

Returning to an Acts 1:8 mission strategy for North Korea

The persecution of North Korean Christians has been both unsparing and systemic for over six decades. Although evidence for this persecution has been largely anecdotal due to the inaccessibility of independent data within the North, the documentation through secondary sources is especially significant. Moreover, the certainty of the existence of extreme persecution is buttressed by the widely-published pronouncements of North Korea's founding father and first president, Kim Il-sung, who bluntly declared in 1962 to the DPRK's Social Security Agency, "We cannot move into becoming a communist society if we have those religious people ... We tried all religious leaders above deacons and executed them ... lay people were put to labor when they changed their belief or were locked up in prison when they didn't ... we executed all of them in 1958." Providentially, not all died!

With the completion in March of 2014 of the landmark UN Commission of Inquiry Report (COI) on the extent of human rights abuses occurring in the DPRK, scrutiny of the highest caliber explored the extent of the infringement of the universal human right of freedom of belief in the North. The COI removed any lingering doubts about what North Korean Christians endure.

If we, figuratively speaking, overlay an "Acts 1:8 template" on the Korean Peninsula, does the response of the regional church fit the Scriptural strategy laid out by Christ Himself? More specifically, have the very significant mission resources developed in the southern and democratic half of the Korean Peninsula been meaningfully and proportionately applied to the catastrophic conditions in the North, i.e. egregious persecution of Christians and the overall deprivation of society's freedom of belief, either directly or indirectly? This paper will endeavor to address these questions and suggest a possible course correction that may better align the local church's priorities to those found in the Book of Acts' mission 'blueprint.'

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