

## Martyr Jan Hus and the Martyrdom in the Korean Church

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*Mr. Lim is a Professor at the Presbyterian University & Theological Seminary in Seoul/Korea, Promotion on the University of Basel in Switzerland (Dr.theol., 1994) based on a study about Christoph Fr. Blumhardt (1842-1919). His speech points out the examples of Korean Christian Martyrs – it is assumed that there are 1 000- 10 000 of those in the relatively short history of the Korean Church. It also presents the story of one of those martyrs, rev. Son Yang-Won.*

### \* ‘Martyrdom of Love’

In this section I like to discuss a different form of martyrdom than that of resistance discussed above. It is the ‘martyrdom of love.’ Let me introduce the story of Rev. Son Yang-Won (1902-50) who proclaimed the gospel to the soldier ready to shoot him as well as forgave the murderer of his two oldest sons. Rev. Son was a pastor caring for patients in a leper house in the 1930s. Because he refused the Shinto Worship forced by Japan, he was put into prison and tortured. He was then willing to be a ‘martyr of resistance.’ After Korea was liberated from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Rev. Son returned to the leper house and began to care for patients. He loved lepers so much even to draw the pus from a patient’s boil with his own mouth. He took a ‘pastoral care in a spirit of martyrdom’ at risk for infection. In 1948, moreover, Rev. Son’s two sons were murdered by a violent communist. For him it was a horrible event comparable to the collapse of the sky or the sinking of the ground. However, Rev. Son adopted the murderer of his sons. By embracing his enemy he overcame the power of death and witnessed to the love of God. One day in September 1950, three months after the break of the Korean War, finally, Rev. Son was shot to a martyr’s death by a North Korean soldier. His age was 48.

To repeat, Rev. Son Yang-Won took care of, and participated in the physical suffering and sorrowful loneliness of, those lepers who were abandoned by their family and alienated from their neighbor. He was a ‘martyr-like pastor’ who loved lepers so much that he sometimes risked infection while drawing the pus from a leper’s boil with his mouth. In a ‘spirit of martyrdom,’ moreover, he refused the forced Shinto Worship during the period of the Japanese occupation of Korea. When the conflict between atheistic communism and Christian faith resulted in the murder of his sons, he may have immediately felt resentful in front of their dead bodies, but transformed his anger into such a great love of his enemy in Jesus Christ that he decided to adopt the murderer of his sons. In this way he overcame and dismissed the ideological conflict. In September 1950 he was shot to death while proclaiming the gospel to the soldier who was attempting to shoot him. At last the ‘white martyr’ became a ‘red martyr.’ In memory of his great life Korean Christians speak highly of him as “a little Jesus in Korea.”

### \*\* ‘Martyrdom of Resistance’

The Korean Church, though it has a relatively short history as compared to the history of Christianity in Europe, has witnessed to many martyrs. The total number of

martyrs in Korea, both Protestant and Catholic, is estimated to be 1,000 at a minimum and 10,000 at a maximum. The Korean (Protestant) Church began her history in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the American Protestant missionaries arrived in Korea. The Church witnessed to the gospel in the socio-political context of that time—that is, when the Korean Peninsula was the arena of conflict between the world's biggest powers and Korea was their prey. Hence, the political situation of Korea was under crisis, just like a candle light before the wind. Since 1910 Korea had been under the colonial occupation of Japan for the following 35 years. During the period Japanese colonial rule carried brutal violence and attempted to abolish the Korean culture as a whole. Even the use of the Korean language was prohibited. During the Japanese colonial period the Korean Church committed herself to national independence and organized various resistance movements in order to protect the national culture. For the economic independence of the Korean nation the Korean Church encouraged the development of industrial products and initiated temperance movements in city areas, while leading the movement for economic recovery in rural areas. In 1919 Korean Christians went out to the street and participated in the large-scale peaceful procession for national independence. The Japanese government suppressed the movement with brutal violence, and many church leaders were put into prison and tortured. *In the context of the Japanese colonial occupation Korean Christians identified faith with patriotism.* When the Japanese imperialism forced the Korean people to worship Shinto and to cooperate for the Pacific War (or the Second World War), many Korean Christians refused to do. Of them *dozens of them (about fifty) died in prison and are today held in respect as martyrs in the Korean Church.* In 1945 Korea was liberated from the Japanese colonial rule, as a result of the victory over Japan by the Allied Powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union) in the Pacific War. After the War the Allied Powers occupied the Korean Peninsula which had once been a colony of Japan. For the Korean people this occupation by the Allied Powers meant liberation from the colonial rule of Japan. The United States and the Soviet Union divided the Korean Peninsula into northern and southern territories and governed each part for the time being. Afterwards, the conflict between world powers, especially those around the Korean Peninsula, was amplified and the political situation within Korea became even worse. Finally, the Korean War (1950-53) broke out. During the war the Korean Church suffered from severe persecutions of anti-Christian communists, and many Christians were martyred.

In the history of the Korean (Protestant) Church, in sum, the martyrdom took place primarily during the periods of the Japanese occupation (about 14%) and the Korean War (about 86%). During those periods Christians were martyred due to their resistance either to the Japanese imperialism, which forced the Shinto Worship, or to the atheistic communism. In this sense their martyrdom is described as a 'martyrdom of resistance.' This martyrdom of resistance is the very type of martyrdom that is still alive in the collective memory of the Korean Church, according to which martyrdom is identified with the anti-Japan independence movement or anti-communism. The revival and great growth of the Korean Church for the past several decades, which is currently attracting serious attention of the global church, are founded upon this history of martyrdom.

### **\*\*\*. Inheriting the Martyr's Faith**

The situation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century asks for a martyr's faith, even if in a new form. Due to the economic value system the current Korean society is suffering from the loss of human dignity, shallow capitalism and consumption culture, and the dehumanizing culture in which human beings are treated merely as commodities according to their

economic usefulness. Given this secularism, the church should fight against it by proclaiming the kingdom of God and practicing its core values. The church should advocate a 'white martyrdom' in confrontation with the mammonism which serves money like God (Rev. 7:9-17). Also, the church should advocate a 'green martyrdom' with a view to the globe-wide ecological crisis that have resulted from the destruction of God's created order by the modern arrogant civilization.