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Korean church slams activist's northern incursion

by UCA News



A screenshot of an interview with Robert Park uploaded on YouTube

SEOUL -- South Korean Church leaders have condemned US Christian activist Robert Park's incursion into North Korea, saying it will not help religious freedom in the country and may do more harm than good.

Park, a Protestant Korean-American, crossed the border on Christmas Eve with a Bible in his hand, shouting: "I brought God's love! God loves you!" according to local media.

He was immediately arrested.

"The Gospel shouldn't be presented aggressively. It doesn't help to increase religious freedom," Reverend Kim Tae-hyon, director of the Church and Ecumenical Relationship Department of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), told UCA News.

The North Korean government may see Park's actions as politically motivated and provocative, he added.

Father Raphael Seo Jong-yeob, executive secretary of the Korean Bishops' Committee for the

Reconciliation of the Korean People, agreed the action was counter-productive.

"You shouldn't talk about, or recklessly throw questions on human rights in someone else's country because it will hurt the feelings of the people," he said.

Park's act will just "aggravate the North's hostility toward the South and the rest of the world," and be an impediment toward the reunification of the two Koreas, he added.

Catholic Human Rights Committee chairperson Regina Pyon Yeon-shik also condemned Park's actions.

"Trying to highlight human rights issues by committing such a fanatical act won't help improve the situation there," she said.

Reverend Lee Soo-bong, secretary general of the Christian Mission for North Korea, however, defended Park.

"Nobody knows what results his unexpected act may produce. His act could be another chance to evangelize North Korea if we see it positively," the Presbyterian pastor said.

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He noted that some mission groups in South Korean Protestant churches, at great risk to their lives, are already handing bibles to North Koreans at the border between North Korea and China.

"I respect their efforts. On the other hand, there are many other groups focusing more on humanitarian aid for future mission work in North Korea."

Father Seo said that as far as he knows there are no Catholic missionaries working in the North.

Church sources say there are some 3,000 Catholics in North Korea. Changchung Church in Pyongyang is the only Catholic church there, but it has no resident priest or Religious working in it.

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