

# **Korean Reunification Theology: A Theological Reflection on Peace in the Situation of Conflict and Division between North and South Korea**

Ji-Seok Jung

Ji-Seok Jung is teaching Ethics of Peace at Sungkonghoe University, and Peace Education at Hanshin University, Korea. He is a head of Christian Peace Institute, and a member of Peace and Reunification Committee of Korean YMCA.

## **I. Introduction**

Korean Reunification Theology (KRT) has appeared as a theological output of the reunification movement of the Korean ecumenical Christian groups.<sup>1</sup> Reunification has been the most delicate political problem in the Korean peninsula since the division between North and South Korea in 1948. Progressive Christians participated in the reunification movement individually in the 1970s; however, it was from the early 1980s that the Korean churches involved themselves in the reunification movement as a primary mission.

Korean churches had adhered to an anti-Communist ideology based on their own

---

<sup>1</sup> The representative group is the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), which is composed of seven denominational Churches: the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK), the Korean Salvation Army, the Korean Anglican Church, the Korean Evangelical Church, and the Assembly of God. The Assembly of God joined in 1998. The whole number of Christians who belong to the NCCCK's member Churches are up to around half of all the Christians in South Korea. Korean churches in this thesis means South Korean Churches, including those outside the NCCCK.

experiences of oppression under ‘Communism.’ Assuming an aggressive attitude towards North Korea, they supported militarism as a just means of defeating ‘Communism.’ Accordingly there arose the belief among these South Korean churches that reunification was possible only by destroying the North Korean state. On the other hand, KRT aims to be a theology of peace. A reunification theologian, Pak Chonghwa [Park Jonghwa],<sup>2</sup> describes that ‘peace is a way of reunification and at the same time a goal of reunification.’<sup>3</sup> In the Korean peninsula, the aim of national reunification is peace and the peace of which we speak is that of the *minjung*. In South Korea ‘peace’ was indicative of democratization from a military dictatorship, a recovery of human rights which had been violated by the logic of security, and a freedom from the threat of war between North and South.

This article explores the historical, political and religious background and the key ideas of KRT. The main causes of the division between North and South Korea, the two streams of the reunification movement and the two types of the South Korean Christian reunification movement are historically examined, and the key ideas of KRT are dealt with in three ways in turn: peace, nation and *minjung*.

## **II. Historical, Political and Religious Background of KRT**

### **II-1. Main Causes of the North-South Division: Colonialism, Cold War and Korean War**

The nature and cause of the division between North and South in the Korean Peninsula have been characterized by three terms – ‘Colonialism,’ ‘Cold War’ and ‘Korean War.’ First, Korea was colonized for 36 years by Japan, and liberation came with the ruin of Japanese imperialism in 1945. However, the liberation was not a hopeful building of a new country but a road leading to national division. The destiny of Korea was already

---

<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses the McCune-Reischauer romanization of Korean according to euphonic changes in the pronunciation of Korean letters. In the case of name already expressed in English, it is parenthesized. Here and elsewhere, names are listed in Korean order, with surname first.

<sup>3</sup> Pak Chonghwa [Park Chonghwa], *P’yŏnghwasinhak-kwa Ek’umenik’al Undong* [Theology of Peace and Ecumenical Movement] (Ch’ŏnan: Korean Theological Institute, 1991): 16.

decided, regardless of the will of the Korean people, by the two Cold War superpowers.<sup>4</sup> The U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. tried to create a government for half the country in their own images. In 1948 two rival states, a Communist system in the North and a liberal democracy in the South were established: the Yi Sŏngman [Rhee Soonman] government in South Korea in August, and the Kim Il-sŏng [Kim Il-sung] government in North Korea in September.<sup>5</sup>

However, the respective governments did not renege on the idea of reunification; for both governments, reunification was the conquest of the rival government by force and inevitably the Korean War broke out in June 1950.<sup>6</sup> The War was 'a war of reunification'.<sup>7</sup> However, the War solved nothing and brought enormous casualties and ruin in its wake.<sup>8</sup> The War ended in an armistice between North Korea and the U.N. on July 27, 1953: 'Technically the war has never ended.'<sup>9</sup> Hence, the unresolved conflict heralded an arms race between the two Koreas.

The ideological conflict between the political elite spread to the people in the North and South. Mutual hostility, distrust and phobias were deeply ingrained in the Korean psyche. In South Korea anti-communism has become a national policy while anti-American imperialism has prevailed in North Korea. The Korean War hardened and distorted the division.

A reunification predicated on force results in an ominous arms race with militarism becoming more and more rampant. The vicious cycle of an arms race – increased military tension which, in turn, stimulates the arms race – was a tabloid edition of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Ingram, *History of the Cold War* (London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd., 1955): 186.

<sup>5</sup> Kang Man'gil, *Isipsegi Uri Y3ksa [Our History in the Twentieth Century]* (Sŏul: Ch'angjak-ko Pipyŏngsa, 1999): 177–223.

<sup>6</sup> Pak Myŏnglim, 'Han'guk Chŏnjaeng [Korean War].' *Han'guksa 17: Pundan'gujo-8i Chŏngch'ak 1 [17 Korean History: 1 Fixation of the Division Structure]* (Sŏul: Han'gilsa, 1994): 338; Kang Man'gil, *ibid*: 248.

<sup>7</sup> Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*: 238.

<sup>8</sup> Nearly six million people were wounded and died: 300,000 South Korean combatants, 142,000 Americans, 17,000 other foreigners, 1,500,000 Chinese, 500,000 North Korean combatants and 3 million Korean civilians.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Hastings, *The Cold War* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1969): 64.

Cold War in the wider world continuing within the logic of deterrence. Military expenses in the South Korean government's annual budget have always been the biggest item, and the burden has been borne by the people. The division was used to justify autocracy in both Koreas.<sup>10</sup> 'The Korean peninsula became two big prisons because of the division'.<sup>11</sup> This is dealt with in detail later.

## **II-2. Two Streams of Reunification Movement**

There have been two approaches to reunification in South Korea: One is to stress the necessity of force for reunification and the other is by peaceful means. The government and the conservatives, including conservative churches, have supported the former position while non-governmental progressive groups, including progressive churches, have backed the latter. Thus the reunification movement in South Korea has been divided into two streams: conservative and progressive. The conservatives have a crudely dualist understanding of the division: South Korea is a good system and the North is an evil system.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, they believe that reunification can be achieved only through conquest of the northern communist system. Reinforcement of military power has been seen as a necessary requirement and accordingly militarism has become predominant. Distrust and antagonism have been propagated with anti-Communism. However, progressives accept North Korea as a present reality and a potential partner in a dialogue for reunification. They stress the peaceful means and the idea of one nation as superior to conflicting ideologies of North and South. They stand against militarism and strive for a peaceful resolution.

We now examine the historical development of the two streams in the reunification movement in South Korea.

---

<sup>10</sup> Pak Chonghwa, *P'y3nghwasinhak-kwa Ek'umenik'al Undong* [Theology of Peace and Ecumenical Movement] (Ch'3nan: Korean Theological Institute, 1991): 126.

<sup>11</sup> Mun Ikhwan, *Mun Ikhwan Ch3njip 3: T'ongil* [Mun Ikwhan Complete Works 3: Reunification] (S3ul: Sakyej3l, 1999): 130.

<sup>12</sup> Han Wansang, 'Minjok-8i Tongjils3ng Hoebok-kwa Han'guk Kyohoe-8i Samy3ng [Recovery of National Identity and Mission of Korean Church], edited by Han'guk Kidokkyo Kyohoe Hy3p8iheo T'ongil Wiw3nheo [The NCCCK Reunification Committee], *Nam-Puk Kyohoe-8i Mannam-kwa P'y3nghwat'ongil Sinhak* [Meeting of North-South Churches and Peaceful Reunification Theology] (S3ul: Minjungsa, 1990: 365-71): 367.

First, a nationalist group has tried to prevent the division of the country. When, according to the ideologies of the two Superpowers, the Korean political elite divided the country into capitalist and communist, the nationalists rejected the foreign interference stressing national unity as superior to ideology. However, their endeavor for 'one Korea' failed because of the overwhelming political and military hegemony of both superpowers and that of the political powers in North and South Korea.<sup>13</sup> Their failure, however, was not futile for 'national independence' and 'national unity transcending ideologies' became key ideas of the progressive reunification movement in South Korea. Meanwhile, the two separate governments in North and South maintained 'reunification through military force,' arguing for their legitimacy in the Korean peninsula, and their conflict exploded to war. The War, with its enormous casualties and calamitous destruction proved that neither side could achieve reunification by military means. The idea of peaceful reunification became the basis of the progressives but at the same time was suppressed by the southern government because of the northern government's political motion of peaceful reunification.<sup>14</sup>

The Yi S8ngman government regarded the northern government as an illegal political clique and all North Korean proposals for peaceful reunification as political propaganda. For the Yi S8ngman regime reunification meant only a restoration of the 'lost northern land.' Anti-communism was strengthened as a national policy.

Reunification became a strategy of a political struggle between the two governments, a phenomenon producing two distortions in South Korea – a governmental monopoly of the reunification discussion and the suppression of the progressives: 'The Progressive Party leader Cho Pongam, who ran in the presidential election in 1956 and, even though defeated by Yi S8ngman, succeeded in getting substantial support from the people with the slogan 'Peaceful unification through free election', was executed in 1958, charged with being 'a North Korean spy'. This event was symbolic of the place of the progressive reunification movement in South Korea. The progressive ideas of peaceful

---

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Cumings, "The Division of Korea", John Sullivan and Roberta Foss, ed., *Two Koreas – One Future* (Lanham (MD): University Press of America, 1987: 5-18): 7-10.

<sup>14</sup> Ch'oe Changjip, 'Kukminkukka Hy3ngs3ng-kwa K8ndaehwa-8i Munje [Formation of National State and Problem of Modernization]', In *Han'guksa 17: Pundan Kujo-8i Ch3ngch'ak 1 [Korean History 17: Fixation of the Division Structure 1]* (S3ul: Han'gilsa, 1994: 61-129): 119.

and national independent reunification were risky and were forced underground. The Yi Sŏngman government kept an aggressive policy of military reunification and used the anticommunist policy to suppress domestic political rivals on the other.<sup>15</sup>

The progressives were revived by the April Revolution of Democracy that brought down the Yi Sŏngman dictatorship in 1960. The ensuing political democracy brought about people's free discussion on reunification.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the anticommunist reunification movement weakened with a corresponding intensification of the people-centred reunification movement.<sup>17</sup> At that time the most striking feature was the rise of the idea of 'peaceful reunification'.<sup>18</sup> This included progressive ideas such as national independence, peaceful reunification through a direct negotiation between North and South, and a neutralized reunification.<sup>19</sup>

This progressive movement was terminated by the 1961 coup d'état led by Major-General Pak Chŏnghŏi and the formation of a military junta. He revived the anticommunist policy with increased hostility towards North Korea. Indeed, the military regime executed the president of a daily newspaper, who argued for peaceful dialogue between the North and South governments, on the charge of spying. Pak Chŏnghŏi, under the slogan, 'construction first, reunification second,' substituted reunification with economic development; called the 'modernization movement' it merely reified their

---

<sup>15</sup> Kim Hakjun, 'Che-yi Konghwaguk Sidae-ŏi T'ongilnonŏl [Reunification Discussion in the Period of the 2th Republic]', In Song Kŏnho, ed., *Haebangjŏnhusa-ŏi Insik [Conscientiousness of History in Before and After Liberation]* (Sŏul: Han'gilsa, 1980): 307.

<sup>16</sup> Kim Tongch'un, 'Sawŏl Hyŏkmyŏng [April Revolution]', In *Han'guksa 18: Pundan'gujo-ŏi Chŏngch'ak 2 [Korean History 18: Fixation of the Division Structure 2]* (Sŏul: Han'gilsa, 1994: 303-333): 325.

<sup>17</sup> Pak Sunkyŏng, *T'ongilsinhak-ŏi Yŏjŏng [Journey of Reunification Theology]* (Sŏul: Hanul, 1992): 106-107.

<sup>18</sup> Kang Man'gil, *Isipsegi Uri Yŏksa [Our History in the Twentieth Century]* (Sŏul: Ch'angjak-ko Bipyŏngsa, 1999): 284-85.

<sup>19</sup> Chŏng Sŏngghan, 'Han'gukkyohoe-ŏi Nam-Puk Pundanŏisik-kwa T'ongilŏisik Pyŏnhwa-e Kwanhan Yŏksajŏk Yŏn'gu [A Historical Study on the Shift of the Korean Church's Consciousness of Division and Reunification Between North and South]', Ph.D. Dissertation in Graduate Institute of Presbyterian Seminary in Sŏul, Korea, 2002: 113.

policy of division.<sup>20</sup> Because it depended basically on a low-wage and a low-grain-price policy the economic measure demanded sacrifice from laborers and farmers. This brought about the people's movement in South Korea, though this was always suppressed by the logic of national security. At the same time the political, economic and military dependence on the U.S.A. deepened.

In the 1970s, the people's movement, though still suppressed, realized that reunification and democratization were necessary for the people's liberation.<sup>21</sup> As the previous regime had done, Park Chung-hee used the reunification issue to strengthen its dictatorship. Immediately after the 7.4 South-North Communiqué<sup>22</sup> of 1972 he changed the constitution into 'Yusin [Revitalization] Constitution' underlining a continuation of his presidential power in October, 1972.<sup>23</sup> Anti-Park groups were usually labeled as pro-North communists and sentenced to death, imprisonment for life or for a long-term spell in gaol. As far as any movements were related to the ideological problem in South Korea, the suppression was intense and always justified by the logic of national security. The South Korean government used the reunification issue as a rationale for dictatorship.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Yi Suin, 'T'ongilj3ngch'aek-8i Ch3n'gae Kwaj3ng [Developing Process of Reunification Policy]', In *Han'guksa 20: Chaju, Minju, T'ongil-8i Hyanghay3 2 [20 Korean History: 2 Towards Independence, Democracy, Reunification]* (S3ul: Han'gilsa, 1994: 177-211): 192.

<sup>21</sup> Hong K8nsu, 'Kidokkyo Yunlihakj3k Ipjang-es3 Pon T'ongil [Reunification from the Perspective of Christian Ethic]', edited by Han'guk Kidokkyo Kyohoe-Hy3p8ihoe T'ongil Wiw3nhoe [The NCCCK Reunification Committee], *Nam-Puk Kyohoe-8i Mannam-kwa P'y3nghwat'ongil Sinhak [Meeting of North-South Churches and Peaceful Reunification Theology]* (S3ul: Minjungsa, 1990:156-327): 205-212.

<sup>22</sup> In the early 1970s détente between the USA and the USSR allowed the two Korean governments to meet and to work towards a peaceful settlement. As a result of the meeting in 1972, the two governments issued a Joint Statement of Reunification on July 4, 1972, the '7.4 South-North Communiqué.' This Joint Statement was a very surprising event, unexpected by ordinary people, and included significant contents in terms of reunification. The Statement included three principles: independence, peace, and national unity.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Henderson, 'The Politics of Korea', edited by John Sullivan and Roberta Foss, *Two Koreas - One Future?* (Lanham (MD): University Press of America, 1987: 95-118): 104.

<sup>24</sup> Song Tuyul, *T'ongil-8i Nonli-r8l Ch'ajas3 [Searching for Logic of Reunification]* (S3ul: Hankyere Sinmunsa 1997): 42.

The problem of reunification was considered strategic because military dictatorship used it as an instrument of suppression. This strategic consideration produced three stances on reunification. First, reunification would follow democratization. That is, democratization should be achieved first and then reunification should follow. In 1970s this was supported mainly by the progressive Christian group who had dedicated themselves to human rights and democratization. Second, there were those asserting reunification as a priority. Third, a few people stressed the simultaneous drive towards reunification and democratization.<sup>25</sup>

In the early 1980s the reunification movement experienced a significant turning point. In October, 1979, Park Chung-hee was assassinated and his regime collapsed. The expectation of civilian democratic government was thwarted by another coup in May 1980. Many civilians resisted the military's desire to hold onto political power. Thousands of civilians were killed or injured in Kwangju, the fourth city of South Korea with the military labeling resistant civilians as pro-Communist revolutionaries. That is, the military group justified their violent oppression in terms of national security in the same way as the previous regime. This experience awakened people; as long as the division continued military power would be seen to be justified and democracy difficult to realize. The reunification movement started to mobilize actively to overcome the division. Realizing that the military was controlled by American power, the movement included both the anti-American national independence and the anti-military democratization movements. Thus the anti-American movement came to the fore in this period and gave rise to radical action: fire-bombing of the American Cultural Institute in Pusan (March 18, 1982) and an occupation of the American Cultural Institute in Seoul (May 23, 1985). In the 1980s the so called '*Minjok* (Nation) *Minju* (Democracy)' movement was linked to the reunification movement and this also aimed at liberating the oppressed people (*Minjung*). *Minjok*, *Minju* and *Minjung* formed core axis of the progressive reunification movement. Despite its suppression by the military regime, this particular movement continued to increase in popularity. In South Korea the 1980s saw a period in which the reunification movement achieved a cohesion.

### **II-3. Two Types of the South Korean Christian Reunification Movement**

---

<sup>25</sup> Mun Ikhan, *Mun Ikhan Complete Works 3: Reunification*, 18-24.



Korean Reunification Theology (KRT) is a production of the southern Christian movement for reunification, which has developed since the early 1980s. In order to understand the characteristics of KRT this subsection examines the historical background of the division of the Korean Churches, the South Korean Churches' attitude to reunification, and the appearance and development of the southern Christian movement for reunification.

In the political division after liberation from Japanese imperialism, the Korean Churches assumed three attitudes. At first the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches kept a 'one Church policy' not divided into North and South.<sup>26</sup> However, many Christian leaders in the North held a pro-American and anticommunist attitude because the northern Presbyterian churches were mostly influenced by the American fundamentalist missionaries<sup>27</sup> and this became a political cause of the North Korean Communists' oppression of Christians.<sup>28</sup> Until 1945 American missionaries were 65.9% of 1,530 missionaries working in Korea, most of them fundamentalist conservatives<sup>29</sup> who regarded Communism as an evil ideology. After liberation in 1945, strongly influenced by these American missionaries, the North Korean Christian groups formed anticommunist political parties, which resulted in the communists' suppression of churches in North Korea. The suppression was political as well as religious. Many northern ministers crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea and their experience of suppression by North Korean Communism formed a firm anti-communism in the South Korean Churches. At the same time the North Korean Churches rapidly became weakened. With many Christians coming from North Korea, the South Korean Churches started to support the South Korean government while Christians staying in the North

---

<sup>26</sup> Kim Yangsan, *Han'gukkidokkyo Haebang Sipny3nsa [Ten Years History of Korean Church after Liberation]* (S3ul: Religious Education Section in the Presbyterian Church of Korea, 1956): 52.

<sup>27</sup> Kang Inch'3l, *Han'guk Kidokkyohoe-wa Kukka·Siminsahoe [Korean Christian Church and Nation·Civil Society]* (S3ul: Institute for History of Korean Christianity, 1996): 86-87. According to other research American missionaries amounted to 1,710 persons whose number was 87.6% of total number of 1,952 missionaries who worked in Korea from 1893 till 1983 (Yi Many3l 1991: 445).

<sup>28</sup> Han Ky3ngjik, *K3nkuk-kwa Kidokkyo [Christianity and Foundation of Country]* (S3ul: Borinwon, 1949): 148.

<sup>29</sup> Yi Many3l, *Han'gukkidokkyo-wa Minjok8isik [Korean Christianity and National Consciousness]* (S3ul: Chishiksan3psa, 1991): 445.

supported the North Korean Communist government. Finally, Churches in North and South were divided into two, following two different political ideologies.<sup>30</sup> This was a different case from that of German Churches which kept a 'one Church policy'.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand there were neutral Christians trying to prevent the division of the Korean peninsula. Finally, however, they also split into two camps: socialist and liberal democratic, and resulted in failure.<sup>32</sup> When the Korean War broke out, the Korean Churches completely split and stood on each side of the conflict. During the War Christians in North and South prayed only for the ruination of the enemy and the victory of their own side.<sup>33</sup> While North Korean Christians cursed American imperialism, South Korean Christians saw North Korean Communism as an evil ideology. At that period, for the two Christian groups in North and South, reunification was seen in opposite ways: a communist country for the North on the one hand and a democratic country for the South on the other.<sup>34</sup> In brief, the Korean Churches were not independent of the conflict between the two different political ideologies.

After the Korean War, the Christian population in North Korea rapidly decreased. On the other hand, the South Korean Churches increased under the auspices of the Yi Sŏngman government which regarded itself as a Christian, anticommunist, and pro-American.<sup>35</sup> The South Korean Churches' strong anticommunist faith supported the Yi Sŏngman government's policy. In particular, the Christians who came from the North held an 'extreme anticommunist faith' in the South thus deciding their political attitude.<sup>36</sup> Holding the idea of a 'Holy War' against atheistic Communism, the South

---

<sup>30</sup> Kim Hŏngsu, 'Han'gukkyohoe-ŏi T'ongilundong Yŏksa-e Taehan Chaegŏmt'o [Review on the History of the Reunification Movement of the Korean Churches]', Ch'ae Suil, ed. *Hŏinyŏnsinhak-kwa T'ongilhŏinyŏnundong [Theology of Jubilee and Reunification Movement towards Jubilee]* (Chŏnan: KTI, 1995): 422-23, 428.

<sup>31</sup> Reinhard Henkys, *Die Evangelische Kirche und der SED-Stadt-ein Thema Kirchlicher* (Zeitgeschichte Haag+ Herchen Verlag: Ffm, 1993): 78-99.

<sup>32</sup> Kim Hŏngsu, *ibid.*: 423-25.

<sup>33</sup> Kim Yangsŏn, *ibid.*., 77.

<sup>34</sup> Chŏng Sŏngghan, 'A Historical Study on the Shift of the Korean Church's Consciousness of Division and Reunification Between North and South': 72-112.

<sup>35</sup> Kang In-chŏl, *ibid.*: 210-20.

<sup>36</sup> Chŏng Sŏngghan, *ibid.*: 111.

Korean Churches supported the Yi Sŏngman's military reunification through conquest over the North.<sup>37</sup> This anticommunist faith and anti-North Korean attitude has informed the mainstream of South Korean Christians.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the South Korean Churches' attitude to reunification was ideologically very hostile to the North Korean Communism and politically conformed to the South Korean government's policy. This has formed a mainstream of South Korean Churches.

A challenge came from some liberal Christians. For a short time after the 'April Revolution' in 1960 when Yi Sŏngman's autocratic government fell, some theologians and ministers criticized the blindly emotional anticommunist faith and instead urged the South Korean Churches to take more realistic approaches: economic development, human rights and freedom, social justice and renewal of Church. These discussions stopped with the 1961 coup, but critical consideration on the anticommunist faith prevailing within the South Korean Churches appeared, mostly amongst South Korean liberal Christians.

In the 1970s progressive Christians started to participate in the struggle against Park Chung-hee's military regime and to see the reunification issue as relating to democracy and social justice in South Korea. They criticized both Communism and capitalism and stressed economic equality as a way to compete with Communism.<sup>39</sup> Their participation in the democratization movement against the military dictatorship was recognized as a mode of reunification movement and contributed to change the North Korean government's negative attitude to religion: 'It is important to make a tie with religious men of South Korea'.<sup>40</sup> In brief, the progressive Christians' critical approach to the anticommunist faith of the South Korean Churches and participation in the social justice and democratization movement began to undermine the South Korean Churches' fixed stance to reunification.

To sum up two types of Christians were formed in South Korean Churches:

---

<sup>37</sup> Kim Yangson, *ibid.*: 89-90.

<sup>38</sup> Kim Hong-su, *ibid.*: 433-36.

<sup>39</sup> Pak, Hyŏngkyu. 'Hanbando-ŏi Milae-wa Kyohoe-ŏi Sŏnkyojase [The Future of the Korean Peninsula and Churches' Attitude to Mission].' *Christian Thought* (September 1971: 43-48): 48.

<sup>40</sup> Hŏ Jongho, *Chuch'esasang-e Kich'ohan Namjosŏn Hyŏkmyŏng-kwa Chokukt'ongil [Chuch'e Philosophy-Based Revolution of South Korea and Reunification of Fatherland]* (Pyŏngyang: Sahoe Kwahak Ch'ulp'ansa [Social Science Publication], 1975): 112-14.

progressives and conservatives. The former included participants in the democratization movement, those critical of anticommunist faith, rebels against the military government, and usually ecumenical, while the latter were strong anticommunist believers, conformist, evangelicals and the majority. Korean Reunification Theology (KRT) is a product of the former group criticizing a theology of division: disinterest in the problem of division, belief in anticommunist faith, justifying the war to conquer the North Korean communism, using a simple dichotomy that God stands for South Korea not the North, supporting the South Korean military force, and silence towards the military regime's dictatorship and human rights violations: 'The Message of the International Christian Consultation on Justice and Peace in Korea' describes it as follows:

The division of Korea is reflected in the life of the Church as well. Denominationalism, internal division, theological dispute and internal power struggles, systemic discrimination against women, etc. threaten the unity of the body of Christ. The South Korean Churches have adhered to anticommunist faith as equated with the Gospel. This ideological faith has militated against the Christians' calling to be reconcilers in society. South Korean Christians' anticommunist faith makes it impossible for them to accept the reality of Christian community and the continuing living witness to the Gospel in North Korea.<sup>41</sup>

### III. Key Ideas of the KRT

In this section dealing with the key ideas of reunification theology, the *Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reunification and Peace*<sup>42</sup> and reunification

---

<sup>41</sup> Han'guk Kidokkyo Kyohoe Hy3p8iheo T'ongil Wiw3nheo [The NCKK Reunification Committee], ed., *Nam-Puk Kyohoe-8i Mannam-kwa P'y3nghwat'ongil Sinhak [Meeting of North-South Churches and Peaceful Reunification Theology]* (S3ul: Minjungsa, 1990): 56.

<sup>42</sup> Hereafter this document is referred to the '88 Reunification Declaration, which was drawn up over four years, through study consultations and seminars. Participants included theologians and delegates from the member Churches of the NCKK. It was adopted by the 37th Assembly of the NCKK in 1988, and supported by not only the South Korean reunification movement groups but also North Korean Churches.

theologians' ideas are analyzed in three ways: peace, nation and *minjung*. These are considered in turn below.

### **III-1. Peace**

The '88 Reunification Declaration is firmly based on Christian pacifism. The Declaration confesses a universal God, Jesus Christ as the 'servant of peace' and the Holy Spirit as reconciler. It says,

‘the churches of Korea believe that all Christians have now been called to work as apostles of peace (Colossians 3: 15); that we are commanded by God to overcome today’s reality of confrontation between our divided people – who share the same blood but who are separated into south and north; and that our mission task is to work for the realization of unification and peace (Matthew 5: 23-24).<sup>43</sup>

The Declaration expresses clearly that Korean churches’ concern and efforts for reunification are ‘an issue of faith,’ that is, recognizing that reunification can be accomplished only through ‘sharing in the life of suffering of our own people.’ Based on this Christian pacifist faith, the '88 Reunification Declaration proposed a way of peaceful reunification to the governments of South and North. This was the first time that a pacifist approach to reduce military tension had been considered by the NCKK.

As already mentioned, in July 1972, the South and North Korean governments agreed to a principle of peace to embody reunification non-violently. However, the principle has not been implemented in practice. The peace which they have sought, was based on political realism that force could guarantee the peace in the conflicted situation of modern Korea with its friend-enemy dichotomy. This has produced an interminable arms race in a vicious cycle of ‘division – distrust – military reinforcement – national security’.<sup>44</sup> For many years now the logic of deterrence has been predominant and national security became a primary concern in the two Koreas: this is a negative peace which, KRT criticizes, has resulted in an enormous human cost and military tension in the Korean peninsula. Instead, KRT stresses a positive peace that aims to eradicate

---

<sup>43</sup> The '88 Reunification Declaration

<sup>44</sup> Pak Chonghwa, *Theology of Peace and Ecumenical Movement*: 19.

militarism and the causes of war.<sup>45</sup>

The '88 Reunification Declaration included four practical ways to ensure the positive peace of reunification: the immediate conclusion of a peace treaty, withdrawal of the United States troops stationed in South Korea, disarmament and the removal of nuclear weapons in the Korea peninsula. O Chaesik [Oh Jaishik] stresses peace as a crucial mission of the Korean churches.

In this pressing time of military confrontation, the Korean churches must enhance and teach peace: that neither confrontation nor war but people's self-reliance and peace is our nation's goal; that not hatred but love is our society's norm. The Korean churches should abandon a false logic that peace is powerless and brings about the destruction of nation and Churches, and instead recover an essential teaching of Christianity that peace is real power and brings about a genuine transformation.<sup>46</sup>

A serious problem associated with the military security logic of which we have spoken is that often the military group can create critical moments through small clashes or tension through large-scale military training. These activities consciously promote a 'psychological insecurity to justify the further acquisition of arms' and through this process strengthen their positions. This seems to be beyond political control. On account of this, political peace talks between North and South were often invalidated by military interference. This situation deepens a vicious circle and legitimates the arms race as a way of deterrence. In the '95 Jubilee Declaration, the Korean Churches moved to ensure the 'priority of mutual security and the peace of the nation over military superiority or the security of the divided halves'<sup>47</sup> and suggested, as a way of achieving

---

<sup>45</sup> Kim Yongbok, 'P'y3nghwa-wa T'ongil [Peace and Reunification].' Edited by Han'guk Kidokkyo Kyohoe Hy3p8iheo T'ongil Wiw3nheo [The NCKK Reunification Committee], *Nam-Puk Kyohoe-8i Mannam-kwa P'y3nghwat'ongil Sinhak [Meeting of North-South Churches and Peaceful Reunification Theology]* (S3ul: Minjungsa, 1990: 177-84, 354-58): 177-184.

<sup>46</sup> O Chaesik, 'Minjok-8i Kwaje-wa Kyohoeilch'i Undong [Mission of Nation and Movement of Church Unity]', edited by The National Council of Churches in Korea, *Han'guk Y3ksasok-8i Kidokkyo [Christianity in the History of Korea]* (S3ul: NCKK, 1985: 245-56): 254.

<sup>47</sup> Park Kyungseo [Pak Ky3ngs3], *Reconciliation and Reunification*. (Hong Kong: Christian

it, the formation of a joint military committee for disarmament and for controlling military expansion, purchase of new weapons and large-scale military exercise. The Korean Churches thus suggested a gradualism through political settlement.

### III-2. Nation

KRT stresses a concept of nation in two ways: national independence and national unity. As to the first, Korean history in the twentieth century has been distorted by foreign powers' rule and interference: Japanese colonialism and the division by the two superpowers of the Cold War. The loss of national independence brought about the suffering of the people. KRT argues that to achieve national independence is a necessary way towards reunification. Because the division of the Korean peninsula was a result of the Cold War, reunification was influenced necessarily by the antagonistic superpowers, a situation continuing under American involvement in east Asia.<sup>48</sup> As to national unity, this idea is highlighted as a way of overcoming the ideological conflict and division between North and South; originally one country, Korea has still held on to a single, national identity for more than five thousand years, an identity seen as superior to ideology. KRT accepts the two ideas of nation already announced in the 7.4 North-South Communiqué in 1972 as still valuable ideas of reunification, neither chauvinist nor jingoist.<sup>49</sup> Rather, it is the 'liberative nationalism,' which frees 'the oppressed, colonized and neo-colonized people for their own self-determination, self-reliance, autonomy and rights as people'.<sup>50</sup> However, reunification theologians are reluctant to use the 'nationalism,' preferring 'Nation' to correspond to 'community'.<sup>51</sup>

---

Conference of Asia, 1998): 114.

<sup>48</sup> Kang Ch3nggu, 'T'ongilgwaj3ng-8ros38i P'y3nghwahy3pj3ng-kwa P'y3nghwa-ch'eje Kuch'uk [Establishment of Peace System and Peace Treaty as a Process of Reunification]', edited by The Policy Committee of the National Council for National Reconciliation and Cooperation, *Minjokhwahae-wa Nam-Nam Taehwa* [Korean Reconciliation and South-South Dialogue in Korean Peninsula] (S3ul: Hanul Academy, 1999): 153-59.

<sup>49</sup> An P'y3ngmu [Ahn Byungmu], *Han'guk Minjok Undong-kwa T'ongil* [Korean National Movement and Reunification] (S3ul: KTI, 2001): 256-60.

<sup>50</sup> Noh Jongsun [No Ch3ngs3n], *Liberating God for minjung* (S3ul: Hanul Academy, 1994): 47.

<sup>51</sup> An P'y3ngmu, Y3ksaap-e minjung-kwa T3bul3 [Before History With Minjung] (S3ul: Han'gilsa, 1986): 215-73; Pak Chonghwa, *Theology of Peace and Ecumenical Movement*, 32.

KRT asserts that national independence should be pursued in the concept of national freedom and self-determination in which the minjung has effective authority over their own. Struggle for self-determination in the interdependent world, a main impulse in countries of the Southern hemisphere, becomes an imperative task for overcoming the division in the Korean situation.

The two-government system on the peninsula made a war and the continued threat of war inevitable. In this situation national unity has been proposed as a substitute for ideological unity, as the way of transcending rivalry leading hopefully to peaceful reunification, an important method of peacemaking. Emphasis on national unity is to envisage reconciliation between the two peoples. Ideological indoctrination by both governments only has created hostility and distrust.

The starting point for KRT is its seeking a way of transcending the damaging bipolar ideological struggle between communism and laissez-faire capitalism and restoring national unity towards reunification. The '88 Reunification Declaration suggested the recovery of mutual trust in four ways by: (1) ending mutual hostility and aggressive inclinations, the slandering and vilification of one another; (2) the opening of exchange, visits and communications; (3) exchanging and cooperating in such academic areas as language, history, geography, biology and natural resources, and in the areas of culture, the arts, religion and sports; (4) economic exchanges.

Thereafter, the NCKK's Jubilee Declaration demanded a repeal or at least a revision of the National Security Law of South Korea and equivalent laws in the North which define the other as an anti-state organization or an enemy. KRT regards the removal of these substantial obstacles as an imperative for reunification and reconciliation.

Reunification theology has endeavored to build mutual trust through mutual understanding. For this task some reunification theologians have engaged in dialogue with Marxism and particularly with Chuch'e philosophy.<sup>52</sup> A reunification theologian, Pak Sunky3ng, has tried to apply the fruits of European Christian dialogue with Marxism

---

<sup>52</sup> Pak Sunky3ng, *Journey of Reunification Theology*, 124-131; Pak Chaesun, 'Chuch'e Sasang-kwa Minjung Sinhak [Chuch'e Philosophy and Minjung Theology]', edited by The NCKK Reunification Committee, *Nam-Puk Kyohoe-8i Mannam-kwa P'y3nghwat'ongil Sinhak [Meeting of North-South Churches and Peaceful Reunification Theology]* (S3ul: Minjungsa, 1990):185-202.



and liberation theology to the Korean situation.<sup>53</sup>

Cooperation for liberation is Korean minjung theology's approach to seeking an authentic liberation of the people through dialogue with the Church's philosophy. They believe that a transcending of ideology is possible only in the struggle towards human liberation, something already appreciated in the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism in the third world generally, and which is carried out often at a practical rather than a theoretical level. That is, 'the primary interest of Christians in dialoguing with Marxists should not be the mere fact of talking to Marxists, but the higher goal of enhancing human dignity, freedom, creativity and wholeness'.<sup>54</sup>

### III-3. Minjung (People)

Since the mid-1970s the *minjung* was widely used to describe the people who suffered under the weight of political, social and economic oppression. So called '*minjungologists*' appeared in the areas of politics, economics, sociology, history, literature, philosophy and theology articulating their ideas from a *minjung* perspective.

*Minjung* designating the people as an unnamed grass-root entity emerged as historically significant, but in Korean history the *minjung* has always been suppressed.<sup>55</sup> A *minjung* theologian, S3 Namdong saw positive facets to the *minjung* as a human group with a divine element; as masters of their own life rather than someone's slave; a third world people who have struggled for national independence against foreign powers.<sup>56</sup> The *minjung* is distinguished from 'proletariat'.<sup>57</sup> According to S3 Namdong 'proletariat'

---

<sup>53</sup> Pak Sunky3ng, *ibid*, 82-88.

<sup>54</sup> Pak Sunky3ng, *ibid*: 124-31.

<sup>55</sup> An Py3ungmu, 'Minjok Minjung Kyohoe [Nation Minjung Church]', edited by Han'guk Kidokkyo Kyohoe Hy3p8ihoe [The National Council of Churches in Korea], *Han'guk Y3ksasok-8i Kidokkyo [Christianity in the History of Korea]* (S3ul: NCCCK, 1985: 291-309): 211.

<sup>56</sup> S3 Namdong [Suh Namdong], 'Minjung(Ssial)-8n Nuguin'ga [Who is Minjung(Ssial)]', edited by Han'guk Sinhak Y3n'guso [The Korea Theological Institute], *Han'guk Minjungron [Korean Minjungology]* (S3ul: Korea Theological Institute, 1984): 539-42.

<sup>57</sup> Kim Yongbok [Kim Yongbok], 'Messiah and minjung: Discerning Messianic Politics over against Political Messianism', edited by The Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (CTC-CCA), *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History* (Maryknoll:

means the socially and economically exploited laborers with the *minjung* adding an anthropological and biblical face to the social and economical. A biblical term, which is likened to the *minjung*, *oklos*, found in the Gospel of Mark meaning a socially weak people like children, widows, orphans, the sick, disabled, the poor and the sinner.<sup>58</sup>

*Minjung* theology emerged from the liberation-praxis of Korean Christians in the 1970s in which they discovered the *minjung*, 'the oppressed and marginalized people either at the bottom or outside the social, economic and political strata'.<sup>59</sup> For *minjung* theologians, the *minjung* are likened to an image of Jesus as the suffering servant. Hence, between KRT and *minjung* theology there is a close relationship:

*Minjung* theology has developed into the theology of reunification for the divided people in Korea... because suffering of the oppressed people was caused by the strategy of divide-and-conquer for the benefit of the superpowers. Therefore it is a natural step for *minjung* theology to be the theology of reunification of the oppressed and divided people in North and South Korea.<sup>60</sup>

KRT aims to overcome the division from the perspective of the *minjung* who have most suffered from the division. Reunification means a peace of the *minjung* in Korean context. KRT denies 'anti-*minjunic*' reunification which continues the political and social oppression, and the economic exploitation of the *minjung*.<sup>61</sup> KRT focuses on the victim of division and, in general, the peoples of both North and South are such victims. There have been those who have particularly and immediately suffered from the division, the so-called 'separated family members' who have lived without contact between husband and wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters. They number

---

Orbis, 1981: 183-93): 184.

<sup>58</sup> Ahn Byungmu [An Py3ngmu], 'Jesus and Minjung in the Gospel of Mark', edited by The Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (CTC-CCA), *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981): 138-52.

<sup>59</sup> Lee Yvonne Youngja, 'Religion, Culture of Han and Hanpuri, and Korean minjung Women: An Interdisciplinary Post-colonial Religio-cultural Analysis of the Indigenous Encounter with the Colonial Religions in Korea', Ph. D. Dissertation, The University of Denver, 1999: 15.

<sup>60</sup> Noh Jongsun[No Ch3ngs3n], *Liberating God for minjung*, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Pak Chonghwa, *Theology of Peace and Ecumenical Movement*, 32-33.

about ten million people on the peninsula. And there are those who have had family members involved in Communism or pro-North Korean activities during and after the Korean War. Social discrimination and unjust treatment towards them was considerable. They have not only been placed under constant and strict surveillance by the Korean Intelligence Agency and police but also debarred from government employment, public institutions and even from some companies in the South. This discrimination is seen by KRT as the suppression by ideology. Alternatively KRT stresses humanitarianism, human dignity and freedom as the process and goal of reunification and anticipates that for such victims reunification is the only way of peace.

The government's monopoly of reunification had resulted in a justification of the military dictatorship; unfortunately KRT sees a subtle confirmation with the civilian governments. During the period of the military dictatorship the KRT's advocacy of the people's genuine participation in discussions around reunification focused on the application of democratic principles to reunification and a realization of basic human rights free from any ideological barrier. This was characteristic of the period when the reunification movement coincided with the democratization movement against military dictatorship. The '88 Reunification Declaration stressed the achievement of reunification through '*minjung* democracy,' that is, to guarantee the *minjung*'s full participation in the reunification discussion and decision-making.

KRT sees that the principle of the '*minjung* first' is still valid even in the period of democratization which a civilian government started in the South in 1992. Hong K8nsu, a reunification theologian, criticizes the first civilian president Kim Y3ngsam's policy of reunification as 'reunification from above',<sup>62</sup> 'reunification messianism' in which the ruler's will and ability is central to reunification. Such an approach pursues reunification through secret talks and summit meetings; thus the *minjung* are bystanders and further in the government's eyes legitimates its monopoly of the reunification issue. As a result, reunification is directed to the interests of the ruler and elite. The reunification

---

<sup>62</sup> Hong K8nsu 'Minjok Chaju T'ongil-8i Ch3nmang [Prospect of National Independent Reunification]', edited by Han'guk Kidokkyo Changrohoe S3ul Nohoe [The Committee of Peace and Reunification in Seoul Synod of The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), *T'ongil H8iny3n-kwa Hanadoen Kyohoe-8l Pij3n [Jubilee for Reunification and Vision for the Oneness of Church]* (S3ul: S3ul Synod of the PROK, 1995): 182.

messianism is 'anti-*minjungic*'.<sup>63</sup> Ch'ae Suil suggests grass-root democracy through local self-government as a system in which the *minjung* may enjoy full participation.<sup>64</sup> The *minjung*-centered approach to reunification and peace is a key characteristic of KRT.

## VI. Conclusion

Korean division was caused by colonialism, the intervention of the Cold War superpowers and the internal political elite's conflict and brought about the Korean war which, in turn, worsened the division. Military tension and the arms race created the rampant militarism in the Korean peninsula and it became a hotbed of political, economic and social injustice from which the North and South Korean *minjung* suffered. These historical elements of the division characterized KRT to focus peace, nation and minjung.

This article has contrasted two streams of reunification movement in South Korea. Government and conservatives supported the military reunification to seek the conquest over the North in regarding North Korea as an enemy. On the other hand, peaceful reunification was stressed by progressives. They stressed nation rather than ideology and peace rather than military force and the *minjung*'s democratic participation rather than government's monopolizing reunification. They developed the ideas of nation, democracy and the *minjung* and linked them to the reunification movement.

Churches have been mainly conservatives. They adhered to a strong anticommunist faith and supported the South Korean government. In the early 1970s some Christians participated in democratization and human rights movements and were concerned with reunification. They were the pioneers of KRT.

The key ideas of KRT are considered as being peace, nation and minjung. Having been regarded as the most representative document of KRT, the '88 Reunification Declaration was firmly based on Christian pacifism and the nation-*minjung*-centered reunification.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid: 183-84.

<sup>64</sup> Ch'ae Suil, ed., *H8iny3n Sinhak-kwa T'ongil H8iny3n-undong [Theology of Jubilee and Reunification Movement towards Jubilee]* (Ch3nan: Korea Theological Institute, 1995): 268.

The ideas of peace and nation reflect on those of the 7.4 South–North Communiqué, but KRT proposed a concrete way to carry out the ideas. The idea of the *minjung* reunification, based on the ideas of the *minjung* democracy and humanitarianism, is the unique to distinguish KRT from the reunification policies of the North and South Korean governments. KRT supports neither capitalism nor socialism, but it seeks the third way beyond both social systems. Theologically the third way envisions the Kingdom of God. The true reunification is ultimately to achieve a peace of the *minjung*. In this regard there is a kinship between KRT and *Minjung* theology.