



CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF KOREA
조선의 그리스도인 벗들

2023 | SPRING
NEWSLETTER

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.
We love because he first loved us...”*

1 John 4:18-19

We remain in a time of waiting. North Korea's borders are still tightly closed to travelers of all kinds, and have only partially opened in recent months to the transport of goods, albeit at a far reduced level than pre-2020 trade. So far, UN agencies have been able to deliver a very limited variety and quantity of goods inside starting in 2022; non-governmental organizations still cannot. Yet, despite the current context, you, our prayer partners and donors have remained faithful to pray and help us keep our doors open, ready for re-engagement when that becomes possible again. We are grateful for visitors who continue to come, for partners who remain prepared to re-engage, for donors who continue to give, and for volunteers eager to resume life-giving work inside the country.

In this age of growing fear, we wanted to share with you the article below. It was written by the Reverend Dr. Samuel H. Moffett. The Mofetts served in Korea from 1947-1981, when they resigned so that Sam could accept a call to become the Henry W. Luce Professor of Ecumenics and Mission at Princeton Seminary. Sam was born in Pyongyang in 1916, in what is now North Korea, the son of pioneer Presbyterian missionaries. He died on February 9, 2015 at the age of 98. He is the author of *“A History of Christianity in Asia,”* Volumes I and II. Sam's wife, Eileen Moffett, served as a Board Member of Christian Friends of Korea from 1999-2003. We hope that you will find his article both illuminating and encouraging as we continue in this season of deep uncertainty.

DOES CHRIST MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

By Samuel H. Moffett

(edited by Heidi Linton with permission from Eileen Moffett)

What does it matter if world mission in the 21st century moves toward building interfaith relationships rather than the narrow-minded goal of 19th and 20th century missions to lead people to a trusting faith in Jesus Christ? Does the vast sea of unbelievers in the world want to turn to Christ? Why should they? What difference does it make? Aren't there other satisfying religions available? It won't surprise you to hear that I think it does matter; and that it makes a great deal of difference.

One reason I know it makes a difference is that I lived in a time and place where the difference that Christ makes became sharply clear, not in individual lives alone but in a whole nation's life and culture. In the West we've had Christian believers for at least 1,800 years, but most of the difference begins on the inside where you can't always see the distinctive contrast clearly at first. But can you imagine a country where there were no Christians, where Christ was not known, and then the first ones began to turn to him?

If you could watch the change – the revolution really –that begins to ripple through a whole nation when the first handful of people really see Jesus, you would no longer ask, “What difference does it make?”

I was born in Korea where Christians had only been above ground and not in hiding for a little over 125 years. My father was there almost at the very beginning. I’ve seen the difference. I think it is best described by a short verse, “Perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18) That puts it too simply perhaps, but the difference is the difference between love and fear, living in love vs. living in fear.

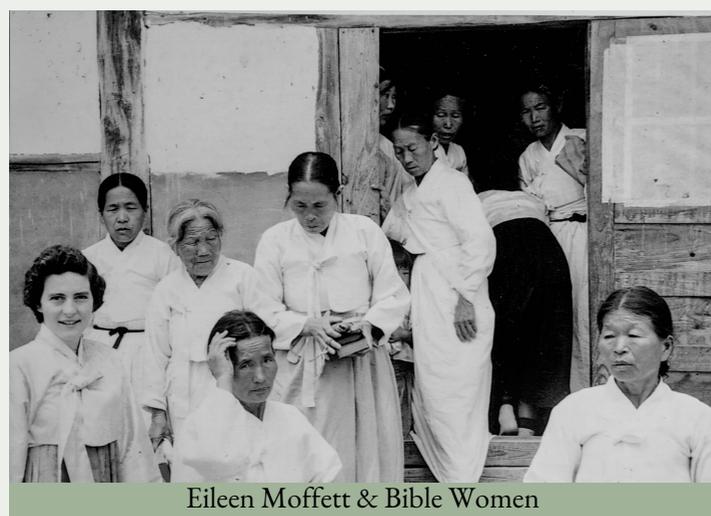
Don't think of it in terms of civilizing the savages. You know the old caricature of the Christian making converts: the missionary in a black suit, pith helmet, beating through the jungle with an umbrella in one hand to keep off lions, and a Bible in the other to convert cannibals. But turning to Christ isn't a savage becoming civilized. The Koreans weren't savages. In fact, to them, it was the westerners who were the savages. Back when some of your ancestors and mine were running off to battle, clothed in nothing but blue paint, the Koreans were moving through stately court rituals to the music of jade flutes and dressed in silks and satins. No, the story of the coming of Christ to Korea, and Koreans coming to Christ, is not a story of the difference between savagery and civilization, but between love and fear.

Just how much fear there was in Korea only the first missionaries really knew; those who walked where Christ had never been known. Korea had its so-called higher religions, Buddhism and Confucianism, but the real religion of the people was a fear of the spirit world. They saw evil spirits in every dark corner, in the rocks and trees and hovering on the roof-tops ready to cause disease and maim and cripple. Evil spirits bring floods and fire and financial and physical ruin.

In such a situation, what a difference Christ makes. Missionaries in those early days of spiritual darkness, like my father, simply said, “I know about your spirits, but I am not afraid of them because I know the Great Spirit. God is a Spirit. You don't have to be afraid, because the Great Spirit loves you. God is love. And you can know that He loves you because He sent his Son as a living sacrifice for you. Not just for me and my people, but also for you. God didn't send his Son to New York or London. His Son was born in Asia; and he loves the whole world. He died to save it.”



Samuel H Moffett, Andong 1957



Eileen Moffett & Bible Women

Now, if that sounds like too simple a gospel, how do you explain the difference that it makes? How do you explain the revolution it made in the lives of the Korean people who first heard it and believed it and turned to Christ? In the countryside, Korean mothers used to give their babies ugly names like Little Squint-Eye and Little Wart on the Nose, not because they thought their babies were ugly, but because they loved them and were afraid. They wanted to protect them from the evil spirits. What spirit would harm Little Squint-Eye when there might be a beautiful baby to cripple and destroy! But when that mother became a Christian, when she turned to Christ, one of the first things she would do would be to change the name of her baby.

Little Squint-Eye would become Little White Cloud, or Little Jewel, because beautiful babies deserve beautiful names. Did it make a difference? It made all the difference in the world in that home, because perfect love casts out fear.

Old Traditional Korea is Gone

Of course that old traditional Korea I have been describing is gone today. Korea has changed radically since the days of the pioneers. I lived as a missionary in a very modern Korea and a very sophisticated city of seven or eight million people, now grown even larger (26 million in 2023) with skyscrapers, subway networks, fast-moving autos and air pollution. But you know, there is still the same need for the transforming difference that comes when men and women turn to Christ.

Korea has changed very dramatically, but God's love never changes, and His love as revealed in Jesus Christ makes all the difference. It is not our love for Him, which is sometimes very weak. Not those Korean mothers' love for their babies. That still left them afraid – afraid that the spirits would take their babies away. No. John, in this same letter in the Bible, makes very clear what kind of love it is that takes away fear. “The love I speak of,” he says, “is not our love for God, but the love He showed to us in sending His Son as the remedy...for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

When the world changes, God's love is still at work. One of the first changes in Korea when old traditional Korea began to change, was that fear of the spirits lessened, but another fear took its place. The Japanese came and conquered the land, and fear of the conquerors was just as bad as fear of the spirits. But not all Koreans were afraid. Some, particularly in the Christian church, had discovered the secret that casts out fear. God loves us, and if God be for us, who can be against us? In 1919, Korea's bravest leaders signed a Declaration of Independence. Half the signors were Christians although they made up only 3% of the populace. The Christians were not afraid. Perfect love casts out fear. It does more than free from fear, it frees for witness and service and all the things that Christians can do to make this a better world. It makes that kind of difference.

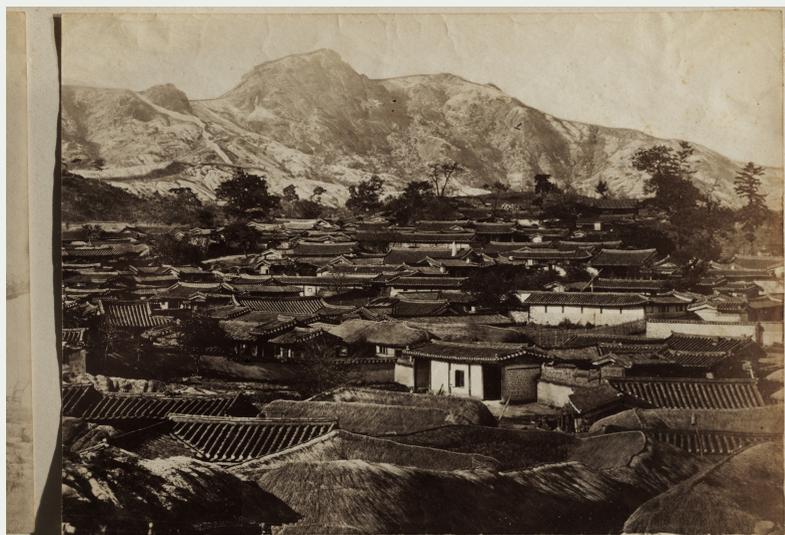


Classic Korea: shoes outside the church

But the world changed again in Korea. The Japanese are gone. But Korea has been cut in two, leaving a new context of competing rivalries. I wish I could say that now there is no more fear on the Korean Peninsula. But in the city of Seoul where I lived, people are still afraid. Seoul is only 30 miles from what some say is the most heavily defended border in the world - the 38th parallel. There are again millions of Koreans who are afraid – afraid of war, even a nuclear war. But not all. Some have faced even this terror and found, as always, that perfect love casts out fear.

Pastor and His Two Sons

The best example of the confrontation between Christianity and communism, I found in the life of a mild Korean pastor, Pastor Son. His greatest joys in life were his two sons. The older was president of the High School Christian Association in the village where his father preached. One day before the great invasion of 1950, a communist guerilla band seized the village. Its leader was a 19 year old ideologue. They made their center of operations on the school campus. Quickly they rounded up the school leaders. They took Pastor Son's older son to the edge of the athletic field, beat him and demanded he give up his Christian faith. “Do it, or I'll shoot you,” said the 19-year old communist. His younger brother rushed forward. “Don't shoot him, shoot me! He's the oldest son!” And the young communist shot them both. Two days later the insurrection collapsed.



Historic Korea

The Chief of the town's police came to the pastor. “You'll be glad to know we've captured the man who murdered your sons,” he said. “Come, we are going to shoot him.” Pastor Son thought for a moment. Then he said, “Don't shoot him. Release him into my care. I'll guarantee for him.” And the police chief looked at him as if he had gone mad. You might agree. And I don't intend to imply that this is the way to solve all political threats on a national or world scale. This was a purely personal, Christian response, and Pastor Son did exactly what he said he would do. He raised the boy in his own family to take the place of his two dead sons. And the communist became a Christian, the murderer became a son, and Pastor Son unwillingly found himself a national hero.

They wrote his biography and called it “The Atom Bomb of Love.” It was a good title. There is indeed explosive, life-changing power in that kind of simple faith that takes God at his word, and accepts his love, the perfect love that casts out fear, and transforms hate, and changes death to life.

I hope these few examples from Korea will show why I say that it does matter – it does make a vast difference when one unites his life to Christ. Not just for Koreans. Once they thought it was just for westerners. But Christ is for us all. When we turn to Him, we turn from a world controlled and paralyzed by our own fears which are all very real, but need not be shattering. For you can turn from that anxious world to a world created and sustained and governed and saved by the love of God in Jesus Christ. God loves you! Of course it matters, not just for the world of the 19th or 20th century, but for the world of the 21st century and until Christ comes again. Yes, there is a future for Christian world mission. The missionary still carries the good news of God's covenants. Adonirum Judson, of Burma, once exclaimed, "The future is as bright as the promises of God!" But millions of people in this world of ours still do not know God's promises. Does Christ make any difference? Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) Trusting Christ makes all the difference in the world.



Reprinted from the June 2005 issue of Cross Culture
(A Newsletter of The Association Of Presbyterians For Cross-Cultural Mission, which ceased operations in 2011)
Historical photos from the Moffett Collection at the Theodore Sedgwick Wright Library, Princeton Theological Seminary

Sharing in Disruption and Suffering

To say that the past 3+ years have been difficult for us at CFK is an understatement. The significant losses, contradictions, sacrifices, fears and disruptions of the Covid era continue to reverberate through families, relationships, civic and daily life in a multitude of ways. In the CFK extended family, many continue to face very painful and life-altering circumstances that have shaken assumptions, relationships and temporal hopes. In our post-Christian society, even the most basic truths of life and identity are being ever more loudly and forcefully questioned, with strife and divisions amplified through social and online media. And this is all on top of the overwhelming trauma and ongoing devastation in Ukraine, Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, Haiti... the list goes on.

Meanwhile in North Korea there are increasing, but impossible-to-confirm reports of starvation in various places inside the country. With borders still tightly closed and virtually all foreigners locked outside the country, we can't observe directly what is happening on the ground. We know that multiple factors have contributed to deepening hardship inside the country – including economic difficulties due to sanctions, significantly reduced trade during the pandemic, droughts and regional flooding, and internal government priorities that invest in defense above all else. Estimates are that the economic strides made in the country from 2011 -2019 have largely been reversed – meanwhile, humanitarian aid provided to the most vulnerable citizens inside the country has been stopped for over three years. While it is impossible to know what is going on inside, we have grave concern for the lives and health of many. Opportunistic diseases like tuberculosis cannot help but continue to expand and claim lives in this context of extreme poverty, deprivation and hardship. Through a third party, we recently learned of the unexpected death of a long-time colleague inside – and we wonder how many more are suffering greatly.

Now more than ever before, we, those living on the Korean Peninsula (North and South), and our greater world need the hope found in 1 John 4:9-10, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." May we grasp more deeply the depths of God's redemptive love for us through Jesus, and lay claim to His promise that "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (v18) Only in that truth can we find the courage we need to shine His light faithfully and without restraint despite the increasing darkness and hopelessness of our age. Thank you for your faithful prayers and partnership.