

Korean Reunification and *Tongil* Theology¹ - The Meaning of Community between Leonardo Boff and *Tongil* Theologians for the Korean Reunification

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The term *tongil*, which Korean people use today to refer to reunification, literally means “coming together as one.” For Korean people, reunification is a coming together as one community. For Christian people, the significance of Korean reunification should not be limited to the notion of creating one single political unit, one Korean nation; rather, it should focus on building a new Korean society in which all Koreans will be able to live in peace and love in a community where justice prevails. This is the focus of *tongil* theology², which addresses the building of a new Korean society focused on being *one* community characterized by justice.

In this study, in order to examine the notion of a justice community that *tongil* theology addresses, I first analyze the notion of community/communion in the work of Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian liberation theologian. His paradigm provides a framework for a critical analysis of the principal elements of *tongil* theology—unity and community.

After looking at Boff’s work, I will discuss the works of three contemporary Korean *tongil* theologians,³ who, like Boff, understand community/communion to be a central element of Korean-Christian ethics of reunification. First, I will analyze the work of Park Soon-Kyung, a woman professor emerita of Ewha Woman’s University in Seoul⁴. Then I will look at the work of Moon Ik-Hwan, the late professor of Hanshin Theological Seminary in Seoul. Both Park, a woman, *tongil* theologian, and Moon, considered the father of the *tongil* movement, were committed to reunification of Korea as the becoming of one community.⁵ Their

¹ This paper is a little revised in my PH. D. dissertation that was written in 2009 at Drew University.

² *Tongil* theology is different from the unification theology associated with the worldwide Unification Church established by Moon Sun Myung during the last quarter of the 20th century.

³ 통일신학동지회, [*Tongil* Theology Comrade Association], which was organized by pastors, scholars, and Christians who lived abroad, mostly in the United States and Germany i.e., Kang Wi-Jo, Hong dong-Kun, Lee Young-Bin, Lee Hwa-Sun, etc, was established in Los Angeles in 1986. After three years, 통일신학동지회, [*Tongil* Theology Comrade Association] was established in Korea by Moon Ik-Hwan, Park Soon-Kyung, Hong Kun-Soo, Hong Sung-Hyun, Park Hyung Kyu, Cho Yong-Sul, Park Jong-Hwa, Noh Jong-Sun, etc. See 통일과 민족교회의 신학, [*Tongil and Theology of National Church*], ed., *Tongil* Theology Comrade Association. (Seoul: Hanul, 1990), Introduction.

⁴ Park Soon-Kyung is the first Korean woman to receive a Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Drew University (now known as the Graduate Division of Religion of the Theological School). A systematic theologian and student of the renowned Professor Carl Michaelson, Dr. Park was awarded her doctorate in 1966 and continues to work as a professor emerita on issues of the reunification of the two Koreas, especially as a *tongil* theologian.

⁵ Moon Ik-Hwan died in Jan 18, 1994.

“warming mind” (thought) was matched by their “body” (practice).⁶ They were imprisoned repeatedly for participating in the reunification movement, yet they continued to march for Korean reunification, which they understood to be the movement of God’s Kingdom. The third *tongil* theologian I study is Noh Jong-Sun, a professor emerita of Yonsei University in Seoul. He considers Korean reunification as a key issue of Christian social ethics, and he mentions that Korean reunification will contribute peace and justice for the global community. Park, Moon, and Noh, agree that community/communion must be a central element in the Korean reunification.

A. Community/Communion in the Work of Leonardo Boff

Leonardo Boff claims that “in the beginning is communion.”⁷ That is, he believes that in the beginning, God did not exist in the solitude of One but existed and exists in the communion of the Divine Three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁸ Each Person of the Trinity exists in the presence of the other, being open to each other in radical mutuality, so much so that each builds a single movement of love, communication, and encounter.⁹ This results in an eternal communion, in the intimate unity of the Three Persons in one God. For Boff, Trinity is the root and prototype of universal communion.¹⁰

In Boff’s understanding of the Trinity, the idea of communion is very prominent, and it is closely related to human communities. In *Trinity and Society*, Boff notes that all things always exist in communion with others, that is, in relationship with each other. For Boff, communion is characterized by four elements: presence one to another, reciprocity, immediacy, and community.¹¹ Presence one to another refers to “being open, sending a message to another in the expectation and hope of being heard and accepted, while at the same time, hearing and receiving a message from the other. The message is the true presence of one person who wishes to enter into dialogue and communion with another.”¹² In order to commune, he notes, one has to offer a welcome to the other.¹³

Communion is about reciprocity between two presences as they relate to each other. For Boff, communion cannot come from one side alone. It is much like two hands clasping each other. He points out that the richness of reciprocity—which is not to be confused with fusion—consists in one having and keeping her/his

⁶ 따뜻한 마음 (warming mind) in this context refers to passion for Korean reunification. 몸 (body) refers to practice resulting from “warming mind”.

⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 3. Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 9.

⁸ See also, Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 47.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹¹ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 129.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

own identity. To engage deeply in the relationship of communion, “reciprocity, for its part, presupposes a certain con-naturality between the elements that commune: totally distinct beings, with virtually nothing in common, will find it difficult to form bonds of communion.”¹⁴ He posits that “reciprocating and con-natural beings feel a certain attraction to one another; the greater this attraction, the more perfect the communion between them.”¹⁵

Boff’s third characteristic of communion, immediacy, refers to being *with* another and *for* the other to the point of being *in* the other. True communion occurs in direct and immediate relationships: eye to eye, face to face, heart to heart. It means more than physical presence. “Communion implies intimacy, transparency of intention, union of hearts, and convergence of interests.”¹⁶

Lastly, community emerges from relationships of communion. Boff states, “the product of relationships of communion is community; this implies living together, valuing the individuality of everyone, accepting differences as the interchange of riches, establishing personal relationships, doing away with formalities.”¹⁷ He claims that “community is a spirit that should inform all forms of human society rather than a specific social grouping.”¹⁸ He also posits that “the community spirit implies a utopia: a society that is without conflicts and that consists of an interplay of relationships in which the common good is placed above individual good because the members of such a society feel bound up with each other and completed in each other, through each other and by each other.”¹⁹ Boff states that this utopia has never been achieved in human history, yet it continuously unleashes energies to bring about “social changes in the direction of more balanced and participatory forms of living together.”²⁰ Thus, community implies a process of creating a utopia while valuing the individuality of each one, accepting the existence of differences as the interchange of riches, and willingly establishing relationships and doing away with formalities. Philosophically, Boff considers communion as follows:

Being-us: the product of the dynamic of communing is the *us*, the actual community, not just in the sense of a social, familial, loving community, but as a mode of being by which we become part of a single whole. We are, we live, we exist as human beings who always find themselves in particular communions with others. ... Beings in communion live in a permanent state of ex-centricity, since their centre is called by another centre outside them in order jointly to form a community.²¹

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. 131.

This mode of “being-us,” according to Boff, finds the ultimate model in God.²² Within the Trinity, each one is distinct from the other, but cannot be defined without the others.²³ Each divine person is affirming the others and surrenders to the others, being one *for* another, *by* another, *in* another, and *with* another.²⁴ Boff points out that “the unity of the Trinity is made up of these relationships; it is a unity peculiar to the Trinity, a tri-unity.”²⁵ He posits that God is in communion precisely because God is a Trinity of Persons. The essential perspective of the triune God, the communion existing among the divine Persons in unity, is not mere uniformity. This is why Boff considers the Trinity to be the perfect community. In his view, true communion leads to community through mutual sharing and reciprocity. He states, “Community results from personal relationships in which each is accepted as he or she is, each opens to the other and gives the best of himself or herself.”²⁶

Boff demonstrates the implications of the Trinity for political and religious life in society. For him, faith in the Trinity means criticism of all injustices and a source of inspiration for basic changes that must include a dimension of social transformation. To liberate people is to transform their social and economic structures. This liberation aims to bring about participation and communion, the realities that most closely mirror the very mystery of Trinitarian communion in human history. The Trinity produces “a vision of a church that is more one of communion than of hierarchy, more service than power, more circular than pyramidal, more loving embrace than bending the knee before authority.”²⁷ For Boff, the Trinity constitutes “a perichoretic communion” that provides a model for how church and society should be conceived. He writes,

We are called to live together and to enter into the communion of the Trinity. Society is not ultimately set in its unjust and unequal relationships, but summoned to transform itself in the light of the open and egalitarian relationships that are obtained in the communion of the Trinity, the goal of social and historical progress.²⁸

Thus Boff roots the Christian commitment to the transformation of society on the Trinity: as Christians we seek to change society since the Supreme Reality is the prototype of all other reality.

For Boff every creature and the whole of creation bears Trinitarian characteristics. In other words, all beings bear an image and likeness of the Trinity. Each existing being bears the mark of the Father who is characterized with boundless mystery. Each entity causes something else to be derived from it. That is, each

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 133.

²⁴ Ibid. This is the way Boff explains the meaning of the Trinity. He offers analytical, philosophical, and theological considerations in his attempt to make clear how “God is infinite communing.” See, Ibid., 128-134,

²⁵ Ibid., 133.

²⁶ Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 3.

²⁷ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 154.

²⁸ Ibid., 158.

entity has a beginning, but, at the same time, it is the created beginning of something else. In this sense, we are an expression of the mystery of the first person of the Trinity usually called “Father,” but in this case a father who should be understood as having both fatherly and motherly characteristics.²⁹

Every creature bears the mark of the Son. The Son shows the presence of supreme wisdom. The Son is revelation and intelligence. Each being also “reveals itself, shows its truth, and in this manner enters into communication with the other.”³⁰ This entering into relationship with one another is what constitutes all sisters and brothers.

From a Trinitarian perspective, everything also bears the mark of the Holy Spirit who is love and union. “The things of the universe are not simply thrown together, but they make up totalities of meaning; there is order, despite the apparent chaos. Particularly among persons, love and attraction to union and communion are at work.”³¹ The Holy Spirit whose image and likeness we bear is who makes possible love and union among persons, what makes community possible.

The image and likeness of the Trinity in every creature makes restoration of union, communion, and harmony among all beings as was ordered upon their creation. We are invited, as created beings, to seek the reality of God within history and to participate in creating communion, convergence, and union out of the most variegated differences, in order to mirror the internal reality of the Trinity.

B. Main Elements of *Tongil* Theology: Unity and Community

While *minjung* theology arose in the context of the 1970s democratic movement, *tongil* theology arose during the 1980s, during the national reunification movement.³² *Tongil* theology focuses specifically on the need to overcome Korea’s division, which it sees as structurally evil. *Tongil* theology examines the object of Korean reunification in the light of the Gospel of peace. For *tongil* theology, Korea’s national division is a structural reality that hinders the establishing of God’s peace in history.³³ The goal of *tongil* theology is a “just peace” that makes possible one Korean community. For *tongil* theology, Korean reunification is not an end in itself but the way to accomplish unity among all Koreans and to re-establish one community.³⁴ To do this, mistrust and

²⁹ Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 106

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Park Soon-Kyung “Theological Significance of the Koran’s Unification-Liberation” in *Minjok Tongshin* (Feb. 23, 2004), 2.

³³ Park Jong-Hwa “The Achievement of National Reunification and Formation of *Tongil* Theology” in 신앙과 신학 제3집, 전환기에선 한국교회와 신학, [*Faith and Theology No. 3, Korean Church and Theology on the Transition Period*], ed., Korean Christian Association (Seoul: Yang Seo Gak, 1988), 115. Park Jong-Hwa was previously on the faculty of Hanshin Theological Seminary and a *tongil* theologian. Today, he is a senior pastor of Kyung Dong church at Seoul, a typically progressive church in Korea.

³⁴ Ibid., 123.

hostility have to be overcome. A one-sided victory will not accomplish the goal of one community. Rather, *tongil* theology's aim is a peaceful community that is the fruit of justice (Isaiah 32:17).³⁵

1. Park Soon-Kyung

Park Soon-Kyung, the first female *tongil* theologian, points out how the Kwangju Democratic Movement contributed to building and development of *tongil* theology.³⁶ On May 18, 1980, to quell the students and citizens demonstrations against martial law in Kwangju, Chun Doo Hwan, the then military dictator of South Korea, sent in special forces trained for brutal combat to massacre the protestors. The Kwangju massacre brought together students and progressive intellectuals who formed the Kwangju Democratic Movement and began to actively participate in the reunification movement. After the Kwangju massacre, the military in South Korea attempted an appeasement policy, allowing more freedom to discuss societal issues, particularly by students and critical intellectuals. Though this was a manipulative strategy, not a real attempt to bring about peace, some people saw it as an opportunity to advance reunification movements previously viewed as illegal in Korean society. It was out of this situation that *tongil* theology began to be elaborated, always in relation to the people's movement.

Reflecting on the origins of the Kwangju Democratic Movement, Park posits that *tongil* theology begins with the screams of the people and continues because of the people being heavily burdened by national division.³⁷ For her, *tongil* theology begins with confessing the sins of national division, a structural evil and the cause of people's pain. *Tongil* theology aims to achieve a peaceful community, a community of *shalom* that functions as a democratic and just society. In her view, equality, peace, liberty, and justice are the true way for national reunification. She proposes reunification as intrinsic to justice, and without justice the Kingdom of God is not possible. If Christianity is not engaged in the liberation of the oppressed, Christianity has lost the meaning of divine salvation through Jesus Christ.³⁸

How can we sustain our faith in eschatological resurrection and proclaim

³⁵ Ibid., 130.

³⁶ Park Soon-Kyung "Theological Significance of Korean's Unification-Liberation" in *Minjok-Tongsin* (Feb. 23, 2004), 2. See, also, Park Soon-Kyung, "Tongil theology: Korean Reunification and Kingdom of God" in 기독교와 주체사상: 조국통일을 위한 남북 해외 기독교인과 주체사상가의 대화, [*Christian Faith and Juche Philosophy: Christian and Juche Dialogue for Reunification of Motherland*] Ed. The Association of Korean Christian Scholars in North America, inc. (Seoul: Faith and Intellect Company, 1993), 133-134.

³⁷ She considers reunification, "the third way." Even though she does not directly mention what the first way and the second way are, the first way refers to Christianity and "the second way" refers to Marxism. She thinks that the first way and the second way need to be somehow reconciled to seek a cooperative way. Park Soon-Kyung, 통일신학의 미래, [*The Future of Tongil Theology*] (Seoul: Sagaejeol, 1997), 342-343. Park Soon-Kyung, 통일신학의 여정, [*A Journey of Tongil Theology*] (Seoul: Hanul, 1992), 69. Park Soon-Kyung, 통일 신학의 고통과 승리, [*Suffer and Victory of Tongil Theology*] (Seoul: Hanul, 1992), 288.

³⁸ Park Soon-Kyung, 통일 신학의 고통과 승리, [*Suffering and Victory in Tongil Theology*] (Seoul: Hanul, 1992), 288.

the eschatological coming Kingdom of God without being practically engaged in the liberation of the poor *minjung* of the world from the powers of global capital? Christianity that has become part of a capitalist world has lost the meaning of divine salvation through Jesus Christ, and made it impossible to proclaim the actual coming of the Kingdom of God.³⁹

From Park's perspective, the human liberation movement toward transformation of the world order is a preparatory correlative to the proclamation of the salvation and coming Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is a dynamic power that transforms society.⁴⁰ That is, the Kingdom of God will be established on this earth. For her, it is not Biblical to think that without working to establish justice and peace in the world, Christians will go to the Kingdom of God after death. The Kingdom of God becomes a reality only when justice, peace, and love are realized.

For Park, the Holy Spirit is God in history transforming society.⁴¹ The Holy Spirit births a new church, a new nation, and a new world. This is why Park calls the Holy Spirit "Mother." As Mother, the Holy Spirit is a source of life as well as the Spirit that transforms history and the world.⁴² According to Park, the Korean reunification movement is a working of the Holy Spirit to transform North and South Korea.⁴³ It is the Holy Spirit of life, freedom, and love who will unite them into one, into a new unified Korea with political freedom, economical equality, social justice, and love.⁴⁴

Park sees Korean reunification in light of the Biblical jubilee.⁴⁵ The year of jubilee in Leviticus 25 happened every 50 years and included returning land to its original owners and liberating slaves and servants. Its purpose was to re-establish equality in the community based on God's justice.⁴⁶ For Park, Korean reunification aims at national liberation and equality and, like in the Biblical jubilee, aims at democratic social liberation and equality.⁴⁷

In order to find the third way, reunification, Park deals with the concept of *minjok*, which literally means "people of a nation"—a combination of *min* (people) and *jok* (family). *Minjok* in *tongil* theology refers to the oppressed people—oppressed because of the division. Park says that "*minjok* as the subject of reunification is the subject of national liberation."⁴⁸ The *minjok* have to be the focus in the process of

³⁹ Park Soon-Kyung, "Theological Significance of Korean's Unification-Liberation" in *Minjok-Tongsin* (Feb. 23, 2004), 5.

⁴⁰ Park Soon-Kyung 통일신학의 미래, [*The Future of Tongil Theology*], 151.

⁴¹ Ibid., 155.

⁴² Ibid., 157.

⁴³ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁵ Ibid.,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

reunification.⁴⁹

Park also denounces male domination in the reunification movement and in the Korean churches. In her view, Korean women need to be awakened in order to fulfill their prophetic task for Korea's reunification. For her, women's participation in the reunification is a test of the true democratic spirit of the reunification movement. This is why she insists that the patriarchy of the reunification movement and of the Korean churches must change. According to Park, equality of woman and man is connected with social, economic, and national equality. For her, it is the historical mission of women who struggle for the Kingdom of God to work for equality in all these areas.⁵⁰ The struggle for equality for women has to be understood as part of the process of Korean reunification. Equality of woman and man is a key element of the Kingdom of God.⁵¹

2. Moon Ik-Hwan

Pastor Moon Ik-Hwan (1918–1994) was very active in the Korean reunification movement. He saw the Korean people as one people, one body.⁵² For him, the unity of the Korean people has to be the primary objective, which is why he saw it as transcending differences in ideologies and systems.⁵³ His understanding of unity was based on the idea of *shalom* as presented in Jeremiah 8:11: "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."⁵⁴ Moon understood *shalom* as referring to personal health of mind and body, social health consisting of being united as one people, existence in an economically prosperous state, and possession of a religiously sound life.⁵⁵ This true *shalom* is not a utopia but a coming down from Heaven; it will be established by those who struggle for a life full of justice and peace.⁵⁶ The will of the Creator, God of *shalom*, will be done by human hands. This is why, for him, Christianity has to focus on the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace and justice, rather than on personal salvation.⁵⁷ Moon thought that to achieve the *shalom* community, Korea must be reunified.

Moon claimed that the early church community was considered a *shalom* community where equality, justice, and liberty existed.⁵⁸ He states that a new community, a *shalom* community, would be established through the reunification of North and South Korea. The result would be one Korea where justice, equality, and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 47-50, 295.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 248-249.

⁵¹ Ibid., 246.

⁵² Moon Ik-Hwan 통일은 어떻게 가능한가, [How to Possibly Achieve Reunification], (Seoul: Hakminsa, 1984), 41.

⁵³ Ibid., 39, 42.

⁵⁴ Moon Ik-Hwan, 메시아 왕국을 향하여, "Toward Messianic Kingdom" in 한국의 정치신학, [Political Theology in Korea], ed., Christianity Thought (Seoul: Christianity Thought, 1987), 368.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 369.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 368, 372.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 373.

⁵⁸ Moon Ik-Hwan, How to Possibly Achieve Reunification. 96.

democracy would flourish and where human dignity and equality would be enhanced.⁵⁹ The *shalom* community as a democratic and egalitarian society⁶⁰ would love and nurture the people, and this would contribute to bringing about peace.⁶¹ For Moon, reunification would bring about this *shalom* community.⁶²

To achieve this goal, Moon claimed both Koreans in the North as well as in the South need to overcome a divisive, military logic, one of white and black, that does not permit them to engage in seeking unity.⁶³ For him, *tongil* theology begins with *hanmom*—“one body,”⁶⁴ or the overcoming of all body-mind dualism.⁶⁵ Korea is one body.

Moon discussed a geographical reunification⁶⁶ seeing the land as representing our very bodies that come from the dust.⁶⁷ Without loving the land, we cannot love our bodies. If we love our bodies, we should love our land. The land is our bodies, our ancestors’ bodies, and our descendants’ bodies.⁶⁸ Therefore, as long as our land is divided, our bodies are divided. This is a tragedy that demands reunification.⁶⁹ In order to overcome it, we need a broad mind—not only a broad will—which embraces all differences.⁷⁰

The *minjung* were important to Moon. For him, God—who is the God of the *minjung*—stands by the victims of the Korean division. Korean people follow the God of Exodus who liberated the Israelites from Egypt. Moon understood that reunification needed to be achieved through the efforts of Korea’s *minjung* without external interference; Korean *minjung* have to be the moral agents who bring about a reunified Korea.⁷¹ He believed that the division of Korea had brought only suffering to the *minjung*. For him the division of Korea resulted in dictatorship in the North (Kim Il-Sung) and in the South (Park Chung Hee) as well as in uneven distribution of wealth.⁷² For Moon, as long as Korea remained divided, the *minjung* would remain oppressed and exploited; as long as Korea remained divided, the *minjung* would be oppressed and exploited by the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁶¹ Ibid., 97.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Moon Ik Hwan “우리의 염원”, [“Our Desire”] in 통일과 민족교회의 신학, [Tongil and the Theology of National Church], ed., Tongil Theology Friends (Seoul: Hanul, 1990), 15.

⁶⁴ This term *hanmom* usually translated as “one body.” The term doesn’t confine to a physical body, but one including body with mind.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁶ Later, Moon speaks of three different dimensions of reunification: people reunification, nation reunification and land reunification beyond geographical reunification.

⁶⁷ Moon, *How to Possibly Achieve Reunification* 41.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 37-38.

⁷² Ibid., 21.

capitalism of South Korea and the communism of the North. Thus, to work for the reunification of Korea was for Moon a way of working for the liberation of the *minjung*, for democracy, and for peace.⁷³

3. Noh Jong-Sun

Reunification theologian Noh Jong-Sun contends that Korea has been used by powerful countries for their own interests.⁷⁴ In his view, the division of Korea was not an accidental happening but a byproduct of the Cold War between the United States and Russia. In order to overcome dependence on the United States and Russia, both North and South Korea need to find a way to achieve the reunification of the Korean peninsula. In particular, Noh stresses, North and South Korea will achieve genuine decolonization and liberation from the domination of the super powers by reuniting.

Noh considers that the greatest factor hindering reunification is the people's division-oriented mindset which, at the same time, is a product of the actual divided reality they live. Thus, to bring about reunification, one has to work to change the people's way of thinking, so they can begin to see North and South Korea as one community. Under the influence of the actual division, the logic of division is pervasive in all walks of Korean life. In particular, Noh notes, most of the Christians in the South have had a division-faith, division-ideologies, and division-theology.⁷⁵ Noh emphasizes that North Korea and South Korea are not enemies but rather represent one national community.⁷⁶ North and South Koreans are brothers and sisters tied to one another beyond any differences in ideology or system of government.

As a *tongil* theologian, Noh offers theological insights that emphasize that North and South Korea are not enemies but people united by blood ties. He notes that like Israel in the Bible,

Both Koreas had been one kingdom for thousands years of Shilla, Koryu, and Chosun Dynasty. Both Koreas had been the victim of Japan's colonial rule, which was cruel. Koreas became the victim of Super Powers' divide and rule strategy and their alien political and economic ideologies of western Marxism and western capitalism. Two Koreas had suffered and killed because of the Korean War and other low intensity conflicts. Two Koreas lost their dignity as they exchanged the words and propaganda, demonizing each other and calling each other the puppet countries of the United States and Russia. Both Koreas made each other enemies, although we are the victims of the global political hegemonies wars. Yet both Koreas share the same blood ties as relatives, and they shared the same history, same natural heritages, and same language.⁷⁷

Noh posits that Ezekiel 37: 15-26 shows us a God in favor of reunification. In this passage the division of

⁷³ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁴ Noh Jong-Sun, *God of Reunification: Toward a Theology of Reunification* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1990), 1; see also, Noh Jong-Sun, *The Third War* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2000), 96.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁶ Noh Jong-Sun, "Division and Reunification of Korea" in *The Third War: Christian Social Ethics* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2000), 98, 107.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 60-61.

Israel is presented as being against God's will.⁷⁸ God wants to reunify the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel: "I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them, and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms."

According to Noh, God, who at first enjoyed *tongil*, eventually experienced division between the divine and the first human beings. This division brought about sin.⁷⁹ He claims that we can enter into the process of community salvation only when we repent of such a division and work toward reunification. He contends that just as God provided Israel with liberation from the bondage of Egypt and Babylonia, so, too, will God make possible the Korean reunification.⁸⁰

For Noh, reunification is not a going back to a Korea as it was in 1945. Reunification is a dynamic process that pursues something new: justice, peace, and communion. The reunified community will have to be grounded in justice. Justice for Korea will come if both North and South Koreans respect differences, stand in solidarity with each other, and establish relationships based on respect for each other.⁸¹

C. Ethical Elements in *Tongil* Theology

The reunification of the two Koreas is understood not just as the overcoming of present-day division as the central element of justice for all Korean people. *Tongil* theology focuses on reunification, which is intrinsic to peace, justice, liberty, reconciliation, and equality. The goal of *tongil* theology is to create the communion of all Koreans with mutual respect and service of others as key characteristics. *Tongil* theology is about building a new Korean society in which all Koreans are able to live in peace and justice: in community.

1. Park Soon-Kyung

From Park Soon-Kyung's work emerges the need to make intentional efforts to listen to the experience of those who suffer personally the oppression of the division. This listening seeks true mutuality, for her reunification is about embodying a mutuality that makes possible working towards a common good. Reunification, then, respects the moral agency of all involved by promoting a mutuality that values and embraces diversity.

⁷⁸ Noh Jong-Sun, 통일신학을 향하여, [*Toward a Theology of Reunification*] (Seoul: Hanul, 1988), 57.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁸¹ Noh Jong-Sun, "Inter Korea Talks and the Paradigm Shift for Politics of Shalom" in *The Third War: Christian Social Ethics*, 61.

Park, therefore, proposed a dialogue between Christians and Marxists in a relationship of communion between the two Koreas. She sees Christianity functioning as an ideology that defends capitalism.⁸² Christianity, then, is a subtle defense of the oppressive status quo. She follows Marx in seeing religion as playing a role in the justification of the status quo. Park believed that Christians in South Korea support anti-communism as a way of defending the status quo. Christians, therefore, needed to dialogue with Marxists in the North in order to overcoming the division.⁸³

On March 28–30, 1991, a dialogue in which Park participated took place at Stony Point, New York in the United States,⁸⁴ between Marxists and Christians. The dialogue succeeded in beginning to eliminate a considerable number of prejudices, misunderstandings, and false interpretations of each position. This dialogue had as its goal enhancing human dignity, equality, liberty, reconciliation, and peace. Christians took Marxism and socialism seriously. They accepted that it is a Christian responsibility to espouse values that are common to both Christianity and socialism. At this time, Park heard a presentation by a North Korean, *juche* (self-reliance) philosopher, and she decided to work with the concept of *juche* to incorporate the idea into her work in theology and Christian ethics.⁸⁵

Four months later, July 9–12, 1991, another dialogue took place in Tokyo. Park made a presentation entitled “Prospect of Christianity and National Reunification.” She indicated that Christianity needed to engage in *juche* beliefs as the guiding philosophy of North Korea.⁸⁶ Implicit in her message was a call to all Koreans to respect each other. She called for a process of reunification that would honor and care for all Koreans. This, she hoped, would develop an environment and climate in which the long imbedded distrust, suspicion, hatred, and even fear of each other would be overcome, making room for mutual understanding and respect. She suggested that the South needed to be open itself to what *juche* philosophy teaches about self-reliance, economics, and defending one’s country.⁸⁷ South Korea and North Korea must look for ways to combine the strengths of both socialism and capitalism. Many in Korea wish for a reunified society. Both Koreas know that, if they are reunited, they will be strong, rich, and prosperous, as they engage a spirit of self-reliance and unity while

⁸² Park Soon-Kyung, 통일신학: 조국통일과 하나님나라, “*Tongil Theology: National Reunification and Kingdom of God*”, in 기독교와 주체사상: 조국통일을 위한 남북 해외 기독교인과 주체사상가의 대화, [*Christianity and Juche thought: A dialogue between Christians abroad and Juche Philosophers*], ed., North America Christianity (Seoul: Faith and Intellectuals, 1993), 132.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 24–25.

⁸⁵ Park Soon-Kyung, 통일 신학의 고통과 승리, [*Suffer and Victory of Tongil Theology*] (Seoul: Hanul, 1992), 112.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 118. 226–229. See also, Park Soon-Kyung, 주체사상에 대한 금기: 냉전체제를 넘어서, [*Taboo about the Juche Thought: beyond of the System of the Cold War*], in 평화와 통일의 실천마당, [*Practical Dimensions of Peace and Reunification*] ed., The Committee of Articles Collection for Rev. Hong Kun-Soo (Seoul: Hanul Academy, 2003), 371. I include in the next chapter a short explanation of *juche*.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

envisioning a future of a communal solidarity for justice, peace, and love. Her presentation in Tokyo was costly; upon returning to Korea, Park was jailed by the South Korean government.

Park's understanding of *minjok* parallels Boff's position that reciprocity presupposes a certain con-naturality. For her, *minjok* provides the con-naturality needed to create a bridge between capitalism and socialism.⁸⁸ She considers that acknowledging the Korean people as *minjok* is most important, for it implies cooperation and co-existence. She focuses particularly on how being *minjok* means that the people of North and South Korea do not require interference of foreign countries to bring about reunification.⁸⁹ Since North and South Koreans are *minjok*, they can live together even if they have different ideologies. *Minjok* is for Park a third way, a way in which the democratic principles in both socialism and capitalism can lead to a truly egalitarian society. For Park, it depends on the creative wisdom of the North and South to establish themselves as a *minjok*, thus creating this third way.⁹⁰

2. Moon Ik-Hwan

In an exchange of letters between Park and an imprisoned Moon Ik-Hwan, Moon talks about how *tongil* theology must transcend being "*hanminjok*," meaning one same nation or one same people being divided, as Israel did when they went beyond being different tribes and became one *minjok*, a new community based on a covenant with God.⁹¹ *Tongil* points to the fact that Korea means more than one, and it must move toward being one large, inclusive community. For Moon, this meant engaging in a synthesizing process of the two ideologies and systems in order to bring about national liberation. Liberation for the people of North and South Korea means *tongil*: reunification.⁹² For Moon, liberty and equality are not separated; they are two sides of one same coin.⁹³ According to Moon's interpretation of the Bible, justice is about liberty with equality. Justice also means a praxis of loving others.⁹⁴ For Moon, therefore, the work of becoming one Korea is a praxis of love that harmonizes liberty with equality.

Moon understands peace as a profound and embodied sense of fulfillment, happiness, well being, and friendship in a social, communal, and covenantal manner.⁹⁵ Peace is to love life. Peace is in fact an expression

⁸⁸ Park Soon-Kyung 통일신학의 미래, [*The Future of Tongil Theology*] 295.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 331.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁹¹ Moon Ik-Hwan, 목메는 강산 가슴에 곱게 수 놓으며: 늦봄 문익환 목사의 옥중서신, [*Keeping the Memory of Mountains in My Heart: Letters of Rev. Moon Ik-Hwan in Prison*] (Seoul: Sagejul, 1994). 247.

⁹² Ibid., 248.

⁹³ Ibid., 249.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ William A. Vangemeren, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Vol. 4. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 130-131.

of love. Peace stops wars that kill life.⁹⁶ He also saw poverty as an enemy of peace, for it keeps people from fullness of life. *Tongil* theology is a peace theology and, therefore, must consider the economic problems the Korean people face. Political freedom is impossible without a measure of economic freedom. For this reason, helping North and South Koreans who suffer in poverty is very important. Disregard for human life is ultimately inhumane and morally wrong. For Moon, community is based on love, a love that enhances human dignity and deepens the relationship between Koreans from the North and the South.⁹⁷

Moon, like Park, used the concept of *minjok* to encourage efforts of establishing a dialogue between the North and the South based on the liberation of all Korean people. To promote dialogue, Moon visited North Korea and met with Kim Il--Sung in 1989, then the leader of North Korea, in spite of the danger of being arrested. Moon and Kim agreed that *tongil* will be achieved if the goal is co-existence and not one of conquering the other.⁹⁸ Moon believed what Boff points out, that we need to meet face to face in order to overcome prejudices and the fixed negative notions of the other, to be able to experience understanding and empathy. Koreans are aided in this by the fact that we have common historical, cultural, and national roots that are older and deeper than the ideological differences of the last half century. Personal meetings and dialogue make possible “presenting oneself to another and offering a welcome to another.”⁹⁹ This will aid both sides to overcome distrust and hatred and to find ways of moving beyond ideological differences.

3. Noh Jong-Sun

Noh Jung-Sun’s main contribution is to insist on the need to change the present day mind-set of North and South Koreans so they can see themselves as brothers and sisters who care for each other and want to be one national community beyond differences in system of government. He emphasizes that North and South Korea are not enemies but people united with blood ties. Noh talks with great insistence about the 10 million divided families in Korea who are still suffering because of the division of Korea.¹⁰⁰ Without wiping away the tears of those divided families, there is no possibility of true peace.¹⁰¹ Those separated families, who have suffered for more than 50 years as victims of the division, clamor for the immediacy of communion Boff talks about. A start toward *tongil* would make it possible for North and South Koreans to freely visit their relatives no matter where they are. This would help establish intimacy and understanding among all Koreans and will contribute to the

⁹⁶ Moon, *Keeping the Memory of Mountains in My Heart*, 251.

⁹⁷ Moon’s sense of community parallels Boff’s understanding of con-naturality.

⁹⁸ Cha Hee Dong, 늦봄 문익환의 삶과 사상, [“Life and Thought of Late Spring, Moon Ik-Hwan”], *민중과 신학*, [Minjung and Theology], 3 (2000, Autumn).

⁹⁹ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Noh, *God of Reunification: Toward a Theology of Reunification*, 25.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

restoration of unity among people who share one same ethnic identity and heritage. The task of reunification must be to restore trust among Koreans, and starting with family visits seems most natural. Exchanges among scholars, cooperation in the area of economic development, and reduction of the military tension along the demilitarized zone could follow.

Noh contends that North and South people do not know that they are treating capitalism and communism as if they were idols.¹⁰² North and South Koreans must repent of the sin of worshipping any ideologies. Renouncing such idolatry is a way of advancing *tongil*. He also posits that western theology has influenced the Korean churches, encouraging the internalizing of capitalism instead of criticizing it. In so doing, western theology and the Korean churches have contributed to sustaining a divided Korea as if it is God's will.¹⁰³ He posits that it is idolatry to practice any theology that does not include *tongil* as a central element, for a divided Korea destroys *imago Dei*, human dignity, and humans as *imago Dei*.¹⁰⁴ Theology always has to take into consideration that any ideology to be persuasive should be founded on the universal value of human dignity, that solidarity is intrinsic to peace. Solidarity does not aim at the victory of one over another. Peace is the result of relating to one another as persons created in the image of God.

One of the goals of Korean reunification is to promote the worth and dignity of every person. This is why we need to start seeing each other as being of equal value, created equally, loved equally as children by our God. It is a task of Korean Christians to prepare for the inevitably coming reunification. It is imperative to lay the necessary groundwork for a harmonious living of North and South Koreans.

D. Conclusion

The first three elements of Boff's model—presence one to another, reciprocity, and immediacy—are very much paralleled in the work of the three *tongil* theologians I have examined. The insistence that reunification has to be about recognizing Koreans are *minjok* speaks to the communion that is the aim of Boff's paradigm. If the churches are not about doing all they can so all Koreans can once more be *minjok*, then I do not think Korean churches can preach about God being Trinity.

The proposals of Park and Moon that rest in the idea of being *minjok* are also very similar to Noh's insistence on wiping the tears of divided families. All three of these *tongil* theo-ethicists are about bringing the people together and requiring the structures of government to do whatever is necessary so the Korean people can stop suffering the pain of being a divided people. They all see, like Boff, that to focus reunification in making

¹⁰² Noh Jong-Sun, *Toward a Theology of Reunification*, 58.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

the people one—*minjok*—again, a process of visits and dialogue has to be established. Only then will the people from North and South Korea come to know each other again. Only in the immediacy of personal contact will they be able to establish a sense of reciprocity that will overcome suspicion and mistrust. Only in the reciprocity that can take place when they are together can a *tongil* Korea begin to emerge.

I am reminded of a poem by Moon Ik-Hwan, “Two Skies, One Sky,” in which a father suffers because of the division of Korea. As he stands in the Demilitarized Zone on a cold, rainy night, he looks up to the sky as the morning light begins to shine. With the left eye he could see North Korea, and with the right eye he could see South Korea. He cries as he realizes that these are not different skies but one same sky, one same heaven.¹⁰⁵

This is the same realization that guided Moon Ik-Hwan and continues to guide Park Soon-Kyung, Noh Jong-Sun, and other *tongil* theologians and Koreans in the North and the South who are really committed to the reunification of Korea.

Abstract

This paper deals with the notion of community in *Tongil* theology for Korean reunification. 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. *Toingil* theology is about reunification. From the Christian point of view this means communion/community. I work with the notion of community in Leonardo Boff and in *Tongil* theologians, Park Soon-Kyung, Moon Ik-Hwan, and Noh Jong-Sun. Reunification, therefore, is not to be left only in the hands of politician but it has to involve the Korean churches and the focus must be the creation of one national community. It is not limited to political reunification, but seeks the construction of a new society in which all people will live together in a peaceful and just society. 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 creation of a unified nation of people. The rich understandings that emerge from the dialogue between Leonardo Boff and the three Korean *Tongil* theologians I work with in this study 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.

¹⁰⁵ Moon Ik-Hwan, 두 하늘 한 하늘, [*Two Skies, One Sky*] (Seoul: Creativity and Critics Company, 1989), 164-165. Translation mine.

In thinking of the notion of community, I am reminded of a poem by Moon Ik-Hwan, “Two Skies, One Sky,” in which a father suffers because of the division of Korea. As he stands in the Demilitarized Zone on a cold, rainy night, he looks up to the sky as the morning light begins to shine. With the left eye he could see North Korea, and with the right eye he could see South Korea. He cries as he realizes that these are not different skies but one same sky, one same heaven.

Key Words

Korean reunification, community/communion, *Tongil* theology, unity, Leonardo Boff, Park Soon-Kyung, Moon, Ik-Hwan, Noh Jong-Sun

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