

Towards an Ethics of Korean Reunification

Sam Kyung Park (Ph.D. Drew University 2009)

Introduction

An ethics of Korean reunification needs to uncover issues of oppression, exploitation, and domination that are results of the division of Korea. This division is one of the main causes of the structural evils present in the societies of both South and North Korea. The steady escalation of military competition, mutual distrust, reciprocal vilification, and hostility between the South and the North generates and sustains these structural evils. From a Christian perspective, the division of the Korean peninsula is sinful, not only because of the violence in which it is rooted and the pain it has caused the people, but also because it has contributed to the creation and sustaining of unjust systems in the North and South.

A. Goal of This Dissertation

What ethical understandings must guide the work of reunification? What are the central elements of an ethics of Korean reunification? In this dissertation I study three Korean theologies, *minjung* (the people), *sangsaeng* (life-sharing) and *tongil* (reunification),¹ searching for these elements. The contribution of this dissertation is to examine *minjung* and *sangsaeng* theologies in view of what they can contribute to an ethics of reunification. A second contribution is to propose that the central understanding of *tongil* theology—reunification—has to be understood as the building of a Korean community, not just the creation of one nation. Basic to this understanding of community is a deep sense of justice, which comes from *minjung* theology, and of resolution of resentment (reconciliation), which comes from *sangsaeng* theology. The goal of the dissertation is to propose an ethics of reunification that guides us, not only in the work of creating a single political unit, but also in the construction of a new society in which all people are able to live together in peace and with justice.

To begin to work toward this objective, Korean reunification, therefore, needs to overcome political oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural imperialism. Such a goal will, indeed, result in true national reunification that will promote the worth and dignity of every person, which, from the Christian perspective, is based on the belief that everyone is made in the image and likeness of God. At the beginning of the 21st century, then, I believe that a Korean Christian ethics of reunification must deal with existing injustices in the South as

¹ The term *minjung* is a combination of two characters, 민(*min*) translated as people, and 중(*jung*), translated as mass; the word *sangsaeng* is comprised of 상(*sang*), meaning mutual and 생(*saeng*), meaning life; the term *tongil* is comprised of 통(*tong*), meaning coming together and 일(*il*), meaning one.

well as in the North, bringing about reconciliation by resolving the built-up resentment that exists between both Koreas, and creating a sense of community that preserves diversity. *Minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies, three Christian theologies elaborated in Korea between 1970 and the present, guide this attempt to contribute to the questions of how to bring to an end the painful division of Korea.

The ethics of Korean reunification that I am proposing is important for it grounds the struggle for reunification in Christian concepts and in elements that emerge from Korean culture and history elaborated in *minjung*, *sangsaeng* and *tongil* theologies. I understand Korean reunification to be a matter of justice as conceptualized by theologies of liberation—*minjung* theology among them. The proposals of this dissertation can be used, I believe, by all those involved in the work of reunification. But the audience of this dissertation is in particular the Korean churches. Some of them are involved in the work of reunification but without any clear theo-ethical framework; others are simply not involved because they do not see the work of reunification as an element of justice, which is the main message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that the ethics of Korean reunification I propose here may help to ground the work of the Korean churches involved in the reunification movement and might provide motivation those churches that are not involved.

In short, my thesis is that justice is intrinsic to the work of reunification. Drawing from different Korean schools of thought that I analyze through the lens provided by three liberation theo-ethicists, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Leonardo Boff, my thesis is that liberation, resolution of resentment, and the creation of community—all of them intrinsic elements of justice—have to be the central elements of an Ethics of Korean Reunification.

B. An Overview of This Dissertation

Minjung theology developed in the 1970s in South Korea as a response to the oppression generated by the Park dictatorship. Its main focus is the liberation of the *minjung* from the bondage of oppression and poverty. *Sangsaeng* theology, a theology that draws from Korean indigenous religious thought, was proposed in the 1980s by Park Jong-Chun, a contemporary theologian who currently is a faculty member at Korean Methodist Theological University in Seoul, Korea, and by Hong Jeong-Soo, a contemporary Korean-Christian theologian living in the United States. The principal focus of *sangsaeng* theology is reconciliation as the principal way to overcome Korean fratricide and to establish a firm ground for justice in a unified Korean nation. In the 1980s, *tongil* theology emerged in Korea as a result of the increasingly developing conversations aimed at reunification. The principal theologians representing this movement are Park Soon-Kyung, Moon Ik-Hwan, and Noh Jong-Sun, among others. Its main focus is to provide religious understanding and motivation

that will enable the creation of a unified nation of people. *Tongil* theology is based on sharing and participation in a *bap* (rice) community, reflecting the fact that North and South Koreans are one people and must again become one nation.

This dissertation analyses these three Korean theologies using the framework of three non-Korean liberation theo-ethicists: Gustavo Gutiérrez,² Ada María Isasi-Díaz,³ and Leonardo Boff.⁴ Based on Paul Tillich's "method of correlation,"⁵ and on methods used by liberation theologies,⁶ I bring together the political and social realities in the Korean peninsula with liberation theology's understanding of the Kingdom of God, reconciliation, and community elaborated by these three theo-ethicists. At the same time, I use the method of correlation to put these three Christian understandings in conversation with elements coming from *minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies.⁷ Just like Tillich gave theological answers to existential questions, this dissertation attempts to give theo-ethical answers to the present Korean situation.⁸ These answers, learning from liberation theology, are grounded in Korea's history and proposed as an historical project for the building of one Korean nation—of one just and peaceful Korean society. This dialogue has yielded a rich crop of elements that I believe must be an integral part of a Korean ethics of reunification. These elements are as follows: liberation from poverty and other forms of oppression; reconciliation through resolution of the resentment among the Korean people by the division of their nation; and *minjok*⁹—unity that respects diversity.

The first of these elements, liberation from poverty and other forms of oppression, arises from *minjung* theology, a school of thought born in the midst of the Christian struggle for social justice during the democratization movement against the military dictatorship of South Korea in the '70s and '80s. *Minjung* theology, in line with other liberation theologies, argues that the poor have a special knowledge, an

² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991); *A Theology of Liberation: The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

³ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Reconciliation: A Religious, Social, and Civic Virtue," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* (May 2001): 5-36; *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); *En La Lucha: In the Struggle*.

⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

⁵ The method of correlation brings together a human question with God's answer. His method of correlation "explains the contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. I., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 60.

⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, 15th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), Introduction and Chapters 1-5; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha – In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), Introduction and Chapters 1-3.

⁷ By the time I studied the liberation theo-ethicists, I already had some knowledge of *minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies and was able to see the similarities between what they were saying and the three Korean theologies.

⁸ Tillich, 60.

⁹ The term *minjok* is comprised of 민(*min*), meaning people and 족(*jok*), meaning family.

epistemological privilege about justice, gleaned from their immediate and historic experience of structural injustices of every sort. The centrality of the poor in *minjung* theology has been expanded to include all those who are oppressed not only economically but also by dominant understandings of gender and sexuality and of ethnicity and race.

The writings of the prominent first-generation *minjung* theologians Suh Nam-Dong, Ahn Byung-Mu, and Kim Yong-Bock have helped me see the relationship between liberation and the Kingdom of God. Suh understands the Kingdom of God to mean a social life that guarantees human freedom and equality through a participatory *minjung* democracy. For Ahn, to participate in the Kingdom of God means to return to an egalitarian society. Kim's understanding that the Kingdom of God refers to a society where the rules of justice, *koinonia*, and *shalom* prevail helped me to see the need to explore further how reunification ethics has to deal with the issue of community, which is central to *tongil* theology.¹⁰ And the emphasis on identifying the *han*¹¹ of the *minjung* led me to explore *sangsaeng* theology, which helps to deal with the accumulated sense of pain, suffering, and resentment.

Secondly, in this study, I employed the work of two contemporary Korean *sangsaeng* theologians, Park Jong-Chun and Hong Jeong-Soo, both of whom have studied Buddhism and Shamanism, religions that are central elements of Korean culture.¹² *Sangsaeng* theology is based on *haewon-sangsaeng*—*haewon* means “resolution of resentment,” and *sangsaeng* means “life-sharing”—an idea proposed by the 19th-century Korean thinker, Kang Jeung-San (1871–1909). Kang incorporated the Shamanistic tradition of *haewon* and brought it together with elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Park and Hong built on Kang's idea that the world of *sangsaeng* is “not made through revolutionary or violent means but uses peaceful and nonviolent ways characterized by the principles of *sangsaeng*, which will bring about a new society with coexistence, harmony, equality, and justice as central elements.”¹³

A third source for the elaboration of a theo-ethics for reunification is *tongil* theology, which sees the division of Korea as evil. Since 1988, *tongil* theology has been discussed among theologians, pastors, and

¹⁰ Suh Nam-Dong, *Minjungshinhakoui Tamgu* [*The Search for Minjung Theology*] (Seoul: Han Gil Sa, 1983). Ahn Byung-Mu, *Minjungshinhak Iyagi* [*The Story of Minjung Theology*] (Seoul: Theological Institute, 1988). Kim Yong-Bock, *Messiah and Minjung* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1992).

¹¹ The word *han* names a deep feeling that rises out of the unjust experience of the people. It is often translated just as “indignation.”

¹² Park Jong-Chun, *Sangsaengshinhak*, [*The Theology of Sangsaeng*] (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1991). Hong Jeong-Soo, *Baezzanun Hananim*, [*God the Weaver: Christian Message for Postmodern Korean*] (Seoul: Chomyung Press, 1991).

¹³ Noh Kil-Myung, “*Minjung* of the Thought of Jeung-San,” in *Jeungsandosasang* [*JeungSanDo's Thought*] 12. (1986): 213-215.

progressive Christians. Park Soon-Kyung, of Ewha University in Seoul, was the first woman theologian to focus on the reunification of Korea from a theological perspective. For her, “*Tongil* theology cannot be possible without believing that Christ will hear the scream for *tongil* of the Korean people, who carry the yoke and sins of division, and he will come to us.”¹⁴ Parallel to understandings I found in Gutiérrez, Isasi-Díaz, and Boff, Park emphasizes the fact that *tongil* theology begins with the screams of the *minjok* and *minjung* pressed down under the heavy burden of national division.

Moon Ik-Hwan, an influential *tongil* theologian who worked as a reunification activist in the 1990s and is now deceased, considered social justice and welfare concerns for the people in South Korea as a critical path toward Korean reunification.¹⁵ In his view, without a truly just and democratic society, reunification will not be possible; true democracy and reunification are one and the same issue. For Moon, the Korean people are one body, one people, one nation.¹⁶ In his view, *tongil* means becoming one community that embraces all differences, without divisions. Both Moon and Park are theologian-activists, and both of them have been imprisoned by the South Korean government repeatedly.

Another reunification theologian who has influenced me significantly since he was my professor at Yonsei University is Noh Jong-Sun.¹⁷ He is also a theologian-activist who has traveled to North Korea repeatedly, establishing contact with Christian groups there. According to Noh, Adam and God at first enjoyed *tongil* but eventually experienced division.¹⁸ That division between the first human being and God is what we call sin. Following on the footsteps of Park Soon-Kyung, Noh has referred in a positive way to *juche*, the ideology of North Korea, claiming that South Korea is not at all self-reliant, but is dependent on the super powers. Noh claimed that in order to achieve a self-reliant reunification of the Korean peninsula, we first need to repent for the division caused by our endorsement of ideologies, such as capitalism and communism, which the superpowers imposed on the Korean peninsula.¹⁹

¹⁴ Park Soon-Kyung, *Tongilshinhakui Yeojung*, [A Journey of Tongil Theology] (Seoul: Hanul, 1992), 69.

¹⁵ Moon Ik-Hwan, “Reunification of North and South and Korean Church” in *Moon Ik-Hwan Moksa Jeonjib 4kwon*, [Moon Ik-Hwan Series] Vol. 4] (Seoul: Sa-Ge-Jul, 1999).

¹⁶ Moon Ik-Hwan, *Tongilen Yeodekge Ganuohanga*, [How to Possibly Achieve Reunification] (Seoul: Hakmins, 1984), 42.

¹⁷ Noh Jong-Sun, *The Third War* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2000); *Liberating God for Minjung* (Seoul: Hanul, 1994); *God of Reunification: Toward a Theology of Reunification* (Seoul: Yonsei University, 1990).

¹⁸ Noh Jong-Sun, *Tongilshinhakur Hyahayeo*, [Toward a Theology of Reunification] (Seoul: Hanul, 1988), 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

In this dissertation, before setting out to do the analysis of *minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies, chapter one presents my own faith journey. I combine this narration with an analysis of injustice in South Korea using a paradigm of oppression elaborated by Iris Marion Young.²⁰ This first chapter serves a double purpose. First, it grounds the elaboration of a Korean ethics of reunification in the reality of the majority of South Koreans. Second, it identifies my social location as well as my commitment—that is, the perspective from which I write, the worldview that I bring to this project. In doing this I follow the feminist method that insists on the disclosure of the subjectivity of the author.

The dissertation ends with a brief history of the reunification movement in South Korea, since this is the sphere in which I believe the work of this dissertation can make a contribution. Though much work has been done about Korean reunification from different theological and ethical perspectives, no work has been done to bring together the elements of all *minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies—truly Korean theologies—into a Christian ethics of reunification.

This dissertation sets out to accomplish three things. First, it brings together the need to work for justice in South Korea and the struggle for reunification. In doing this I am claiming that the work of reunification is not a matter of going back to what Korea was before it was divided, but that reunification is about a going forward to create a new society in which all Koreans can have justice. Second, I am proposing a Christian ethics of reconciliation. This modest proposal is an attempt at elaborating a theo-ethics of reunification that makes clear that if we call ourselves Christians, then we have to be involved in the work of reunification. Central Christian beliefs—the Trinity, the Kingdom of God, sin as estrangement from each other, the centrality of community—cannot be upheld in Korea if we do not work for the reunification of our nation. Third, this dissertation is a call for a Korean solution to the division of our country. I use three theologies that are Korean theologies: *minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil*. I believe that we Koreans have to liberate ourselves, that we have to be about justice for all Koreans. The rich understandings that emerge from the dialogue among the three Korean theologies I work with in this dissertation will contribute, I believe, to a definition of social justice that is not limited to political reunification, but aims to protect the dignity of every person and to contribute to the full participation of all Koreans in one society.

²⁰ According to Young, there are five categories of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 39-65.

The Reunification Movement and the Role of Churches

A 21st-century Korean ethics of reunification has to emerge from Korean culture and Korean reality. It has been the goal of this dissertation to articulate this ethics grounded in Korean thought and Korean reality.

I first realized a need for a Korean ethics of reunification as a result of the teachings of Noh Jong-Sun, my professor at Yonsei University, who said that *minjung* theology evolved into *tongil* theology. I kept this very much in mind as I pursued my doctoral studies. I read widely about *minjung* and *tongil* theology. In so doing, I discovered *sangsaeng* theology and came to see how its main elements should also play a role in an ethics of reunification.

From these three theologies—*minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil*—I draw the central values for an ethics of Korean reunification: justice, resolution of resentment, and community. The vision of one Korea, of becoming again one family, has to be grounded in justice. In Korea this will not be possible without the resolution of resentment, without healing the deep wound of *han*.

A. Elements Drawn from *Minjung*, *Sangsaeng*, and *Tongil* Theologies

1. *Minjung* theology

Minjung theology was born from the struggle of South Koreans against the injustices of the military dictatorships in the 1970s. The understanding of liberation that emerged from such struggles as well as from *minjung* theology included a deep sense of democracy—the participation of the people in determining the form of government and the priorities of our nation. It also has to do with denouncing and struggling to change the exploitation of the *minjung*, the marginalization and violence of Korean women, and all other forms of injustice.

2. *Sangsaeng* theology

Sangsaeng theology is based on a school of thought that emerged from a frustrated revolution by the people in the 19th century. The main focus of *sangsaeng* theology is to overcome the culture of resentment that can lead to killing due to *won* and *han*. *Sangsaeng* theology affirms the possibility of resolving conflicts, of healing broken relationships, of doing away with death-dealing grudges. Only through *haewon* (resolution of resentment) can forgiveness and reconciliation become a reality. Through *haewon-sangsaeng*, victory can be attained over *sangguik* that is, over the social-economic contradictions and the spiritual and ideological conflicts that have created and fueled *won* and *han*.

3. *Tongil* theology

Tongil theology focuses on bringing about one unified Korea, one community of people, one Korean family of *minjok*, which *tongil* theology proposes respects diversity, making this theology a very dynamic enterprise. *Minjok* does not equal homogeneity. It requires harmony, which combines with diversity to bring about unity. *Minjok* insists on the richness of diversity, the diversity that exists when one considers the differences between North and South Korea. *Tongil* theology focuses on a praxis of peace that is open to differences—*yin-yang*—and enables opposites to live together.

B. North Korean Contribution—*juche*

The contributions of *minjung*, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies emerge from South Korea. A fuller Korean ethics of reunification will emerge from a true dialogue between North and South Koreans and necessarily will have to include elements that come from North Korea. Though it is not for me to determine what these elements should be, *juche* seems to be, possibly, one of those elements. I am not arguing for the inclusion of *juche* as an element in a Korean ethics of reunification. I offer this small analysis only to signal openness to understandings coming from North Korea.²¹

Juche is the official state ideology of North Korea. Park Soon-Kyung, as I indicated above, proposed that *tongil* theology should embrace *juche*. Others, like Shin Eun-Hee, whose work I use in this chapter, have studied the religious dimensions of *juche* that could well be considered in a Korean ethics of reunification.

What is *juche*? Etymologically, *Ju* (主) means “the main principle” and *che* (體) “body” or “self”. *Juche* refers to “sovereign autonomy,” “self-determination,” or “self-reliance.”²² *Juche* was used as a slogan by Kim Il-Sung, the late founding president of North Korea in the mid 1950s. According to Shin, the historical development of *juche* thought can be divided into three major periods; *juche* thought as anti-imperialist ideology (1950s–1960s); *juche* thought as Korean humanism (1970s–1980s); and *juche* thought as North Korea’s state religion (1990s–2000s). Although the way *juche* has been understood and applied has changed throughout the history of North Korea, *juche* is considered a “human-centered view on the world.”²³

Among the three interpretations of *juche*, Shin focuses on *juche* as a form of Korean humanism, as life-centrism, from which a theory of sociopolitical life emerges.²⁴ The sociopolitical life is central in *juche*

²¹ *Juche* also has been used by *tongil* theologian Noh Jong-Sun. Dr. Shin Eun-Hee, whose article I use in this study, received her Ph.D in theology from St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto, in Canada.

²² Shin Eun-Hee, “The Sociopolitical Organism: The Religious Dimensions of *Juche* Philosophy,” in *Religions of Korea in Practice*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 517.

²³ Shin “Sociopolitical Organism), 518.

²⁴ Shin “Sociopolitical Organism), 519.

thought,²⁵ wherein a human being has both a physical life and a sociopolitical life. While the physical life is given by one's biological parents, the sociopolitical life is given by society and can only be discovered within the context of a fluctuating network of relations. *Juche* thought stresses that "the other is extremely important to any notion of the self and its development; indeed, one cannot be fully understood without the other."²⁶ Therefore, the self is always defined in terms of—and functions only within the context of—its communal value."²⁷ In *juche*'s understanding, the people are "at the center of everything, in that they are the masters of the world and play the decisive role in transforming the world and in shaping their own destiny."²⁸ *Juche* thought places both the self and the other inextricably bound in a web of sociopolitical life.

Since *juche* focuses on relationality, it serves to bring together the people, the party, and the leader together into close relationship.²⁹ This three-way relationship is seen as one big family. Shin points out that *juche*'s sense of a communitarian society is based on the Confucian sense of filial piety, which includes the duty of the children to dissuade the parent from an immoral course of action.³⁰ This means that the original Confucian sense of filial piety includes a sense of reciprocity that precludes a one-sided authority of parents over children.

When it comes to the idea of oneness, *juche* embraces both individuality and multiplicity as implicit in the one-and-many relationship.

The one-and-many principle represents the totality of reality as a powerful agent of change, in which a great multitude of things are integrated into the structured whole of coexistence through *juche* thought. The sociopolitical life unifies many through its own creativity and is the foundation of the ontological unity of the people, the party, and the leader.³¹

In thinking about how to combine *juche* with some of the ideas discussed in this dissertation, there seems to be a parallel between relationality in *juche* and the understanding of *minjok* used in *tongil* theology. In *juche* thought *minjok* becomes a reality in the sociopolitical sphere. *Minjok* is the result of the struggles of the community and comes to be within the social and political context that includes numerous commonalities (i.e. same blood, same language, same culture).

²⁵ Shin "Sociopolitical Organism), 520.

²⁶ This understanding clearly functions in a collective society.

²⁷ Shin "Sociopolitical Organism)

²⁸ Shin "Sociopolitical Organism)

²⁹ Shin "Sociopolitical Organism), 521.

³⁰ Shin "Sociopolitical Organism), 523.

³¹ Shin "Sociopolitical Organism)

In *juche*, the *minjok* refers to the social community that is considered self-sufficient. The *minjok* is inclusive of all *minjung*. The goal of *juche* is the self determination of the *minjok*, which will not happen without resolution of *won* and *han*.

C. The Christian Churches and Korean Reunification

In the 1950s, Christianity in South Korea had a bitter experience when approximately 200 church leaders were executed by the North's communist government during the Korean War. This experience greatly contributed to the anti-Communist stance of Christians in the South.³²

In 1961, after the military *coup d'état* that brought General Park Chung-Hee to power, the government's policy was construction first, reunification second. Under this regime, most Korean churches did not focus on reunification on the assumption that it was best to follow an anti-Communist line.³³ In those days, the churches concentrated on the growth of the church rather than on reunification.

During the 1970s, most Korean churches were conservative, rarely paying attention to social problems. They were only concerned with personal spiritual matters. Their position on the anti-Communist line caused them to be against reunification. On the other hand, the progressive churches became deeply involved in Korean social problems. Their main concerns were human rights and the democratization of South Korea. The progressive churches were also involved in the reunification movement, seeking reconciliation and coexistence between the South and the North.³⁴

The Christian churches of North and South Korea agreed to meet at Tozanso in Japan, October 29 to November 2, 1984, but the delegates from North Korea did not appear. Regardless, the participants decided to "support Korean attempts to bring about peace, reconciliation, and unity, including reunification of the peninsula and to establish a constructive relationship with Christians and with the government of North Korea."³⁵

Even though the historic meeting between North and South Korean churches did not occur in the Tozanso conference in 1984, some significant contacts were made between the Korean National Council of Churches (KNCC) and the Korean Christian Federation of North Korea.

³² Korean Association of Christian Studies, ed., *Minjoktongilkwa Hankokkidokkyo*, [*The Korean Church and Reunification*], 125.

³³ Korean Association of Christian Studies.

³⁴ Korean Association of Christian Studies, 126.

³⁵ Kang, 132.

1. The First Glion Conference (September 2–5, 1986)

In 1986, under the efforts of the International Council of the World Council of Churches, the Christian leaders of South and North Korea met at Glion, Switzerland, for the first time since the division of Korea. Four representatives from North Korea and six from South Korea attended this conference. They had a seminar entitled “Biblical and Theological Criteria of Christian Concern for Peace,” and shared the idea that they had to break the barrier within each country and try to create a just and peaceful future for Korean reunification. They embraced and shared the Lord’s Supper. As a result of this conference, in 1987, the National Council of Churches in the United States sent delegates to visit North Korea.³⁶

2. The Second Glion Conference (November 23–25, 1988)

At this meeting, seven delegates from North Korea and 11 representatives of KNCC reaffirmed their commitment to work for national reconciliation and agreed on the three principles of reunification adopted by the two governments in 1972. The delegates adopted the Glion “Declaration on Peace and the Reunification of Korea” and determined that the Sunday before each August 15 would be celebrated as “Common Prayer Day for Peaceful Reunification.” They also agreed that 1995 would be observed as the Jubilee Year for Peace and Reunification, and it was.³⁷

On February 29, 1988, for the first time, KNCC officially published a “Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reunification and Peace.” In this declaration, Korean Christians confessed the sins of hatred and division. The KNCC set forth five basic principles for national reunification: independence, peace, national unity, humanitarian basis, and the *minjung* principle. The last two principles are important to highlight. The fourth principle linked reunification to issues of justice:

Reunification must bring about not only the common good and benefit of the people and the nation. It must also provide the maximum protection of human liberty and dignity. Since both nation and people exist to guarantee human freedom and welfare, while ideologies and systems also exist for the sake of the people, primary consideration must always be given to humanitarian concerns and measures, which must never be withheld for any reason.³⁸

The fifth principle expressed concern for the *minjung*.

³⁶ Korean National Council of Churches (KNCC) ed., *NamBukgyohweui Mannamgwo pyeohwatongilshinhak*, [Meeting with Churches of South-North Korea and Peaceful Tongil Theology] (Seoul: The Institute of Korean Christian Social Problem, 1990), 34-37. See also, Chae Soo-II ed., *Heenyeonshinhakkwa Tongilsheeyeonundong*, [Jubilee Theology and Movement of Reunification Jubilee] (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1995), 518-532.

³⁷ Ibid., 137. See also, KNCC, Ibid., 28-30.

³⁸ Noh Jong-Sun, *The Third War—Christian Social Ethics* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2000), 220.

In every step of the formation of proposals for reunification the full democratic participation of all members of society must be guaranteed. Most importantly, participation must be assured for the *minjung* (common people), who have been continuously alienated and excluded from the decision-making processes of society despite their constituting the majority of the population.³⁹

The declaration called the Korean churches to overcome their local self-centeredness and their preoccupation with ecclesiastical power in order to fulfill their mission regarding responsibility peace and reunification.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, most leaders of the conservative churches criticized the KNCC as a pro-Communist organization. Regardless, the 1988 KNCC declaration is one of the most important documents in the history of the South Korean reunification movement.⁴¹

3. The Third Glion Conference (December 1–4, 1990)

North and South Korean churches met again at Glion in 1990. At this meeting, they agreed to the following eight points.

- a. Continue celebrating the Sunday before August 15 as “Common Prayer Day for Peaceful Reunification.”
- b. Promote education for peaceful reunification.
- c. Develop common programs that would create solidarity between North churches and South churches.
- d. Urge both sides to issue a declaration of nonaggression, arms reduction, and ending large military exercises.
- e. Call for the release of imprisoned people involved in the reunification movement.
- f. Work to change laws and systems which impeded contacts between people from the North and the South, and work to meet in Pyongyang and Seoul.
- g. Promote visits of separated family.
- h. Establish an institute that would promote and organize common programs between North and South churches.⁴²

The participants at this Glion conference decided that future meetings should take place in Korea.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 227.

⁴¹ Noh Jong-Sun, *Tongilshinhakur Hyahayeo*, [Toward a Theology of Reunification: Third World Christian Ethics] (Seoul: Hanul, 1988), 41.

⁴² Chae Soo Il ed *Heenyeonshinhakkwa Tongilsheeyeonoundong*, [Jubilee Theology and Movement of Reunification Jubilee] (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1995), 471-472.

4. The Fourth Glion Conference (March 28–31, 1995)

Though this conference is called the Fourth Glion conference, in reality it took place in Kyoto, Japan. This meeting was entitled “The Fourth Christian International Committee for Korean Peninsula Peace and Reunification.” At this meeting, the focus was on the Jubilee year. The North and South churches approved that the Jubilee worship service including both the North church and the South church, together, was to be held on August 15, 1995, at Panmunjeom (the demilitarized zone).⁴³

5. Meetings in the 21st Century

On October 17 to 21, 2004, 55 church leaders and consultants from nine countries of Asia, Europe, and North America met under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) at the Tozanso YMCA Conference Centre in Japan to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the historical ecumenical consultation that opened lines of communication between Christians of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK).⁴⁴

May 23 and 24, 2005, the churches of North and South Korea held a prayer meeting at Mt. Kumkangsan in North Korea. When Kang Young-Sup, a leader of the Korea Federation Church of North Korea, met Shin Kyung-Ha, then a president of KNCC, they made a joint declaration about peace in the Korean peninsula.⁴⁵

On August 9 to 11, 2007, on the 100th anniversary of the Korean Great Revival that took place in 1907, in Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea, the Peace and Unification Committee of South Korea, hosted the international consultation on “The Role of the Church for Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula.” The consultation comprised all the churches belonging to the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Christian Council of Korea.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Toward an Ethics of Korean Reunification

In this 2007 international consultation, one of the keynote speakers was Lee Jae-Joung, then minister of unification of the South Korean Government. Lee is an academic theologian who received his doctorate in

⁴³ http://www.kncc.or.kr/Data/BoardList.asp?bbsKind=pds_docu&mode=list&pg=36&sch=&keyword=; see 1980-2000nyon *Hankuk Kyhoe Tongil Yoedongzareozib 16* [The Resources of the Korean church reunification movement between 1980 and 2000, # 16]; accessed March 1, 2009.

⁴⁴ <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/tozanso2004.html>; accessed March 3, 2009.

⁴⁵ <http://www.christiantoday.co.kr/view.htm?id=163038>; accessed Feb 29, 2009.

⁴⁶ <http://www.kncc.or.kr/Data/BoardList.asp>; accessed March 3, 2009. On the importance of the 1907 Revival, see Lee Young-Hoon’s article: <http://dpark.files.wordpress.com/2006/08/01-1-yhlee.pdf>; accessed March 3, 2009.

theology from Toronto School of Theology—Trinity College.⁴⁷ Though he spoke as a government official, his speech had theological undertones. In his speech entitled, “The Role of the Churches in Peace-Building and Unification on the Korean Peninsula,” he noted that the churches of Korea did not abandon hope for liberation during the thirty-six years of harsh colonial rule by Japan.⁴⁸ Now the mission of the Korean churches is “the establishment of peace on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia and the formation of a national community”. He continued, “The value of the 21st-century is peace, and the goal is unification.”⁴⁹ In order to bring peace to the Korean peninsula, he said, the focus has to be co-existence, which is based on respect of each other and on trust. In order to promote co-existence, reconciliation, and cooperation, Lee Jae-Joung pointed out that inter-Korean relations are fundamental. Without progress in inter-Korean relations, peace will never be established. Lee insisted that where there is a unified will, there will be a way.⁵⁰

At the end of the 2007 international consultation, a statement was issued entitled “Our Commitment to Peace and Unification in the Korean Peninsula.”⁵¹ Just as in past documents, this document calls for the Korean churches to work for peace and reunification. It quotes a declaration issued in 1988 that boldly stated that this work for peace and reunification has been commanded by God and, therefore, the churches are obligated to carry it out.⁵²

After noticing that “much progress has been made in the quest for reconciliation and peace in Korea,” the document turns to what is yet to be accomplished. It mentions that “suspicion, prejudice, and hatred have not yet disappeared from the hearts of the people.” I propose that understandings that emerge from *sangsaeng* theology can make a contribution in this area. Suspicion, prejudice, and hatred are at the heart of the resentment—*haewon*—that Koreans need to overcome. The principle of *haewon-sangsaeng* wisely recognizes that there is a *yin-yang* tension between these negative sentiments of suspicion, prejudice, and hatred and their resolution. A Korean ethics of reunification is not about ideas but about a way of living, of moving from *haewon* to *sangsaeng*. Pointing out that we need to have resolution of Korean *won* and *han* does not mean that we cannot move ahead until these disappear. On the contrary, it means that one has to find ways to battle daily the resentment that have built among Koreans, particularly the last 60 years of our history.

⁴⁷ Koreanunification.net/2007/09/03/personalities-in-korean-unification-lee-jae-jeong; accessed Feb 28, 2009.

⁴⁸ See Appendix B for complete text of his address.

⁴⁹ Appendix B, 195.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 201.

⁵¹ See Appendix C.

⁵² Ibid., 204.

The statement calls for peacemaking, pointing out that it “requires patience, the building of confidence, new ideas, and new approaches. Peacemaking requires the shared wisdom of the whole community of faith.”⁵³ The understanding found in *tongil* and *sangsaeng* theologies can also help in this area. Peacemaking is about becoming *minjok* (becoming one) as well as about *sangsaeng* (life-sharing). The call for using the shared wisdom of the community can be enriched with the perspective of reconciliation that is part of *sangsaeng* theology. Understandings emerging from *sangsaeng* and *tongil* theology can help Korean Christians to “broaden [their] perceptions of what it means to be Church in a situation of division and brokenness, as a reconciling and healing community.”⁵⁴

The statement asks for a comprehensive economic development plan that will contribute to the welfare of all Koreans living on the peninsula. *Minjung* theology’s emphasis on justice based on the Gospel message is parallel to this request. *Minjung* theology’s preoccupation with the participation of all Koreans in issues of government is present in the carefully worded sentence that says that the reunification of Korea is a regional issue, one that the Koreans have to resolve themselves, while recognizing that it has “global implications.”

Minjung, *sangsaeng*, and *tongil* theologies can enrich the theo-ethical basis for the full participation of the churches in the reunification movement. The churches must “join people of other faiths and civil society groups in the common cause of peace and unification.”⁵⁵ These three theologies provide the churches a very specific hermeneutics for reading the Gospel in Korea in the 21st century, and for working ardently for the reunification of our country.

I close with a popular song—a popular common prayer of the Korean people.

우리의 소원은 통일 꿈에도 소원은 통일
Our wish is *tongil*. Even in our dreams, our wish is *tongil*.
이정성 다해서 통일 통일을 이루자
By the sacrifice of our lives, Let *tongil* come.
이겨레 살리는 통일 이나라 살리는 통일
Tongil in order to save our nation and to save our people;
통일이여 어서 오라 통일이여 오라
Oh, come quickly *tongil*! *Tongil*, please come!

⁵³ Ibid., 205.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 206.

⁵⁵ Ibid.