

## Jesus and the Korean Experience

Mako A. Nagasawa

1784. The message of Jesus entered Korea, when Korean diplomats brought books back from China. One of those books was called *The True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*, written by a Jesuit scholar living in China named Matteo Ricci. Those Korean diplomats and scholars, Peter Yi Seung-hun and two other men, began to teach people about Jesus.

1884. The message of Jesus had spread in Korea *without foreign missionaries*, to around 70,000 believers. That was in spite of the fact that it was illegal to be a Christian in Korea at that time, and the government persecuted the early Catholics. It was also in spite of the fact that the Catholic Christians resisted the Confucianism of their time because of its bias towards nobles and men. They followed the teachings of the Bible, which taught the dignity of all people before God and special care for the poor.

1884. Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries arrived.

1910. Protestant Christians were in charge of the only complete educational system in Korea at the time, because only the church provided education from primary to college level. This brought them into direct conflict with the Japanese imperial policy of shutting down Korean schools.

1911. Imperial Japan began an imperial policy to annihilate Korean culture through the destruction of religion, literature, historical records, and especially, schools. They promoted the worship of Shinto and Japan.

1912. Ahn Chang-Ho was elected chairman of the Korean National People's Association, which emerged as the supreme organization for Koreans abroad and played an active role in negotiations with the U.S. government. A Christian, he said he couldn't hate the Japanese; instead he used non-violent resistance and political advocacy. At the same time, he and many other Christians believed that peace must be the fruit of justice, and therefore Korea had to become independent.

1919. The Joseon Dynasty was forcefully absorbed into the Japanese Empire. Ahn Chang-Ho started underground activities that focused on regaining Korean independence. He and other Christians were at the forefront. They helped draft the Korean Declaration of Independence. In fact, 50% of signers of the Declaration were Christians, even though only 1% of the population of Korea was Christian at the time! Ahn Chang-Ho was the first provisional president. During the resistance demonstrations the Japanese police opened fire on the unarmed Korean crowds, killing thousands. Many thousand more were arrested and tortured. But when Japan fell and Korea became independent, these actions contributed to why Christianity has flourished in Korea.