, many Christians have been killed or detained in concentration camps. The U.S.

⁹ "Running Against History: Defector Sees Kim's Regime as Increasingly Brittle."

¹⁰ Kim, Jong-suk, Bukan Gyohwae Jaegunron (Seoul: Jili Wa Jayoo Press, 1998), p. 104.

¹¹ Michael Breen, p. A1.

State Department estimates that North Korea detains about 150,000 political prisoners and family members in maximum security camps in remote places.¹² These camps are called, in North Korea terms, “Special Dictatorship Target Areas,” and they detain prisoners who have been given life sentences.¹³

3. Government Surveillance

Another factor that makes it difficult for missionaries to have access into North Korea is the tight government surveillance that exists inside the country. Even if a missionary could enter North Korea he would be extremely prohibited in his activities after entering. In North Korea, every action of the foreigner, as well as every national, is watched by government authorities. North Korea closely resembles a totalitarian state that is under the total control of the central government.

The institution that monitors the citizens’ political behavior is the State Security Agency. It supervises whether people are following every order of the government. The standard of every citizen’s behavior is the 10-point Principle for Solidifying the Party’s Monolithic Ideological System. These are the Ten Commandments of North Korea.

They are as follows:

- 1) All society must be dyed with Kim Il Sung's revolutionary ideology,
- 2) Kim Il Sung must be upheld with unswerving loyalty,
- 3) Kim Il Sung's authority must be made absolute,
- 4) Kim Il Sung's revolutionary thought must be regarded as the people's belief, and his instructions as their creed,

¹² U.S. Department of State.

¹³ The Institute for South-North Korea Studies, The Human Rights Situation in North Korea (Seoul: The Korea Herald Inc., 1992), p. 134.

- 5) the principle of unconditional loyalty must be observed in carrying out Kim Il Sung's instructions,
- 6) the Party's ideological unity and revolutionary solidarity, with Kim Il Sung at the center, must be strengthened,
- 7) Party members must emulate Kim Il Sung and equip themselves with the same Communist personality and revolutionary working methods as he has,
- 8) Party members must keep the political life given to them by Kim Il Sung and return his political confidence in them with loyalty,
- 9) the entire Party, nation and armed forces must establish strict discipline to behave uniformly under the monolithic leadership of Kim Il Sung, and
- 10) the revolutionary task initiated by Kim Il Sung must be inherited and perfected generation after generation. This principle, which in fact reigns over the constitution, is regarded as the most important norm ...¹⁴

The instrument the State Security Agency uses to keep watch over each citizen is the Five-Household System.¹⁵ It is a watch system designed to place the entire populace under constant political surveillance. Five households are organized into one team in which Party propagandists supervise the ideological indoctrination of the residents. The key is that every member of the team is used as an informant against everyone else.¹⁶ Thus far, the North Korea regime has been successful in keeping its people under constant watch and fear. Any complaint against the government or religious activity other than worshipping Kim Jong Il can be punished by incarceration or death.

4. Propaganda

The government's control of media and its use of propaganda further prevent the access of Christian missions into North Korea. If information could flow into North

¹⁴ A Handbook on North Korea, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ The Institute for South-North Korea Studies, p. 36.

Korea freely, the gospel could enter the homes of the people through radio, television, and newspapers. However, all information flow into North Korea is designed, disseminated, and controlled by the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party.¹⁷ Thus, except for a small number of the elite, the North Korean populace is completely unaware of the outside world.¹⁸

The government uses all forms of media— radio, television, magazines, and newspapers— to carry out the ideological indoctrination of the populace. Radio sets in North Korea are capable of receiving only government stations and broadcasts. The U.S. Department of State reports, “the regime prohibits listening to foreign media broadcasts except by the political elite, and violaters are subject to severe punishment.”¹⁹ Thus, the only “intellectual food” that most DPRK citizens are fed is the controlled press. Influence from abroad is getting even weaker than before, since fewer people travel nowadays to other countries.²⁰

As a result of government propaganda, the North Korean regime has succeeded in creating a special people that has lost the ability to perceive reality and is exhausted to its limits psychologically by fear.²¹ Propaganda has taken control over every thought in North Korea. People have lost the ability to think for themselves. Defector Hwang Jang Yop explains:

¹⁷ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #5," January-February 1997, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_5.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

¹⁸ The Institute for South-North Korea Studies, p. 59.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State.

²⁰ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #10."

²¹ Ibid.

The North Korean system is much more brutal and inhumane than Stalinism. It totally and completely controls the soul of the ordinary citizen. Their thoughts have been bombarded for decades with propaganda about the heroism of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Most of these people are simply incapable of thinking about being critical.²²

Not surprisingly most North Koreans believe that their society is the most just and prosperous in the world.²³ All they hear is the voice of the North Korean government.

5. The Challenge of Access in North Korea Mission Work

Lack of access into the country due to the North Korea regime's antagonism toward Christianity, persecution of the church, close surveillance and propaganda are sources of great difficulty in North Korea missions. If missionaries are not allowed into the country, then how can the gospel be preached? However, this obstacle is not impossible to overcome because no government can successfully keep out the gospel of Jesus Christ completely. No government can destroy the invisible church of God. No government can go against God and succeed. Thus, the obstacle of access into North Korea should be seen more as a challenge that we must overcome to be successful in North Korea missions.

B. Juche Ideology

Another obstacle facing mission work and church planting in North Korea is Juche ideology. Even if one had access into North Korea to do mission work, the Juche ideology poses such an immensely different view of the world than Christianity that many

²² "Running Against History: Defector Sees Kim's Regime as Increasingly Brittle."

²³ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The

difficulties would arise. Thus, it is necessary to seek a definition of Juche, examine the uses of the Juche ideology in society, and explore the challenges it presents to church planting and mission work in the country.

1. Definition of Juche Ideology

Juche is the philosophical theory that guides all facets of political, economic, social, religious, and personal life in North Korea. Juche is a brand of Communism, which mixes aspects of Marxism, Leninism, Christianity, Confucianism, and xenophobia (hatred of foreigners) to emphasize that the Korean people's destiny can be assured only by self-reliance.²⁴ Juche, in Korean, means, "self-reliance" or "self-dependence."

Juche ideology consists mainly of two parts—a philosophical theory and a guiding principle. The philosophical theory maintains that the masses are the masters of history and revolution. Kim Jong Il says, "the history of social development is the history of man's independence, creativity and consciousness,"²⁵ and "the socialist cause is the revolutionary cause of independence, which is limited at realizing independence for the popular masses and is advanced and accomplished by the struggle of the masses."²⁶ In other words, the Juche cause is to free the popular masses, and this is possible because history is determined by the masses. The guiding principle asserts that the masses are not able to realize their revolutionary goal without being organized and led by the Leader

DPRK Report #10."

²⁴ Orvill Schell., "In the Land of the Dear Leader; North Korea," Harper's, July 1996, p. 58.

²⁵ Jong Il Kim, "The Juche Philosophy Is An Original Revolutionary Philosophy," 26 July 1996, <http://people.enternet.com.au/~juche/juchephilosophy-or-rev.htm> (1 Oct. 1998).

²⁶ Jong Il Kim, "On Preserving the Juche Character and National Character of the Revolution and Construction," Korean Central News, 21 June 1997, <http://people.enternet.com.au/~juche/preserve->

(“Suryong”).²⁷ The Leader makes it possible for the masses to unite and pursue “the revolutionary cause” of independence and self-reliance. The “Theory of the Immortal Socio-Political Body” states that political life is given only by the Leader, and political life must be considered more precious than physical life.²⁸ Thus, in Juche thought the Leader deserves the respect and obedience that is due to the divine Creator. The ruling hierarchy in Pyongyang has also grafted the Confucius virtue of loyalty and filial piety into Juche ideology, and through ceaseless indoctrination campaigns, converted all the people into becoming loyal children of the “absolute father.”

Originally North Korea adopted Marxism-Leninism as its ruling philosophy when it proclaimed its establishment in 1948.²⁹ However, it later replaced it with the so-called Juche ideology, which it alleges is a creative application of Marxism-Leninism. The evolution from Marxism-Leninism to Juche can be divided into four stages:

The first stage covers the period from the inauguration of the North Korea regime in 1948 through 1967, when Marxism-Leninism served as a pure ideology, the second stage from 1967 through 1974, when the Juche idea was declared a “creative application” of Marxism-Leninism, the third stage of a transitional nature from 1974 through 1980, when the term Marxism-Leninism, was erased from the charter of the Workers’ Party, and the fourth stage after 1980 when Marxism-Leninism was scrapped both in theory and reality.³⁰

2. Influence of Juche in Society

juche.htm (20 Oct. 1998).

²⁷ A Handbook on North Korea, p. 11.

²⁸ Chan-il Ahn, “North Korea’s Ruling Ideology: The Substance and Falsehood of Juche Ideology,” East Asian Review, Vol. 9, No. 4, Winter 1997, p. 61.

²⁹ A Handbook on North Korea, p. 11.

³⁰ Seung-ji Kwak, “The Evolution of North Korea’s Ideology,” Vantage Point, Vol. 21, No. 3, March 1998, p. 33.

The Juche idea guides all political matters in North Korea by giving the regime an ultimate goal of liberation from imperialist forces and reunification of the country. Kim Jong Il describes the need to preserve Juche against imperialism:

The struggle to preserve the Juche character and national character is the struggle against imperialism and dominationism . . . the imperialists are now working more blatantly than ever to obliterate the Juche character and traits of other countries and nations and realize their dominationist ambition.³¹

The Juche thought asserts that the nation's struggle is one against imperialistic forces that are trying to erase the independent qualities of the country. The North Korea regime describes South Korea's opening to the West as a tragedy. Kim Jong Il says, "In South Korea... the soul of the nation and beautiful customs are now being totally erased by the clamour of the authorities for anti-national "internationalization" and "globalization."³²

Further, the Juche idea guides political action in North Korea by making reunification with South Korea an urgent national goal. Kim Jong Il describes reunification as a sacred national task:

To reunify the country in accordance with the noble idea of respected comrade Kim Il Sung is the revolutionary duty and moral obligation of our party and our people. It is a sacred national task devolving upon our generation . . .³³

The North Korea regime sees national reunification as the only way in which the nation of Korea can successfully complete "the revolutionary task" of freeing the popular masses and country from imperialist forces. It is an extremely nationalistic and paranoid political regime.

³¹ Jong Il Kim, "On Preserving the Juche Character and National Character of the Revolution and Construction."

³² Ibid.

³³ Jong Il Kim, "Let us Carry Out the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung's Instructions For National Reunification," Pyongyang, 15 August 1997, <http://www.kimsoft.com/korea/kji-815.htm> (1 Oct. 1998).

The Juche thought also guides all economic matters in the North. The North Korea regime seems intent on being self-reliant even in economic terms. Even though its closed economic policies have resulted in mass famine and a degrading economy, Kim Jong Il continues to avoid reform and introduction of capitalistic features in the economy. This is largely due to the fact that Juche ideology criticizes capitalism as a major obstacle to national development. Kim Jong Il says:

It is not socialism but capitalism that blocks the road of national development. In the capitalist society where the nation is split into hostile classes and individuals' interests are placed above social interests, national unity cannot be achieved, people cannot have the attitude as befits masters towards the development of the country and nation, nor can social wealth be used properly for the common development of the nation.³⁴

Kim Jong Il believes that adherence to the Juche idea, even in its economic principles, will eventually lead to national prosperity.

The Juche thought also pervades every other facet of North Korean society, affecting society, culture, family, education, and even personal relationships. As a result of Juche, the nation has become very nationalistic and extremely loyal to Kim Jong Il. The Juche idea has also created a culture in which collective rules and norms are followed versus a western, individualistic view of relationships. Korea specialist Bruce Cumings has cleverly noted that Juche "is a state of mind, not an idea, and one that is unavailable to the non-Korean. It is the opaque core of what one could call North Korea national solipism."³⁵ In Juche thought, there is no room for God, because Kim Il Sung is God the

³⁴ Jong Il Kim, "On Preserving the Juche Character and National Character of the Revolution and Construction."

³⁵ Orville Schell, p. 58.

Father, Kim Jong Il is God the Son, and Juche is God the Holy Spirit.

3. The Challenge of Juche to North Korea Missions

The Juche philosophy presents several challenges to North Korea missions. First, in Juche thought there is no room for Christian missions or Christianity. Since Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are God, any suggestion that there is another God is sacrilegious. How does one share the message of the true and living God with people who are so convinced that their “Leader” is the true God? Second, in Juche thought there is no room for the Christian church. If a North Korean decides to believe in Jesus, then how does he participate in church life? Is he to proclaim his faith and face arrest or martyrdom, or is he to keep his faith secret and attend secret church meetings? How does a North Korean Christian live his life in a Juche-oriented society? Third, how can missionaries “redeem” elements of the Juche thought in proclaiming the gospel and spreading a church planting movement? Though much of the Juche ideology opposes Christian thought, its structure and world view are similar. Can elements of Juche be used to help North Korean people understand and accept the gospel easier? How can the collective values of Juche be used in a healthy, Christian way? These questions, and more, are the challenges Juche philosophy presents to Christian missions in North Korea.

C. Famine

Besides limited access and Juche ideology, the recent famine in North Korea presents new obstacles and challenges to mission work in the country. Spreading the gospel to a people that are dying of starvation is a sensitive matter. The extent of the famine, the

causes of the famine, and the issues it presents to Christian missions must be examined.

1. The Extent of the Famine

North Korea has been hit with a massive famine that is changing all facets of life. Since 1990, North Korea has had a food shortage of more than 1 million tons every year, and lately a two million ton shortage.³⁶ According to a delegation from the U.S. House of Representatives, the famine-death toll since 1995 probably ranges between 900,000 and 2 million.³⁷ According to defector Hwang Jang Yop, 2.5 million DPRK citizens have died in the last three years from famine. He estimates 500,000 people had starved to death in 1995 and a million each in 1996 and 1997.³⁸ However, some estimates put the death toll even higher. The South China Morning Post reported that 3.5 million had allegedly died of famine in North Korea since 1994, citing a Korean Buddhist monk who interviewed 1,500 North Korean refugees in the border area in China.³⁹ Following this estimate, it is possible that out of North Korea's 22 million populace a staggering 16 percent may have already died due to the recent famine.

If these estimates are accurate, the famine in North Korea clearly equals, if not surpasses, the great Ethiopian and Somalian famines of the 1980s and early 1990s. First, the North Korean famine toll exceeds the death toll in Somalia where 1.5 million died in

³⁶ Moo-Hwan Kim, "Food Crisis and Potential Changes in North Korea Agricultural Policies," Vantage Point, Vol. 21, No. 7, July 1998, p. 34.

³⁷ Tony Emerson, "Nuclear Theater," Newsweek, Vol. 82, No. 9, 31 August 1998, p. 37.

³⁸ Jean Yoon, "Defector: Famine Killed 2.5 Million North Koreans," Reuters, 15 July 1998, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/recent_daily_reports/09_98_reports/SEP30.html (20 Oct. 1998).

³⁹ "3.5 Million Allegedly Died of Famine in NK," JoongAng Ilbo, 28 Sept. 1998, http://english.joongang.co.kr/jnews/jnews/asp?n_id=19980928006 (1 Oct. 1998).

the early 1990s, and in Ethiopia where 1 million died in the mid 1980s.⁴⁰ Second, a higher percentage of people have starved to death in North Korea than the famines in Ethiopia and Somalia. Third, the North Korea famine is slower and more devastating than in Ethiopia and Somalia. In Ethiopia in 1984 and Somalia in 1992, some areas were completely unaffected, while others, savaged by civil war as well as crop failure, starved.⁴¹ However, in North Korea everyone is slowly starving together. It is a kind of socialist famine where few are unaffected.⁴²

Accurately estimating the number of deaths in the North Korea famine is extremely difficult for a number of reasons. First, the North Korea regime does not allow many foreigners to enter, and when foreigners are allowed to enter they are restricted to travel to areas where the government allows them. As a result, the outside world has very little knowledge of what is going on in North Korea. Second, the Pyongyang authorities have been accused of exaggerating the food situation in a bid to obtain more food from the international community.⁴³ In fact, statistics out of Pyongyang are, as a rule, not reliable. Third, the North Korean government bars hunger relief workers from making unscheduled on-site inspections.⁴⁴ In fact, relief workers are not allowed to visit areas in North Korea that were hit by the famine the most. Thus, even relief agencies find it

⁴⁰ John Pomfret, "Congressional Aids Report High Hunger Toll in North Korea," Washington Post, 20 August 1998, A22.

⁴¹ "The Horrors of North Korea," The Economist, 9 August 1997, U.S. Edition, p. 34.

⁴² Carroll Borget with Jeffrey Bartholet, "Days of Hunger," Newsweek, 5 May, 1997, Atlantic Edition, p. 24.

⁴³ "Testimony by Defector Kim Dong-su: 'North Korea's Agricultural Policies Seriously Flawed,'" Vantage Point, Vol. 21, No. 3, March 1998, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Henry Chu, "U.S. Officials Report Horror of North Korea Famine," Los Angeles Times, 20 August 1998, A1.

difficult estimating the full extent of the famine.

Though exact statistics are difficult to reach, the horror of the famine is hardly doubted by relief aid workers, visitors, and North Korean defectors. One relief aid worker recalls:

Each morning I was in Pyongyang I ran around parts of the city I would not otherwise have been shown. Everywhere I saw people slumped by the side of the road, exhausted and starving, and people stripping bark off the city's trees for food.⁴⁵

One Chinese businessman who travels to North Korea several times a month confirms people eating tree bark, saying “All the bark has been carved from the trees with knives” and people have begun eating the inner layers of pine-tree bark—especially noxious.⁴⁶

The North Korea authorities have reportedly even broadcasted recipes for boiling various grasses.⁴⁷ Recently, incidences of cannibalism have been reported by refugees fleeing North Korea. The relief agency Doctors Without Borders cited a 23-year-old refugee who says he saw his neighbors eat their dead daughter. The refugee also cited a Chinese-Korean who said one woman ate her 2-year-old child to stave off hunger.⁴⁸

Perhaps the people affected by the famine the most are the children and the elderly. They are the ones who are most susceptible to starvation and death. According to United Nations figures, more than 80 percent of North Korean children under 10 years are suffering from malnutrition.⁴⁹ A whole generation of people are growing up stunted in their growth. UNICEF reported that it had observed severe physical problems among children such as night blindness, which eventually leads to total blindness, rickets and

⁴⁵ Hilary MacKenzie, “Among the Dying,” Newsweek, Atlantic Edition, 17 Nov. 1997, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Carroll Borgert, p. 24.

⁴⁷ “Politics of Food,” Asiaweek, 16 May 1997, p. 17.

⁴⁸ David Woo, “Starvation Stalks a Wasted Land,” Insight on the News, Final Edition, 19 June 1998, p. 19.

scurvy.⁵⁰

Famine-related diseases are killing many more people than starvation.⁵¹ As people grow hungry and their bodies weaken, their immune system weakens immensely. As a result, the public health emergency is of urgent concern. Many North Koreans are developing stomach diseases because of contaminated water. Rivers are so polluted in parts of North Korea that the water can't be used even for industrial purposes.⁵² Half of the human waste produced in Pyongyang, according to South Korean estimates, is dumped in the Taedong River without treatment.⁵³

2. Causes of the Famine

Famine and mass starvation in North Korea are signs of a contracting economy and poor agricultural policies. According to the Institute of Contemporary International Problems, the North Korean economy's growth figures from 1990 to 1995 are as follows: -3.7 percent in 1990, -5.2 percent in 1991, -7.6 percent in 1992, -8.5 percent in 1993, -2.0 percent in 1994, and -5.0 percent in 1995.⁵⁴ The major cause of famine in North Korea is that the economy has reached a point where it cannot even feed its own people. In Pyongyang, cars are idled because of lack of spare parts and fuel, telephones only work

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, "Daily Report," 1 July 1998, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/recent_daily_reports/07_98_reports/JUL01.html (20 Oct. 1998).

⁵² Jeffrey Bartholet, "The Starving Landscape," *Newsweek*, 2 June 1997, Atlantic Edition, p. 30.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #2," July-August 1996, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_2.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

sporadically, and no heating or tap water is available in apartment houses.⁵⁵ The deteriorating economy has left many fertilizer factories lying idle due to lack of fuel and raw materials.⁵⁶

The North Korean economy was hurt severely when assistance from the Soviet Union was cut off after 1990. Unable to obtain sufficient supplies of oil and coal essential to industry, DPRK industrial output fell.⁵⁷ North Korea soon realized that it was more “reliant” on foreign countries than it had thought it was. The North Korean economy was also stifled by an over-developed military industry that sacrificed development in the consumer goods industry and agricultural sector.⁵⁸ It is estimated that up to 50 percent of the DPRK’s national income is spent now in one way or another on military needs. Much is channeled through the budget into civilian branches, but is in fact spent for military purposes.⁵⁹ For the sake of military development North Korea has sacrificed the rest of the economy, including the ability to feed its people.

Another major cause of the famine is North Korea’s failed agricultural policies. North Korea officials would rather blame natural disasters, citing the 1995 floods as the major cause of the famine. It is true that in 1995 North Korea experienced the worst natural

⁵⁵ “Testimony by Defector Kim Dong-su: ‘North Korea’s Agricultural Policies Seriously Flawed,’” p. 28.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Bartholet, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Flake, Gordon, “International Economic Linkages of North Korea,” Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, August 1995, <ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/papers/flake0895.txt> (1 Oct. 1998).

⁵⁸ Kark-Bum Lee, “Social Integration of Two Koreas: With a Comparison of German Experiences,” Germany and Korea: Lessons on Unification, eds. Myoung-Kyu Kang and Helmut Wagner (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1995), p. 249.

⁵⁹ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, “The DPRK Report #3,” September-October 1996, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_3.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

disaster in its history—massive floods. Though North Korean official statistics of \$15 billion worth of damage were probably inflated,⁶⁰ nevertheless, harvests were reduced to less than half the 1993 levels.⁶¹ However, the true cause of the flooding was failed agricultural policies. Much of the hillsides had been stripped of their trees and shrubs, leaving the land vulnerable to erosion and floods. First, Kim Il Sung tried to double rice by ploughing up marginal land on the hillsides, thereby uprooting much-needed trees.⁶² Second, as the economy worsened many farmers started to slash trees to barter with China for food. As a result, even a normal amount of rain causes in flooding in North Korea.⁶³

The famine situation is not likely to improve in the near future. Russian experts note, “In absence of radical reform aimed at increasing efficiency in land use and preventing land degradation, unfavorable conditions in the agricultural sector will continue to prevail in the late 1990s.”⁶⁴

3. Challenges the Famine Presents to Missions

The famine in North Korea poses several challenges to Christian missions in the country. The first concerns the ethics of relief aid in missions; more specifically, is it

⁶⁰ Stephen Linton, “North Korea Under the Son,” The Washington Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring 1996, p. 3.

⁶¹ Jonathan Frerichs, “Starving Off-Camera; North Korea Famine,” The Christian Century, 2 July 1997, p. 613.

⁶² “Why is North Korea Starving? And What Can Be Done About It?” The Economist, 7 June 1997, U.S. Edition, p. 35.

⁶³ Jeffrey Bartholet, p. 30.

⁶⁴ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, “The DPRK Report #2,” July-August 1996, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_2.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

ethical to give aid to a country that openly resists the gospel and persecutes the church? Following a logical argument, the more aid is given to North Korea, the longer the regime can stay in power; the longer the regime stays in power, the longer Christians are persecuted and Christian missions blocked. However, many relief agencies claim that aid should not focus on politics and needs. World Vision Vice-President Andrew Natsios denies aid supports the regime, but rather “the people who are first to die in a famine are children under five, [breast-feeding] mothers and elderly people... the elites and the military always eat.”⁶⁵ However, there is clear evidence that aid is diverted to the military while the masses go hungry. According to defector Kim Dong-su, North Korean Ambassador Kim Heung-rim once told the members of the North Korea mission to the FAO that food aid is being diverted to the military in preparation for war.⁶⁶ Defector Lee Kwang Soo, when asked if he would give aid to North Korea, replied, “I don’t want to give them anything. If I send them stuff it will be used for the Army. That aid goes to party members and the Army.”⁶⁷ Political experts note, “for the North Korean leadership, there is only one concern of importance: ensuring that the military, upon which the North Korean leadership relies as the cornerstone of its power, is kept well-armed and well-fed.”⁶⁸ Almost all relief agencies are not allowed to supervise distribution of aid because the government takes direct control over all food distribution. Therefore, it is not clear if

⁶⁵ “Helping North Korea,” The Christian Century, 5 Feb. 1997, p. 118.

⁶⁶ “Testimony by Defector Kim Dong-su: ‘North Korea’s Agricultural Policies Seriously Flawed,’” p. 28.

⁶⁷ Michael Baker, “Awakening of a North Korean Spy,” The Christian Science Monitor, 16 April 1998, p. 1.

⁶⁸ “Running on Empty: North Korea Struggles to Survive,” CSIS Watch, 18 Feb. 1996, <http://www.csis.org/html/7wtch151.htm> (1 Oct. 1998).

aid, and how much, is going to the people who need it most. Is it right to continue to give aid even if we can't confirm that it goes to the hungry? Should relief agencies still give food aid even if they can't supervise distribution? What should be the Christian stance towards giving to North Korea famine relief?

The second challenge the famine poses to missions in North Korea is related to meeting needs—how do we meet the spiritual, physical and social needs of a starving people? People starving to death have obvious physical needs—the need for food and medical care. Besides physical needs, spiritual needs also appear, such as the need for spiritual security, a healthy inner state of mind, and a positive outlook on life. Also, people living in famine conditions experience social needs. Many families in North Korea have been broken apart as family members have died. Children without parents, parents without children, and people dislocated in society will need to find their place in society once again. They will need to experience new relationships in a healthy way. All of these needs present a unique challenge to the Christian mission effort centered around North Korea. How do we share Jesus to a people that is being decimated by famine?

D. The Uncertainty of Change

The final obstacle to mission efforts is the uncertainty of change that surrounds North Korea. Nobody knows when or if the government will loosen control over religion. In fact, as the economy worsens, the situation in North Korea becomes increasingly unpredictable. Thus, for those involved in North Korea mission work the task of planning is extremely difficult. The dilemma is whether to wait until the government loosens control over religion to push forth with mission work, or to go ahead with

mission efforts that might risk the lives of many foreign missionaries and North Korean church members. In order to understand this uncertainty that surrounds the regime in North Korea, four scenarios for change will be examined: no change, reform, militaristic reunification, and voluntary collapse. In each scenario, the writer will show its plausible sequence, the factors supporting it, and the possible peninsula outcomes.

1. No Change

The first possible scenario for the North Korea regime to follow is that of no change. In this scenario, the Kim Jong Il regime continues its totalitarian rule by crushing all opponents and critics of the government. Kim Jong Il upholds the Juche philosophy in all aspects of government, and there is little change in economic, political, or social policies. Perhaps North Korea enters into better relations with China and Russia, resuming the relationship that upheld North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s and thus alleviating the chronic shortages of food. On the peninsula, the antagonistic relationship with South Korea is perpetuated with large armies showcased.

Though many North Korea observers state that the regime will be forced to make changes in the near future, it is plausible that the North Korea regime shuns change altogether. First, the North Korea regime is somewhat successful in rejecting change so far. Kim Jong Il continues his purges of the government and no signs of protests or demonstrations are visible anywhere in the country. Furthermore, the fact that the regime is holding out despite large numbers of people starving to death speaks to the present

confidence of the regime.⁶⁹ The current North Korea regime has outlived the expectations of most observers, and it is possible that it could continue to do so. Russian experts note, “the political system of the DPRK may survive for a long time, no matter how unjust, illogical, or simply strange it might seem to outsiders,”⁷⁰ as in the case of Libya, Iraq, and Myanmar.

In the case where the North Korea regime follows a “no change” policy, several outcomes for the Korea peninsula are possible. First, it is clearly possible that North Korea continues in its current state for many years to come. North Korea’s ailing economy can be restored from aid and resumed trade with China, and perhaps Russia or the Middle East. In this case, the North Korea mission effort will face a tremendous obstacle in accessing the country for many years to come. We must also consider a perpetual state of this regime where Kim Jong Il selects a successor and successfully transfers leadership in the future. In this outcome, reunification and the loosening of the government’s control over religion is bleak over the next forty to fifty years. Another possible outcome of the “no change” scenario is sudden collapse of the regime. After resisting change the Kim Jong Il regime could suddenly collapse via a coup or the willing surrender of the government. In this case, the collapse would be sudden since no previous signs of change would be visible. Chaos would reign in the Korea peninsula as scenarios for rapid absorption or gradual reunification would be examined. Freedom of

⁶⁹ Carroll Borgert with Jeffrey Bartholet, “Days of Hunger,” Newsweek, May 5, 1997, Atlantic Edition, p. 24.

⁷⁰ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, “The DPRK Report #12,” March-May 1998, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_12.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

religion would be instantly granted, leading to a rush of religious groups entering the country, including cults. However, in the case where border movements are restricted, it is uncertain if South Korean religious groups will be free to enter North Korea.

2. Reform

Another possible scenario in the case of the North Korea regime is one of reform. In this scenario Pyongyang follows the advice of China and opens its economy, albeit slowly, to international trade and foreign investment. The regime opens new special economic zones aimed at encouraging export growth and technology transfer. North Korea then follows the example of China in allowing limited political change over a long period. People in North Korea are given limited religious freedom. The economy improves over the years, thus alleviating the food crisis of its past. Economic integration with the South may move toward rapprochement with unification many years down the road.⁷¹

Several factors contribute to making this scenario highly possible. First, Kim Jong Il might have no other choice but to implement reforms. Amos Jordan notes, “only a massive infusion of relief aid and economic assistance can sustain the regime in the short and mid-term; only deep economic reforms, coupled with continuing economic aid, can sustain it in the long-term.”⁷² In fact, signs that the elite are becoming critical of Kim Jong Il are becoming more visible. Thus, it is likely that the DPRK will sooner or later

⁷¹ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #4," November-December 1996, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_4.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

⁷² Amos A. Jordan and Jae H. Ku, “Coping With North Korea,” The Washington Quarterly, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter 1998, p. 33.

embark on reforms, or else at some point his associates will likely topple or exterminate him.⁷³ Another factor that gives credibility to this scenario is that some believe that the foremost goal of the North Korea regime is national survival, not the forceful domination of the South. These “optimists” believe Pyongyang is gradually trying to end its isolation and is beginning to engage the outside world.⁷⁴ However, some note that reforms mean the end of the Kim Jong Il regime. CNN reports:

But Kim Jong Il still faces a fundamental dilemma. To revive his ruined economy and rescue his people from hunger, Kim needs to begin reforms, which, by opening the country and introducing elements of the market, could spell the end to his regime.⁷⁵

Most Russian observers think Kim Jong Il is simply scared to launch reforms because he remembers the fate of communist reforms in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, North Korea’s deteriorating economy might give enough incentive for Kim Jong Il to initiate change.

In a scenario of reform several outcomes on the Korean peninsula are possible. First, the reforms that Kim Jong Il implements could be successful and follow the case of China. As the economy and government slowly open to change, religion will be increasingly tolerated. This would probably lead to a government-sanctioned church, much like the 3-Self Church in China. However, Kim Jong Il would retain control and mediate change.

⁷³ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #12."

⁷⁴ Kenneth C. Quinones, "North Korea’s ‘New’ Nuclear Site- Fact or Fiction?" Korea Times, 3 Sept. 1998, p. 5.

⁷⁵ CNN Newsroom Worldview 04:30 a.m. ET, 29 Sept. 1998, Transcript #98-92900V05.

⁷⁶ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #9," September-October 1997, http://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_9.txt (1 Sept. 1998).

Second, as Kim Jong Il implements reforms he could be toppled by a coup d'etat. Those in the North Korea military dissatisfied with an "opening to the West" policy could seize power in the name of Kim Il Sung's legacy. In another case, technocrats together with the elite and military could take over the government in an effort to improve conditions in the country if Kim Jong Il's reforms are not successful. North Korea could return to the totalitarian Juche state of government, which is admittedly unlikely, or the government could open up, leading to eventual reunification. All in all, if Kim Jong Il implements reform the most likely outcome is for North Korea to follow the example of China. In this case, mission efforts must have a long-term mission strategy to work within a communist country and with a government-sanctioned church.

3. Militaristic Reunification

A third possible scenario for the North Korea regime to follow is one of militaristic reunification. In this scenario, Kim Jong Il, realizing that his country is doomed, decides to make a drastic move to salvage his government. North Korea threatens to deploy nuclear weapons over Seoul and Tokyo unless the United States backs out and Seoul agrees to reunification on equal terms. North Korea and South Korea enter into a confederation with two states and two governments, eventually leading to a unified country.

Several factors make a militaristic reunification scenario plausible. First, reunification, according to Kim Jong Il, is North Korea's greatest national task. He states:

We must achieve the country's reunification, the lifelong will of respected comrade Kim Il Sung and the vital demand of the nation. National reunification is the greatest national task that must not be delayed any

longer.⁷⁷

In the case where North Korea faces imminent doom, Kim Jong Il likely will pursue reunification by force as a last option. Second, the status of the military continues to elevate in North Korea's power structure. In September, 1998, a constitutional revision created an omnipotent National Defense Commission, now defined as the nation's most powerful organ, with Kim Jong Il in the new position of chairman.⁷⁸ The Economist notes, "Mr. Kim is increasingly surrounding himself with military hardliners... this gives the impression that the North will be run more like a military state, and one in a state of emergency."⁷⁹ Kim Jong Il might be tempted into a military option as he increasingly becomes dependent on the army for power. Third, militaristic reunification might appeal as the best-case scenario to the North Korea regime. Rather than being absorbed into South Korea—in the process facing extreme humiliation—North Korea would likely opt for a two-state confederation, even if the means was nuclear blackmail.

The outcome of a militaristic reunification effort by North Korea would be marked by sudden, severe change. If successful, North Korea would almost instantaneously enter a confederation with the South, and the process of reunification would begin.

Reunification would take the world by surprise. Mission agencies would find many obstacles of access removed, and depending on how well prepared for such a situation

⁷⁷ Jong Il Kim, "Let us Carry Out the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung's Instructions For National Reunification."

⁷⁸ The Institute of Contemporary International Problems with the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "The DPRK Report #14," September-October 1998, ftp://ftp.nautilus.org/napsnet/RussiaDPRK/DPRK_Report_14.txt (20 Oct.1998).

⁷⁹ "North Korea: The Accession," The Economist, 12 Sept. 1998, U.S. Edition. p. 43.

mission groups are, missionaries would enter the North in large numbers. If militaristic reunification ends unsuccessfully, it is possible that North Korea could deploy nuclear weapons, supposing they possessed them, and Seoul and Tokyo would be devastated. Following this, the North Korea regime would collapse immediately or after a military standoff. Mission groups will be faced with a twin-towered task of cleaning up after a nuclear holocaust in South Korea and ministering to a famine-stricken society recovering from a totalitarian collapse of the government in North Korea.

4. Voluntary Collapse

The last likely scenario for the North Korea regime is one of voluntary collapse. In this scenario, Kim Jong Il, rather than trying to save Juche or his government, officially announces that Juche is a failure, and awaits absorption of the North by the South. A period of chaos and disorder is followed by meetings between the two governments to facilitate the joining of the two states.

Though not as likely a scenario as the previously mentioned ones, this scenario remains a possibility. For one, this is the way that East Germany and the Soviet Union chose to unshackle themselves from Communism. Nobody prior to its collapse foretold the sudden, passive surrender of Communism in the Soviet Union. This could very well be the case in North Korea. Also, many observers note that North Korea is already on the verge of collapse. It might be easier for Kim Jong Il to surrender than to try to implement reforms or save his regime.

In this scenario the voluntary collapse of the regime is sudden and unexpected. It is followed most likely by a period of chaos, where refugees and unemployed people by the

hundreds of thousands would be displaced. In such distress, the church could play an instrumental role in bringing order to society through relief and humanitarian efforts. The door to North Korea missions would also likely be opened, though it is unclear how much freedom missionaries will have in their activities in the North. It is clear that the more prepared North Korea mission efforts are, the greater influence they will have during this time.

5. The Challenge of Timing and North Korea Missions

The unpredictability surrounding North Korea presents unique challenges for mission endeavors. First, not being able to predict when North Korea will open up to missions makes it difficult to mobilize people. Most people find it easier to wait until after North Korea opens up to start any action. Second, the many possible outcomes of North Korea in the near and far future make it difficult for mission agencies to agree on methods and vision. Can we form a strategy that comprehensively considers all likely scenarios of the North Korea regime, and plans accordingly to meet all the needs? How are current mission agencies approaching mission work in North Korea? Is it possible to implement a strategy for a church planting movement in North Korea? These are the questions we now need to examine.

Chapter 2: Current Mission Efforts Examined

In this chapter the writer seeks to examine current mission strategies for North Korea. Chapter two addresses the question, “How are current mission efforts doing in overcoming the obstacles to North Korea missions?” For the purpose of analysis, current mission strategies have been grouped into three categories: humanitarian aid, direct missions, and indirect missions. The writer will examine each strategy’s strengths and weaknesses in light of the obstacles to missions presented in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the writer will argue that these strategies are not adequate and that a new comprehensive strategy for church planting in North Korea is needed.

A. Humanitarian Aid

The first type of major North Korea mission work can be labeled as humanitarian aid. This group is made up of non-government organizations who give food and humanitarian assistance to North Korea. Most of these agencies are either Christian movements or supported in part by Christians.

1. Extent of Humanitarian Aid

According to the ROK Unification Ministry, the DPRK received US\$950.98 million worth of aid from the U.S., ROK, and international organizations from 1995 to

September 1998.⁸⁰ This aid came mostly in the form of food and medical relief. In 1997 alone, the U.N. World Food Program and the International Red Cross delivered 800,000 tons of food worth \$186.66 million to North Korea.⁸¹

The chart below lists what major U.S. non-government organizations are doing in North Korea as of November 1997:⁸²

NAME OF ORGANIZATION	GROUP ASSOCIATED WITH	SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES
Adventist Development Relief Agency	Seventh Day Adventist Church	Has provided more than \$5 million in medical, food and agricultural aid.
American Friends Service Committee	Mennonite Church	\$475,000 of food relief and agricultural support, namely fertilizer
American Red Cross		\$9 million of food, clothing, blankets, medical and building materials
Baptist World Aid	Baptist World Alliance	Funds channeled through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank
Care USA		\$18 million in food commodities
Catholic Relief Services	Catholic Church	\$250,000 of corn/soya blend, rice, and vitamins
Christian Reformed World Relief	Reformed Church	\$150,000 of rice and wheat
Church World Service		1000 tons of rice, beef, antibiotics, clothing and blankets
Direct Relief International		\$250,000 of medical supplies
Food for the Hungry International	Christian	over \$5.59 million of wheat flour, rice, corn, medical supplies, and milk
Heifer Project International		donating dairy goats
Lutheran World Relief	Lutheran Church	2,500 tons of food, and clothing
Map International		\$4 million in medicines and medical supplies
Mercy Corps International		\$1 million in medical supplies, and food
Refugees International		mobilizing public opinion and

⁸⁰ Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, "Daily Report," 6 Oct. 1998, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/recent_daily_reports/10_98_reports/OCT06.html (20 Oct. 1998)

⁸¹ Moo-Hwan Kim, p. 34.

⁸² The American Council for Voluntary International Action, "Humanitarian Aid in North Korea," Media Resource Guide, November 1997, <http://www.interaction.org/sitrep/nkorea3.htm> (1 Oct. 1998).

		political action
United Methodist Committee Relief	United Methodist Church	\$6.75 million of humanitarian relief
U.S. Committee for UNICEF		providing nutritional rehabilitation to malnourished children, funding totals \$11.8 million
World Relief	National Association of Evangelicals	working with Korean churches to provide food relief
World Vision	Christian	\$5 million of rice, medical supplies, clothing and seeds.

2. Evaluation of Humanitarian Aid as Mission Work

Humanitarian aid has its strengths and weaknesses as a way of mission work. First, relief aid has given many people a tangible way of helping North Korea. For a country that is so closed to foreign influence, relief aid provides a channel to gain access into North Korea and help people there. Also, humanitarian aid has spread awareness of the grave famine conditions in North Korea. Through many campaigns and pledges, people are gaining awareness and giving money. The American Council on Wheat for Reconciliation estimates, while appealing for 500,000 tons of American surplus wheat to go to North Korea, that about 50,000 to 100,000 Korean-Americans were mobilized in 3 weeks to write or call.⁸³ Further, humanitarian aid might open up the door for more access into North Korea. The hope of every relief agency is that the relief they are providing would influence the North Korea government to open its doors more to the world.

⁸³ Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, "Daily Report," 14 Sept. 1998, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/recent_daily_reports/09_98_reports/SEP14.html (20 Oct. 1998).

Humanitarian aid, on the other hand, faces several major handicaps. First, relief agencies are given limited access into North Korea. Though most agencies would like to monitor distribution, the North Korea government allows very few foreigners to come in and monitor relief efforts, let alone speak to people and share about Christianity. Second, humanitarian aid is limited in its influence in North Korea. While humanitarian aid might provide food and assistance to many starving people, humanitarian aid has yet to have any significant impact in gaining converts and building up the Christian church in North Korea. Moreover, most relief agencies do not have long-term plans of evangelization, training of leaders, and/or church planting.

B. Direct Missions

A second type of mission efforts in North Korea can be described as direct missions. Although Christianity is severely persecuted and missionaries are not allowed to enter the country, some groups have chosen creative ways to evangelize North Korea.

1. Extent of Direct Missions

The extent of direct mission efforts in North Korea is limited, yet broad in scope. One of the methods of direct missions that has experienced fruit is that of radio broadcasting. The Far East Broadcasting Station has a 250 Kilowatt transmission broadcasting Christian radio into China and North Korea.⁸⁴ These broadcasts are largely made up of Bible reading, Bible teaching, and inspirational messages.

⁸⁴ Kang, Sang-won, "Bukhan Sungyo Hyunhwangkwa Julryakjuk Jaehan." D. Min Thesis. Korea Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996.

Another method of direct missions is that of Bible smuggling. South Korean Groups such as Living Water Korea, China Missions, and Cornerstone Ministries International are involved in the publishing and the actual delivery of Bibles to North Korea.⁸⁵ Bibles are usually delivered through a Chinese person crossing the North Korea-China border.

Still another method of direct missions is evangelizing and training North Koreans on the China-side of the North Korea-China border. Though limited in scope, agencies have found that some North Koreans can cross the border and reenter via bribes. Thus, on the border towns of North Korea in China some Christians are being trained and sent back into North Korea.

Finally, some have chosen to enter North Korea via tentmaking. While foreign companies enter North Korea's special economic zones, some of the expatriated people are Christians, and some with mission intentions. Though statistics are not available it is said that relationships are being formed with North Koreans and evangelism is cautiously undertaken.

2. Evaluation of Direct Missions

The main strength of direct missions is that mission work is being accomplished as people are evangelized and church leaders trained. Those involved in direct missions realize that humanitarian aid is not enough and that they cannot wait until North Korea "opens" up because there is no guarantee that it will. Thus, in the sense of church planting and evangelization of the country, direct missions is accomplishing the most

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

now.

However, several weaknesses stand out in the direct missions approach. First, agencies involved in direct missions experience difficulty mobilizing people. Since most of their activities must be kept secret for security reasons, these agencies are severely limited in spreading awareness and mobilization among churches. Thus, many of these direct mission groups pursue their activities with a segmented, but loyal group of supporters. Second, most of these direct mission agencies are not prepared if North Korea suddenly collapses and opens up to missions. These agencies are so involved in salvaging the present that they are not anticipating a sudden collapse of the North Korea regime. These agencies do not have the support and cooperation of the larger church to organize and send in trained teams in such a case.

C. Indirect Missions

A third type of mission activity can be described as indirect missions to North Korea. This type of missions is comprised of activities such as research, preparation for missions upon reunification, and mission activity in China directed to affect North Korea.

1. Extent of Indirect Missions

First, several groups participate in North Korea missions by providing much-needed research, papers, and Christian analysis. In South Korea, such groups include the Mission and Unification Training Center for North Korea, The Evangelical Movement for National Unification, South-North Sharing Campaign for Peace and Reunification of Korea, Institute of North Korea Studies, and the Research Institute for National

Unification.⁸⁶

Second, some groups are preparing for missions after reunification takes place. In South Korea, the Reconstruction Movement for the North Korean Church has mobilized the participation of 85% of South Korean churches and 49 denominations under the Korean Association of Churches. It has divided the responsibility among South Korean churches to “reconstruct” the estimated 2,850 churches that existed in North Korea before Kim Il Sung.⁸⁷ This group hosts monthly workshops and intends to begin education and training for the purpose of preparing people to reconstruct North Korean churches.

Third, some indirect mission groups concentrate mission activity in areas surrounding North Korea for the purpose of spreading influence into North Korea. In northern China, the Yanbian University of Science and Technology and Yanbian Maritime Training School were set up largely by South Koreans in an effort to evangelize and train ethnic Koreans in northern China.⁸⁸ These students, once trained, will be in an ideal position to enter North Korea and pursue the evangelization of the country.

2. Evaluation of Indirect Missions

The main strength about an indirect missions approach to North Korea is that it is investing in the future. Indirect missions has contributed significant research that will greatly aid the cause of missions, especially when North Korea opens up. Also, the Reconstruction Movement for the North Korean Church has set up a network of churches

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

⁸⁷ Kim, Jong-suk, p. 104.

⁸⁸ Kang, Sang-won, p. 100.

that are willing to support North Korea mission work. This movement has been the most successful in gaining support from the South Korean church.

However, indirect missions poses several weaknesses. First, while preparing for missions long-term, as in the case of the Reconstruction Movement for the North Korean Church, much short-term mission activity can be overlooked. Though the Reconstruction Movement for the North Korean Church boasts an 85% participation rate among South Korean churches, much of the preparation taking place is passive. People are not being mobilized, training in small numbers is just being initiated, and there lacks a general urgency for North Korea missions. Preparation for the long-term goal of reunification has distracted people from the urgency of spreading the gospel in North Korea now. Second, agencies following an indirect missions approach are not prepared for the sudden collapse of North Korea. For many of these agencies, preparation for North Korea missions entails preparing for reunification, not a sudden collapse of North Korea. Thus, if the North Korea regime suddenly collapses, essentials for mission work, such as trained mission teams and leaders, Bibles, prayer support, and church involvement, are lacking.

D. Evaluation of Current Mission Efforts

Though current mission activities for North Korea missions must be applauded for their efforts, they fall considerably short of being all they can be. The task of evangelizing North Korea is a battlefield. For one thing, time is an enemy of North Korea missions as everyday thousands of people die without having heard the good news of Jesus. If North Korea missions can do more in a shorter period of time, then it must do so. Second, various cults are battling with the church to get a head start in North Korea. The

Unification Church is active in forming ties with the North Korean government and in preparing its church members to enter North Korea when it opens. If the church is not prepared to handle the various possibilities surrounding North Korea, then cults will have an advantage. Current mission efforts are already losing ground against time and the cults. Furthermore, current mission efforts will likely fail to overcome the obstacles to North Korea missions stated in Chapter 3—access, Juche philosophy, famine, and uncertainty of change. In the next section, the writer will examine why current mission efforts will likely fail, how mission efforts will fail, and finally what it will take to succeed.

1. Why Current Mission Efforts Will Likely Fail

Current North Korea mission efforts will fail to overcome key obstacles and lose out to the cults for two reasons—lack of mobilization and overlap of resources. First, lack of mobilization of people and resources for North Korea missions is evident in the church and will not be solved within the current structure of current mission efforts. Some people argue that people cannot be mobilized because currently there are no ways of doing mission work in North Korea. However, even if access into North Korea is difficult, mobilization for a prayer movement and preparation for North Korea missions could be organized. However, very little mobilization of people is taking place. The main reason for this is because each mission agency and group involved with North Korea is largely working on their own, without cooperation and integration. Thus, when mobilizing people there is no overlying movement that can encompass current mission activity in North Korea. The common church-goer sees many small movements for North

Korea missions, but they all lack the legitimacy that an encompassing movement can have. Second, mission activity in North Korea will be severely restricted because of the overlapping resources of current mission agencies. Since there is little cooperation and integration among mission agencies involved in North Korea missions, many resources are wasted. Knowledge is not shared, training is done independently, and planning is not coordinated. As a result, the overlap in resources will greatly hurt mission efforts.

2. How Current Mission Efforts Will Fail—Possible Scenarios

The present writer argues that in every scenario the North Korea regime is likely to follow, current mission efforts will likely fail to overcome major obstacles and will lose out to the cults. First, in a “no change” scenario where Kim Jong Il maintains power and North Korea does not open up, current mission efforts will lose out to time and the cults. Current “direct mission” efforts are supported only by a minority of churches and mission agencies. In a scenario where North Korea successfully resists change, all of the people and resources that are planning for missions after reunification will be, in a sense, wasted because reunification would not take place. Thousands upon thousands of North Korean people would die as allocations are wasted on a reunification scenario that does not take place. Also, cults will enter and spread great influence as the church will be unable to counter their progress. Second, a similar situation would arise in the case where Kim Jong Il successfully pursues reforms. Change in North Korea would likely come so slowly that groups preparing for reunification would continue to do so.

Furthermore, current mission efforts are not prepared for a sudden collapse of the North Korea regime. If North Korea were to collapse today, the church is not prepared to

take advantage of the sudden opening. Many foreign mission agencies are leaving the task of evangelizing North Korea in case of collapse to the South Korean church. However, the South Korea church is preparing for a scenario of reunification in the distant future, not that of a sudden collapse. Thus, even the Reconstruction Movement for the North Korean church has very few people trained or teams organized to enter North Korea unexpectedly. As a result, many opportunities will be lost if the North Korea regime does collapse suddenly. Cults will get a strong hold inside the country, perhaps even stronger than the church. The harvest of souls that could take place would be missed.

3. What It Will Take To Succeed—A Change in Strategy

A drastic change in strategy is needed if current mission efforts for North Korea wish to succeed. First, mission agencies must cooperate under a united campaign. Uniting under a common campaign would facilitate the mobilization of the church for North Korea missions. Further, cooperation would eliminate the overlap of resources. Second, mission agencies must be prepared for the wide range of possible scenarios that could take place in North Korea. The North Korea mission movement, as a whole, must be prepared if North Korea suddenly collapses, as well as if North Korea doesn't open up at all in the next fifty years. Unless a comprehensive strategy towards North Korea is adopted, many opportunities for evangelization and missions will be lost. Third, mission agencies must adopt a strategy for a church planting movement in North Korea. This strategy to plant reproducing churches must be the goal in both short-term and long-term mission activity.

Chapter 3: A Strategy for Church Planting in North Korea

In this chapter the writer presents a strategy for a church planting movement as the most effective strategy for North Korea mission work. Chapter 3 argues that a church planting movement can be seen as the paradigm for a mission strategy in regards to North Korea and unite dispersed mission efforts under one banner. An attempt will be made here to define a church planting movement, apply a church planting movement as a strategy to North Korea, and offer short-term, as well as long-term, strategies for mission efforts. Chapter 3 addresses the question, “What is the most effective mission strategy for North Korea?”

A. Defining a Church Planting Movement

The first step in bringing mission strategy under the paradigm of church planting is to define a church planting movement—its background, definition, biblical basis, and characteristics.

1. Background

In the 1980s many involved in the task of world evangelization asked the question, “What would God have us do?”; it drove many to conclude that the true fruit of mission work is the fruit of the indigenous church. Thus, the focus of missions turned to

evangelization that results in churches. However, in the 1990s world evangelizers were asking another question – “What’s it going to take to get the job done?” With the millennium approaching, many were anxious to complete the Great Commission before the year 2000. The world was already divided into people’s groups that needed to be evangelized, but there was uncertainty as to the method to reach them. The overriding conclusion has been a church planting movement for each unreached people’s group.

2. Defining a Church Planting Movement

A church planting movement is a rapid and exponential multiplication of indigenous churches within a population segment (people, city or country). A church planting movement implies the rapid growth, expansion and multiplication of churches until a whole people has access to the gospel. Oftentimes, a church planting movement begins exogenously (of external origin such as by a missionary) but becomes indigenous and self-propagating. It is lay-intensive. It is not dependent upon buildings or facilities, and it tends to be messy both in form and doctrine.

Church planting movements are characterized by local initiative, discipleship, mentoring of leaders, families and homogenous groups coming to faith in Christ, the establishing of local churches and their expansion to begin more churches.⁸⁹ This spontaneous expansion goes far beyond what can be strategized at the beginning.

Missionary Ronald Allen explained this spontaneous expansion of the church as follows:

I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the

⁸⁹ Avery T. Willis, Jr., p. 4.

irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by the addition of new churches.⁹⁰

3. The Biblical Basis for a Church Planting Movement

The express purpose of the early church was to see local churches planted in ever increasing number all over the known world. It was their biblical mandate inspired by the Holy Spirit. First, a church planting movement has a Spirit-empowered commission. This missionary burden for the planting of the church was born of the Spirit. Robert Coleman states the goal of Acts 1:8: “He intended to save out of the world a people for Himself and to build a church of the Spirit which would never perish.”⁹¹ The Spirit is the One who took charge and empowered the early witnesses. And the Spirit of God is continuing to drive His people to plant new churches throughout the world. Second, a church planting movement is a Spirit-impelled witness. The Spirit impels us to witness. Further, the Spirit impels people in a church planting movement to witness and plant churches which will multiply themselves and extend the witness of their living Lord.⁹² Third, a church planting movement results in a Spirit-gifted community. The Spirit gives us a scriptural burden for fellowship (2 Pet. 1:1) and through that fellowship, nurturing and sharing, a motivation to grow and establish other new churches results. Missiologist David J. Hesselgrave states that the primary mission of the church “is to proclaim the gospel of Christ and gather believers into local churches where they can be built up in the

⁹⁰ Ronald Allen, The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962) p. 7.

⁹¹ Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism (Wilmore, Ky.: Asbury Seminary, 1963), p. 17.

faith and made effective in service,

thereby planting new congregations throughout the world.”⁹³

4. Marks of the Contextualized Church

Churches that are a result of church planting movements display the marks of a contextualized church. The four basic elements which make the church contextualized are: self-propagation, self-support, self-government, and self-theology.⁹⁴

First, a truly contextualized church must be self-propagating. In a successful church planting movement it is not enough that one church is planted. Rather, the established church must, in turn, reach out to its neighbors, grow, and create new churches.

Second, a contextualized church must be self-supporting. If a church established by a missionary continues to be dependent on mission offerings, the church will never gain the dynamic independence needed as a local church.

Third, the contextualized church must be self-governing. New converts must learn the responsibility of making their own decisions regarding church issues. Also, to place the responsibility of government upon the local church allows it to free itself from the domination of foreign missionaries and to follow a native style of administration and evangelization.

Fourth, the contextualized church must be self-theologizing. The church must be

⁹² Melvin L. Hodges, A Guide to Church Planting (Chicago: Moody, 1973), p. 18.

⁹³ David J. Hesselgrave, Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 20.

⁹⁴ Melvin L. Hodges, The Indigeneous Church, (Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1953). p. 22.

relevant to the culture and prophetic within the society. It should be able to interpret the Bible to meet the needs of the people.

5. A Church Planting Movement as a Strategy

One of the underlying premises of a church planting movement is that it cannot be controlled. It is an act of God's Spirit moving where churches are being multiplied even faster than one could plan or strategize. However, to do nothing would be as great a mistake as thinking that one could fabricate or plan up a church planting movement. Thus, in devising a strategy for a church planting movement the role of the missionary is to be a catalyst used by God to spark and nurture church planting movements.⁹⁵

As missionaries serve to facilitate church planting movements, it is essential that they uphold principles for an effective strategy. The International Mission Board (IMB) has summarized some of these basic principles as follows:⁹⁶

1. The gospel must be introduced in the language, forms of thought, and culture of the people.
2. Indigenous methodologies must be followed if the church is to have the freedom to expand exponentially without depending on outside support.
3. Local leaders must be discipled and trained to lead their own people.
4. Churches must be taught to carry out the missionary task in their own culture and other cultures.
5. Factors within the culture must be evaluated and strategies devised to take advantage

⁹⁵ Avery T. Willis, Jr., p. 4.

⁹⁶ Avery T. Willis, Jr., p. 5.

of the unique opportunities presented among each people group.

6. The missionary must keep a low profile and be a servant to the local leadership to empower them to lead the movement.
7. The Holy Spirit must be active and at work in the people who receive the gospel to develop them in Christlikeness and give them a vision of His mission to reach all the peoples of the world.
8. The gospel flows most easily through homogenous units and especially people groups who identify the personnel as being “one of us.”
9. Cooperation among evangelical groups greatly enhances the growth of a church planting movement.
10. A continual focus on bringing lost persons to faith in Christ is absolutely necessary to sustain the movement.
11. Research and methodology influences the movement although it is not the cause of it.

B. A Church Planting Movement as a North Korea Mission Strategy

In examining a church planting movement as a mission strategy for North Korea, several issues must be considered. How feasible is a church planting movement in North Korea? What are the advantages of a church planting movement? What would be the key defining characteristics in a church planting movement strategy for North Korea?

1. Feasibility of a North Korea Church Planting Movement

There are several reasons why some people do not believe a church planting movement can exist in North Korea. First, some people believe that the government

holds too tight a grip on society to allow a church planting movement to form. However, the Church of Jesus is not a building, but rather a body of believers. According to some estimates there are up to 30,000 underground believers in North Korea.⁹⁷ Though the activities of these underground believers are largely unknown, it is possible that the beginnings of a church planting movement can already be in process. Further, even if a full-blown church planting movement is not possible in the status quo, a church planting movement on a smaller scale could be possible. Finally, there is no guarantee that North Korea will remain as closed as it is now. Therefore, by pursuing a church planting strategy, we can reap more fruit when North Korea does open.

Other people claim that a church planting movement is impossible in North Korea because missionaries are not allowed to enter the country. However, this stance discredits the various forms of mission work currently being extended into North Korea. First, though missionaries cannot enter as official “missionaries,” they can enter as tentmakers, carrying another occupation into the country. It is possible that through a tentmaking ministry a church planting movement could form. Also, though foreign missionaries may be denied entrance into North Korea, alternative avenues of access do exist. For example, Christian Chinese business people who often travel in and out of North Korea could spread the gospel and build up the Church. Also, Christian radio is being broadcast into North Korea, with people, though few in number, being able to listen to its message. No matter how hard a government tries, it cannot completely keep out the gospel of Jesus Christ, nor can it destroy the living Church.

⁹⁷ Baek, Joong-hyun, Bukhan Gyohwaega Eednayo? (Seoul: Kookmin Ilbo Press, 1998), p. 186.

Furthermore, some people claim that we should wait until North Korea opens to pursue a church planting movement strategy. However, this stance is presuming that North Korea will open up in the future. If North Korea were to never open up, then we would be waiting endlessly. Therefore, in approaching North Korea, we must not assume that North Korea will open up, but rather pursue to build up the Church now. And if North Korea does open up, we will be better prepared to plant churches and train leaders.

2. The Advantages of a Church Planting Movement

The advantages of a church planting movement as a mission strategy for North Korea are manifold. First, the goal of church planting in North Korea allows mission groups and agencies involved in North Korea missions to unite under one banner. Mobilization efforts to raise people and resources will be aided because people can be directed under a united banner that pursues the establishment and expansion of the North Korean church. This could also give credibility to smaller groups involved. Under one banner mission resources can be more effectively allocated, avoiding costly overlap.

Second, the goal of church planting gives a long term perspective to North Korea mission strategy without losing sight of the short term. Christian mission efforts based on long-term goals, such as indirect missions, can focus their efforts on establishing a self-standing, reproducing church in North Korea. Even groups involved with relatively short-term projects can gain from this long-term perspective. Christians groups involved in humanitarian aid can provide aid in hopes of eventually establishing a North Korean church.

Third, mission groups can see the multiplication of their efforts as churches they helped

plant, in turn, plant other churches. Through the spontaneous expansion of the North Korea church, the number of believers in North Korea can multiply exponentially beyond our imaginations. Through the obedience of one person or team, God can begin a spontaneous expansion of the church that evangelizes the whole country.

Fourth, in a church planting movement, new North Korea converts will experience church life. A major obstacle in many mission efforts is that new converts are not plugged into the church, and as a result do not continue in their faith. However, since the expansion of the church is esteemed highly in a church planting movement, converts are easily placed into the body of the church to experience accountability and growth. This can assure a high standard of quality in North Korea mission work.

Fifth, a church planting movement in North Korea is the best way to ensure that North Korea can continue mission work. Without the continual expansion of churches there is no guarantee that mission activity around the world will be sustained. However, expanding churches produce new church leaders and church planters that are able to continue and expand mission work. Thus, North Korea can one day send out missionaries in large numbers to countries all over the world.

3. Characteristics of a North Korea Church Planting Movement Strategy

A church planting strategy in North Korea must carry three distinct characteristics in order to succeed. First, the church planting strategy must be an effort of cooperation joined by a large number of mission groups and churches. One of the keys to overcoming the obstacles in North Korea missions is being efficient in people and resources. The current overlap and waste of time, people and money must be avoided by the networking

and cooperation of mission groups.

Second, the church planting strategy for North Korea must be one based on contingency planning. In other words, the strategy must be prepared for all likely regime scenarios—no change, reform, militaristic reunification, and voluntary collapse. The scenario that the Church is least prepared for now is that of the sudden collapse of the North Korea regime. In that case, the Church needs to be prepared to send trained teams into North Korea to plant churches and to raise up an indigenous and contextualized church. A church planting strategy in North Korea must also not leave out the possibility of slow change or no change in the North Korean regime.

Third, the church planting strategy in North Korea must be an urgent strategy calling for action now. Mission efforts in North Korea must fight against the enemy of time, as thousands are dying by the hour without having had the chance to hear the gospel of Jesus. The Church needs to be taught and mobilized to get involved in the mission effort in North Korea. A church planting strategy is a strategy that needs to be urgent.

C. Short-Term Mission Strategy

Many mission efforts can be carried on under the banner of a strategy for church planting in North Korea. We should not try to limit activities, but encourage mission groups to take initiative in a broad scope of activities. Various efforts can share cooperation and networking under the same guiding purpose of church planting.

1. Awareness Movement

One of the greatest needs in mobilizing people and resources for North Korea missions is the lack of awareness among Christians about the situation in North Korea. Therefore, a movement to spread awareness for North Korea missions should be organized under the banner of the establishment and expansion of the North Korean church. This movement should include spreading awareness through churches, mission groups, the internet, newspapers, radio and other forms of media. Out of this awareness movement an intercessory prayer movement should also be organized to pray for the different needs of the people in North Korea. This type of movement will help raise people and resources to facilitate all other short-term mission efforts.

2. Tentmaking

A mission strategy for North Korea should encourage and develop avenues in which people can enter North Korea as tentmakers. Existing tentmakers doing ministry in North Korea should be equipped and supported by the Church, though discretely. Further, Korean-Americans should be encouraged to utilize their language and cultural skills, along with their technical skills, to gain creative access into North Korea.

3. Christian Radio

Christian radio as a means of spreading the gospel and building up the North Korea church must continue to be used as a short-term mission strategy. The Far East Broadcasting Company ought to be applauded for their efforts that have shown fruit through their radio ministry. However, more radio and media access methods should be researched and developed.

4. Bible Distribution

Bibles can be used in two different ways. As a short-term strategy, Bibles can be published and delivered, though at high risk, through avenues that exist on the China-North Korea border. These efforts should continue with the Church's support. Further, in the case of the sudden collapse of the North Korea regime, Bibles for every family in North Korea should be stored and made ready to be distributed at a moment's notice.

5. On the China Border

Efforts on the China border to train Chinese and North Korean people who have access to North Korea ought to be continued and developed. Also, other avenues in which people can enter through the Chinese border should be examined.

D. Long-Term Mission Strategy

Long-term planning and strategic activities should also be encouraged and developed. By cooperating under the common theme of establishing and propagating the North Korean church, long-term activities can gain coherence and efficiency.

1. Church Planting Teams

Church planting teams must be organized and trained to enter North Korea at a moment's notice. In case of a sudden collapse of North Korea, thousands of prepared teams need to enter immediately before cults get a stronghold in the country. Teams should be mobilized and trained together as if North Korea was going to collapse at any

moment. Even if North Korea does not collapse, the training and the mobilization of people will lead to a healthy growth of research and awareness.

2. Research

Research of North Korea, and especially of North Korea missions, should be encouraged and fostered. Though much research is being carried on by secular agencies, there is a severe shortage of people doing Christian research of North Korea. Many topics and issues need to be addressed, such as how to communicate the gospel to North Koreans, how the mission efforts can fill the spiritual, social, psychological, economic and personal needs of the people, what a contextualized North Korean church should look like, and how to communicate the gospel to those struck by massive famine.

3. Indirect Missions

Indirect missions also need to be continued and fostered. Reaching out to the people groups near North Korea can aid in the future evangelization of the country. Also, reaching out to refugees and defectors can help in the cause of North Korea missions as well.

E. Coordinating Mission Efforts – An Internet-based Mission Movement Strategy

The present writer proposes an internet-based mission movement in four stages to coordinate short-term and long-term mission efforts under the united banner of church planting strategy. This movement will spread prayer awareness and organize cooperation among mission groups for church planting in North Korea.

Stage One – Awareness

Goals: *to set up a “Web center” for North Korea awareness and recruit local church representatives responsible for distributing information.*

In this stage, the first step is setting up a Web site to mobilize awareness for North Korea. The web site will contain the following sections:

1. **Call to involvement.** A section on the urgent crisis in North Korea and the call to awareness. Here, the vision of the web site and movement is presented.
2. **Awareness resources.** Included here are newspaper and journal articles, pictures, pamphlets, video clips, etc., used to spread awareness of the need in North Korea.
3. **Bulletin boards.** Divided into different categories people can dialogue with each other and share opinions and ideas on North Korea.
4. **Prayer Room.** Current prayer requests are recorded and prayer enlisted. Prayer teams are organized.

Next, a representative in as many churches as possible is recruited. This person can be a lay person or clergy. This person must have an interest in North Korea and missions. He or she will be the link to spread awareness among their congregation. The web site will be responsible for providing the representative with resources to pass on to the church via the internet (ie., pamphlets, pictures, prayer requests, etc.) The representative will check the web site on a regular basis (monthly, bi-monthly, etc.) and is responsible for distributing information.

Stage Two – Building a Base

Goals: *to build a base of information distribution and dialogue and to begin mission training.*

In stage two, the web site and local church representative network is developed and strengthened. The web site becomes consistent in providing monthly (perhaps even bi-weekly or weekly) updates and resources for local church representatives to distribute to their congregations. A system of confirmation and feedback from representatives is also developed to improve the system.

Also, the web site is advertised and promoted among the Christian community. Dialogue is encouraged through bulletin boards. A movement to gather and store Bibles for North Korea is started. Specific prayer for towns and cities in North Korea is arranged. The Web site also provides a channel for information exchange on North Korea and missions. Fundraising is also promoted.

Further, stage two includes the beginning of North Korea mission training. On-line seminars are offered (perhaps even real seminars also). Issues such as language, culture, discipleship, and current events will be addressed. Cooperation is fostered between mission groups as resources on North Korea missions are shared with each other. The Web center then begins to act as a center for North Korea mission training.

Stage Three(a) – Filling the Vacuum

Goals: *in case of a sudden collapse of the North Korea regime, to quickly gather, train, and send out as many missionaries as possible.*

In this stage, a scenario of a sudden collapse the regime and the granting of religious freedom in North Korea as a result is considered. In such a case, there will be a great

need of missionaries to be quickly mobilized, trained, and sent out. The process is as follows:

1. With the news of religious freedom in North Korea, an urgent SOS call to mobilization is sent out through all the local church representatives via the internet. Pamphlets are distributed to every local church in the network calling all those interested in North Korea missions to training.
2. A date of training is set, and people all over the country/world converge. After their training they are sent out in teams to different areas.
3. Next, mission activity is coordinated through the web site to prevent overlap by missionaries. All (at least, as much as possible) North Korea mission activity is monitored as the information gathered via the Web site. The Web site then acts as a recruiting center for more missionaries and also helps coordinate existing mission work.
4. The Web site also enlists prayer support of local churches. Churches are updated on up-to-date North Korea mission activity through their local representative. Answers to prayer requests are also distributed and shared.

Stage Three(b) – Creative Access Missions

Goals: *in case that the North Korea regime does not collapse, to encourage creative access mission opportunities, continue prayer awareness, and further mission training and coordination efforts.*

In the case where the North Korea regime does not sudden collapse but rather gradually opens to religious freedom, mission training will be offered continuously and

avenues for creative access will be looked into. Some creative access opportunities may include:

1. Business opportunities, especially in the free trade zones.
2. Teaching opportunities, especially in English and computers.
3. Social development opportunities such as farming development and relief work.
4. Radio broadcast opportunities, such as those being carried out by the Far East Broadcasting Company.
5. Training Korean-Chinese in China on the North Korea border who have free access into North Korea.

The time period of this stage where North Korea does not open it is undetermined. It could be from months to decades. In fact, there is a possibility that North Korea could move in the direction of China in setting up a government-regulated Christian church. As a result, we must take advantage of all creative access mission opportunities.

Stage Four – Towards a self-sustaining North Korean Church

Goals: *to coordinate mission activity and prayer support for a self-sustaining North Korean Church..*

In stage four, people are already in North Korea active in mission work. Here, the web site provides a channel of communication and coordination among mission agencies and churches in the following ways:

1. Recruiting needs are advertised through the web site. Long-term, as well as short-term missionaries are recruited. Needy areas are suggested via the Web site, though freedom to go where the individual wishes is granted.

2. The prayer needs of North Korea mission activity are made known to local churches. An intercessory prayer movement is developed. Video, audio, and pamphlets are regularly distributed through the local church representatives for distribution to local congregations.
3. Ongoing mission training is organized and coordinated. Mission training is offered on-line through the internet, but also seminars and training sessions are given through the cooperation of mission groups.
4. Mission activity is coordinated. A forum is provided for missionaries to gather and agree upon a strategy for church planting. Training of indigenous leaders is done in cooperation. Resources are shared and successful church planters are given an opportunity to share their methods.

Conclusion

This thesis has discussed mission strategy for the country of North Korea. First, it looked at why North Korea is a difficult place to do missions by examining four factors—government control, Juche ideology, famine, and the uncertainty of change surrounding North Korea. Next, it examined current mission efforts, arguing that current activities are inadequate and insufficient to overcome barriers to mission work. The main weakness in current efforts discussed was the lack of mobilization of people and resources, and the overlap of resources. Finally, it proposed a mission strategy for North Korea based on church planting, cooperation, and contingency planning.

The final question, which this thesis does not attempt to answer, is what will it take to implement the prescribed strategy of a church planting movement in North Korea. First, it ought to be a movement for which all of the dynamic forces involved cannot be fully planned. Ideas need to be exchanged and dialogue needs to take place between people involved in North Korea missions. Second, leadership and vision must be supplied and maintained to bridge various mission groups under the theme of church planting. This can come from one person, a church, or an association of groups. Third, the Holy Spirit must spread a compassion and love for North Korea that gives power to all other efforts. Without the Holy Spirit working all our efforts are in vain.

Many other themes of research can stem out of this thesis: how to communicate the gospel in a culturally relevant way, how to plant churches in North Korea, how to train North Korea church leaders, as well as a multitude of other topics of research are possible.

Perhaps, the most important thing in North Korea missions is that we listen to the voice of Jesus. Can we hear His voice that cries out for the millions that die without hope? Can we hear His voice that is telling us creative ways to share the gospel with them? Can we hear His voice that gives us all we need to accomplish the task? Jesus is speaking; so, let us hear.

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