



1992 TEMPLETON PRIZE FOR PROGRESS IN RELIGION

PUBLIC AFFAIRS: THE NOLAN / LEHR GROUP
50 WEST 29TH STREET • SUITE 9W • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10001 • TEL: 212 779-0700 FAX: 212 689-0376

AN INTERNATIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPER



TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 1992

50¢ (\$1.00 CANADIAN)

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

© 1992 THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PUBLISHING SOCIETY - All rights reserved

VOL. 84, NO. 131

Tenacious Christian Reflects on \$1 Million Award

By Lucia Mouat

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

NEW YORK

THE impression he gives is one of gentleness and modesty. Yet during his lifetime as a religious leader in Korea, the Rev. Dr. Kyung-Chik Han has stood by his convictions against strong external pressures with a rare courage and tenacity.

Dr. Han, the 1992 winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, is the founder and pastor emeritus of the Young Nak ("Everlasting Joy") church in Seoul, the world's largest Presbyterian church. With 60,000 members and six Sunday services, that church has helped to launch 500 affiliate churches worldwide. In fact, there are 2 million more Presbyterians in Korea today than there are in the United States.

The Young Nak church has its roots in weekly prayer meetings begun in 1945 in Seoul by Han and 27 of his church followers. They were fleeing communist persecution in the north after the nation was divided.

Life under the Japanese, who occupied Korea from 1910 until 1945, was little easier. Shortly after leaders of a Christian school and college in Pyongyang invited Han to teach the Bible and English and give a daily chapel talk to students in 1931, Korea's occupiers determined that Han was "anti-Japanese," he says, and "threw me out" of the school.

He then became pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Shinuiju. After a brief imprisonment early in World War II for refusing to worship Emperor Hirohito at a Shinto shrine, Han also was stripped of his church position by the Japanese.

Even after he fled to the south, Korean officials in

Seoul often made things difficult for him, says Han's son, the Rev. Hewon Han, a Presbyterian minister in Clemmons, N.C. Once, when his father was coming to the US to give a speech, Korean authorities insisted on seeing the speech before they would allow him to leave. He chose not to make the trip.

Born in a small northern village to poor parents who were followers of Confucius, Han was converted to Christianity by a cousin at the tender age of seven. He went to Christian schools and a Christian college in Korea. A Western missionary helped him get to the College of Emporia in Kansas where after one year he received his BA degree.

By taking jobs and securing a loan, he went on to study at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he was president of his senior class and now has a faculty position named for him.

It was when he fell ill and was recovering in the US after his studies that "I really got my faith," he says. He read the biography of St. Francis of Assisi and prayed a great deal. He had planned to stay on in the US to continue his studies but, out of gratitude for the many who had helped him, he decided to return home. "I came back to Korea determined to give my whole life to God," he says.

The Young Nak church now has missionaries in 21 countries, including rural and industrial sections of Korea itself. Commenting on the Los Angeles riots, Han says Korean churches in the US should think about sending out missionaries just within US cities such as Los Angeles. Though many Korean churches have ra-

cially mixed congregations, Han says that some Koreans "tend to look down on blacks" and that all need to "repent and be more Christian." Their attitude, he says, "needs to be one of more love and of helping in every possible way."

Through his work in the church, Han, a great-grandfather who has at least a half dozen other relatives who are Presbyterian ministers, started a university, two high schools, a library, and a seminary, as well as an orphanage and home for elderly people. He would like to see the \$1 million from the Templeton Prize used to reestablish and strengthen churches in North Korea when politically possible. A strong Korean patriot, he wants very much to see his country united again. In the meantime, he has given the prize money to the elders of the Young Nak church in Seoul to make their own decision.

The annual Templeton prize was launched 20 years ago by mutual-fund manager and investor John Marks Templeton to fill what he saw as a critical omission in the range of Nobel Prizes.

He wanted to make his the largest monetary prize in the world in recognition of the role of religion in improving mankind. Winners, chosen by an international panel of judges, are selected, as Sir John puts it, not for "saintliness" or mere good works but for achievements of a nature that increase man's love or understanding of God.

Past winners include Mother Teresa, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and the Rev. Billy Graham.



HAN: Templeton Prize recipient began huge Korean church.

ROBERT HARRISON - STAFF