

## **“The 21<sup>st</sup> Century World Mission through Mission to America”**

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### **Introduction:**

When the first KWMC was held at Wheaton in 1988, the number of Korean missionaries was no more than a several hundred. However, twenty years later today, Korea became a nation that sends out almost 20,000 (18,650) missionaries to 168 countries throughout the world. It has been already several years since Korea ranked the second in world mission. Furthermore, an article that Korea will rank the top in world mission was featured as the cover story in March 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*. Would Korea, a small country in the east, be able to surpass America, the world's most powerful nation and take the first place in world mission? However, whether Korea becomes the first or second in world mission is not an important issue that requires our attention. I believe the subject matter to which we must pay attention is the mission strategy God is mapping out through the Korean people.

Christianity in Korea has a relatively short history – no more than 120 years. God has disciplined the Korean people and Korean church through the 35 years of Japanese oppression, the pains and turmoil of the division of the Korean peninsula and Communist oppression of church since World War II, and through the 3-year Korean War which sacrificed over 2 million lives. God used these hardships to train and use the Korean church for world mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the time Korea was in ruins and was the poorest nation in the world with the annual per capita income of less than \$100. However, God uplifted such country and made it into a leading nation in world mission.

Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, God began to send Koreans to America, the most powerful nation in the world, in order to carry on world mission through the Korean people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. God sent 2 million Koreans to America in relatively short 35 years and enabled them to plant as many as 4,000 churches in America during the last 30–40 years, thus making Korea into a

nation that planted the largest number of churches per population in American immigration history. Then what is God's will in doing so? Did God plant Korean churches in America so that Koreans may build large churches, worship in Korean language, and indulge in nostalgic thoughts of homeland with fellow Koreans? No. God planted such a large number of Korean Churches in America with a much more far-reaching and grand dream, that is, as part of His strategy for world mission.

From the beginning, God has been sending Koreans to America with a vision and strategy for world mission, because America is the key nation in God's strategy for world mission. What is important is not whether Korea ranks first or second in the number of missionaries it sends out. Rather, what is important is to know God's strategy for the world mission and being used in His plan in Great Commission. Then why would God want to map the 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy for world mission through America? We must look for answers from the Bible to see how God used nations and people to carry out the mission.

## I.

America is the 21<sup>st</sup> century Rome. History reveals the centrality of Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century strategy for world mission drawn by God. God had prepared Rome before the foundation of the world and mapped out strategies for world mission in which Rome was to place a central role. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century strategy for the world mission Rome was the key nation. That is why God evangelized Rome by sending the two giants of faith in the 1<sup>st</sup> century – Paul and Peter -- to Rome and through their martyrdom. Why Rome then? Rome was the most powerful nation in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and therefore the Christianization of Rome would open up the evangelistic road to extensive civilizations under Roman rule and influence much more readily and quickly. In fact, when the Roman Emperor Constantine professed Christ in 313 AD, the evangelization of countries in Europe and Northern Africa under Roman influence strode on Roman roads. Historians have said "Every road leads to Rome." In fact, the gospel spread to the world, traveling on Roman roads. 21<sup>st</sup> century America is like 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome. Every road leads to and passes through America.

21<sup>st</sup> century America is the most powerful nation in the history of the world. Every road in the 21<sup>st</sup> century indeed passes through America. Every air route in the world passes through America. Every airline in the world is present at JFK International Airport in New York. Why is that? It evidences the fact that America holds the central power in the world. In other words, the present day

America is the center of politics, military, economy, science, industry and commerce, scholarship and culture of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United Nations Headquarters is in the United States. The vast majority of headquarters of the world's international bodies are in America. Not only every air route in the world leads to America, but every vessel of commerce leads to and leaves from America.

The present era is referred to as the era of globalization. However, economic circles often say, Americanization is Globalization. America is the nation that fed and sustained the world that fell into ruins post World War II. It is hard to name a nation that did not receive American aid. America helped postwar Europe lying in ruins by launching Marshall Plan, and assisted Germany and Japan – the two defeated nations – to become nations with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> economic power in the world. Korea too was able to rise to economic power due to enormous amounts of American aid. Even China is experiencing such phenomenal economic growth today through its trade with America.

Furthermore, the whole world acknowledges America as the best country to live in the world. America has become the object of envy and many in the world want to come and live in America. In fact, it is said that even Muslims who are antagonistic toward America want to live in America. Thus there are 180 ethnic groups with their own language currently living in America. It was likewise in 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome. Rome was the nation of multiethnic society in the 1st century. 21<sup>st</sup> century America is the most multiethnic nation that has ever existed in the history of the world. Thus, to evangelize America is to evangelize the world. If we proclaim the gospel to the 180 language groups residing in America, they will eventually share the gospel with their relatives and friends living in their home country as they travel back and forth. Thus the gospel spreads to the world in and through America. That is what had happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century when Rome was evangelized.

Moreover, there are more than 1 million foreign students from all over the world studying in American colleges and universities. America is the only “mission field” where one does not have to go overseas to engage in world mission. In American colleges and universities, there are students from countries and regions unreachable with the Gospel by us. When those students finish their studies and return to their own countries, they will become influential leaders in their respective countries. Proclaiming the gospel to such students studying in America is God's strategy for world mission. Rather

than spending tens of thousands of dollars for proclaiming the gospel message to various people groups by going to remote countries and towns scattered throughout the world, sharing the gospel with each foreign student from the four corners of the world studying in America would be much more efficient and effective way to use our resources and multiply results a hundredfold and a thousand-fold more. When such foreign students believe in the Lord Jesus and return to their own country, they may even be able to change their national law that prohibits Christianity.

The collapse of the New York World Trade Center's Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 at the hands of Muslim terrorists opened a new era in world history. The problem of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been the seemingly endless cold war with Communism. But communism finally collapsed with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Now historians say that world war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the cultural war between Christianity and Islam. Can Christianity win? Many scholars have a pessimistic outlook. Thus, the chief challenge of world mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century confronting us is that of sharing the gospel with Muslims. Missionary endeavor is illegal in most Islamic nations, and missionaries are prohibited from those nations. Thus missionaries who had entered secretly are either deported or put to death when found out.

However, we are free to share the gospel with over 6 million Muslims in America who either emigrated from Islamic nations or are here to study. America is a nation that guarantees freedom of speech.

Therefore, America is the world's most important "mission field". To evangelize America is to evangelize the world. We must penetrate into American colleges and universities and proclaim the gospel. There, students from all parts of the world are being trained and educated to become world leaders. We must share the gospel with Muslims residing in America. And we must proclaim the gospel to 180 ethnic groups in America. Here is an example. There are about 40,000 Chinese immigrants living in South Philadelphia. Every summer 2nd generation Korean-Americans go there, rent a church building and hold the gospel-based summer school for 5 weeks and share the gospel with the children of Chinese immigrants. Among them are children from Indonesia and Vietnam. When the gospel is shared with the children, even the parents come to faith in Christ. Such ministry is referred to as "Urban Mission."

In West Philadelphia 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean–Americans from Emmanuel Church planted a multicultural church with over 500 members in the vicinity of the University of Pennsylvania. Not only that, they have been sharing the gospel with black children in the area for the last ten years or so through the West Philadelphia Tutoring Project. The hope of the world is found in sharing the gospel with children – for sooner or later, it is those children who will be leading and carrying on the world. And it is for such work as these that God has been persistently sending Koreans to America during the last 30–40 years and enabling them to plant 4000 churches.

## II.

At first, perhaps because Paul had not realized the importance of evangelizing Rome, he had poured out his evangelistic passion to Asia and Bithynia. However, Paul’s epistle written to the church in Rome reveals vast missiological interest Paul had for Rome. At first, Paul appears as if he is not interested in mission to Rome. Why should he proclaim the gospel to an enemy country? And we can understand Paul’s heart from a human perspective. Paul seems to have tried very hard to go east. However, it is written in the Bible that God did not allow it. It is written in Acts 16:6–7, “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.”

Had Paul gone east with the gospel, Korea may have been evangelized before Rome. But such was not God’s strategy for world mission. God’s strategy for world mission was for Rome to receive the gospel first. Europe was next and Korea was to receive the gospel toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

God stopped Paul from going east and showed him a vision of going west. It is written Acts 16:8–10, “So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” In God’s strategy and order of world mission, Asia did not come first but Europe.

From then on, the gospel moved on westward through Paul from Philippi to Thessalonica, then to Berea to Athens, and to Corinth. God led Paul westward with the gospel because Rome was in West and God's strategy for mission required Rome to be evangelized. Eventually Paul's eyes were opened to God's strategy for mission and His purpose for Rome. Paul wrote the epistle to Romans from Corinth and made clear his intention to visit Rome in 15:23-24. The Bible records that although Paul made efforts to visit Rome several times, the road had been blocked. When Governor Festus asked Paul during his imprisonment in Caesarea, whether he is willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand there for a trial, Paul answered, "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried." (Acts 25:9-10) Apostle Paul preferred to go to Rome because he wanted to open a door for the gospel by proclaiming the gospel to the household of Caesar. Thus God sent Paul albeit as a prisoner to Rome.

God sent Koreans to America, that is, to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Rome. We Koreans say that we came to America to seek a better life and to give our children a better education. However, in reality, it is God who has brought Koreans to America from 35 years ago so that they may be used for proclaiming the gospel to the 180 multiethnic groups currently living in America and engage in world mission in and through America.

### III.

Now the issue before us is how 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans who planted Korean-American churches will evangelize America. It is hard to even conceive the idea that a small nation like Korea will evangelize a large powerful nation like America. Until now we have thought that mission involves rich countries with civilized culture proclaiming the gospel to poor countries with uncivilized culture. And that is how mission has been thought of and done during the past 200 years. However, that is not biblical mission. From the book of Acts, we see Paul from a small and weak colony Judea evangelizing Rome, the world's most powerful nation at the time. That was God's strategy for mission. If God sent people from a small country like Korea to America in order to evangelize America, the world's most powerful nation as Rome was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century with purpose of evangelization of the world, then what we need to do is to understand God's strategy and obey God's mission strategy as Paul did. It is not

us but God who carries on world mission. All we have to do is simply obey with the readiness and spirit of martyrdom as Paul did.

Then how can 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans enter American college campuses and share the gospel with 180 ethnic groups? Isn't it impossible because of language barriers? Mission involves overcoming language and cultural barriers in order to share the gospel with people who are different from us. Surely there are some 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans who speak fluent English, and therefore can share the gospel by overcoming language and cultural barriers. However, we can expect much greater works for world mission from 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans who grew up in America and therefore are both linguistically and culturally fluent. I believe God's will in sending 2 million Koreans to America during the past 35 years and enabling them to plant 4000 churches in this land was to bring up 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans who can engage in world mission by evangelizing America. It can be compared to how God had led Paul to Rome for world mission in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Most of 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans were able to plant only Korean churches and share the gospel with only Koreans, but 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans with no language or cultural barriers have access to much wider audience.

English has become the world language today. Greek was the world language in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. US citizenship is like the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman citizenship. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy -- all of whom God used mightily in world mission were Roman citizens and spoke fluent Greek. God used such people in mighty ways in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. God's purpose in sending Koreans to America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and enabling them to plant 4000 churches was to bring up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans who hold US citizenship and are fluent in English, and therefore can evangelize America and the world. 2<sup>nd</sup> generations Korean-Americans are US citizens from their birth. Paul said that he is a Roman citizen by birth. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Koreans are unconstrained in their use of English language. Paul was also uninhibited in his use of Greek language and thus wrote all his New Testament epistles in Greek. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans can share the gospel with both American students and foreign students from all parts of the world studying in American colleges. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans can share the gospel with both blacks and Caucasians as well as with people from 180 ethnic groups.

Whichever of the world's international city we may be in, we can get by speaking English for we can find English speakers everywhere these days.

Thus 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans are not limited to America. They can share the gospel wherever they are in the world. Presently there are 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors proclaiming the gospel to hundreds and thousands of people in multicultural settings and serving at large multicultural city churches. Among them are Chae An, David Gibbons, Min Chung, and Stephen Um. There are countless examples of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors who planted multicultural churches, whether large or small, and are faithfully proclaiming the gospel. Furthermore, there are 2<sup>nd</sup> generation pastors who have penetrated into American college campuses and planted multiethnic churches for college students. Min Chung is the most representative of them. Now over 1,000 people worship at the multiethnic church (which constitutes about 40% 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans and 60% other ethnic groups) Min Chung planted in Urbana, IL where the University of Illinois is located. This year, the church is commissioning one of its pastoral staffs, Paul Chi, to plant a new multiethnic church in Madison, WI where the University of Wisconsin is located. In addition, there are Paul Kim, Steve Kim, Young C. Kim, and Robert Kim in Philadelphia who have successfully planted multiethnic churches either in college campuses or in the city; Victor Kim and Brian Lee in New York; John Cha in Washington, Matthew Ro in Atlanta; Joshua Kang, Seesun Yoo, Peter Kim, Steve Kang in Chicago; and Sam Park, Sam Yoo, Owen Lee, Iron Kim, Paul Kim, Harold Kim, and James Han in Southern California. And God continues to plant myriads of multiethnic churches in America's largest cities and college campuses through 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans can plant English-speaking multiethnic churches not only in America, but also in any other international cities in the world whether it be London, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Manila, and Jakarta. Nowadays, young people fluent in English are swarming into the world's international cities, including Seoul.

The life of Korean-American churches lies in nurturing and raising up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. Why did God all of a sudden plant 4000 Korean Diaspora churches in America toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? The reason was to bring up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans who can evangelize America and thereby engage in world mission. Unless Korean-American churches realize this fact, Korean-American churches will forfeit the purpose and reason for their existence. The task of bringing up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans precedes overseas mission for Korean-American churches. The most important and prior task of mission for Korean-American churches is



raising up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. The demise of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans will be the demise of Korean-American churches. No matter how much Korean-American churches grow numerically, build great buildings, and help countless missionaries, churches that fail to bring up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans will die away with 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans. In other words, large church buildings, great mission enterprises will not outlive 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans but will perish with them. 19<sup>th</sup> century England had ranked the top in world mission, but it failed to raise the next generation to take over its mission endeavor. Thus, England's mission enterprise has attenuated to the point of obliteration today and its church buildings are being sold to Muslims and turning into mosques. Raising up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans is Korean-American churches' first and foremost task of mission. It will not be an exaggeration to say that if Korean-American churches gain 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans, they will gain everything. However, on the other hand, if they lose their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans, they will lose everything.

I am afraid that Korean-American churches are forgetting the purpose and reason for their existence and are thinking only of 1<sup>st</sup> generation ministries. If we immigrated to America for our children, then the purpose of Korean-American churches ought to be to bring up our children well and commit them to God's will. If we believe that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation can engage in mission more effectively than 1<sup>st</sup> generation, then 1<sup>st</sup> generation should prioritize and commit themselves to the work of bringing up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.

We must nurture 2<sup>nd</sup> generation to perceive and engage with the world more broadly. We must pray God will raise up not only pastors who will transform America but also evangelists like Billy Graham out of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. And outstanding theology professors who wield vast influence in theological mainstreams should be produced from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. Already there are worldly renowned Bible scholars from 1<sup>st</sup> generation Koreans like Dr. Se Yoon Kim who teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary. Yet even more distinguished figures should come forth from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. Great missionaries like Hudson Taylor and William Carey should also come forth from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. However, evangelism is not the only way to carry on mission. Christian literary figures such as C.S. Lewis must be produced to engage in cultural mission. Prominent Christian writers, playwrights, and musicians should come forth and engage in cultural mission to Christianize not only the culture of America but

the cultures of the world as well. Furthermore, there should be 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans who penetrate into the political and legal world of America like Dr. Harold Koh who served as Assistant Secretary of State during the Clinton years. In such ways godly Christian men and women who can exert Christ's influence in every area of life throughout America and the world should come forth.

Then what must Korean-American churches specifically do? Without a question, they must bring up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. That is our mission. Then how are we to bring up our 2<sup>nd</sup> generation?

1. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans are our children growing up in America, and we are to bring up our children and dedicate them to Christ. Therefore, bringing up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans begins at home and at our Sunday schools. After they have grown up it is already too late. We must begin with little children. When our Sunday schools are fortified, the faith of our children can take firm root, and they can find their identity in Christ and their calling in world mission as 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans. Then their faith and sense of identity in Christ, and the awareness of their calling will continue to grow well into youth group to college group, and on. Young men and women who have been called by God should be generated. Great lay men and women, pastors and missionaries should come out of them. When I attended Westminster Theological Seminary's 2007 Graduation Ceremony in Philadelphia, I was shocked that there were only two 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans in the graduating class. I can't help but point out that this is a grave problem. Where did the problem begin? Unless we seriously investigate the matter and make necessary rectifications, the hope of Korean-American churches will be severed.
2. One reason that the number of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American seminary students is decreasing is that they have no places to go after they graduate from seminaries and thus feel forlorn. Although 1<sup>st</sup>-generation pastors need and look for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation pastors for their ministries, they have neither effective measures nor visions to raise up 2<sup>nd</sup> generation pastors. 1<sup>st</sup> generation pastors are busy hiring 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors to take charge of Sunday schools, youth groups, and etc., but have no vision of nurturing 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors beyond that. 1<sup>st</sup> generation pastors must engage in conversation

with 2<sup>nd</sup> generation pastors, listen to them, and be able to mentor and coach them.

3. Korean-American churches ought to provide financial support to 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors when they plant churches or go overseas as missionaries. Many Korean-American churches are giving financial support to missionaries sent out by churches in Korea. But Korean churches in Korea can easily support their missionaries and do not need financial assistance from Korean-American churches. However, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors and missionaries need the support of 1<sup>st</sup> generation Korean-American churches. There are many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation pastors who want to plant churches or go overseas as missionaries and yet are despairing due to lack of funds.
4. Churches planted by 2<sup>nd</sup> generation pastors soon become multiethnic churches. Most 2<sup>nd</sup> generation multiethnic churches I visited were composed of less than 40% 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-Americans and of 60% or higher other ethnic groups. That is indeed world mission in the land of America. However, these multiethnic churches need financial support for the first 3 years, and unless 1<sup>st</sup> generation Korean-American churches provide them financial assistance; the hope of multiethnic churches will perish. In 2007, Sarang Community Church in Southern California decided to set aside \$50,000 in their annual budget for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American multiethnic church planters and give each multiethnic church planter \$500 per month for 3 years. I pray that Korean-American churches will follow the example of Sarang Community Church and give financial assistance to 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean-American pastors to plant multiethnic churches.

If this is indeed the mission God has given to Korean-American churches, we must humbly prostrate ourselves and begin by praying the prayer of obedience to God's will. May God bless our churches that we may continuously pray for and obey the noble privilege and task given to us. Amen.