

# What's the Right Thing to Do for Korean Reunification? - In terms of my autobiography<sup>1</sup>

Sam Kyung Park  
(Seoul Theological University)

## I. Introduction

Theo-ethical understandings are autobiographical in the sense that how one conducts oneself, and how one lives, defines or structures one's moral and theological claims.<sup>2</sup> My biography, in other words, undergirds my theo-ethical discourse. This understanding highlights the fact that knowledge is grounded in experience. Knowledge is not merely a corpus of ideas; it's also an understanding that emerges from experience. Recognizing the role of my life's journey in my theo-ethical discourse also leads me to value perspectives other than my own. Yes, recognizing that one's experiences influence greatly what one thinks makes one recognize that there is a vast multiplicity of perspectives different from one's own, precisely because there are endless experiences different from one's own. One's limited experience leads to accepting the experiences of others and the understanding that emerges from those experiences. I believe the autobiographical approach to theology and ethics, therefore, is important in our modern pluralistic society.

In the pages that follow I offer an account of my "actional route," that is, my own personal story as it has been framed by the historical and social reality in which I have lived, and as it intersects with "the social practices of other agents."<sup>3</sup> Narrating my faith journey is a way of identifying how I am implicated in the theo-ethical discourse that this study elaborates.<sup>4</sup> Thus, disclosing biographical information is my attempt to exercise "epistemological vigilance;" it is my attempt to identify experiences and understandings that influence me and that limit what I know and understand.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Personal Journey

What is the meaning of studying ethics and theology in the divided Korean peninsula? This question has been with me from the beginning of my faith journey. It guides my work in theology and ethics, and makes clear for me that justice requires liberation from all forms of oppressions.

My concern for justice was conceived and strengthened through my struggle for liberation against the oppressive Korean social regime during the period from 1960 to 1980. This struggle moved me from focusing on justice solely as a spiritual dimension and individual responsibility, to seeing justice as a political and social issue. It has allowed me to realize today that, given the present political and social reality in Korea, without

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<sup>2</sup> Lee Jung Young, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 7.

<sup>3</sup> "Actional route" is the technical term Mark Kline Taylor uses to refer to "both our concrete individual stories and social practices of other agents, actors, and forces that issue from them." (Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 27. In this text, Maduro claims that the epistemological vigilance is "a permanent, critical consciousness of the limits of our capacity to know reality, and of the concealing and distorting tendencies of this same capacity."

reunification of North and South Korea, justice will not become a reality in my homeland. I see this political issue strongly linked to social justice: One without the other is not possible.

When I first became a Christian at the age of 12, I considered justice as only a religious virtue. Later, I came to realize that justice is a social and a political virtue, as well as an ethical norm related to the proper and appropriate ordering of the life of human beings. What led to this change in my way of thinking is the context for this article.

## 1. Christian Formation in Korea

I was raised in the rich religious conservatism of the Evangelical Holiness Church tradition. My faith and thinking were influenced, from the fifth grade to the seventh grade, by my pastor, the Rev. Park Tae Hee. He came to my church after having been in charge of another church for three years following his graduation from seminary. Since most of the congregation members had only a primary school education, the Rev. Park became a teacher of our whole congregation. He always used a blackboard during his preaching. Usually, his sermons and teaching were focused on the salvation of the individual person rather than social issues. He dealt with spiritual phenomena and analyzed them in relation to the biblical understanding of the spiritual dimension. He taught that justice and faith had to do with individual persons rather than with social problems. I came to understand through his teaching that the status quo, both politically and economically, had been established by God. As I was growing up, my church was like most Korean churches: They were indifferent to the economic and social problems of our society. Ministers preached only about individual ethics and only had spiritual concerns. No significant voice was raised in religious circles regarding the violation of human rights and disregard for personal dignity that was rampant in Korean society at that time.

It is no surprise, then, that at that time my own personal ideology included many of the views of the “status quo.” My thinking during those years could be described by the following claims: “Anyone can make it if they just work hard enough.” “People who live in poverty are merely lazy.” “The United States is a compassionate nation, solely interested in justice for all.”

## 2. Paradigm Shift

### (1) Student Movement

My college years were a time of great growth for me; I experienced a significant shift in my way of thinking about justice. When South Korean students introduce themselves, especially those of my generation, they mention the year they entered college. I entered college in 1980, a year of turmoil and tragedy due to ongoing student protests and demonstrations that resulted in the Kwangju massacre. These events set in motion a decade of social and political unrest, a tragic period in the history of Korea in which the student democratic movement played a vital role.

College students went to school every morning knowing that among us were policemen of our own age dressed in civilian clothes, pretending to be like us. We called them *Japsae* (bird catchers) because their duty was to catch the student leaders who led the street demonstrations. We studied while breathing an air that we called “pepper fog,” from the bombs set off to dispel our demonstrations. This intense political activism; the reading of books critical of the status quo, including Marxism, liberation theology, and critical philosophy, and continually discussing the future of Korea and its international relations were an essential part of student life.

We considered ourselves “almost-politicians,” patriots resisting an authoritarian regime. During that time, many of my friends were arrested, and some had to serve in the army against their will.

During these years, given the situation in which I was living and the many books I read, I examined issues having to do with economic exploitation and cultural imperialism propagated by multinational corporations in the poorer two-thirds of the world. With my fellow students, I discussed how the United States participated in the oppression of many of the world’s citizens. I came to realize that the United States had been using what is called “low intensity conflict” to continue its domination of the third world. All of these experiences led to a radical shift in my way of thinking. No longer did I believe that the United States was a compassionate nation in the pursuit of justice.

My thinking also shifted when I learned that the world has only a limited amount of resources and wealth. I came to realize that capitalism allows the rich to become richer at the expense of the poor becoming poorer. I came to understand that there are whole sectors of society where, no matter how hard they work, the people will always live in poverty. I realized that poverty is supported and condoned by social and political structures that are controlled by those who have power and by the institutions they manage. Their power is a result of an interconnected economic and social web of which we are all a part. My readings of Marxism provided me with certain insights that helped me understand the depth of the social and economic injustice in Korean society and the world. These readings challenged me to become more deeply critical of capitalism and to see the role it plays in social injustice.

As a Christian I used my experiences in the student movement and what I learned in college to become a better Christian, not to become a Marxist. My conservative faith taught me to be concerned only with the individual and her or his salvation. It did not help me in the task that I came to believe as a college student is the obligation of all Christians. As a Christian in Korea during the 1980s, I listened carefully to the challenges of Marxism that emphasize social structures more than individuals, and I came to believe that God wanted me to work to reform evil social structures. I embraced a religious faith that is about justice in this world, one that demands careful analysis of oppressive social structures.

## (2) The Influence of *Minjung* Theology

In my 20s, *minjung* theology, a liberation theology elaborated in Korea, powerfully influenced my understanding of justice and the need to relate religion and society. Traditional theology interprets the Bible using official church doctrines as a framework and is not concerned with social problems. As some theologians came to understand the Bible from the *minjung* perspective, they tried to put aside the traditional framework of doctrines that ignored the experiences and understandings of the oppressed. *Minjung* theology did not emerge from doctrines and abstract thought but from the lives of the *minjung* and the involvement of theologians in the *minjung* struggle for justice.

*Minjung* theology helped me to understand the notion of justice in relation to the oppression and injustice that existed in Korea in the 1980s. *Minjung* theology taught me that the stories of *minjung* crying and suffering were a social analysis of the reality I was living. This “view from below” became a fundamental criterion in my analysis of all situations of injustice. For me, the viewpoint of the poor and the oppressed

became the starting point for the struggle to achieve justice in society. *Minjung* theology helped me to see that theology has to contribute to this struggle. Therefore, I came to believe that theology is a praxis.<sup>6</sup>

### III. Starting Point for an Understanding of Justice: Oppression/Injustice

Following what I learned in my years as a university student, I started to articulate my understanding of justice with an analysis of the injustice that existed in Korea from 1960 to 1980. I believe that an in-depth analysis of injustice, which manifests itself in oppressive structures, attitudes, and behaviors, is absolutely necessary as a first step in the struggle for justice. One has to understand first the nature of oppression. One has to first listen to the cries of the oppressed.

What is oppression? To explain oppression, I use the schema developed by Iris Marion Young in which she analyses five categories of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that oppressed people often experience more than one type of oppression, and these different forms of oppression are interconnected. For example, at the same time racial minorities face cultural imperialism and powerlessness, homosexuals face systemic violence and marginalization. The categories are not separate from one another; rather, they interact and support each other to perpetuate structures of oppression. Here I explain each of the forms of oppression and illustrate each of them with examples from Korean history between 1960 and 1980.

Young follows the Marxist understanding of economic exploitation, pointing out how one group benefits at the expense of another.<sup>8</sup> When one talks about exploitation, then, one is referring to “who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and how and by whom the result of that work is appropriated.”<sup>9</sup>

In Korea during the time of the Park regime, the energies of the *minjung* were used to benefit the growing middle class and the rich. There was at that time in Korea an unequal distribution of wealth because the political and social institutions enabled a few to accumulate wealth while they constrained the *minjung*—the poor in the countryside and the working class in the cities.<sup>10</sup> The economic structures of my country were not designed to protect the poor.

Previous to Park Chung Hee becoming president in 1961 and later leading a military revolt, Korea had largely been an agricultural society.<sup>11</sup> During his regime, Park emphasized economic development, and Korea became increasingly industrialized. During the early years of his tenure, Park was largely supported by the people because he offered political stability and economic development. He won popularity for his firm, military type of leadership. He established a stable government and promoted economic growth and prosperity.

In spite of the worry and concern of most cabinet members, Park ordered the construction of a highway between Seoul and Busan, which became a most important link for transportation. He built modern houses for many who had always lived in straw-thatched houses. He fixed roads that formerly were too narrow and curvy for safe driving. He changed the management of individual units of housing into group management

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<sup>6</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues — Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 48–61.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>9</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Young, 53.

<sup>11</sup> For general information about Korea during the Park regime, see, Lee Ki-Baik, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

systems. He accepted loans from the United States of America, West Germany, and other countries, and used the funds for industrial development. As a result, Korea recovered from the losses suffered during the Korean War in 1950. The national income rapidly improved.

However, much of this was done at the expense of the *minjung*. Many were expelled from their own homes in order to facilitate modernization. For example, the poor who lived in shacks built on hillsides had their homes demolished without adequate compensation in the government's drive to build a new and extensive road system as well as factories. In the case of industry, an unfair union existed between politics and big business. The government provided special benefits to large enterprises with large capital, while it did nothing for small and medium-size enterprises that could simply not grow or keep operating without help.

The government tacitly permitted the exploitation of laborers to maximize profits (i.e., paying workers less than was needed to cover living expenses, allowing inferior and dangerous work conditions). In order to increase Korea's international competitive power in exports, the cost of production had to be very low. Thus, salaries had to be restrained. The price of agricultural products was also regulated by the government. For example, the price of rice, the primary food staple of almost all Koreans, was controlled in such a way that the livelihood of the farmers was threatened. During this period, movements for laborers' rights were suppressed, and their human rights were trampled.

The basic argument for economic development has been that it is *for* the people. However, in the process of economic development, the people are always excluded from the development of plans and from all decision making, of course, decisions that have to do with wages and the distribution of profits. As a result, the rich get richer, the government spends more and more, while the poor are exploited. The wealthy capitalist uses the labor of the poor to increase profits.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the energies of the "have-nots" were used for the power, status, and wealth of "the haves."

Such depth of exploitation of the *minjung* made clear that a change in the systems and structures set up by Park was necessary. To bring about the end of exploitation, there needed to be a "reorganization of institutions and practices of decision making, alteration of the division of labor, and similar measures of institutional, structural, and cultural change."<sup>13</sup> Justice could not be achieved by a mere redistribution of wealth. Attention had to be paid to the participation of all in the decision-making process and the rectification of injustices.

The second mode of oppression, marginalization, has to do with the exclusion of those whom the dominant group considers "different" or "other." Those marginalized may be the elderly, disabled, or any group that is not considered important by those holding power. That they are marginalized means their ability to be employed is severely limited.<sup>14</sup> Marginalization, however, extends well beyond the issue of employment to the exclusion of a "certain kind of people" from the social life of a society. This, in turn, leads to lack of self-respect of those marginalized, "to identity crisis, to lack of self-worth ... "[which] is totally destructive."<sup>15</sup>

While Park was in power, in November 1970, Chun Tae Il, a young needle worker who labored in a sewing factory under miserable conditions for 14 or 16 hours a day, set himself ablaze and ran through the

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<sup>12</sup> Suh Changwon, *A Formulation of Minjung Theology: Toward a Socio-Historical Theology of Asia* (Seoul: Nathan Publishing, 1990), 224.

<sup>13</sup> Young, 53.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 111.

crowded streets, crying, “Laborers also are human beings!”<sup>16</sup> His act of self-immolation indicates the degree to which the *minjung* were marginalized. Chun Tae Il was aware of his value as a human being. But he also knew that if society does not recognize one as valuable, one will lose self-worth and self-respect. He desired to be considered a valuable person.<sup>17</sup> His cry was directed to the oppressors but also to the *minjung* in an attempt to raise consciousness among them.<sup>18</sup>

The third form of oppression is powerlessness. Young defines it as “the lack of autonomy and control over the circumstances of one’s life with a corresponding lack of opportunity to enhance one’s capabilities and a lack of respect or dignity as well.”<sup>19</sup> Powerlessness affects those who lack authority and who are denied access to economic, social, cultural, and political structures. The powerless may not be aware of their lack of power, nor are they necessarily aware of the societal structures and institutions that uphold the power and authority of those in control. According to Young, this powerlessness results in “inhibition in the development of one’s capacities, lack of decision-making power in one’s working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies.”<sup>20</sup>

During the mid-1980s, the powerlessness of the *minjung*, oppressed by the Park regime, was evident. To be able to stay in power, the regime sent students to jail, tortured them, and even killed them. There was no law to protect them because power was held exclusively by Park. The students were struggling to have a voice in society so they would be able to influence the actions of their government. But they were powerless. Elections for the general public were suspended. A special body comprised of specifically chosen military officers affirmed the presidency of Chun Doo Hwan, a military general, who followed the policies of Park. His presidency continued from 1980 to 1988.

Historically, the central predicament of the *minjung* in Korea has been their powerlessness at the political, economic, and cultural levels.<sup>21</sup> The *minjung* have not been able to influence economic decision in any significant way or, at least, have noteworthy input regarding their relationship with the owners of the fields and factories where they labored. As poor, marginalized people, the *minjung* never have had political power, and thus are excluded from determining their destiny. Korean cultural values and symbols do not take into consideration the values of the *minjung* but rather represent only those of the rich and powerful to define the relationship of the powerful to the powerless, the *minjung*.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth face of oppression Young addresses is that of cultural imperialism, which refers to the “measuring of a particular group based upon the experience of the dominant culture.”<sup>23</sup> Cultural imperialism leads to minimizing or judging to be irrelevant the customs and different groups in society. The dominant group stereotypes all but those like them as “other,” while shaping, defining, and determining “normal” exclusively

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<sup>16</sup> Cho Byung Ho, 한국 기독교 청년운동 100년사 산책 [A History of the Christian Student Movements in Korea] (Seoul: The Written on Earth, 2005), 92.

<sup>17</sup> Korean Theological Study Institute, ed., 1980년대 한국 민중신학의 전개, [In Development of Minjung Theology in the 1980s] (Seoul: Korean Theological Study Institute, 1990), 25, 66, 88.

<sup>18</sup> This is the meaning given to Chun Tae Il’s action by different *minjung* theologians like Suh Nam-Dong and Ahn Byung Mu. Chun Tae Il’s event significantly influenced the birth of *minjung* theology. Suh, Nam-Dong, “두 이야기의 합류” [“A Combination of Two Stories”] in 민중과 한국신학 [Minjung and Korean Theology], ed., Committee of Theological Study, KNCC (Seoul: Korean Theological Study Institute, 1985), 271.

<sup>19</sup> Young, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>21</sup> Suh, 226.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Young, 58–59.

according to their own perspective. The prejudices and discrimination of the dominant group are mechanisms employed to maintain its privileged status.

According to Isasi-Díaz, the most destructive aspect of cultural imperialism is not what it does to the oppressed but what it makes the oppressed, in this case the *minjung*, do to themselves.<sup>24</sup> They internalized the way the dominant culture views them in such a way that they lose their own identity. The system of values, beliefs, and practices established and sustained by the powerful legitimated the status quo of the political, economic, and cultural system in Korea from 1960 to 1980. The oppressed people were manipulated by the dominant group and became victims, losing their identity. The struggle against the Park and Chun regimes were an attempt by the *minjung* and those in solidarity with them to oppose domination and being ignored by the dominant culture.

A key example of the cultural imperialism in Korea was and continues to be the way Korean women are treated; they are the “*minjung* within the *minjung*.” They are *Han*-ridden.

*Han* is a sense of unresolved resentment against injustice suffered, a sense of helplessness because of overwhelming odds against us, a feeling of total abandonment ... a feeling of acute pain of sorrow ... an obstinate urge to take “revenge” and to right the wrong all these constitute.<sup>25</sup>

Korean women at large and *minjung* women in particular have suffered in a patriarchal society greatly influenced by the teachings of Confucius with its strict authority hierarchy. Male imperialism keeps *minjung* women at the bottom of this hierarchy. According to a well-known Korean saying, “A woman must obey men during her entire life: her father, her husband, and her son.”

The last form of oppression discussed by Young is systematic violence. The *minjung* suffer violence not because of who they are or what they do personally, but simply because they are *minjung*. The violence they suffer is irrational. Yet, such violence is so common that it has become is part of the cultural and political system. No one, or very few, protests against police beatings or killings of *minjung* people. The student movement was indeed a protest against the systemic violence the *minjung* were suffering in Korean society.

During Park’s regime, systematic violence affected not only the *minjung* but all who opposed him. Students, as well as conscientious intellectuals who were identified as the opposition by Park, were arrested, tortured, and in some cases, were even murdered. The regime saw the student protests as a threat to itself and the status quo. Therefore, it believed it was justified in using violence against them. However, the students’ protests were but a reaction against the violence created in Korea by the oppressive structures of the government.

#### IV. Meaning and Role of Ideology in Theology and Ethics

In the 1980s, as a Korean college student, I lived in the middle of a conflict of ideologies. When I became involved in the student movement, my Christian faith was influenced by different ideologies. What do I mean by ideology? How do I understand ideology? Though I learned about Marxism during the student movement, I did not put aside my religious faith and embrace Marxism. I continued to turn to the Bible as the source of my ideas, as the foundation for what I thought and did in the student movement. It was not until I came to do graduate studies that I understood the relationship between faith and ideology—that is, not ideology

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<sup>24</sup> Isasi-Díaz, 114.

<sup>25</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung, “*Han-pu-ri*: Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective” in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed., R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 55.

in the Marxian sense, but ideology as proposed by different liberation theologians in Latin America and Asia. I focus particularly on the meaning of ideology in the work of Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit priest in Sri Lanka, who describes himself as a Christian-Buddhist and who is committed to the poor. Also guiding me in my understanding of ideology is Juan Luis Segundo, a Jesuit priest from Uruguay, who in several of his books has worked to clarify the meaning of ideology and the connection between ideology and religion.

### 1. Aloysius Pieris

For Aloysius Pieris, ideology is a worldview that is essentially programmatic, pertaining to “this worldly future to be realized, not without a struggle, in the socio-political order.” Pieris proposes that an ideology can be realized “with the aid of certain tools of analysis or a method of discernment based on its own premises.” Finally, for Pieris, an ideology is required “by its own intrinsic nature to be transcended by the truth it seeks to articulate.”<sup>26</sup>

For Pieris, the difference between religion and ideology is about an absolute future. Whereas ideology does not consider an absolute future, religion acknowledges it.<sup>27</sup> The target of ideology is this world’s secular progress.<sup>28</sup> Religion, on the other hand, not only deals with this present world but also “points to an Absolute Future, a Totally Other, so that the horizon of final liberation is given a metacosmic ultimacy.”<sup>29</sup> For Pieris, then, there is a connection between ideology and religion. He believes “emphatically” that the “Absolute Future” proposed and pursued by religion “has to be anticipated” in this world, “not only through the spiritual achievements of individual persons but also through visible structures in human society.”<sup>30</sup> Ideology, “usually,” according to Pieris, provides the “visible social structures, strategies, and institutions” that religion needs to “anticipate” the Absolute Future. Ideology, though concerned only with “this worldly future” since it always has to be “transcended by the truth it seeks to articulate,” is often—though not always—thought to reach into the realm of religion in this search.<sup>31</sup>

One last feature of Pieris’ understanding of ideology needs to be considered. He explains that a worldview, in order to develop and implement a program for the betterment of the social order, need to use “certain tools of analysis or a method of discernment based on its own (that is, ideological) premises.”<sup>32</sup> Two points are important to be made regarding this feature of ideology. First, Pieris insists that a society is not “simply the sum total of individuals.” The point he is trying to make is that personal conversion or change will not lead necessarily to change in the structures of society. He says, “The counter forces that operate in society overpower individuals in their efforts to attain the desired perfection.”<sup>33</sup> For Pieris, there is no possibility of the person “in isolation to be put right.” A person can be “put right” only “in dynamic relationship to society.” This understanding of the person as a social being is central to Pieris’ understanding of ideology.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Pieris does not say this explicitly but suggests it repeatedly.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27–28.



The other point is this: The tools used for analysis cannot contradict the vision of the attainable future the ideology proposes and promotes. Justice cannot be brought about using unjust methods, for example. The programmatic worldview has to respond in all of its aspects to the underlying premises of the ideology. It is only then that “faith in the perfectibility of the present can be sustained by hope in a perfect future,”<sup>35</sup> which I believe has to be one where justice becomes operative at all times and in all circumstances.

## 2. Juan Luis Segundo

Latin America theologian Juan Luis Segundo worked extensively with the concept of ideology.<sup>36</sup> Segundo considered ideology to be “the system of goals and means that serves as the necessary backdrop for any human option or line of action.”<sup>37</sup> Ideology has to do with the presuppositions all persons have as to what is important and should be sought, and at what price and effort. In highlighting that ideology is about “what is important,” Segundo brings to the fore the issue of values. As he succinctly puts it, ideology is “a logical system of interconnected values.”<sup>38</sup>

In particular, Segundo focuses on the relationship between faith and ideology. In his book, *Liberation of Theology*, he poses the question directly.<sup>39</sup> His answer follows along the lines of Pieris’ distinction between ideology and religion. Ideology is not about an absolute, like faith is. On the contrary, ideology adapts “to historical demands and necessities in and through a process of slow maturation.”<sup>40</sup> Segundo issues a clear warning that an ideology should not take “absolutist features” and try “to impose conditions on everything else, forcing history to dance to its tune.”<sup>41</sup> However, though “an ideology is grounded on arguments whose value is relative,” subjectively, one lives it “as an absolute value.”<sup>42</sup> This is precisely why ideology is confused with faith by some, perhaps by many. For Segundo, ideology functions as a bridge between how we know God and the problems that we encounter in the unfolding of history. He comments:

Our theory, in other words, assumes that there is an empty space between the conception of God that we receive from our faith and the problems that come to us from an ever-changing history. So we must build a bridge between our conception of God and the real-life problems of history. This bridge, this provisional but necessary system of means and ends is what we are calling ideology.<sup>43</sup>

Segundo cites a case in the Bible to illustrate his understanding of ideology.

Consider the Israelites who arrived in the Promised Land. For them, the extermination of their enemies was concretely the most clear-cut way of conceiving who God was and what he was commanding in the face of specific historical circumstances. Thus the extermination of enemies was the ideology that faith adopted, with or without critical thoughts, at that moment in history.<sup>44</sup>

The faith of the Israelites was permanent and unique while their ideology, bound up with different historical circumstances, would change.<sup>45</sup> Their faith put them in touch with the Absolute; their ideology,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>36</sup> See Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 102; Juan Luis Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 102.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

though based on what they believed God (the Absolute) commanded, was relative, that is, it adapted their faith to history. Faith works through ideology. Ideology depends on faith. Their natures and functions are different, but they are interrelated.

Segundo suggests that a possible approach to relate faith to new historical situations is “to invent an ideology that we might regard as the one that would be constructed by a Gospel message contemporary with us.” Inventing that ideology involves building a bridge that functions between faith and our present-day situation, which calls for creativity here and now.<sup>46</sup>

For Segundo, “Without ideologies faith is as dead as a doornail.”<sup>47</sup> Faith without ideology cannot lead to action. Faith, ideology, and action are intrinsically linked together, each with a distinct role. In this sense, the task of ideology that faith adopted is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it. He posits that faith is “maturity by way of ideologies, the possibility of fully and conscientiously carrying out the ideological task on which the real-life liberation of human beings depends.”<sup>48</sup>

Since faith cannot be apart from ideology, then one can conclude that faith has an ideological character. As faith is related to social justice or to political problems beyond personal moral decision making, it is, indeed, ideological in character. Faith, then, and not only ideology, is praxis oriented and related to the strategy to reform or change concrete situations.

One last point needs to be considered. The interconnection between ideology and faith is relevant not only at the level of praxis but also at the level of concepts and explanations. In other words, there is a connection between ideology and theology. Theology as an explanation of a given faith needs to take into consideration the ideology that keeps faith alive.<sup>49</sup> The questioning of the ideology, since it is not absolute, that arises from a particular historical situation creates a suspicion, says Segundo. This suspicion has to be applied “to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular,”<sup>50</sup> and to the Bible. The re-reading of theology and of the Bible provides a new hermeneutics that will, in turn, help to refine and re-define the ideology.

## V. Conclusion

My journey has brought me to understand justice as a value and a virtue, a habitual way of acting to eliminate injustice.<sup>51</sup> Justice-making, which is the way I understand justice, responds to the specifics of unjust practices. In this article, justice is considered within the context of creating a society in which no one is to be marginalized, discriminated against or violated because of lack of power or limited resources. Justice-making is about the liberation of people from oppression, about the resolution of resentment as well as the creation of communion/community in the North and South for all Koreans. Yes, justice is the centerpiece of my ideology and the heart of my faith. I understand reunification as an element of justice-making in 21st-century Korea.

My involvement in the Korean student democratic movement when I was a college student made me come face to face with injustice. I now understand that my college years helped me develop an ideology that,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 117–118.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 121; Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, 106–110.

<sup>48</sup> Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 9.

following Segundo's hermeneutical circle, led me to examine my faith. I have come to realize that the Gospel message of Jesus is not only about love but also about justice, that is, about social justice. My involvement in the protests against the Park regime made me come to believe in God as a liberator, standing on the side of the needy, the poor, and the oppressed, and to believe in liberation as a central element of salvation. Once I joined the student democratic movement, I came to see the role that religion and theology can play in the struggle for justice. I came to understand that faith without ideology is dead, and since religion and theology influence ideology, I had to examine my faith.

In my country, I have struggled to understand the face of justice for Korea in the 21st-century. Looking at Korea, I see the great chasm between north and south as an open wound of injustice. This unjust situation is the result of other injustices within the north and within the south. This injustice 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 sustainment of systems in the North and South that are unjust. To heal such a chasm and a division, we must indeed deal with oppression in the north and in the south. Korean reunification, I believe, is not apart from the work of justice within both Korean societies.

## **Abstract**

What's the right thing to do for Korean Reunification? – In terms of my autobiography

Park, Sam Kyung  
Assistant professor  
Dept of Christian Ethics  
Seoul Theological University

This paper deals with the notion of justice in my faith journey for Korean reunification. This paper is a study of biographical and ideological disclosure. After an analysis of my personal journey in the Korean student democratic movement and *minjung* theology are analyzed in order to construct a new society in which all people will live together in a peaceful and just society. For the understanding of justice, I work with the notion of oppression in Iris Marion Young (2 January 1949 - 1 August 2006), a professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. In doing this I am claiming that Korean reunification is about a going forward to create a

new creation of a unified nation of people and to seek the construction of a new society in which all people will live together in a peaceful and just society. The rich understandings that emerge from the relationship between faith and ideology I work in this paper will contribute, I believe, to a definition of justice that is not limited to political something, but aims to protect the dignity of every person and to contribute to the full participation of all Koreans in one society.

## Key Words

Justice, Ideology, Autobiography, Korean Reunification, Oppression/Injustice

정의, 이데올로기, 자서전, 한국통일, 억압/부정의

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