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Religion's Mitigating Role in Pyongyang-Washington Relations

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Abstract

Kim Il-sung made a calculated gamble during his final years as President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) by opting to host two religious leaders in Pyongyang whose worldviews sharply contrasted with his own and with each other's. Kim first welcomed Unification Church Founder Sun Myung Moon and his wife Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon to Pyongyang in November 1991, and in April 1992 he hosted celebrated American Evangelist Billy Graham and his son Ned. Both the Moons and the Grahams had previous ties to Pyongyang. Moon and his wife were both native to the North. Graham's wife Ruth, the daughter of American missionaries to China, had spent three years in Pyongyang as a middle school student. The Moons' and the Grahams' meetings with Kim resulted in initiatives and collaborations beneficial to the North. These continued under President Kim's son Kim Jong-il (1942-2011) and under current DPRK Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, the grandson of Kim Il-sung. There is no record of collaboration between the Moon and the Graham groups in working with the DPRK; nevertheless, each has participated in Track II initiatives that have served to inform and at times mitigate US policy towards the DPRK.

Keywords: religious diplomacy, Korean Peninsula, nuclear weapons, Juche idea, Track II initiatives, conflict transformation, confidence building measures

Religion and Diplomacy in Context

Douglas Johnston, in *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (1995), makes the case that, since the early nineteenth century, Western governments have downplayed the role that religion plays in international affairs. Johnston attributes this posture to the West's "Enlightenment prejudice." As Johnston explains, "Ordinary prejudice denigrates, but absolute prejudice ignores" and "when inadmissible facts cannot be ignored, they are instead transmuted by secularizing relativism" (Johnston & Sampson, 1995, p. 10). He cites how American diplomats and the Western press avoided attributing the 1978 impending fall of the Shah of Iran to an "unusually violent religious reaction to Westernizing modernization." Instead, governments and media alike almost exclusively attributed the Shah's opposition to "repression," "political/constitutional opposition to autocracy," and "the rise of a new class of large-scale entrepreneurs" who were thriving in the Shah's corrupt police state. Johnston submits, "In other words, political, economic, and social motives were all considered important, while religious motive, though salient, was slighted as a surface phenomenon." On assuming power, the Ayatollah Khomeini used his religious authority to suppress dissident voices. According to Johnston, his Iran would be "less 'broadly based,' no more distributive, and if anything more corrupt than its predecessor" (Johnston & Sampson, 1995, pp. 12-13). Johnston points to a similar aversion to religious causalism in the case of the Lebanese civil war of 1982, where the religiously motivated actors of the conflict "were routinely described as 'rightists' and 'leftists' in countless press accounts," which, for Johnston, represented an "obfuscation," and again "a product of secularizing reductivism" (Johnston & Sampson, 1995, p. 10).

In a 2015 article which appeared in *Issues in Governance* Peter Mandaville and Sara Silvestri reflected on the adverse impact of Western diplomacy's opting against the inclusion of religious factors in conflict analyses:

The practical result of this secular bias has been that our bureaucracies have become trapped in their individual frameworks of understanding and an operationalized form of secularism filtered through their own specific cultures, histories and philosophies. In short, most governments conduct themselves with a tacit set of assumptions about what religion is, where it belongs (and where it most definitely does *not* belong), and who or what speaks on its behalf. (Mandaville & Silvestri, 2015, p. 4)

Religion not only fuels conflicts; it can help to abate them. Douglas Johnston cites conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s where religious actors played or attempted to play a pivotal role in helping to transform them. He points to the mitigating roles played by religious actors in conflicts in Yugoslavia, East Germany, Kenya-Somalia, Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, and the Punjab (Johnston & Sampson, 1995). Johnston points to religious actors' "unique potential for mediating conflict in situations where a mutually debilitating impasse has been reached or where major political, economic, and security issues have largely been resolved" (Johnston & Sampson, 1995, p. 265).

One conflict to which Johnston dedicates attention is the Mozambican civil war (Johnston & Sampson, 1995). Between October of 1990 and December 4, 1992 when the conflict finally "ended" through the General Peace Agreement signed by the Government of Mozambique and the

RENAMO¹ rebel group, the Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio played a pivotal role in the settlement. This was not the first conflict where Sant'Egidio had played an important mitigating role. In *Ending Mozambique's War—The Role of Mediation and Good Offices*, Cameron Hume traces how Sant'Egidio's experiences and activities over the years prepared it to assume this role. In "a 1982 meeting at Sant'Egidio's headquarters in Rome, the Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and the patriarch of the Lebanese Melchites, Maximos V, signed an agreement to stop the war between Christians and Druze in the Shuf Mountains south of Beirut" (Hume, 1994, pp. 17-18). A year earlier, Sant'Egidio leader Andrea Riccardi had helped to arrange a meeting with Enrico Berlinguer, leader of Italy's Communist Party, to persuade Mozambique's Communist-led government to remove its restrictions on the free exercise of religion (Hume, 1994).

From 1990 until 1992, Sant'Egidio hosted negotiations between the RENAMO rebel organization and the leadership of the Government of Mozambique. RENAMO challenged the legitimacy of the Mozambican government, berating it for its systematic crackdown on traditional tribal identities. Through a series of ten roundtable talks, the leading actors learned to engage and communicate with each other, address differences, and put in place confidence-building measures and mechanisms that eventually led to the signing of the General Peace Agreement on October 4, 1992 (Hume, 1994, November 1; Lewis, 1998, November 28).

In *Ending Mozambique's War*, Cameron Hume makes the case that organizations such as Sant'Egidio possess the capacity to grasp the inside story: "To get a dialogue started, a third party can identify which parties need to be included in the talks, work out a common understanding of the initial rules of engagement, arrange for the parties to come to the table, provide a site for the talks, and establish a constructive ambiance" (Hume, 1994, p. 26). Hume, nonetheless, notes that there are limits to what a religious organization such as Sant'Egidio can do: "Even when third parties can help launch negotiations, they rarely have the power to convoke the parties;" instead, former colonial rulers, great powers, neighboring states, regional organizations, and the United Nations have all played this role.

The role played by Sant'Egidio in the ending of the Mozambican Civil War was precedent-setting. The United States Institute of Peace chose to include it in its text *Taming Intractable Conflicts* (2004) to highlight the potential role that religious organizations can play in helping to ripen and transform conflicts. *Taming's* co-authors Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson, and Pamela Aall use the example of Sant'Egidio to illustrate religious actors' potential, in certain cases, to bring an intractable conflict to transformation. They qualified their comments at that time by noting that "examples of direct mediation by nonofficial organizations are relatively rare" (Crocker et al., 2004, p. 68).

In conflict transformation, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including religious NGOs, stand to benefit from working with each other. Admission of modern diplomacy's "religious blind spot," led President Barack Obama to create the Office of Religion and Global Affairs in the United States Department of State in 2013 "to expand our understanding of religious dynamics and engagement with religious actors" (Kerry, 2015, September 14).

Is there a role for Sant'Egidio or other religious NGOs in the high-stakes ongoing conflict on the Korean peninsula? On December 8, 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev spoke at United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. There he envisioned, not the Soviet Union, but instead the UN, the "world community" (Thakur, 2022, September 4), and rule of law as the lenses through which the

¹ Resistência Nacional Moçambicana or The Mozambican National Resistance, the rebel group opposing and engaged in military operations against the Left-leaning Mozambican government from the mid-1970s until the Peace Agreement signed in 1992.

problems of the developing world would best be calibrated and addressed going forward (Gorin & Mischenko, 1990). In 1986 The United States Congress ‘broke ranks’ on its own through its passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, even overriding a veto by US President Ronald Reagan. The Act effectively banned “new investments and bank loans to South Africa, prohibited a range of South African exports to the United States, and ended landing rights for South African airlines in the United States” (Gassama, 1995). The message was clear: Anticommunism would no longer be sufficient to garner US military and economic support.

The Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) governed by military generals for decades, began its own transformation into a liberal democracy, buttressed by its powerful economic engine. For its part, The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) remained a backward country, clinging with a quasi-religious conviction to the postulate that only an adapted Marxian perspective, the “immortal *Juche* (주체) idea” of founding DPRK President Kim Il Sung, could usher in a unified and peaceful Korean peninsula. By the early 1990s North Korea, nevertheless, understood that it at least needed to adjust its diplomatic paradigm.

Religious Actors in Pyongyang: The Unique Conditions that facilitated DPRK’s Openness to Meeting the Moons and the Grahams

In the 1990s Sant Egidio’s activities were largely concentrated on Africa (Giro, 1998). Different religious actors would pioneer Track II diplomatic initiatives on the Korean peninsula. The Moon and the Graham organizations each had some practical understanding of the political implications of interacting with North Korea. Sun Myung Moon and his wife were both born in the North. Dr. Billy Graham’s wife Ruth, the daughter of Christian missionaries to China, had spent three years as a middle school student in Pyongyang, the capital of the DPRK. Nonetheless, each group would need to navigate numerous hurdles to gain clearance to visit the North. Like other Western religious organizations that wished to undertake activities in the DPRK, they understood that, in entering the North, the norm was to “leave one’s religion at the door” even though key interlocutors would be aware of the religious connections of these organizations (Snyder, 2007).

Background on and Outcomes of the Moons’ and Grahams’ Visits to Pyongyang

In what follows we explore the trajectories that led both the Moon and the Graham organizations to Pyongyang as well as the developments which have followed as a result. We shall take into account:

- The Pathway that led each to Pyongyang
- Their Experience with Kim Il Sung
- Confidence-Building Measures that followed their Visits

The Pathway that led Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han Moon to Pyongyang in November 1991

Moon’s path to Kim Il Sung and Pyongyang was not a conventional one. Like the Biblical figure Jacob who prepared to meet his brother Esau who had declared his intention to kill him (Genesis 27:41), Moon, like Jacob while in Haran (Ward & Perrottet, 2013, pp. 107-109), first

built a foundation that made him credible before President Kim. Over many years, Moon, who had spent two years and eight months in a North Korean labor camp prior to being liberated by US troops during the Korean War, established an economic foundation that included a worldwide fishing industry, machine tool factories, hotels, jewelry businesses, construction companies, media companies, and stone works. In 1982 he created *The Washington Times*, a daily newspaper that, during his tenure in office, President Ronald Reagan was said to have read every day and endorsed in public settings (The Washington Times, 2022, May 16). Moon and his wife forged ties with influential public figures including US Senator Orrin Hatch, former US Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Civil Rights leaders Ralph Abernathy and Southern Christian Leadership Conference President Joseph Lowry, Dr. Jerry Falwell, Founder of the Moral Majority, and many others. Like Jacob, Reverend Moon, who faced death under the government of Kim Il Sung in 1950 (Ward, 2005) and was spared an attempt on his life by Japanese Red Army member Yu Kikumra in 1988 (Ward & Perrottet, 2013), had something to offer to President Kim because his “Church had a global reach and a certain amount of political influence” (Rosen, 2012, September 6).

Moon wished to visit the DPRK for a number of reasons. Like so many of those who crossed the 38th parallel following the division of Korea at the end of World War II, never to return, Rev. Moon and his wife Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon had left family members behind in North Korea. They had no idea of their fate or circumstances. Rev. Moon wanted to speak to the DPRK leaders about loosening restrictions so that divided families could be more easily united. Looking at the options for the unification of his country, Rev. Moon felt strongly that he had been divinely inspired with ideas on how to facilitate Korean reunification and he wanted to share those both in Seoul and in Pyongyang. Rev. Moon was a practitioner of John-Paul Lederach's understanding of “conflict transformation” long before the term existed. He felt that more than anything else, the extant fears and suspicions between the North and the South, between Washington and Pyongyang, had to be addressed and hearts needed to be opened and healed. His visit to Pyongyang was not a “photo op” but the beginning of a process aimed at serving, investing, and gaining the trust of North Korea to forge a new working relationship between Pyongyang and Seoul, and between Pyongyang and Washington.

In 1982 Moon initiated an annual factfinding tour of American journalists to the Soviet Union through the World Media Association (WMA), which he had created in 1979. In 1988 the relationship between the World Media Association and *Novosti*, one of the major Soviet news agencies, led to the Moons being invited to Moscow in March 1990 (Ward, 2005). Their visit included two meetings (one public and one private) with Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa. A flurry of Moon-sponsored conferences and factfinding tours in conjunction with *Novosti* followed that brought thousands of Soviet students, journalists, officials and business people to the United States under the Moons' sponsorship (Ward, 2005).

In 1990 outreach to Pyongyang began through two separate channels. When, through the World Media Association, Soviet journalists were invited to the United States for a factfinding tour, they met there with the Moons. Rev. Moon requested that a few with connections in Pyongyang visit the DPRK on his behalf and convey to the leadership there that Rev. Moon, who had spent almost three years in prison under Kim Il Sung, was not their enemy and that he wanted to visit and meet with President Kim. Secondly, in consultation with Moon's special assistant Dr. Bo Hi Pak, Dr. Antonio Betancourt, a gifted aide to Dr. Pak, began an outreach effort to the DPRK through former Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carrazo Odio who had a longstanding and trusting

relationship both with the Moon organization and with the DPRK and its leader President Kim Il Sung (Pak, 2000).

The DPRK faced challenges at this time and one issue that may have motivated Pyongyang to be open to the Moons and the Grahams was the potential of including non-state actors in addressing an impending crisis. There was growing evidence that the DPRK was developing nuclear weapons in facilities in Yongbyon, a secluded area outside of Pyongyang. On July 29, 1989, Don Oberdorfer of the *Washington Post* filed the following report:

A team of U.S. officials has briefed the South Korean government on intelligence evidence that North Korea is making intensified efforts to develop a nuclear-weapon capability, administration sources said this week. Evidence of the intensified North Korean drive, which was developed by satellite photography in recent months, has been closely held in the Bush administration. (Oberdorfer, 1989, July 29)

In December 1991 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that New York Congressman Stephen Solarz, Chair of the House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, warned that the evidence of the DPRK's building of nuclear weapons was "incontrovertible"² and that the Pentagon had "taken the unusual step of letting it be known that contingency plans for a military strike" were "being drawn up (L.A. Times Archives, 1991, December 26).

Track I Diplomacy, especially with the United States, a country with which the DPRK never signed a peace treaty following the Korean conflict (Reuters, 2016, February 21), would necessarily be tightly scripted, offering Pyongyang little "wiggle room." The DPRK outreach to civil society, including religiously inspired organizations, could potentially open new, unofficial, and hopefully less threatening channels of communication with Washington (Ward, 2005).

The Moons' Experience with Kim Il Sung

Scott Snyder, a Korea expert for the Council on Foreign Relations, observed that "Moon began his efforts to engage with the North Koreans at a time when the South Korean government still formally opposed that kind of interaction" (Rosen, 2012, September 6). The Moons were granted visas and they arrived in Pyongyang on November 30, 1991 and, as per a DPRK request, all of the members of the delegation were overseas Koreans. Sun Myung Moon participated in a variety of official meetings with DPRK officials during his one-week stay where potential future collaborations were discussed and explored. Not one to pull his punches, Moon also made clear to Kim's staff that he felt that Kim Il Sung's *Juche* idea could never serve as the basis for Korean reunification, especially because it offered no space for God or religion (Pak, 2002). Those accompanying Rev. Moon felt that this frank articulation of his views would serve as an obstacle to him meeting with Kim Il Sung. Nevertheless, on December 4, 1991, Kim Il Sung did welcome Reverend Moon; they met with a warm embrace and, in the Korean style, walked hand in hand as brothers and friends to a banquet by President Kim held in Moon's honor. That Kim-Moon discussion focused on Moon's request for a renewal of Inter-Korean dialogue and a plea to Kim to allow more reunions of the families separated by the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) since the end of the conflict. They also discussed collaborations on tourism, industry, as well as the expansion and improvement of DPRK infrastructure.

² The articles clarify that this evidence stems from Pyongyang "pressing ahead to develop reprocessing technology so that it can produce weapons-grade fuel."

They spoke of the peaceful reunion of the Korean peninsula. Assurances were made to Reverend Moon by President Kim that the North would remain free of nuclear weapons, which, we know, became an unkept promise. Kim expressed the hope that Moon's organization might help to arrange a meeting with President George H. W. Bush (Pak, 2002).

The closing of a banquet held by Kim in Moon's honor reflects the warm ties that defined their encounter. Reverend Moon spoke first: "I'm very happy that your health looks so good, President Kim. You are a bit older than me, so it's almost like you are my elder brother." To that, President Kim proposed a toast: "Let's work together like 형님 (Hyongnim) and 동생 (Dongsaeng) [elder brother and younger brother] and see if we can't do something really good" (Pak, 2002, p. 77).

Confidence-Building Measures that followed the Moons' Visits

Moon's November 1991 visit was followed soon after by the arrival in Pyongyang of Josette Sheeran, a top *Washington Times* journalist, in April 1992. Sheeran interviewed Kim, and DPRK officials later expressed their appreciation that the published interview quoted him directly rather than "interpret" his statements (Ward, 2022, June 26). At the end of May 1992, the American Freedom Coalition, a Moon-sponsored high-ranking delegation of American leaders of government and civil society participated in a Track II diplomatic initiative in Pyongyang. Led by the Hon. Richard Ichord, a nine-term former Democratic Congressman from Missouri, the delegation composed of other former top leaders including CIA Deputy Director Max Hugel, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia John Holdridge, US Ambassador to Japan and Assistant Secretary of State Douglas MacArthur II, California Congressman Robert Wilson, and the Hon. Bob Mathias, California Congressman and two-time Olympic Gold Medalist. Congressman Ichord carried a written message from the White House with him and the stated purpose of the trip was to encourage an end of the use of abusive language in communications regarding the United States and South Korea. At the conclusion of that visit, which the author of this paper participated in, the DPRK, for the first time since the end of the Korean War, made the decision to suspend its annual "Hate America Month" as a gesture of good will.

The DPRK leadership deliberately chose to convey this decision not to the US Embassy in Beijing, the normal channel, but through Congressman Ichord and the American Freedom Coalition. The DPRK leadership wished to have Ichord inform the White House, to emphasize the role that Moon's organizations rather than traditional diplomacy had played in this momentous decision (Ward, 2022, June 26). This action confirmed that one of the rationales for the original decision to welcome the Moons was to explore a new channel for Track II Diplomacy.

In 1994 the Moons followed up by establishing a company in the North to promote tourism to the DPRK and the Moon movement also assumed the management of two hotels and invested in a light industry complex and in a newly created Raseon special economic zone. In 1998 the Unification movement also established the Pyeonghwa General Motors Corporation, the DPRK's first auto manufacturer, as a 70-30 joint venture between the church's Seoul-based Pyeonghwa Group and a state-run enterprise in North Korea (Hyon-hee, 2012, September 3). During a freeze in cross-border relations between North and South Korea, the Unification Church provided food aid to the North and in 2000 it established a council to provide consistent humanitarian assistance to Pyongyang (Hyon-hee, 2012, September 3).

On the occasion of the passing of Kim Il Sung in 1994, Rev. Moon's Special Assistant Dr. Bo Hi Pak traveled to the North to honor President Kim on behalf of the Moon family (Pak, 2000). On the tenth anniversary of Moon's 1991 visit, Dr. Moon also sent top Church representatives to

commemorate that occasion and reaffirm the commitment to maintain ongoing ties. After the death of Kim's son and successor, Kim Jong-il, in 2011, one of his sons, Hyung Jin Moon, traveled there to pay respects on behalf of his father (Sands, 2012, September 13).

The Unification Church's investments in North Korea opened the way to broader corporate initiatives from the South Korean business sector. By 2012 some 100 South Korean companies employed North Korean laborers at the Kaesong industrial park, a special economic zone just a few miles north of the DMZ. Korea expert Scott Snyder describes Pyonghwa Motors as having served as "a crucial test-run" for all the Korean businesses that were established there later (Rosen, 2012, September 6).

The Atlantic (Rosen, 2012, September 6), the New York Times (Armstrong, 2012, August 15), Foreign Policy (Fish, 2012, September 4), and the Korea Herald (Hyon-hee, 2012, September 3) number among the publications, which have reported on the significance of the Moon-DPRK relationship over the years. In February 2012 in an article entitled "The Bush Administration's Secret Link to North Korea," *The Daily Beast* reported that, from 2003 to 2008, Dr. Douglas Joo, President of the Washington Times, frequently traveled between Pyongyang and Washington, D.C. and served as an informal liaison between the United States Department of State and the Government of DPRK Supreme Leader Kim Jong Il (Roston & McKelvey, 2012, February 7). A few days after his passing, Sun Myung Moon was posthumously recognized in a September 5, 2012 declaration in Pyongyang by DPRK President Kim Jong-un, grandson of Kim Il Sung, as a "Hero of National Reunification" (Sands, 2012, September 13; Toresen, 2021, August 20). In 2013, Mr. Park Sang-Kwon, President of Pyeonghwa Motors, was given the rare honor of being named an Honorary Citizen of Pyongyang by President Kim Jong Un (AFP, 2013, January 22). There have been ongoing communications between the Moon organization and the DPRK since then. In 2022 a floral display with a message to the Moon Family was sent from current DPRK Leader Kim Jong Un on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Reverend Moon's passing (Kyodo News, 2022, August 13). Moon's spouse Hak Ja Han maintains communication with the North and established a working partnership and study group on Korean Reunification co-chaired by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon (Universal Peace Federation USA, 2022, August 9).

Background on and Outcomes of the Graham's Visits to Pyongyang beginning in April 1992

The Pathway that led Dr. Billy and Ruth Graham and their Children to Pyongyang

Dr. Graham said that he first turned his attention to Pyongyang in 1990. Like the Moons, the Grahams also had personal ties to Pyongyang. Graham's wife Ruth, whose parents had been missionaries to China, studied at the highly regarded Pyeng Yang Boarding School in North Korea during Korea's annexation by Imperial Japan. The connection deepened when one of the Graham's nephews married a Korean woman whose family was of North Korean origin, in addition to being people of deep Christian faith (Graham, 1997).

The call for the preaching of the Gospel "in all of the world" in Matthew 24:14 may explain why Dr. Graham called upon communist countries to allow their citizens not only to practice their faith but share it with others. Speaking in Washington, DC in 1970, Graham observed:

Many people have asked me why I, as a citizen of Heaven and a Christian minister, join in honoring any secular state. Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21). The apostle Paul

proudly boasted that he was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28). The Bible says, "Honor the nation." (Billy Graham Library, 2020, July 3)

When, eight years prior to traveling to Pyongyang, Dr. Graham met with Boris Ponomorev, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Council of the Supreme Soviet, in Moscow in 1984, he told Chairman Ponomorev that "religious believers were some of the USSR's best citizens—honest, hard-working, not prone to the common Soviet problems of absenteeism, alcohol, and theft." He told Ponomorev that Americans "found it hard to understand why Christians in the USSR could not practice and propagate their beliefs as freely as nonbelievers" (Graham, 1997, p. 525). Because of the Christian duty to honor one's country, Dr. Graham's son Franklin has also insisted Christians can be excellent citizens in North Korea:

I want the communist government to know that Christians are not their enemies, and they have the potential of being the very best citizens in the country because God commands all of us to pray for those that are in authority. (Sells, 2018, June 12)

A key dimension of the work of the Grahams in North Korea has been a respectful but open call for an end to all forms of religious repression (Sells, 2018, June 12).

The Experiences of Dr. Billy Graham and his Son Ned with President Kim Il Sung

Kim Il Sung, an avowed atheist, was raised in a Christian home, the grandson of a Presbyterian Pastor. While Kim criticized religion's tendency to defend the status quo and to focus on Heaven rather than the problems facing us on earth, Kim recognized the substantive role that Christian leaders had played in the Korean independence movement:

Many Korean Christians were respectable patriots...who devoted their whole lives to the independence movement. They prayed for Korea and appealed to God to relieve the unhappy Korean people of their stateless plight. Their immaculate religious faith was always associated with patriotism, and their desire to build a peaceful, harmonious and free paradise found expression invariably in their patriotic struggle for national liberation. (Sung, 2007).

In his meeting with Kim Il Sung on April 2, 1992, Dr. Billy Graham conveyed a brief verbal message from President Bush to President Kim and President Kim conveyed a response to President Bush through Dr. Graham. Graham spoke of the need for the United States and the DPRK to go beyond "the suspicion and enmity which have characterized our relations for the last half-century" and replace them "with trust and friendship" (Graham, 1997, p. 622). Upon meeting Dr. Graham, President Kim "expressed hope that a new springtime was coming in DPRK-US relations" (Graham, 1997, p. 626).

Dr. Graham's son Ned, who accompanied his father to the April 1992 meeting, returned to the DPRK again in 1993 and once again met with President Kim. Ned showed Kim a "picture book" of the 1992 trip that he and his father had prepared which documented their visit to the DPRK. Graham noted that, in creating this report, which was also publicized in the United States, he and his associates "had taken pains to be objective, neither overlooking nor emphasizing our differences" and, according to Graham, the sensitive way in which things had been handled "seemed to please President Kim" (Graham, 1997, p. 628).

While visiting Pyongyang in 1992, Dr. Graham was invited to speak in the two official churches in Pyongyang, one Catholic and one Protestant, and President Kim also arranged for him to speak to 400 students at Kim Il Sung University, which was wholly unprecedented.

In January 1994, as international concerns about the DPRK nuclear weapons development grew larger, Dr. Billy Graham felt called to return to Pyongyang once again. Prior to this he met with President Bill Clinton, and he offered to convey a message to President Kim Il Sung on behalf of President Clinton if the President felt that it would be helpful. Just prior to leaving Beijing for Pyongyang, Graham did receive that message and he delivered it during this, his second meeting with Kim Il Sung. President Kim reciprocated with a “fairly extensive response” that, according to Dr. Graham, “included a specific proposal that President Kim felt would break the logjam in the difficult discussions over the nuclear issue” (Graham, 1997, p. 631).

Prior to the meeting, Dr. Graham and President Kim met with the members of the press corps and said:

I consider it a great honor to have a friend like you in the United States. You have become a member of our family. Graham said that this deeply touched him, particularly given the differences in our points of view. (Graham, 1997, p. 630)

Confidence-Building Measures that followed these Three Meetings

Dr. Graham's wife Ruth visited North Korea in 1997 and remarked that the Korean people remained as warm-hearted as she had known them to be during her middle school days. Since 2000 Billy Graham's son Franklin, President of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association, has visited North Korea on five occasions. *Samaritan's Purse*, led by Franklin Graham, has provided millions of dollars of humanitarian assistance including food distribution, health care services, agricultural assistance, and modern medical equipment (Sells, 2018, June 12) to those in need in the North.

In 2006 Franklin Graham called upon President George W. Bush to engage directly with North Korea on the nuclear issue. Instead of the six-party talks, which Franklin Graham felt had little prospects for success, he called upon the Bush administration to meet the North Korean leadership “face to face” and “eyeball to eyeball.” Franklin also opposed United Nations sanctions seeing them as punishing the people rather than “Kim Jong-Il and his family and his generals that support him.” He described North Korean hospitals as not having basic equipment to help the people and that, in sum, the DPRK is a “very poor country” needing American help. He offered at that time to help to facilitate dialogue with the DPRK:

If my father, myself, someone else going can help the dialogue and help to bring peace between these two countries, a better understanding between the United States and the DPRK, I think it's worth doing. I think that's worth the risk of possibly being used. (PBS, 2006, July 14)

When Kim Jong Il died unexpectedly in 2011, Franklin Graham encouraged President Barack Obama to reach out and attempt to forge a relationship with the new leader Kim Jong Un (Newsmax Wires, 2011, December 19). Noting that he had visited North Korea four times by that time, Graham appealed to the United States to build stronger bridges of understanding with Kim Jong Un and called upon President Barack Obama to “reach out to the DPRK's new leader and extend a helping hand to the people who are suffering through an early cold winter and serious food shortages” (Newsmax, 2011, December 19; BGEA, 2011, December 19). In 2013 Franklin

Graham supported NBA star Dennis Rodman's appeal to President Obama to make a phone call to President Kim (Nelson, 2013, March 6). He also communicated on several occasions with the Trump administration about the importance of trying to build a new dynamic in the relationship with the government of Kim Jong Un (Sells, 2018, June 12). In February 2018, Graham reiterated that the United States needed "to be talking to North Korea" and he lobbied US and UN officials to expand humanitarian exemptions for sanctions (Yi, 2022, p. 135).

Conclusion: The DPRK and the Role of Track II Religious Diplomacy

North Korea is unlike any other country in today's world. It has largely isolated itself for eight decades. It views itself as under siege, with more than 20,000 American troops deployed along its southern border. The DPRK leadership feels marginalized, surely threatened by the 2019 *Human Rights Watch Asia* call for "the US, the EU, and other governments to escalate their efforts to hold Kim Jong Un and his senior officials accountable for their egregious human rights crimes" and the 2018 UN Human Rights Council call for the "eventual prosecution of North Korean officials responsible for crimes against humanity" (Human Rights Watch, 2019, January 17).

North Koreans are sensitive to the precedent set by the fate suffered by Col. Moammar Qaddafi in 2012. Just eight years after Qaddafi owned up to and abandoned his plans for building a nuclear arsenal, he was summarily tortured and executed by an angry mob for his crimes without due process. As NATO military operations in Libya opened against the government of Col Qaddafi, a North Korean spokesperson made an official statement:

It has been shown to the corners of the earth that Libya's giving up its nuclear arms. ... was used as an invasion tactic to disarm the country by sugarcoating it with words like 'the guaranteeing of security' and the 'bettering of relations.' Having one's own strength, [the DPRK spokesperson continued,] was the only way to keep the peace. (Rapp-Hooper & Waltz, 2011, October 24)

The DPRK will not easily cede their nuclear weapons. One can anticipate that, for such a concession, they would expect more than safe passage for Kim Jong Un, his family, and the DPRK's "inner circle" of leadership. As a fellow academic once suggested to me, there may be something to learn from the way that the United States opted not only against prosecuting Emperor Hirohito; it deliberately supported efforts to find a respectful role for the Emperor and the Imperial family in Post-World War II Japanese society.

Final Thoughts

No Master Plan exists outlining a role for religious organizations in DPRK-related peace initiatives. The United States Institute of Peace scholars Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson, and Pamela Aall point to some of the important roles that can be played by nonofficial actors in intractable conflicts:

- Publicizing conflicts in national capitals and through the news media so that they are harder to ignore
- Building local capacity for peacemaking by improving negotiation skills

- Facilitating contact between influential (although not necessarily official) members of the contesting parties
- Serving as the eyes and ears of the international community in a conflict
- Bolstering an official peace process (whether state-based or led by the United Nations) through collaborative programs and building support for peace in the larger community. (Crocker et al., 2004, pp. 69-70)

The Moon and the Graham initiatives inside the DPRK over the past thirty years have contributed in each of these areas. The ties that the Moon and Graham organizations have fostered for four decades have helped the North Koreans to feel, at least to some extent, that someone in the West “has their back” and understands them. Franklin Graham expresses it this way: “I think that the North Koreans have been wanting to talk to the Americans for a long time.” He has described the North Koreans as “a prideful people” that “just want to be shown respect” (Sells, 2018, June 12).

In his 1984 meeting with Boris Ponomarev of the Supreme Soviet, Billy Graham observed: “We must not only talk about how much we need peace; we must also *establish suitable conditions for peace*” (Graham, 1997, p. 525). Religious NGOs can play a helpful role in the building of such conditions. The lessons learned from the Moons and the Grahams in their work with North Korea can serve as one reference point for the next steps in US-DPRK relations.

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