

Korean Covenanters: J. G. Vos, Bruce Hunt, and a Presbyterian Covenant in Manchuria

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Introduction

The practice of covenanting appears in diverse times and places in the history of the church. One example is found during the Japanese occupation of Korea at the time of World War II. At this time, there was a Korean group which practiced biblical covenanting against Shinto worship. This group, referred to as the “Korean Covenanters,” developed and signed a covenanting statement against Shinto worship. Ministers who subscribed to the covenant led their worship and preached before them. Subscribing lay people could come and participate at the Lord’s table.

The Korean Covenanters worked closely with and were led by Bruce Finley Hunt (1903-1992), a missionary of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), and later of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Hunt had many fellow workers laboring shoulder-to-shoulder for the advancement of God’s Kingdom in East Asia. Among them was Johannes Geerhardus (J. G.) Vos (1903-1983) who graduated the same year (1928) as Hunt from Princeton Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. J. G. Vos, served as a missionary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), whose members were commonly referred to as Covenanters. Vos was engaged in missionary work with a movement of Chinese Covenanters in Manchuria. In support of the act of covenanting of the Korean Christians in Manchuria, Vos offered wise, biblical contributions toward this political but religious protest.

This paper focuses on understanding the largely untold story of the Korean Covenanters, including the missionary cooperation between Bruce F. Hunt and J. G. Vos. Understanding covenanting as a means for Korean Christians to respond biblically and theologically to a context of persecution by the Imperial Japanese Army provides helpful application for 21st-century Christians. To enable both historical understanding and application, this essay considers the origin and practice of the Korean Covenanters, a brief history of this stream of the Korean church, the lives and relationship of Bruce F. Hunt and J. G. Vos, and the theology of covenanting in the setting of hostile civil magistrates.

Background

The starting point: Appearance of the term, “Korean Covenanters”

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The two terms *Korean* and *Covenanters* are usually not linked together. The term *Covenanters* in church history has generally referred to the Presbyterians in Scotland from 1638 to 1690 who fought against the Stuarts of England for “the preservation of the Reformed religion, particularly the spiritual independence of the Church and the sole headship of Jesus Christ within it.”² The era of the Scottish Covenanters was centuries prior to the time when the Gospel reached the Korean people who had long been dominated by superstitious practices for thousands of years. What connects the Korean Covenanters with the Scottish Covenanters, who lived over five thousand miles away and three hundred years earlier?

Evidence suggests that the English usage of the term “Korean Covenanters” first appeared in January and February of 1943 in the *Presbyterian Guardian*, the journal of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Over these months the periodical published two articles by Bruce Hunt entitled “Korean Covenanters.”³ The articles also included the covenanting statements of the young Korean Reformed Presbyterian mission. Besides these two articles, in his book, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings Which Followed*, Hunt referred to the Korean Covenanters recording that

Following the example of the Scottish Covenanters, a statement was drawn up, pointing out the biblical teaching on shrine worship and the necessity of breaking completely from those who condoned idolatry. From then on, no one was baptized who did not give consent to this document, and no one was allowed to lead services who had not subscribed to it ... There were about twenty-five small Korean Christian groups in north Manchuria which subscribed to this covenant, with just a little short of five hundred covenanted baptized members and an average attendance for all the groups of about eight hundred people on each Lord’s Day.⁴

As Hunt stated, there were about five hundred, either adults only or possibly including children, who were involved in these covenant groups. They might have been neither a church nor a denomination, but this networking body consisted of twenty-five small preaching stations or local congregations. Together these Christians drew up and signed a statement that was written to demonstrate the problem of shrine worship which the Japanese Empire forced upon all Koreans, as well as all others under their control. Understanding the overall situation that was occurring in the far eastern part of Asia requires an awareness of the background of the early Korean church history.

Brief History of the Church in Korea

It was not until the year 1832 that Protestant Christianity touched the land of Korea, although Roman Catholicism had come into Korea during the eighteenth century. The first attempt was

² K. M. Brown, “Covenanters,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 218.

³ Bruce F. Hunt, “Korean Covenanters Part I,” *The Presbyterian Guardian* 12, no. 2 (January 1943): 19-20 and Bruce F. Hunt, “Korean Covenanters Part II,” *The Presbyterian Guardian* 12, no. 3 (February 1943): 37-40.

⁴ William Newton Blair and Bruce F. Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings Which Followed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 118.

made by a German missionary, Rev. Carl Friedrich Augustus Gutzlaff (1803-1851), who traveled to the west coast of Korea in the summer of 1832. Gutzlaff tried to share the Chinese Bible with the Korean people and also translated the Lord's Prayer into the Korean language during his one-month sojourn on a small island.⁵ The next endeavor was made in 1866 by Rev. Robert Thomas (1839-1866). This Welshman arrived aboard an American merchant ship and sailed to Pyeong-Yang, currently the capital of North Korea. The ship was "unhappily engaged in the fight against a Korean garrison" which resulted in the massacre of the entire crew and the burning of the ship.⁶ These missions to Korea were unsuccessful because of the strong nationalistic attitude of the Korean government toward foreigners at that time. However, God graciously sent more missionaries to this hidden country in Asia.

The next important event was the arrival of Dr. Horace Allen (1859-1932) in September 1884, "signaling a full-scale opening of Protestant missions in Korea."⁷ Dr. Allen was sent by the Board of the American Northern Presbyterian Mission as a medical missionary, the first western missionary who came to Korea, not just for a short visit, but to stay in that land. Then, in the following year, Horace G. Underwood (1859-1916), the first clerical missionary of the Northern Presbyterian Mission Board, set his foot on Korean soil.⁸ After that, the need for more Korean missions gained attention in Western countries, and more Western missionaries came to this small land. According to *World Atlas of Christian Missions*, published in 1911, there were 307 foreign missionaries—ordained missionaries, physician missionaries, and unmarried female missionaries.⁹ The number of foreign missionaries in Korea was less than ten percent of the number of missionaries in China, but they reaped a greater harvest in a short period of time.¹⁰ Early Western missionaries in Korea made it possible, because they trained native Koreans to accomplish this work of spreading the Gospel. In another record by Presbyterian missionaries, it is similarly stated that,

The mission work in Korea has developed with such extraordinary rapidity that it is hard to give an adequate impression of it. The first convert was baptized in 1886; the first little church was organized in 1887. In 1890, 100 converts were reported. In 1909, including catechumens and adherents, who are only waiting for admission to the Church, there are nearly 200,000 men and women who call themselves by the name of Christ and are striving to do His will. The greater part of these are in the regions covered by our own stations. It is plain that this wonderful result could never have been attained by the

⁵ In-su Kim, *History of Christianity in Korea* (Seoul: Qumran Pub. House, 2011), 91-95. Gutzlaff served the Netherlands Missionary Society until 1828 and relocated to China with a passion for people in the Far East. He was also a friend of Robert Morrison (1782-1834), who was well-known as the first Protestant missionary to China. For the details of his life and journey to East Asia, see his *Journal of Three Voyages Along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832, & 1833* (F. Westley and A.H. Davis, 1834).

⁶ In-su Kim, *History of Christianity in Korea*, 96-100.

⁷ Ung Kyu Pak, *Millennialism in the Korean Protestant Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 89.

⁸ Kim, *History of Christianity in Korea*, 121-131.

⁹ Sung-Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876-1915* (Studies in World Christianity) (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 329. Quoted in Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, *World Atlas of Christian Missions* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1911), 83.

¹⁰ In 1910, there were a total of 178,686 adherents of all ages in Korea and 470,184 in China. See *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 329.

handful of foreign missionaries. The work has been done by the Korean Christians themselves, who take quite literally the injunction to “go and tell” the blessings that they have received. So, they have carried the Word to their friends and neighbors all through the land.¹¹

The Word was spread, in particular, during the great revival movement of 1907 in Korea. During this remarkable awakening movement, the gospel was powerfully spread throughout the land of Korea and deeply into the hearts of believers. As *Historical Sketch of the Missions in Korea* recorded, there was “the wonderful increase in believers and enquirers” because of “purifying the hearts and lives of the people and causing them to work more zealously for the conversion of their neighbors.”¹² However, Korean missions did not continue spreading the flames of the gospel. They encountered difficulty due to major political changes. Japan made a protectorate treaty with the Korean empire in 1905 and finally annexed Korea into its own territory in 1910. After that, Korea was occupied by the Japanese Empire for 36 years, until the occupation ended at the conclusion of World War II in 1945.

Japan’s occupation of Korea was the immediate historical context for the Korean Covenanters. Japanese colonization, from the beginning, brought difficult circumstances to early Korean Christians as they contemplated how to react to or resist the Japanese rule, especially when Japan’s rules were opposed to the Scriptures. Tension between the church and civil governments that persecuted Christianity created a significant challenge to the church. Hunt and Vos were the two American ministers who tried to answer this question for the sake of the gospel and the Korean Covenanters. The ensuing sections of this paper examine the lives and ministries of Bruce Hunt and J. G. Vos to provide a more complete understanding of the context of the Korean Covenanters. Why did Hunt and Vos travel across the Pacific Ocean to Korea? What were their theological backgrounds? How were they connected to the Korean Covenanters?

Cooperation for the Kingdom of God

*Bruce F. Hunt*¹³

Bruce Finley Hunt was born of Presbyterian missionary parents William B. Hunt and Bertha Finley on January 4, 1903, in Pyeong-Yang, Korea. Pyeong-Yang was also called the Jerusalem of Asia following the great revival that occurred in 1907, four years after Hunt’s birth. After his mother died when he was two years old, Hunt’s family went on furlough. His father remarried

¹¹ Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Historical Sketch of the Missions in Korea* (Philadelphia: Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, 1909), 17.

¹² Ibid., 18. To provide a taste of the atmosphere of the movement, Rev. Blair, as published in his book, *The Korean Pentecost*, said “Then began a meeting the like of which I had never seen before, nor wish to see again unless in God’s sight it is absolutely necessary. Every sin a human being can commit was publicly confessed that night.” see Hunt and Blair, *The Korean Pentecost*, 83-87.

¹³ The only completed biography of Hunt is available only in Korean. Ung-Kyu Park, *Bruce F. Hunt: Life and Ministry* (Seoul: Grisim, 2006) A brief but useful biography is found on the website of Westminster Theological Seminary which also has the Bruce Hunt archive. See “Bruce Hunt Bio,” Westminster Theological Seminary, <https://students.wts.edu/resources/sarang/brucehunt.html> (accessed January 10, 2017.) This section of the article will rely on an interview with Bruce Hunt, published in the 1998 in *The Banner of Truth*. The interview took place in June 1972, and Don Stephens was the interviewer. See Bruce F. Hunt, “Bruce Hunt: Missionary to Korea,” *The Banner of Truth* (September 1998): 17-27.

during that time and was sent to Chai-Ryung, in another part of Korea, where Bruce lived until he was sixteen years old. Bruce referred to Chai-Ryung as his old home.¹⁴ Because his youth was spent with young native Koreans, he was a very fluent Korean speaker and accomplished his ministry without a language barrier. At home, he grew up with the disciplines of family worship and strict Sabbath-observance. At the same time, Hunt received a great benefit during his youth as he was surrounded by, learned from, and grew to know other Western missionaries.

When he was sixteen years old, he was sent to America for further schooling. There, he stayed with his aunt and her husband, who were formal missionaries in China.¹⁵ After one year of new experience in America, he entered Wheaton College. There, during his second year of studies, the missionary-child experienced a true regeneration and was converted to Jesus Christ. For his senior year of studies, Hunt transferred to a state university in New Jersey and there lived with his parents as they took a year-long furlough. They lived across the street from Princeton Seminary and attended the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton, where Dr. J. Gresham Machen served for a while. More importantly for the story of Hunt's mission work, this church had been the home of J.G. Vos, who was born in New Jersey, baptized at First Presbyterian, and was a former member there. During that final year of studies, Hunt was asked to teach a Sunday School class at the church.¹⁶ After college, Hunt enrolled at Princeton Seminary. While Hunt studied at Princeton, his faith became "greatly deepened and strengthened by the teaching of the professors at what is now called 'Old Princeton.'"¹⁷

Finally, after his nine years' life journey in America, Hunt returned to his Korean homeland to begin his service as a missionary. Hunt was ordained by the Presbytery of New Brunswick of the PCUSA on April 25, 1928, and appointed as a missionary to Korea by the Board of Foreign Missions of the PCUSA.¹⁸ What it meant that he returned to the mission field was reflected in his own testimony. To him,

The call to the mission field is as definite for the Second-Generationer as it was for his father and mother, but it has in it the added attraction of a host of unfulfilled childhood dreams that may be realized in the place where they were dreamed, and a host of recollections that may be lived over again where they first took birth.¹⁹

¹⁴ Bruce Hunt, "A Boy's Reminiscences," *The Korea Mission Field* 15, no.8 (August 1919): 165-167

¹⁵ There is one article written by Bruce Hunt regarding Confucianism. Not only because of his experience living at his aunt's, but also due to his own ministry in Korea later, he had very deep knowledge of Confucianism, a philosophy which had been influenced by both Chinese and Koreans. In the article, Hunt dealt with topics like life after death, God, and sin. Bruce Hunt, "The Best in Man," *The Korea Mission Field* 27, no.9 (September, 1932): 177-182.

¹⁶ Geerhardus Vos and James T. Dennison, *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2005), 42-43.

¹⁷ Hunt, "Bruce Hunt: Missionary to Korea," 23. For these professors, Hunt listed "Davis, Greene, C. W. Hodge, Machen, R. D. Wilson, and Geerhardus Vos." Geerhardus Vos was the father of J. G. Vos.

¹⁸ Princeton Theological Seminary, *Biographical Catalogue of Princeton Theological Seminary 1815-1954: Biographies, 1865-1954* (Princeton, N.J., 1955), 500.

¹⁹ Bruce Hunt, "The Heritage of the Second Generation," *The Korea Mission Field* 15, no.8 (February 1930): 36-37.

Hunt became one of the first second-generation missionaries to carry on the first generation's historic work in Korea.²⁰ He began his first mission work, not in Manchuria, but in Chung-Ju, seventy miles south of Seoul. After four years of ministry in Chung-Ju, he spent his first sabbatical year at Westminster Theological Seminary, which had been founded by his lifelong mentor, Dr. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937). While he was at Westminster, he faced the upheaval within the PCUSA and became a charter member of the Presbyterian Church of America in 1936.²¹ This denominational change also affected this young missionary in his return to the mission field. No longer under the PCUSA Board of Foreign Missions, Hunt was sent to Harbin, Manchuria (China) by the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions.²² This recommissioning took place in 1936, when his seminary classmate, J. G. Vos, was working for Chinese Covenanters in the same region.

*Johannes Geerhardus Vos*²³

Johannes Geerhardus Vos was born on February 4, 1903.²⁴ He was the firstborn of Geerhardus and Catherine Vos.²⁵ Geerhardus Vos married Catherine on September 7, 1894, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, just before his move to New Jersey to fulfill the position of the first Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. After eight years of marriage, J. G. Vos was born. All their four children, including J. G., were born in New Jersey and baptized at the

²⁰ Ung Kyu Pak, "The Significance of Bruce F. Hunt's Ministry in Korea and Manchuria (1928-1952) with Particular Attention to Shinto Shrine Worship," (ThM thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1992), 67.

²¹ Note that the Presbyterian Church of America changed its name to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1939. For more on this history consider Charles G. Dennison, *The History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Coraopolis, PA: The Committee for the Historian, 1994).

²² This was the mission board founded by Machen as an outworking of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. For more on the controversies pertaining to foreign missions and the forming of the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions, see Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 181-212.

²³ Following are a few resources to study his life and ministry. Alvin W. Smith, *Covenanter Ministers, 1930-1963, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* ([Pittsburgh, PA: Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1964], 216-218. Owen F. Thompson, *Sketches of the Ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America from 1888 to 1930* (S.l.: Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1930), 343-345. There is also a volume of essays on the Scriptures edited by John H. White who, in honor of J. G. Vos, gives more insight about him. See the preface and the last chapter, 'Bibliography of the writings of J.G. Vos' in *The Book of Books: Essays on the Scriptures in Honor of Johannes G. Vos* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co, 1978). The "Blue Banner" website also provides the most updated biography (<http://bluebanner.org/about>, accessed January 15, 2017).

²⁴ Thompson, *Sketches of the Ministers*, 343.

²⁵ For the life of Geerhardus Vos, the recent publication *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* has an 82-page biography of Vos. Catherine Vos, in her very last years, joined a local congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America in Santa Ana, California. This denomination, also called the Covenanter church, was where Johannes Geerhardus Vos was ordained and sent to Manchuria as a missionary. The author of *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* also mentioned (p60) that "The family (of Vos) worshiped in a Covenanter church, no doubt because of its proximity and the fact that Johannes, their oldest son, had been ordained a missionary for the RPCNA to Manchuria." Catherine Vos died in Santa Ana, California in 1937 and Geerhardus Vos died in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1949.

First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Princeton. J.G. professed his faith in Christ on February 3, 1917, just one day before his fourteenth birthday.²⁶ Young J. G. Vos, who had grown up in Philadelphia, went to Grand Rapids to study at Calvin College. After two years, he returned to New Jersey to finish up his college education at Princeton University. While at Princeton, he became a member of Phi Beta Kappa, a collegiate honor society.²⁷

After college, Vos entered Princeton Seminary where his father was still teaching as a professor of Biblical Theology. There he “learned to understand and to love Calvinism, the Reformed Faith.”²⁸ Much like Hunt, Vos also appreciated and became attached to the Reformed Faith and saw that it is “the purest and most consistent form of Christianity.”²⁹ He confessed that “it became the great aim of my life to propagate the Christian religion in this its most pure and consistent form.”³⁰ However, due to concerns over the decline of his denomination while he considered future ministry, he decided to join the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.³¹ In his personal testimony about this decision, Vos wrote that

I had made up my mind that I wanted to become a foreign missionary. With this in view I entered into correspondence with the candidate department of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. To my astonishment my love for Calvinism was regarded as a liability instead of an asset. One candidate secretary wrote me that Calvinism might be all right for the intellectual framework, but for a persons real faith, something better would be needed.³²

Not only because of changes in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A, but also because of his disappointment with the Board of Foreign Missions of the denomination, he came to the RPCNA and became a student under care in 1926 when he was a sophomore at Princeton Seminary.

In addition, in the book of the *Sketches of the Ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian of North America from 1888 to 1930*, Owen Thompson enumerated four reasons for why J. G. Vos changed to the RPCNA. First, he was convinced about Scriptural worship, particularly Psalmody; the final reason given was his conviction about Calvinistic theology and the Reformed view of life. The second and third reasons prove particularly noteworthy, in particular, in regard to covenanting. He said in the second reason, “I wished to serve in a Church that excluded members of oath-bound societies from its communion.” And in the third, he noted, “I wished to serve in a Church that stood for maintaining strict discipline over its members.”³³ Thus, Vos joined the RPCNA, which identifies in its theology and history as the Covenanter descendent of

²⁶ Vos and Dennison, *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 42–43.

²⁷ Vos, “Why I left the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and Joined the Reformed Presbyterian or Covenantan Church,” 1. Retrieved from Reformed Presbyterian Church Archives, Pittsburgh.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ Thompson, *Sketches of the Ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America from 1888 to 1930*, 344-345.

the Scottish Covenanters. This decision provides a significant and meaningful connection point between Korean Covenanters and J. G. Vos.

The RPCNA had begun to send their own missionaries to the southern part of China in 1895. Beginning in 1923, with the hope of establishing self-governing and self-propagating Chinese congregations, the southern China mission decided to give more responsibility to the indigenous Chinese church. In addition, the RPCNA mission board was looking for another new mission field. Between two potential fields, Northern Japan and Manchuria, the decision was made to send their missionaries to Manchuria, China.³⁴ Vos volunteered, feeling “strongly the Lord’s leading to volunteer for the proposed new mission field in Manchuria.”³⁵ Along with three other RP missionaries, Vos sailed to East Asia in October 1930. They recognized North Manchuria as a mission field of the “Covenanter Church” and their goal of mission work was to be opened with Tsitsihar, Northern Manchuria and possibly Harbin as centers.³⁶ Vos stayed in Peiping for a year to study Chinese and came to Manchuria in the summer of 1931 to serve Chinese people for his next 10 years of ministry.³⁷ Within that time, like Hunt, Vos spent his one-year furlough at Westminster Theological Seminary to complete his ThM studies in 1937-1938.³⁸ After that, he returned to the city of Yingkou (營口), located in the southwest of Manchuria, and served a Bible school named Newchang Bible College until 1941.³⁹

Vos and Hunt: Friends and Co-Laborers

Both Bruce Hunt and J. G. Vos were born in the same year of 1903 – Hunt on January 4, Vos on February 4. Both were sons of ministers of the church – Hunt had a missionary father, and Vos’s father was a seminary professor. They both were raised in Presbyterian homes and churches (PCUSA). And there is a possibility that they were attending the same church at some point, the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton (later Nassau Presbyterian Church), or at least that they

³⁴ Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, *Minutes of the Synod* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1929), 85-86; Smith, *Covenanter Ministers, 1930-1963, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, 300-302.

³⁵ Smith, *Covenanter Ministers, 1930-1963, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, 217.

³⁶ RPCNA Minutes of Synod recorded, “First, that our Foreign Mission Board recognize North Manchuria as a mission field of the Covenanter Church. Second, that mission work be opened with Tsitsihar and possibly Harbin as centers, as soon as workers now studying have sufficient knowledge of the language, and that areas farther north be invaded as soon as possible.” Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, *Minutes of the Synod* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1931), 54. To look at the early mission (up to 1936) of Covenanters in Manchuria, see Johannes G. Vos, *Our Mission in Manchuria* (Pittsburgh: Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Board of Foreign Missions, 1936).

³⁷ Smith, *Covenanter Ministers, 1930-1963, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, 217 & 300-301.

³⁸ His ThM thesis was published with the title, *The Scottish Covenanters: Their Origins, History, and Distinctive Doctrines* (Edinburgh: Blue Banner Productions, 1998).

³⁹ The port city of Yingkou is also related to Korean churches in general. Interestingly, even before the first official missionary from America arrived in Korea in 1884, there were Bibles translated into Korean and baptized people in Korea. In 1878, a significant year for Korean Christians, the first baptism took place, involving four Korean persons, and they began to translate the Chinese Bible into Korean. This happened in the city of Yingkou, Manchuria, where Vos served at Newchang Bible College. The name “Newchang” is an old name for Yingkou.

had some common connections through the church.⁴⁰ However, their friendship might have begun in earnest at Princeton Theological Seminary. As stated in the previous section, they graduated from Princeton in 1928. In a class of 44 students, they both graduated with a Bachelor of Theology degree. With the same denominational background and similar doctrinal positions, it is hard to deny that Hunt and Vos would have known each other and spent time together.⁴¹

With some assumptions granted, it is plain enough that Hunt and Vos had shared their missionary zeal for the Far East. Hunt said, “I knew also of the wider overseas fields where there were so many who had not heard the gospel. I found that fewer of my seminary class-mates were thinking of these, to me, more needy fields than that of service in their home country.”⁴² Vos’s name was not mentioned, so it is not clear whether or not they often talked about mission work, but it is certain that Vos was already committed to doing mission work abroad during the time of Princeton Seminary.⁴³ Among a small student body at Princeton, it would be a reasonable assumption that Hunt’s experience and vision to go overseas were an influence on Vos since he also considered the same needs in the world.⁴⁴ Interestingly, in their last year at Princeton, a

⁴⁰ As stated above, the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton was Vos’s home church where he was baptized, grew up, and was converted. Vos, at some point in his early seminary years, transferred his membership to the Second Presbyterian Church (later Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church) from the First Presbyterian Church. It was before he joined the Third Reformed Presbyterian church of Philadelphia in 1926. Hunt began to attend the First Presbyterian Church in 1923. The fact that Catherine Vos, J. G. Vos’s mother, had been a long-time member of First Presbyterian church from 1896 to 1937 also showed their personal connection. Catherine Vos joined the RP Church in Santa Ana in 1937; Geerhardus stayed in the PCUSA until his death. Also see, Vos and Dennison, *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 42-43 and 59-60.

⁴¹ *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 22, no. 1 (1928): 2-3; In terms of their theological positions, both had huge concerns about the theological changes at Princeton related to the downfall of the PCUSA. Following are expressions about it from each of them. Vos stated, “Princeton Seminary was at that very time being taken apart and put together again by the modernistic wing of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. ... I saw this going on while I was there ... It soon became evident that those with a zeal for the orthodox faith were not too welcome, while those with any liberal leanings, and those regarded as ‘co-operative’ were soon given appointments.” Vos, “Why I Left”, 2. Hunt also mentioned the downfall of the denomination, saying “The struggle was reflected in friction among the Directors and Trustees, among members of the faculty and even among the students themselves. At this time (1924), the so-called Auburn Affirmation was signed by 1,200 ministers of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Its language implied that belief in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and the virgin birth, miracles, substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection of our Saviour were possible alternative theories, not essential to Christian faith. This controversy caused me to search the Word more carefully and helped to deepen and confirm my faith.” Hunt, “Bruce Hunt: Missionary to Korea,” 21-22.

⁴² Hunt, “Bruce Hunt: Missionary to Korea,” 23.

⁴³ As stated above in the section on the life of Vos, he was already committed to the foreign mission field before his second year at Princeton Seminary.

⁴⁴ In 1928, there were a total seventy-four graduating students at Princeton. Forty-four students, including Hunt and Vos, were conferred the degree of Bachelor of Theology, twenty-eight in Master of Theology and two in diploma of the seminary. The Princeton Seminary Bulletin reported about the plans of those students after their graduation. Among forty-eight students, Hunt and Francis Kinsler were described as “foreign missions, Korea,” I. W. Underhill “Foreign missions, West Africa,” and Paul Woolley, “Traveling Secretary, League of Evangelical Students for a year; then foreign missions, China.” It means that there were not many students planning to be foreign missionaries after seminary training beside those three men, as Hunt stated. Otherwise, Vos was indicated “not yet settled” even though he was

special lecture series was held about Korea and mission to Korea by Rev. George Shannon MacCune, a former missionary to Korea. The title of this course of five lectures was “*Chosen: The Wonder-Working Christ of the Near East Working Wonders in the Far East.*”⁴⁵ It might not be too much of a conjecture to imagine that these two young men who had great passion for foreign missions sat under the same lectures in the same classroom and dreamed of ministering to God’s people around the world.

It is true that there are not many resources to show their personal relationship while they were on the mission field — or before or after. There is no record of correspondence between the two of them. However, there is a substantial clue that hints at their friendship. In a letter dated July 9, 1934, from J. G. Vos to Dr. Scott, written from Sorai Beach, near In-Cheon, Korea, he made reference to Hunt. “We are sharing a tiny cottage with a Seminary classmate of mine who is a missionary in Korea. They have a little girl, eight months old, so we have quite a family here. There is a wonderful beach so we hope to be able to do some swimming before long.”⁴⁶ The crossover references also show that Hunt married Katharine on September 27, 1932, and their first daughter was born in the following year in Chung-Ju, Korea.⁴⁷ It is not too surprising that the two families got together for their vacation in Korea.⁴⁸

In looking at their work on the mission field, it seems their labors likely stemmed from their friendship and relationship as ministers. There are two sources that show their cooperative work for the church of Christ in Manchuria. The first resource in which to find their cooperative work is Hunt’s personal letter written and sent to his parents in 1939, when he was still in Manchuria and the persecution by the Japanese was getting severe. In that letter, Hunt wrote,

Mr. McCameron would like very much to see the school reopened and continued under their growth of americans and desired that in the same way as the Covenanters had loaned Mr. Vos, we should loan Mr. Andrews and the Independent Board’s Mr. Dieffenbacher as a teacher for this institution. I have known and rejoiced of Yingkou school for quite a few years and believe that the addition of Mr. Vos to the faculty had made it even stronger than before. I would like to see such a testimony continued. At present, the school is closed but if it could be reopened as Mr. McCameron hopes and Messers. Vos, Andrews and Dieffenbacher are working for. I still wonder if we as a mission or church should assume any responsibility in the matter.⁴⁹

going to enter the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. See, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 22, no. 1 (1928): 2-3.

⁴⁵ *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 22, no. 1 (1928): 2-3.

⁴⁶ J. G. Vos, personal letter to Dr. Scott, Korea, July 9, 1934, Retrieved from Reformed Presbyterian Church Archives, Pittsburgh. In the RPCNA magazine, *The Covenanter Witness*, there is also a reference that the Vos family expected to go to Korea for a summer vacation. *The Covenanter Witness* 13, no.4 (1934): 57.

⁴⁷ Hunt, “Bruce Hunt: Missionary to Korea,” 23-24. Charles G. Dennison and Orthodox Presbyterian Church, eds., *Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936-1986* (Philadelphia, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 339.

⁴⁸ Another classmate, Francis Kinsler, who also served in Korean beginning in 1930, had a son as his first child.

⁴⁹ Bruce F. Hunt, personal letter to his parents, 1939, Retrieved from Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA.

The Yingkou school was Newchang Bible seminary, where Vos served as a teacher and then principal after his return to Manchuria in 1938. Bruce Hunt also recognized this school and recommended that the Independent Board of Foreign Mission send men to this institute, so that the two Reformed denominations might work together. Despite the school in Yingkou being 470 miles away from Harbin, where Hunt and Vos's Covenanter missionary colleagues worked, Hunt and Vos realized what they needed to do for the mission and thus, worked together.⁵⁰

The second resource that establishes a co-laboring relationship between Hunt and Vos is Hunt's interview about his mission in Manchuria. Hunt's interviewer asked about the difficulty of entering Manchuria because of the hostility of the government regarding shrine worship. In his answer, Hunt mentioned Vos and the statement they drew up together against the hostility of the Japan Empire toward Christians. Hunt said,

But our little group had voted to go ... we got through ...and we praise the Lord that we were allowed into the country. Well, now, later, we did ... several missionaries, Jack. Voss [sic], Dr. Voss [sic] at Geneva College, who's retired now, but he and others, we drew up a statement for the government, telling them that we believed their law was wrong. Now, I'm not sure at that time ... I think when the missionaries went out they hadn't yet formed the law. When we were there, they were forming the law on the control of religions, and we wrote a statement declaring that we believed that law was wrong, and we couldn't submit to it, but they didn't put us out of the country. We tried to make a clear stand on our position.⁵¹

The statement Hunt and Vos drew up, along with others, could not be found in the present author's research. Yet, as Hunt said, the contents of the statement were regarding the law or regulation of the government. As this interview reveals, Hunt and Vos stood together against the government which was in opposition to biblical teachings and the church. They held the same position and acted together regarding this matter.

Having examined the life of these two men and their relationship, the next sections will investigate the Korean Covenanters, their opponents, and their covenanting statements.⁵²

⁵⁰ According to the Foreign Mission Board of the RPCNA during their synod meeting in 1941, it seemed that Mr. Vos traveled to Yingkou and Tsitsihar near Harbin quite often to lead the church ministry where mainly two female RP missionaries worked. It says, "How Miss Huston and Miss McCracken carried such a full program is surprising. Mr. Martin and Mr. Vos conducted communions, performed baptisms, adjudicated cases of discipline, and carried responsibility for the oversight of the growing church. When Mr. Martin left the field, Synod's commission was dissolved." *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1941 Minutes of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh, PA, The Synod, 1941), 35.

⁵¹ Note that Jack was a nickname that J.G. went by with many of his friends. In the transcript provided by Wheaton College, it seems they struggled to identify who Hunt referred to in this statement. They typed his name as "Jack Voss [?] Dr. Voss [?] at Geneva College" Bruce F. Hunt, interview by Robert Shuster, 1980, retrieved from Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. (<http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/trans/104t04.htm> accessed January 20, 2017). For the audio, see <https://media.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Rb5x9Y2Z/view>.

⁵² Regarding their relationship, in another place, it seems they recognized the ministry of on another. Hunt talked about an organization and their contribution to the needy of Korean Christians. "One of the pressing needs of the church in this area (Korea) is for good evangelical and Reformed literature. This led to the formation of the Reformation Translation Fellowship which has been responsible for the translation

Covenanting in Manchuria in the Twentieth Century

Against the False Worship Forced by the Japanese Empire

It will help the understanding of the situation to first gain understanding of Shinto worship and the imminent situation in the 1930s in Korea and Manchuria. As a Korean church historian wrote, “One of the worst persecutions of Korean Christianity was related to the enforced Shinto shrine worship and the subsequent persecution of the churches for their disobedience.”⁵³ Shinto shrines or *Jinjas*, places to perform Shinto worship, were erected across the whole Korea peninsula.⁵⁴ So, what is the definition of Shinto and its worship? Hunt explained that “the word *Shinto* means ‘the way of the god’ or ‘the way of the gods.’” He continues to say,

The ceremonies are usually conducted at a *Jinja*, which means a ‘spirit house.’ Shinto priests often officiated even at ‘patriotic Shinto’ [as opposed to ‘religious Shinto’] ceremonies, calling spirits, and addressing words of comfort or prayers of adoration or thanksgiving and petition to them.⁵⁵

From the early 1930s, Japan began forcing Korean Christians to participate in Shinto worship and insisted that this was not so much a religious act, but an act of patriotism. The principle was as follows: “A Japanese out of duty as a citizen must honor the ancestors of the emperor. This cannot be regarded as a religion. It is a ritual. It is the ceremony of gratitude to ancestors.”⁵⁶ They tried to distinguish between “state Shinto” as non-religious patriotism and “religious Shinto.”⁵⁷ Hunt explained that both western missionaries and Korean Christians were not initially concerned about the requirement because this distinction was being made. Later, however, people increasingly recognized that this is “the worship of deified spirits at the shrines,” and “spirits are being worshiped in these ceremonies.”⁵⁸ Vos also raised his voice to say, “It (Shinto worship) is an extreme form of idolatry which robs the true God of the honor

of several of the best known Reformed books, as well as other literature, into Chinese. Most of the educated people in Korea can read Chinese.” Bruce F. Hunt, *For a Testimony* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), Fourth plate. Reformation Translation Fellowship is “One of J. G. Vos’s important contributions to 20th century Christianity.” Vos and Dr. Charles Chao founded this organization and J. G. Vos continued to serve and assist their work during his professorship and retirement years. (<http://bluebanner.org/about> accessed January 15, 2017).

⁵³ Sang Gyoo Lee, “The Church in Korea: Persecution and Subsequent Growth,” *Unio cum Christo* 1 no.1-2 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary): 282.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 282. In 1935, There were 322 shrines; at the time of the Korean’s independent in 1945, the number had reached 1,141. Those numbers are originally adopted from “*Bulletin of Chosen, 1925-1945* (n.p.: Office of Chosen Governor General, 1945).”

⁵⁵ Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 104. Compare Johannes G. Vos, *A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965) 53-61. In a study of world religions, Vos gives a chapter to “*Shinto, the Deification of Japan.*”

⁵⁶ John T. Kim, *Church Growth and Religious Culture in Korea* (Chicago, Ill: Calvin Institute of World Missions, 1996), 113–114. The citation is originally from Daniel Clarence Holtom, *The National Faith of Japan: A Study in Modern Shinto* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938), 69.

⁵⁷ Vos, *A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World*, 57.

⁵⁸ Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 104.

which is His alone.”⁵⁹ Whether Christians, in public or private, should perform “the ceremonies of bowing reverently to the Emperor’s portrait and of bowing reverently in the direction of the imperial palace” was a critical issue that faced the church.⁶⁰ Imperial Japan forced the issue aggressively and sought to control the Christians.⁶¹ The cost was great if people or organizations refused to take part in Shrine worship. Individuals were denounced as unpatriotic and suffered many disadvantages — like losing their jobs or getting expelled from school. Many were put in prison. Pastors were either forced to resign or were ejected from their churches, and churches and Christian institutions were forced to close.⁶² The oppression of Christians was becoming increasingly harsh as World War II intensified. Hunt depicted the situation during that time in this graphic description:

The penalties for non-attendance or opposition to Shinto ceremonies were of varying degrees. In a police state, where almost everything one does depends on permits, there were countless ways in which public officials could slow down, and make almost ineffective, anything attempted by one who was in their “black books” for failing to cooperate in Shinto ceremonies. In the war years of rationing, one’s stomach was touched and life itself threatened by the mere refusal of a ration card to a “non-cooperator.” Children were beaten or expelled from school and even imprisoned for refusing to bow at shrines ... Slapping and kicking were almost the routine treatment for Koreans being interrogated by the police. Prison diets were intended to barely sustain life. Many were tortured and beaten into insensibility. Heatless cells caused much suffering. Lice, fleas, and bedbugs were the prisoners’ constant companions ... jailers’ sadistic delight in making life miserable for prisoners all combined to cause one to prefer a quick martyr’s death to the prolonged living death, no less a martyr’s, which was the daily experience of those who survived.⁶³

Among the churches, there were not only non-conformists, but also conformists, and the conflicts between them increased. In 1938, the Japanese government finally forced the biggest denomination, the Korean Presbyterian Church, to stand on their side. At the 27th General Assembly in September 1938, the church sustained a motion affirming that “obeisance at the Shinto shrines is not a religious act and is not in conflict with Christian teaching and should be performed as a matter of first importance thus manifesting patriotic zeal.”⁶⁴ This decision immediately brought vocal and written protests, including those from Bruce Hunt. But the final result was not in favor of Hunt. He was expelled from his Korean presbytery due to his refusal to cooperate with the civil magistrate’s efforts to control the church. Vos echoed Hunt’s stand when he insisted that “for the civil magistrate to control religion is an infringement of the people’s religious liberty and a usurpation of Christ’s headship over the church.”⁶⁵ The decision of the

⁵⁹ Vos, *A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World*, 58.

⁶⁰ Johannes G. Vos, “Christian Missions and the Civil Magistrate in the Far East,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, no. 3 (1940): 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Sang Gyoo Lee, “The Church in Korea”, 282 and Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 105-107.

⁶³ Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 107.

⁶⁴ Sang Gyoo Lee, “The Church in Korea”, 282-283. The citation is from Vos, “Christian Missions and the Civil Magistrate in the Far East,” 7-8.

⁶⁵ Vos, “Christian Missions and the Civil Magistrate in the Far East,” 18.

General Assembly was not acceptable to Hunt and Vos, and the sequence of these events launched the birth of the Korean Covenanters in Manchuria.

Against the False Law Forced by the Japanese Empire

Hunt had started his mission work in Harbin, Manchuria in 1936 to serve Korean people in various locations in the area. As Dr. Ung Kyu Pak described, Koreans in Manchuria were a “diaspora.”⁶⁶ They were scattered people who sought land to begin their new life after the Japanese plundered their land and property even before the annexations of 1910 and the following years. There were approximately one million Koreans and thirty million Chinese in Manchuria in the 1930s.⁶⁷ Based on Pak’s research, the Koreans were not welcomed by either the Japanese polices or the Chinese residents. For instance, five Korean churches were torched by bandits in 1935. In terms of Christianity, Korean Christians in Manchuria, then occupied by Japan, were persuaded by Japan’s civil government and practiced Shinto worship without any serious opposition.⁶⁸ Hunt wanted to come to Manchuria and serve the diaspora there. It seems that his ministry began with small meetings, such as Korean worship, and expanded greatly as time went on.⁶⁹

In 1938, after Hunt’s three years of service to Korean Christians, Hunt and his Korean brothers and sisters were confronting difficulties due to their participation in the anti-Shinto shrine worship movement. As stated in the previous chapter, Hunt was expelled by his presbytery in September. In the same month, Manchukuo, a puppet state created by the Japanese in Manchuria, issued the “*Temporary Ordinance for the Control of Religious Temples and Preachers.*” This law allowed that

The civil magistrate may suspend from ecclesiastical office a preacher who opposes local customs, and may cancel a particular church's permission to exist, either because in the magistrate's judgment the existence of such church is contrary to the public welfare, ‘or for other reasons.’⁷⁰

This ordinance recalled the situations faced by 17th-century Scottish Covenanters. In considering the writings of J.G. Vos, one sees how his perspective was colored by his experience in Manchuria. In the preface of *The Scottish Covenanters*, written right after his return to Manchuria in 1939, he said, “Real religious liberty is passing away, and the counterfeit, Erastian toleration, is taking its place. In the face of the present situation, the history of Scottish Covenanters is both illuminating and encouraging.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Pak, “The Significance of Bruce F. Hunt’s Ministry,” 118.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 118-121.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 121.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 122-123. When Hunt left in Manchuria in 1941, he witnessed that there were 500 covenanted members and the total average attendance of 800 people was spread over 25 little groups or churches under three lay-evangelists.

⁷⁰ Vos, “Christian Missions and the Civil Magistrate in the Far East,” 13.

⁷¹ Vos, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 5. In 1940, Vos wrote: “True religious liberty necessarily includes three elements: (1) freedom of thought and belief; (2) freedom of profession and practice, including freedom to propagate one’s religion among the adherents of other faiths; and (3) freedom to abstain from contrary

In thinking of this analysis in reference to Hunt's situation, it must be realized that a man standing against this Japanese order risked losing his ministry. Most of the foreign missionaries and their denominations wanted to avoid troubles with civil rulers instead of standing against those who forced this unbiblical worship. Vos presented surprising statistics that showed how rarely the church rejected the claims of the Japanese government that they had authority in the religious sphere. He states,

When these claims of the Japanese to supremacy in the sphere of religion came up, about 1938 and in the following years, the missionary body in Manchuria (with which I am best acquainted) was immediately divided on the question of compliance with the demands that the churches apply for *permits to exist*. Perhaps 4 or 5% of the missionaries said, "It is wrong in principle," and refused to sign up or comply with the law in any way. The other 95% were also divided among themselves ... When the deadline came, about 95% of the churches, missionaries and native Christian leaders complied, signed up, and accepted government licenses issued by the Japanese officially "permitting" them to exist and carry on religious work. About 5% or so refused, and hence were regarded by the Japanese as lawbreakers, and, indeed, actually *non-existent* churches, because not licensed by the government. Among those that refused were the Orthodox Presbyterians, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, the Covenanters, and (for a time) the American Southern Baptists and Canadian Regular Baptists.⁷²

One of the 4 or 5 percent of the missionaries saying "it is wrong in principle" was Hunt. He understood the underlying outcomes of this law. Without permission from the government, people could not be gathered, ministers could not preach, and churches could not hold communion. However, in his later interview, Hunt witnessed that "we had to meet in certain formal places, and we said, 'Jesus has told us to go and preach.' We have that authority. We do not believe that we should ask a government, 'May we preach, may we meet?'"⁷³ Interestingly enough, as Hunt publicly opposed the Japanese government's attempt to control the church and force Shinto worship on Christians, more of the people who fled Korea and were from the broken Korean Presbyterian Church came to him and wanted to join the church in Manchuria. Given this situation, Hunt saw the need of making some "creedal pronouncement" for various opinions among Korean Christians in the matter of the biblical standard of membership, Shinto worship, and the problems with the "patriotic" requirements.⁷⁴

*A Presbyterian Covenant*⁷⁵

practices, not only in the sphere of religion in the strict sense, but in any sphere of life." Vos, "Christian Missions and the Civil Magistrate in the Far East," 2.

⁷² Huston Rose A, and Johannes G. Vos, *The Foreign Missions Conference of North America: A Review of its Fiftieth Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA: Evangelical Fellowship, 1944), 30–31. Related to this, the various responses by different denominational bodies in the matter of the shrine issue are presented in Pak's "The Significance of Bruce F. Hunt's Ministry," 105–115.

⁷³ Hunt, Interview by Robert Shuster, 1980.

⁷⁴ Hunt, "Korean Covenanters," 19.

⁷⁵ The story of producing *A Presbyterian Covenant* is relying on Hunt's "Korean Covenanters," 19–20, 37–40.

While Hunt was sensing the need to formulate a creedal pronouncement, God added church members daily to the Korean church.⁷⁶ Setting standards for receiving and disciplining members and for selection church leaders seemed necessary. In particular, the question raised among Korean Christians was framed in this way: “Could Christians who had not formally broken from the compromised church, but who might attend such meetings, be asked to lead?”⁷⁷

For the Chinese Covenanters under Vos, using the standards of church membership, such as covenanting, was mandatory, and its standards were higher than other churches in Manchuria. Their requirements for membership were: (1) complete separation from idolatry; (2) careful observance of the Lord’s Day; (3) evidence of regular church attendance; (4) if unmarried, a solemn promise never to marry an unbeliever; (5) if head of a family, evidence that family worship is held in the home daily. With these obligations, members were asked to profess faith in the doctrines of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.⁷⁸ While this standard provided a good guide for the Korean church, Korean Christians also needed their own unique document reflecting their circumstance and time.

In January 1940, a covenanting statement called *A Presbyterian Covenant* was produced. Male and female male and female Korean lay ministers were involved in producing this document. These lay ministers would include evangelists or women who were non-ordained ministers but worked for and with missionaries. The people gathered at Hunt’s house where they fasted, prayed, discussed issues, and searched for light from the Scriptures on the problem of the requirements of the Japanese government. Finally, after a couple of days, they formulated a statement of covenant based on the first rough draft which Hunt drew up.⁷⁹ According to Hunt, the statement points out “the biblical teaching on shrine worship and the necessity of breaking completely from those who condoned idolatry.”⁸⁰ After they produced the covenant statement, no one who did not consent to this covenant as their own could lead their worship or be employed by the church. Also, non-subscribers of this covenant could not come before the Lord’s Supper or present themselves or their children for baptism. Hunt himself established his pastoral relationship depending on the matter of subscribing to the covenant. Regarding this covenant, *The Independent Board Bulletin* of 1942 reported that “In Manchuria a Covenant was drawn up and agreed to by many individuals binding themselves to refuse obeisance as idolatry and to refuse registration because only god, not the State, is the Head of Church.” The bulletin continued to report a significant fact as related to this paper: “The Covenanters, The Orthodox Presbyterian and The Independent Board of Missions, led in this effort and supported it.”⁸¹ This reveals, once again, that the RPCNA (Covenanter) missionaries, including J.G. Vos, contributed to the producing and exercising of *A Presbyterian Covenant*.

⁷⁶ Hunt, “Korean Covenanters,” 19.

⁷⁷ Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 116.

⁷⁸ Vos, *Our Mission in Manchuria*, 11. Vos said, “These standards are distinctly higher than those of most churches in Manchuria, and it has been found very difficult to maintain them; but it is better to hold high standards and build solidly than to have a rapid growth with an unconverted, worldly membership.”

⁷⁹ Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 117. Compare to Hunt, “Korean Covenanters,” 19.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 117–118.

⁸¹ Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, *The Independent Board Bulletin*. (October 1942) cited from Pak, “The Significance of Bruce F. Hunt’s Ministry,” 127.

The next step in this paper will be to analyze the covenant statement made by the Korean Covenanters. There are a total of seven statements or phrases in this declaration, along with the introduction and conclusion. *A Presbyterian Covenant* also includes a total of 82 Scripture proof texts: 16 texts for the first statement, 5 for the second statement, 9 for the third statement, 32 for the fourth statement, 9 for the fifth statement, 6 for the sixth statement, and 5 for the seventh statement. The introduction begins with concern about the difficulty of the current church in Korea due to apostasy and confusion in discipline. Further, it encourages solidarity among non-conformists. Then, seven statements are each introduced with the following words: “We believe the following to be Scriptural teaching on the sin of idolatry which we must flee from.”

The length of each statement varies. The shortest statement, the second, has only one sentence with 44 words; the longest, the last statement, consists of 139 words. The statements emphasize the following subjects:

1. The Christian’s view on the dead
2. Forbidding the inquiring of, seeking, or calling up of the dead
3. Forbidding the putting of trust, glory, and power in any man except the God-Man Jesus Christ
4. Forbidding the serving of any other gods
5. Forbidding the worship of the likeness of any creature
6. Forbidding the building of temples for the worship of any other god
7. Guidelines for discipline in the case of those engaging in idolatry.

As can be seen, all the statements are related to false worship, with a view to the issues pertaining to Shinto worship. The lesson from the statements in their context is that Shinto ceremonies—including “a god house, priesthood, prayer, offerings and a very real recognition of gods and spirits”—should be judged and not participated in by Christians who believe God’s command, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)”⁸² In conclusion, the undersigned were to declare and affirm what they believe about church government, the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, and the Westminster Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as the system of doctrine in accordance with the Scriptures. *A Presbyterian Covenant* concludes with the language of declaration or covenant, “By this subscription we do receive, believe, and do covenant before God, by His help, to keep, preach, and defend them.”⁸³

It must be remembered that there were five hundred baptized members and, on average, eight hundred in attendance at worship every Lord’s day among the twenty-five groups in Manchuria that subscribed to this covenant.⁸⁴ Thus, the signers of the covenant represented a broad base of believers. Nonetheless, much suffering followed the signing of the covenant. Several writers of this covenant and more than seventy subscribers were imprisoned; Hunt was one of them. *A Presbyterian Covenant*, and the organization of groups based on this covenant, became a part of

⁸² Vos, *A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World*, 58–59.

⁸³ Hunt, “Korean Covenanters,” 40.

⁸⁴ Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 118.

the charges against them. For Hunt, this document became “one of the pieces of evidence” presented in the court against him.⁸⁵

Significance and Implications of the Covenant

In the last section of this paper, readers will see significant implications to be found in the covenanting by Korean Christians in Manchuria.

First, *A Presbyterian Covenant* asserted biblical guidelines for good and evil in Christian practice. This covenant was a doctrinal statement; the writers of the covenant hoped that “the open doctrinal statement of the covenant clarified issues in the minds of our Christians.”⁸⁶

Second, the covenant helped the Christians who entered into this covenant “spiritually and mentally to withstand their enemies.”⁸⁷ Not only for the direction of biblical teachings but also for the direction of the life of the church, “the practice of signing covenants or bands” led to their mutual protection and the defense of Protestantism in the midst of such persecution.⁸⁸

Third, the covenant showed the relationship between the church and the state by standing against forced Shinto worship. As Vos expressed in his book *The Scottish Covenanters*, the church has “independence and intrinsic powers, otherwise the state by implication does not have unlimited functions and authority.”⁸⁹

Fourth, there is one important discrepancy to address regarding the use of the Westminster Confession of Faith in Korea. Beginning with the first national presbytery of the Korean Presbyterian Church at its organization on September 17, 1907, the Korean Presbyterian Church did not adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger Catechism. Instead, it adopted the so-called Twelve Articles derived from the Indian Free Presbyterian Church along with only the Westminster Shorter Catechism.⁹⁰ The first Korean Presbyterian denomination that officially adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith was *Haptong*, in 1963.⁹¹ However, as this study has revealed, it is inaccurate to say that the Westminster Confession of Faith was not adopted anywhere in Korea until 1963. As has been seen, the Korean Covenanters had already adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1941.

Fifth, the covenant, holding to the Westminster Confession as the reformed heritage, became the heritage for the confession of faith of the Korean Church. Several Korean church historians and theologians take a critical view of the fact that the Korean church has not yet created her

⁸⁵ Hunt, “Korean Covenanters,” 19.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Vos, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 184–185.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁰ Chi Mo Hong, “The Influence of the Westminster Confession on the Korean Presbyterian Church” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan and W. Duncan Rankin (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 2: 399–402.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 406.

own creeds of faith, theology, and Christian culture. The production of *A Presbyterian Covenant* by the Korean Covenanters offers a significant response to that concern.⁹²

Lastly, the covenant not only influenced Korean Christians in Manchuria but also those who were in Korea. The story of these Covenanters and their boldness against Shinto worship and the Japanese government encouraged Korean Christians in other places as well.⁹³ This was also the intention of Hunt and the writers of this covenant. Hunt wrote,

We wish that it had had a chance to be presented to Christians all over Korea and Japan; if the churches in China must also face these issues, we feel that some such covenant—which would bring the matter before every individual rather than leave it only to church courts and officers to decide—would greatly strengthen the church. “For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war? (1 Cor. 14:8)”⁹⁴

Conclusion

The exercise of covenanting from the Scriptures and church history, a deeper study on Shintoism, understanding the distinction between the Church and the State, and the comparison of Korean Covenanters and Scottish Covenanters would be important areas for further study. This paper has focused less on the Korean Covenanters themselves and more on exploring the historical background of the Korean Covenanters under two leading figures of the Covenanter churches in Manchuria. The fact that the accessible primary resources for the Korean Covenanters are limited is one reason for the focus taken. Nevertheless, observing their history and the story of their faith in Christ should challenge Christians living in the twenty-first century, especially Christians in Korea.

The world in its economy, science, modern philosophy, and theology has changed. Spiritual warfare is ubiquitous in social and political issues. However, the Word of God, which endures forever, remains the only rule to direct all human beings in how they glorify and enjoy God in faith and life.⁹⁵ With conviction of the truth and power of the Word of God, many faithful Christians have fought against what they could not and should not obey; instead they have faithfully followed the path of Scripture. The Korean Covenanters, along with Bruce Hunt and J. G. Vos, are examples of such unwavering faith as they stood against the persecuting government. The reasons for persecution are different from time to time, and churches and Christians in the present day face another form of persecution as they speak out in truth against homosexuality, abortion, militant Islam, and many other issues common around the world. If necessary and where appropriate, like the Korean Covenanters before them, Christians should gladly engage in covenanting, “confessing Christ and His Lordship” in a particular cultural context.⁹⁶

⁹² Pak, “The Significance of Bruce F. Hunt’s Ministry,” 130–131.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 131–135. Hunt stated that this covenant was later used by other groups throughout Manchuria and Korea. At his later trip to the southern tip of Korea in 1946, he also found this covenant in use in Pusan. See Blair and Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, 118.

⁹⁴ Hunt, “Korean Covenanters,” 19.

⁹⁵ See the answer of Westminster Shorter Catechism question 2 and 1 Peter 1:24.

⁹⁶ Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, A-69.