

The Institute for Calvinistic Studies in South Korea

In his book *Dining with the Devil*, Os Guinness persuasively argues that the three strongest national challenges to the gospel in the modern world are Japan, Europe, and the United States. Japan has never been won to Christ; Europe has been won twice and lost twice; and America, though having the strongest and wealthiest churches, is now facing unprecedented trials.

But Os Guinness does not expound on the rapid growth of the Church in many Third World countries. After my wife returned from a trip to Kyoto, Japan, she remarked how struck she was by the deeply ingrained heathenism so noticeable in that city with its thousands of Buddhist and Shinto temples, faithfully attended by multitudes. The membership of the Christian Church in Kyoto is minuscule as it is throughout Japan. Missionaries have few converts. In Europe millions no longer darken the door of a church. It has become largely unchurched. And in Canada and the USA, the statistics are not encouraging either. But God is still at work. In many Third World countries in Africa, the Church is growing by leaps and bounds. In some Asian countries the Church is also experiencing phenomenal growth. Korea is one such a nation which has received a powerful visitation of the Holy Spirit.

The first Protestant church in Korea was planted in 1884. One hundred years later there were nearly 30,000! About 4,900 of these are in Seoul. It has the largest congregation (Full Gospel Central Church), and the largest Methodist and Presbyterian congregations in the world. The increase of the Presbyterian Churches has been astounding: from 802 to 167,352 in a brief 15-years period from 1895 to 1910. The revival of 1907 is a memorable part of that era. Nearly 60% of all Protestants belong to one of the 30 different Presbyterian denominations. The reasons for these divisions have been ecumenism, doctrinal issues, power struggles and personality clashes among church leaders. Leadership training played an important role in the growth of the Korean Church. The largest theological seminaries in the world are in Korea. Several Presbyterian seminaries have more than 1000 students.

A relatively new training center is The Institute for Calvinistic Studies in Korea, 121-9, Bundang-dong, Bundangku, Sung-nam. Judging by the photographs, its buildings and student facilities appear attractive and well maintained. It was founded in 1985 by Dr. SungKuh Chung, a graduate of the Free University, Amsterdam, where he studied the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Dr. Chung is a member of the Calvin Studies Society in America and has written a number of books and articles on John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Groen Van Prinsterer and Calvinism. In 1986, Dr. J.D. Dengerink of the University in Utrecht, the Netherlands, and Prof. Dr. Evan Runner became the Institute's Counselors. The Institute's brochure features on one page a prominent picture of Abraham Kuyper in his official regalia as the prime minister of the Netherlands. I found this rather ironic in the light of a resolution accepted by the majority of mostly white attendees at the 100th anniversary of Abraham Kuyper's Stone Lectures in Princeton, N.J. (1998) The revisionist resolution stated that it profoundly regrets "the limitations and shameful distortions of the Gospel" in aspects of Kuyper's

writing, especially relating to his "understanding of race and ethnicity, gender and sex" which is supposed to have resulted "in much pain and suffering." The Korean Calvinists have not found in Kuyper's writings what the revisionists discovered with their mainly Western eyes. As a former missionary to the Philippines, a predominantly folk-Catholic country, I was particularly interested to learn that the Institute established a branch there.

The Institute trains Christian leaders, pastors and preachers, especially in the Third World, and seeks to equip them to "propagate and defend, in its genuineness, simplicity, and fullness the system of Calvinist faith and practice In all its work ICSK is devoted to the articulation, defense and propagation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as understood by John Calvin and his successors." Some of the courses taught are: John Calvin, *Institute of Christian Religion*; H.H. Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*; B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*; A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*; H. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*; L. Berkhof, *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* and H. Van Til, *The Calvinist Concept of Christian Culture*.

The Institute's statement of faith is thoroughly Calvinist. I was especially impressed by its insistence on the inerrancy of Scripture: "The Bible is the inspired Word of God, the written record of His special revelation of Himself to men, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, absolute in its authority, complete in its revelation, final in its content, and without any errors in it." Beacons of Gospel lights are still shining in our dark world. One such light is The Institute for Calvinistic Studies in Korea. Its existence is greatly encouraging for North American Calvinists.

Johan D. Tangelder
June, 1998