



Interview of Ted Ward by a Representative of a Korean Journal¹

KJ: Please tell me about your personal journey to be a Christian leader Who and what significantly influenced you?

My mother and father were Christians, and were very strong Christian leaders in the church. I was strongly influenced by them. In addition, our family had a very close affiliation with a woman who had retired from a mission career in China. She had come out of China in 1937 during the Nanking invasion by the Japanese. She was ill and quite old so she came to live with my family, and she became a great influence in my life. Thus just before my teenage years, I had direct contact with a person who had a great deal of involvement in the missioning of a part of Asia; still a problematic place for Christianity. It was like growing up with a mission consciousness. I am afraid that so many young Christians lack immediate contact with the mission outreach of the church. It produced in me a conviction that the outreach of the church is an extremely important matter.

If I am a Christian leader, it is not a matter of choice. I did not at any point decide that I should become a leader. Many people treat me as if I were a leader, not because of any appointment, decision, or action, but more in terms of just the accumulation of experiences, and the work of my career, and my involvement with the church. The connection between my university career and my experiences in the church is very close.

My career was first in music education. After teaching music in high school for a time, we went into graduate school, and into university faculty posts, first in music and then in educational research. The research grew into a career in international education and international advisement. I became a consultant to many organizations in the international field. I was a UNESCO consultant, and also with World Bank, USAID, Ford Foundation, and all this through my 30 years on faculty at Michigan State University. During that period, I was involved in contract work through the university in 63 countries. So the international work grew out of my career in education and educational research.

On the side, I was in direct contact with the world of the emerging churches and quite broadly with missions. My first assignments in Korea were back in the days when there was hardly anything in the city of Seoul as tall as the Blue House! And I have been back and forth to Seoul many times with the Ministry of Education and in various other agencies. As in other nations my attention was on Korea's planning of their higher education and adult learning programs.

Now today, the church has recognized the development of leadership as the main activity of missions. In many places the church is already planted by evangelization and is largely in the hands of a local body of believers. The role of missionaries is to help develop support systems. Well my whole career was building leadership development support systems. That competency and background has brought us to the point where today we engage in missions in that role. But this is a

¹ Transcribed from an interview of Ted Ward by a representative of an unknown Korean journal, February 1999

different way of looking at the question of becoming a Christian leader. It emerged out of a combination: professional background, skills, competencies, and the calling of God. But we never *planned* to do it this way.

KJ: You are recognized as a Christian educator who influenced many Christian leaders in America and many other countries. What was in your mind as you were educating them?

Throughout my career I have been extensively involved with international matters, matters of culture, and inter-cultural issues. I have done a great deal of work with students and leaders from many countries. Approximately one-fourth of my doctoral students have been from other countries. Many Koreans completed their Ph.Ds with me at Michigan State or at Trinity. At Michigan State University I was more involved with consultant work overseas and extensively with students from overseas. I would take American and international students to their countries and engage with them on project work. Encouraging leadership has been my purpose in the nations where we were working. So what do I think about when I do that? The main thing is to be careful not to create dependency. I want to encourage the capacity of people who can work with their own competencies and their own skills. I do not want to do things that will replace a skill that ought to be developed. Often we assume that the best way to help people is to do things for them. That pattern is generally called *colonialism*, and I try fervently to avoid that.

What else do I think about? I think about the fact that the sort of doctoral student with whom I am working is likely going to be a leader, and is going to have a great deal of responsibility. I want to encourage that person not to become arrogant or pompous, and too impressed by status. I think some Christian leaders make a terrible mistake when they become arrogant; they develop their own ego to such a point that they are self-centered. To me, leadership in the Scripture is a matter first of all, of being a *follower*. So the real issue is how well a person can follow Christ, and how thoroughly he or she is committed to being a follower of Christ, and able to carry out responsibilities with a humility that is Christ-like. The Apostle Paul says it in Philippians "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." Christ recognized himself in the place of God, being God; nevertheless he humbled himself, and took on the role of the servant." It seems to me that leadership in Christian ministries requires gentleness, patience, and humility. I am very disturbed when I find pastors who violate this principle, especially when I find my own students violating it. It is so crucial for leaders not to be tyrants.

KJ: What do you see as general problems in pastoral leadership in church settings? For example, in some countries, manipulation is very common . . .

When I speak to this issue, I am not thinking about churches in any particular country, or any particular region. I am just looking at some of the things that commonly happen, but I know that they commonly happen in many countries, including Korea and the United States. The tendency in human nature for Christians or non-Christians is that when any person becomes more powerful, gains more status, carries a more powerful authority, that person commonly becomes tempted to believe that this power is really serving God. But when you look closely, some are really serving themselves more often than God.

I am afraid this has become a serious problem because whether it is a large or small church, there is a presumption that since God uses people sometimes in dramatic ways to create large-scale ventures, whether it is a big evangelist who draws lots of people, or a big church that has many people coming

to it, *bigness* and *power* seem somehow to be acceptable or authorized because of the person's claim that this is what God wants. I am afraid that what we see in many such churches is a kind of deafness in the pastors, where they don't really listen well. They don't really want to hear, and therefore they cannot hear what people are saying and how people are reacting. They have limited interaction with people. Orders go down, but feedback does not come back up again, and that one-way communication ultimately weakens the work of God in a place, and becomes the weak spot through which Satan moves into the church.

If someone were to ask me what is most important for a pastor today, I would say, *good ears*, and use them! Listen to people. Interact with people.

KJ: You point out that humankind is leaving this century unprepared for the next century. What are your thoughts about how leadership should prepare for the next century in our pluralistic society?

I think you have identified two of the most important issues. One is the way people reason and value things today, and that comes out of a condition that has emerged in the development of humanity pretty much on a worldwide scale. The twenty-first century brings us into a kind of worldwide consciousness of the ways that people think and reason that are much more similar across the globe than they have ever been before. In the 19th and 20th centuries on almost any topic you would see intercultural contrasts and differences *first*. Now contrasts and differences still exist; similarities are much more common, and the pattern of thought and the pattern of motivations, and the pattern of reasoning of people is becoming more similar in much of the world, partly because of the general phenomenon of urbanization and modernization. The world is becoming more alike in many ways.

But two main issues in the next century that leadership of Christian churches are just not ready to handle are these: first, *postmodern thought* has become a characteristic of human thinking. It is a way human beings are.

The second concern is *intercultural competency* and the capacity to accept people who come from different kinds of backgrounds. The churches of the world are, in so many cases, culturally narrow. They collect people who are alike in many ways; sometimes we hear elaborate explanations of the tendency of churches to be mono-cultural. And we talk about the "homogeneous unit principle" as if God gave it to Moses at Sinai. God did not give such a principle. Instead, it is characteristic of fallen humanity. The fallen-ness of humankind tends to make people defensive and fearful. Defensiveness, fear, and pride are the characteristics that produce mono-culturalism.

Korea is a beautiful example of it. A group of people who tend to be fearful, anxious, aware of their country's smallness, surrounded, and even split along lines that are frightening. But like Americans, Koreans are a very proud people, North and South. And they are rigid. We can see this because Americans are much the same. But it is that combination of fear and pride that produces in people a tendency to be uncomfortable when dealing with anyone outside their own group. This is what produces, I think, your problems in the first and second generation contrasts of Koreans within the United States. Because the first and second generation mix is a combination of two sets of people: the set of people who are still proud and fearful, and a new group that has come along aware of the dangers and the pride. The second generation may also be very proud, but they are not proud on the original lines of "We're proud because we're Koreans."

Since the second generation is not taking its pride then from the same source as the first generation, a conflict is produced. Proud, yes, but different in its roots of the pride, and the old generation is even more fearful because the new generation appears to be rejecting the old basis of pride. But fear in the old generation is not reflected by the same amount and kind of fear as the new generation. The new generation is not as dominated by fear because, in general, American identity is a producer of confidence. Whether a good or shallow confidence, it typically results from sufficient wealth, freedom from hunger, and freedom from want, that produces a kind of strength that offsets the historic fear that characterizes certain generations of Koreans.

When I was a child, this nation had many, many poor and hungry people. The economy was in bad shape. That was my childhood. We had a very different lifestyle from what we have today. And there is in the older generation in America that same kind of fear that comes out of that insecurity from early years of life. Now the Koreans are even closer to it, and it cuts deeper. So I think the issue for the 21st century is to come to terms with the issues of natural humanity, dealing with its tendencies toward intercultural fear, and overcoming fear within the church. We should be a group of people who have confidence because we are “one in Christ” so that the cultural differences are no longer the barriers that they traditionally have been.

The hazard in the American churches is that the communities in the United States are radically changing. More and more communities in the US are becoming multi-cultural. We have many cities in America where the predominant language is Spanish. And dozens of cities where school children represent 6-10 language groups. Americans are confronted, as Koreans are soon to be confronted, with the necessity of living with side by side with those who speak a different language. Now in the cities this usually results in clusters. We have a cluster of Indians speaking 75 different Indian languages in Chicago; Korean clusters; and the Koreans are among the Asians moving into the upper middle class very rapidly.

But where are the churches that are ready to help people learn to cope with cultural difference? They are very difficult to find. It is rare that a church opens itself to people of difference. One of our recent Asian doctoral students was the first person I have known to be called as a pastor to an all-Anglo Chicago church. The church had no other Asians in it. So he was actually on a ministerial staff, chosen by that church. They choose a man from Myanmar! That is a rare thing; and that church is stronger for its having brought him into their midst. He is much stronger for having that real, intercultural experience. What happens to most people when they come into Chicago or other areas in the US is that they go to churches where all the people are as near like themselves as they can possibly find, and it solves their fear problem!

KJ. What would you characterize as main differences between biblical leadership and secular leadership in general.

There are differences, but certain kinds of skills are absolutely necessary in all leadership. The best schools of business management teach values of leadership that are very similar to Christian values, but they also teach some other things that I find disturbing. What is most important is to develop leadership based on a Christ-like model.

Christian leaders are called upon to serve the people of God. The term “servant leadership” has become popular. But a leader who also is a true servant is rare!

If a person wants to control people, and assumes a leadership role out of that motivation, that is dangerous. Some people are going into ministerial training because they want a prestigious job in order to be able to control people. They like the idea of being able to control people. And they see the pastor as a big leader who controls lots of people. That sort of aspiration represents a fleshly appetite.

Others aspire to become ministers in order to gain a secure, well-paying job. Now that always seems strange to Americans, because generally the number of well-paying ministerial jobs in the United States is relatively small. So it is quite possible that even in Korea people go into this career seeking well-paying jobs only to find that there are not that many! But there are enough people making money in ministry that you can become covetous: to have a big car, a staff, all kinds of help, nice clothes.

The quest for wealth is not an appropriate motivation for Christian leadership. There are also things that leaders in the secular world do in relationships with people that would not be acceptable for Christian leaders. Treating people unfairly and harshly, for example. You have to ask if that is what you want from a Christian leader. Is that what you want within the church from Christian leadership?

The major motivation that we read in Scripture is that the leaders that God chooses are those who know how to lead in the reflection of God's love. The Bible inspires us to lead with respect, compassion, and concern, motivated by Christian love.

KJ: Many ministers want to be a servant leader in the church, but some ministers confess that they feel like a doormat. They experience frustration and hurt, and I notice that many Korean ministers, even in the American situation, experience many frustrations. What is the solution?

Many first-generation pastors from Korea experience conflict between their Korean values and the American values that are strongly influencing their congregations. The people within these congregations, especially the first-generation people are in conflict themselves, and they want to hold on to old ways. So they try to force the pastor to be "old Korean." But the more "old Korean" they are, the more incompetent they are in dealing with their young people and those in the Korean-American community who want to learn how to deal with the realities around them.

I see some Korean churches and Korean pastors behaving like museums. They seem to be running a museum of old Korean values. Such a church is not going to be very related to the contemporary society. Therefore, a lot of people are going to be frustrated but they don't know why. So they will attack the pastor. In other words, they blame their irrelevancy on the pastor, and the pastor becomes the object of a lot of their anxiety. This depresses the pastor, who is trying hard to hold on to the old ways. There is much to be learned about how a church adapts to modern or contemporary societies. The Korean-American church situation is a great place to learn about the church and culture. I encourage our excellent doctoral students to study these problems and to try to inquire into what is going on, how to understand them, and ultimately then, to get insights as to what to do about it. Helping people realize what the choices are for the Korean in the American society is essential. What I think stops the learning process is that they accept classic answers, such as "We must have our children speaking Korean." Sorry, but that is not fundamental to Christian development.

In other words, you just cannot hold to an old value simply because it feels good: "If all our children spoke Korean, then we could keep our Korean culture alive longer." I am sympathetic to that. I think it is unfortunate that immigrants lose their language so soon. But one of the reasons they lose their

language is that they make the old language an oppression for their children, and therefore they develop a strong rejection.

Many first-generation Korean-American pastors don't seem to hear the younger generation saying, "I'm going to survive in America. I'm not interested in surviving in Korea." Then parents and pastors become distressed, they need help.

KJ: One of the fears of the Korean people if they lose their Korean language is that their children might lose their faith . . . and their identity with it . . .

Of course! And the more you push the issue, the sooner it will happen! Because when language oppression occurs, anything associated with the motivation for the language takes on a negative value. Parents need to understand that, because the Korean second generation in the US is saying, "Mother insists on taking me to church to hear that Korean sermon; I'm really not interested. The reason is that she's afraid that if I lose my Korean I'll lose my Christianity. So I will choose to lose my Christianity. I'll show her!" Thus the motivation to reject Christianity increases. And there are first-generation Koreans, I believe, who are creating the problem of the loss of Koreans in the second-generation. And the sad part is that they are creating the problem while they are trying an incorrect solution to solve the problem. I am very sympathetic to it, but I do fear what is happening.

KJ: In Korea right now Korean churches are undergoing a major shift leadership, and a younger generation is now emerging in society . . .

Within Korea there are pastors who were part of the rapid growth of Christianity, and there are others who came along *after* the rapid growth; and now many churches are no longer seeing the same sort of rapid growth. The church growth pattern in Korea has largely plateaued or has developed a flat place in the growth curve. I still think the church is moving in Korea, but not as fast. Perhaps the generational difference has to do with whether a person was a leader during the expansion during the rapid days, or during the slower phase.

During the fast growth period pastors could, do you know the phrase "get away with"—to be able to do something and escape the consequences. They could escape the consequences, and get away with behaving in certain ways during the fast-growth period. Now that behavior creates problems. Many of the younger generation see the current problems more clearly and grasp the new environment of Korea, but they displease the older generation of pastors because they are not as aggressive as the old generation was.

KJ: The Korean church is very interested in mission. We are sending missionaries to many other countries? What advice do you have for Korean missionaries in other countries? Many missionaries do their ministries the way they did in Korea.

I have a number of Korean friends who are involved in mission outreach, a number of friends and former students who are well placed in responsible positions, and some of my understanding comes through their eyes.

First, Korea has moved faster into international missions than any nation in the history of the church, which is exciting. Some of the problems in the missions of the outreach of Korea, however, relate to the fact that it has grown so fast. When you expand rapidly, the tendency is to make mistakes. It takes

time to learn from those mistakes, to reorganize and to rethink how you should best do your work. So I prefer not to criticize because I think these problems can be solved—but there are some blind spots. The nations that are sending out missionaries aggressively today, including Korea, tend to send their missionaries out the way American missionaries were sent out from 1910-1940. In other words, they are dropping back to an earlier history. Now why is it that America is no longer sending out that sort of missionary? Because it did not work very well.

Korean missions has not learned well enough from the experiences of other sending nations. The mission model most used by Korea is largely the mission model that was planted by western missionaries in Korea. It is not really an indigenous model at all! A key problem of Korean missionaries in certain places is that they are trying to *control* instead of trying to stand alongside and assist the emerging churches. For instance, wherever the Koreans have created an educational institution, it tends to be a high-control institution with a great deal of emphasis on the school or seminary as a controlling device.

Then there are the stories coming out of such places as Thailand which suggest that Koreans are sometimes fearlessly challenging authority in ways that are not glorifying to God. But if the Korean missionary cannot remain humble, the Korean missionary is probably going to be more a problem than a solution. You become the powerful foreigner, and in some countries the powerful foreigner still commands attention, lives a different lifestyle, refuses to become like the people among whom he or she is ministering. Such a missionary is busy preserving and *spreading* his or her own culture. It is a big problem for all missionaries when they mix national cultures in with Christianity to the extent that it dilutes, defuses, and obscures the gospel.

KJ: One more question regarding church education. Educational ministry philosophy is heavily dependent on church leadership, especially the senior pastor. What do you see as the appropriate attitude for church leaders?

First, I am always delighted when pastors take responsibility for the development and education of people, but I am uncomfortable when they control this sector of responsibility all by themselves, especially in the larger churches. But in some multi-staffed churches the education officer, or the education staff person, is often handicapped by two things: First, by a power model or an authoritarian model of teaching, which is really designed to fit the *modern* mind, not the *postmodern* mind. The postmodern mind wants to reject propositions, statements of facts. “This is so, that is so, you must do this, you must do that.” The postmodern mind simply does not engage in that kind of argument. The postmodern person is saying, “That’s not for me.”

The postmodern mind tends to ask, “What’s your experience? How does your experience relate to my experience? Let me tell you about my experience and then you tell me what your experience tells you.” It is that two-way street in the postmodern mind that we must somehow engage. Instead, many pastors are using a “modern mind approach” where they give propositions and assume that teaching is a didactic matter.

The other handicap in Korea is that your national school model tends to be destructive of human creativity. And if you copy that model as your church education model it would be unlikely that Christian values would be supported by it.

It is hazardous to presume that education is a matter of acquiring a lot of information. There is not enough emphasis in the Korean education model on *reasoning*. Instead it is remembering propositions, learning the statements, learning the right answers to the right questions. If we do Christian education that way, we are not going to be able to really produce a Christian outcome.

I need to add that the American education system is in an unhealthy condition. But it is not as bad as in Japan or Korea. I dislike being too blunt about it, but as I have watched for 40 years the students coming from Japan and Korea to the US I see increasingly painful deficiencies in terms of reasoning and communications based on reasoning.

I appreciate the Korean willingness to work hard and to accept learning as important. But I am concerned when the leading complaint from Korean students is “Please make it more clear what it is you want me to learn. I will learn anything you want me to learn. But you must make it clear what you want me to learn.” We must help people overcome dangerous dependency.