

## Case 8: Ministering to Tyranny

Almost three decades before last year's summit meeting in Singapore between US President Donald J. Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un, another renowned American paid a visit to the so-called hermit kingdom. Reverend Billy Graham was photographed in an historic embrace with Kim's grandfather, Kim Il-sung, the founder of the ruling Kim dynasty.

The presence of the American evangelical leader in Pyongyang marked a renewed interest by missionary and church relief programs in the totalitarian nation. At the time of Graham's visit, North Korea was discovering that it needed all the church-related aid it could get and more.

In 1995, North Korea made a plea to world governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including churches, for help dealing with a devastating famine which took the lives of over a half million people. Soon, North Korea was receiving around a million tons of food every year.

The United States, alone, gave \$1.3 billion in aid over a thirteen-year period, including food as well as coal and oil for power generation. However, aid workers were reporting finding emaciated children in orphanages into the late 1990s. The US government came to suspect that much of the aid and food was going to the North Korea's political elites and to the military. Organizations such as Doctors Without Borders pulled out of North Korea, concluding that it was withholding food from those who needed it the most.

This coincided with on-again, off-again nuclear disarmament talks between North Korea, the United States and other nations. President George W. Bush labeled North Korea as part of the axis of evil in 2002 for its alleged support of terrorism and the pursuit of nuclear weapons. From 2006 to 2017, North Korea tested six nuclear weapons in a race to develop warheads and missiles capable of striking its enemies, including the United States. As a result, the United States and other nations imposed severe economic sanctions against North Korea in an effort to force it to the nuclear disarmament negotiating table.

United Nations' aid to North Korea is down almost 90 percent from its high point in the late 1990's. Former US Representative to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, was quoted as saying "You don't starve your own people in order to fund nuclear weapons."

Despite President Trump's assurance following the Singapore summit that North Korea no longer posed a nuclear threat, US intelligence agencies reported evidence of expansion of a North Korean missile base close to the Chinese border. At the same time, world health organizations estimate that four in ten North Koreans are undernourished and now, more than ever, are looking for help from Christian and other religious charities. However, in the face of continuing international sanctions, there is no guarantee that any aid to help it deal with its humanitarian crisis may not also strengthen North Korea's hand at the negotiating table.

Case from the 2019 National Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl



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