

# Ending the Scapegoating: a Theology of Peace

## I. Introduction

We live in a world where people(s) are deeply divided by race, nation, sex, religion, and economic power. The division among the people(s) is manipulated and sometimes escalated by the powers of the world, and in this process weak sectors are created and isolated. In order to maintain the order of the world which is constantly unstable the order must inflict the unresolved contradictions upon the weak sectors of the world and sacrifice them for the maintenance of the order of the established world. Scapegoats are constantly being created in this world. According to French literary critic Rene Girard, a community externalizes animosities and uneasiness among its members to a scapegoat and by the sacrifice of the scapegoat the community returns to its normality. The normality of this world claims the victimization of some segments and by virtue of their burden and sufferings the order of this world is maintained.

North Korea is now stigmatized to be a victim by the order of the world controlled by the “American and Western Empire,” in which Japan and South Korea play an important part. The “axis of evil” and “rogue country” are typical labels upon North Korea. World mass media like CNN shoots pictures of military parades with missiles and other arms and mass games with colored cards by tens of thousand people moving like one body, which depict NK as a suspicious country that is controlled by the military or the dynasty.

Is North Korea a typical scapegoat in the international network controlled by the U.S.? Or, is NK a rogue country that is unpredictable in its actions and very dangerous for the peace and security of the world? Because it is very dangerous and evil, must the international community punish it? The more the answer tilts onto a positive, the more North

Korea may become a target of animosity and then a preemptive strike. Then international police would start to search the “madman” or “witches” as their sacrifice. My thesis is that Christian message is totally against the motivation of the scapegoating. My claim will be that even the excuse in the name of just cause and just intention, major tenets of the just war theory in Christian tradition, cannot apply to the situation of the Korean Peninsula. It is because that the just war theory will help furthering the process of the scapegoating of North Korea. The paper will not, however, dump the whole of the just war theory; it will appreciate the Biblical idea that justice and peace need to go together. But the paper will regard as dangerous the idea that war can achieve justice and then peace, which is a frequent rhetoric of George W. Bush’s administration. This paper will suggest that we need to explore the idea of life for peace. Lastly, I will argue that a relative non-violent pacifism is the most necessary option for us to take in the region of North East Asia and the Korean Peninsula.

In this paper, I will first briefly describe the peace tradition in the Bible and in Christianity. Secondly, I will critically discuss the mutual relationship among three ideas: peace, justice, and life. Thirdly, I will suggest that we can draw an important element of the world view from New Testament that is fundamentally correspondent with the eastern view of the world especially that of Donghak [literally, Eastern Learning] Religion that started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Korea. The common world view from both the New Testament and the Donghak Scripture, I believe, will positively contribute to our search for the religious and philosophical foundation of peace. Fourthly and Lastly, I will attempt at delineating the meaning of the relative non-violent pacifism as the most acceptable theory to be implemented in the region.

## II. Peace Tradition in the Bible and Christian Churches

Many people believe that the two monotheistic religions Christianity and Islam are more prone to engaging a war than religions in the East. The fact that Korean Protestant ministers often make hostile and bellicose remarks on the communist North Korea may well prove this belief. They are eager supporters of the Bush government’s antagonistic

policy toward North Korea.

I should like to explain what should have distorted the peace-oriented Christianity so easily into a militant religion. The monotheistic faith demands its devotees to pursue purity in faith and ethical discernment between good and evil. The monotheistic faith heightens the consciousness of justice in its devotees by its commandments and laws. The strong consciousness of social justice in monotheistic tradition made possible the prophetic tradition in the history of Israel, and the opposite is also true. The God of Israel is a God of justice. And in this tradition peace (*Shalom*) is derived from justice. The famous phrase in Isaiah 32,17, “the effect of justice (*tsedaqa*) is peace,” has been recalled as the motto for social ethic for peace in Hebrew tradition. In this tradition, the pair ideas, justice and peace, go together. The values of love and compassion, it seems to me, had been thought as minor to the twin values, although love and compassion are equally emphasized later by Jesus and his followers. I understand that Jesus believed that love and compassion come first and their result is justice, because I believe Jesus thought that the ultimate goal of justice was preserving, enriching and empowering the life even for the one lost among the one hundred sheep. It reminds us of the Buddhist teaching that the bodhisattva is vowed to save the whole world—“all beings down to the last blade of grass.” Jesus rejected harming the life in the name of justice (law).

But some parts of the Hebrew Bible go with the Davidic dynasty or with the nation of Israel so closely that it does not transcend the concerns and interests of Israel (Judea) or the Davidic dynasty. For example, there are many curses against enemies in Psalms and peace is meant to be almost equivalent to the security of the Davidic dynasty and its triumph over enemies. “But do thou, O Lord, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may requite them!” (41,10) “For thou hast delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.” (54,7)

The Hebrew Bible is not ambivalent in its attitude toward peace at least within the framework of Israel.

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness (*tsedaqa*) and peace (*shalom*) will kiss each other.” (Ps 85,10)

“Yea, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a way.” (Ps.85,12)

Here again justice and peace are paired, and justice supersedes. Justice demands judgment and vengeance (Isaiah 61,2). The year of Lord’s favor—the Jubilee—is the day of vengeance. Jesus skipped this verse when he read Isaiah 61, 1-2 at the beginning of his public life in the temple (Luke 4,18-19). I believe peace is upfront with Jesus. For Jesus peace is no longer a minor concept compared with justice. The story of the return of the Prodigal son told by Jesus transcends the traditional concept of justice. Love and compassion are supreme part of his teaching. For Jesus justice and peace are originated in love and compassion. I would like at this point to claim that peace and love or peace and life are more connected and paired in Jesus. The peace that is achieved by the action of the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is derived from the father’s absolute compassion for the prodigal son.

Peace churches are founded upon Jesus’ teachings especially the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matt. 5:9) For those who confess Jesus as Christ it is the duty not to be involved in any war or conflict that causes harms and killings. Historical peace churches such as Mennonites, Quakers, and the Churches of Brethren recognized the absolute validity of the Sermon on the Mount in their living. They are not engaged in the exercise of political power and give up all the privileges that would come with that exercise.<sup>1</sup> Theologians of the early Church denounced the serving in the military forces. Clement of Alexandria called Christian soldiers “soldiers of peace” and announced that the sole weapons Christian soldiers carry were the Word of God and the virtues of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Early Christian theologians Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen wrote that violence, war, and serving in the army did not match with Christian life. Origen said that prayer is more effective for peace than engaging in battle. For him

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Huber and Hans-Richard Reuter, *Friedensethik*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990) *Pyunghwa Yoonri*, Sohn Kyutae and Kim Yongok, trans. (Seoul: CLS, 1997) 66.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) *Merton ui Pyonghwaron*, trans. Cho, Hyoje (Bundo, 2006) 81.

prayer is a weapon to target on the spiritual powers that causes conflicts and strives rather than humans.

Christian churches had been peace churches until the Emperor authorized Christianity as an official religion in 312. As the Christian Church became part and parcel in the Roman Empire, the Church. Christians had to serve in the army and got involved in wars. The non-violent peace tradition was interrupted. The theory of the just war was newly introduced by St. Augustine in order to justify some particular wars that are engaged to defend the integrity of the nation and the Christian faith. The weakness of Augustine's just war theory lies not in its intention, but in its naïve, blind trust that by violent means one can achieve the good.<sup>3</sup> He announced, "Love does not exclude a war of compassion for the sake of the good."<sup>4</sup> Augustine derived two classical ideas of the just war theory from Cicero; they are just cause and right intention. Later another criterion that only legitimate authority can proclaim the war was included in the just war theory. The criteria of the just war were developed in the mutual relationship between justice and peace. The just war theory was designed to compromise the two conflicting realities: justice and war. One of the most sophisticated defenders of the just war Thomas Aquinas regarded the revenge against the unjust as a core definitive element of the just war. He defended the crusade as a just war. His just war theory was inherited by the Reformation. Luther defended wars triggered by just cause. According to Luther, the worldly kingdom is so evil that external enforcement including war was necessary. In the midst of many criticisms and castigations against it, the just war theory has been incessantly defended by many realist theologians and clergies up till now. Historical peace churches and theologians including Erasmus rejected the just war as hypocrisy. Actually the history demonstrates the fact that the result of a just war is an injustice, killing both combatants and non-combatants.

## II. Justice, Life and Peace

In this section, I will analyze the weakness of the just war theory

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<sup>3</sup> Merton, 97.

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine, *Letter 138*. Quoted from Merton, 96.

in view of the two seemingly harmonious but conflicting ideas when they are applied to wars especially in the nuclear age, that is, justice and peace. I will suggest another pair to be combined, that is, life and peace, as an alternative to the pair ideas of justice and peace, out of which the just war theory is derived.

The twin concepts of justice and peace have constituted the core of peace ethics in Christian history. Christian peace ethics founds itself on the famous idea in Isaiah 32: 17, "Justice creates peace." It is a Biblical wisdom that peace cannot flourish in unjust conditions. The problem, however, comes from the fact that the meaning of justice varies according to different people in different political and cultural situation. People understand the meaning of justice from their own perspectives and conditions they are in. For example, the meaning of justice understood by neo-cons of the U.S. is intrinsically different from that held by leaders of the North Korean Communist Party. We may well conclude that justice is relative. Different people hold different convictions on justice. The members or elements that constitute justice are different and divergent according to different societies and cultures. Then a war that is just for some group may not be the case for another group. Therefore, there is no such thing as a just war, but a justified war. It is an ideologically justified war. Justice to somebody may be injustice to another. Another example for this would be the conception of justice held by Catholic conquistadors versus that of native Indians. For the Catholic conquistadors the native Indians are evil because they are superstitious, culturally backward, antagonistic toward the Westerners and their civilization and faith, and so on. Hegel praised war because war can make human history progress by overcoming the backward parts of the world by advanced sectors, which is, according to Hegel, the work of the Spirit. When we speak of justice, we must first answer the question: whose justice? For example, is it the justice of the powerful, or the justice of the victim? The worldly power does what it wants in the name of justice. The weak revenge it in the name of their justice. Look at the situation in Palestine. The ongoing blood-shedding conflicts between Christian West and Islamic East is another case. It is very clear that peace cannot be made by a just war. It is clearer that a just war would not work for making peace in a nuclearized area. The explosion of

nuclear bombs would at once devastate indiscriminately the total human and ecological systems in the region. The just war and the pair of war and justice would not bring about peace. To that extent the pair, justice and peace, do not work for peace.

I would like to suggest that we need another pair, that is, life and peace. It seems not a coincidence that the title of our first conference bears peace and life; the exact expression was “peace for life.” Our title expression was not peace for justice, which has often been mistaken as war for justice. But peace for life cannot be in any way mistaken as war for life, because war is too far apart from the idea of life. The traditional pair of justice and peace was replaced by Jesus with another pair, peace and life. Jesus had the absolute respect for life. For him there must not be any scapegoat or lost sheep. His cross was the end of the sacrifice of the scapegoat by humans. His cross should not be seen as sacrifice by God in Latin model of the atonement theory. He was sacrificed by humans and powers that benefit from the worldly order where a scapegoat mechanism is integrated. God does not want and accept the sacrifice of the scapegoat, and so there must not be an evil cycle of violent scapegoat practice any longer in the world. Such an evil cycle was stopped by the cross of Jesus “once for all.” His cross has brought us salvation, if salvation means the flourishing of life. The cross proved to have the effect of salvation by his resurrection, the rise to life. It also proved effective in salvation because it stopped the evil cycle of scapegoating in the world.

Crucifixion, that is, the sacrifice of the victim, still continues in the world. The lowest bottom of the human society and the total environment are being sacrificed to buttress the worldly order, which is systematically and internally distorted. In this world the justice for the powerless is violated or ignored. The justice of the poor and powerless must yield to the justice of the rich and powerful. Now, the concept of justice that is really just should be justice for all lives, the powerful and powerless, haves or have-nots, human and non-human.

Korea is well adjusted to the present world order. Our spending for military expenditure ranks the 11<sup>th</sup> in the world. China as well as Japan spends two times our expenditure; of course, the U. S. spends

much more (25 times).<sup>5</sup> Our government dispatched military to Iraq along with worldly powers. We also participate in the globally operative work of creating and sacrificing scapegoats. We know that the Korean government has only a limited space to make its own choices in this present worldly order. But I believe that the worldly order can be changed when internationally collective efforts at making peace are combined and accumulated.

#### IV. A Worldview for Life and Peace

I would like to briefly explain my understanding of a worldview that I draw from New Testament and the Scripture of Donghak Religion.

First of all, I would like to suggest that some parts of the New Testament like The Letter to Ephesians and The Letter to Colossians interpret Christ as creating, encompassing, immanent in, and reconciling all things in the world (Col 1,15–20). Christ is understood as “peace” that brings reconciliation among all things and humans in the world (Eph 2,14). Love of Christ “binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Col 3,14) There is one Spirit and one God, “who is above all and through all and in all.” (Eph 4,6) We are all in the same citizenship and family in God (Eph 2,19).

Christ, Spirit, and God are in everything in the whole world, and all things are reconciled in harmony in the bond of love and peace. “The peace of Christ” rules in our hearts and calls us in one body (Col 3, 15). I think that this all presence of Christ and “the Peace of Christ” in everything in the whole world is akin to the idea of *Qi* in the Donghak Religion. Qi is understood in the East as present in everything and move all things into unity and harmony in peace (氣化). Things and I are in the same family (物吾同胞). Such immanentism of the Donghak Scripture and New Testament provides us a worldview for peace. Everything is divine, and all are, by the divine life-giving power (Qi, Christ, and Spirit), internally related in the unity of peace; there should not be any part left out in the cosmic relationship. This worldview is an alternative to the present world order, which is internally and systematically distorted.

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<sup>5</sup> *Hankyore*, a daily newspaper, June 12, 2007.



## V. The Relative Non-Violent Pacifism

Now, I would like to suggest the relative non-violent pacifism as the option we can consider as a better framework for our understanding and action for peace. We cannot opt for the just war theory with its Christian realism, nor for any violent, bellicose antagonism when we deal with peace and security in North East Asia especially in the Korean Peninsula. The absolute non-violent pacifism cannot be our choice, because, it can invite an unwanted war.

I will, in the following, delineate my understanding of relative non-violent pacifism. It, first of all, aims at reducing the tension between antagonist parties by negotiations and dialogues, and thereby aims at making peace. So here dialogue and mutual supportive relationship are the most crucial. The dialogue encourages mutual deeper understanding of one another. We can apply the wisdom of those theologians who engage in the dialogue with other religions. Raimon Panikkar argues that by and large we have interpreted the other part with our own categories which are foreign to the other. He continues, “Thus we have not reached the self-understanding of the other. In a word, we have interpreted the other as other, while the other does not see itself as other but as self.”<sup>6</sup> As I alluded in the introduction, North Korea has not been understood by the international powers in a way North Korea understands itself. The picture of North Korea shown on world news programs distorts the reality in North Korea and delivers a wrong message about it. Only genuine dialogue can overcome such a problem.

In addition, relative non-violent pacifism demands us to seek a realistic way to reduce the military power in the common region. Also, the relativists participate in real politics so that they can put pressure on the political powers to plan and implement policies for peace. Furthermore, relativists open their eyes widely to discern real and potential hostile powers in order to prepare themselves to reduce tension and conflicts. They constantly keep their eyes on those potentially hostile powers, especially on their activities for armament. A realistic

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<sup>6</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Religions and the Culture of Peace” *Religion, Politics, and Peace*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999): 190.

analysis of those powers is a necessary part of the relative non-violent pacifism. Again, the relativists do a realistic assessment of the power and influence of the internal and domestic supporters for conflict, tension, intimidation strategy, and even war. Relativists seek to widen their own influence for peace in order to countervail their power and influence. Lastly, the relativists seek the balance of power surrounding their territory and by this balance of power they seek to secure peace and avoid the possibility of becoming a scapegoat in international power politics. In order to maintain the balance of power the relativists may approve maintaining a certain level of defensive forces.

## VI. A Conclusion

In the age of nuclear armaments, it seems that justice is crippled. Pacifists in South Korea demand total extermination of the nuclear weapons in the world including North Korea, as well as the U.S. But only North Korea is under pressure for total extermination of the nuclear armaments. In such a world justice is done within certain limits imposed by the worldly powers. In such a world, the good words of ‘justice for peace’ seem obsolete and even distorted. *Pax Romana* and *Pax Americana* surely validate this assessment. I would conclude that life is more usable concept for theology of peace in a nuclearized age, where justice is mocked and life is suffering. Peace is a condition of life-preservation and life-enrichment. The value of life is operative in the international community. It makes imperative to provide North Korea with food and other resources for the life-preservation of the people, regardless of how much the North Korean government does and will treat its members justly and humanely. Life should be more counted, valued, and operative than justice in the mutual relationship between North Korea and South Korea. Life and peace are the key criteria of our political and personal lives in our times.

Ending the sacrificing of scapegoats is a minimum requirement for justice in the world. But it is not an easy task. This minimum requirement requires a transformation of the present world order and also requires a new worldview, where members are communicative and participatory, and organically related, and no longer divided and discriminatory to each

other. Ending the scapegoating had already started, Christians believe, with the cross of Jesus. But the world is still crucifying the scapegoats along with many other innocent victims in a violent and systemic way. I believe that such a mechanism derives from the lack of communications, mutual cooperation, and mutual learning. Practicing these elementary principles will diminish most of the human tragedies in the world.

<Abstract>

The author argues that the most serious issue that arises out of the peace and conflict matters in the Korean peninsula is that of the scapegoating of North Korea. North Korea allegedly possesses nuclear weapons, but still a small and weak military country compared with the U.S. and Japan. The author stresses the supreme importance of the life of the ordinary people in the Korean peninsula. He also argues that a relative non-violent pacifism is the most necessary option for us to take in the region of North East Asia and the Korean Peninsula and is a most acceptable theory to be implemented in the region. Accordingly, it also becomes the author's argument that the absolute non-violent pacifism cannot be our choice, because, it can invite an unwanted war. The author continues to argue that there is no such thing as a just war, but always a justified war and that the pair concepts of justice and peace eventually do not help in constructing peace in the Korean peninsula. The author concludes that the idea of life is a more usable concept for theology of peace than justice in a nuclearized age, where justice is mocked and life is suffering.

Key words: just war, scapegoating, *Donghak*, peace, justice, life, relative pacifism.