

RECONCILIATION THROUGH REPENTANCE¹

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1. Prayers for Unification Increase

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) member Churches, including our own, are an important force in leading the movement for democratic unification. In 1983 we organized a "Committee to Study the Unification Issue", and through its unrelenting struggle it is contributing to the movement today for unification.

"The Korean Churches' Declaration on National Unification and Peace" issued by NCCCK February 29, 1988, was a major step in Korean Unification Movement history. The students, always a strong social force, have admitted that they have been encouraged and influenced by this Statement.

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) chose for its General Assembly theme in 1983 - the 30th Anniversary of its New History - "The PROK - With the Minjung, for the Nation, to the Ends of the Earth", followed the next year, 1984 - the 100th Anniversary of Mission in Korea - with the theme, "A Prayer March for Peace, Unification and Evangelism", with the sub-theme, "The Korean Church's Mission in its 2nd Century". These two important themes include the special missions - general and universal - of evangelism and peace, along with the overcoming of the division of the Korean peninsula. In 1986, 1987 and 1988 we issued a General Assembly Declaration - (1), (2) and (3) - on "Our Stand on Peace and Unification".

In 1984 the World Council of Churches sponsored in Tozanzo, Japan, an "International Consultation on Peace in Northeast Asia", by which world Church concern for the realization of peace and overcoming of the division of the Korean Peninsula was raised. Following this consultation, various Churches from around the world have visited both North and South Korea, sharing news of their visit. Some visits through arrangements by WCC, have given opportunities for leaders of the Churches in South and North to meet each other in a free, if somewhat contrived situation. In the 2nd Glion Consultation, representatives of Churches of South and North along with world Church representatives, issued the "Glion Declaration" for the improvement of relations.

In April 1988 NCCCK sponsored a Consultation in Incheon (Korea) on the issue of peace on the Korean peninsula, and on July 17, 1989, the Soviet Central Committee meeting in Moscow, unanimously agreed to place on its agenda the issue of 'Policies for

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Reunification of South and North Korea" with the following important issues:

- 1) Withdrawal of U.S. forces from the South as a condition for changing the truce agreement to a Peace Treaty.
- 2) Secure the Korean people's independent spirit.
- 3) Based on the principles of the 1972 South-North Joint Communiqué, reduce military armaments, form a non-aggression pact, get rid of nuclear weapons, reduce armed forces, and solve the problem of separated families.

That meeting further agreed that 1995 be set as the Year of Jubilee for Korean Reunification, and that until then, the Sunday prior to August 15 would be a worldwide day of prayer for Korean reunification. This was, of course, acceptance of the suggestion made by the February 29, 1988 NCK Declaration. Thus the world Church is now participating in the Korean reunification issue

The Korean Student national organization, one of the greatest strengths in our society, was out in front in quoting from the NCK 1988 Declaration, and at the same time began its own concrete movement for unification. The students tried to arrange for a meeting between students of South and North, but the government forcibly stopped it. However, they broke through the steel barrier and sent a representative to the so-called Pyongyang Youth Festival.

Compared to previous regimes, the 6th Republic showed a totally new attitude. The July 7, 1988 Declaration had much deeper meaning than the July 4 Joint Communiqué (1972). Its central point was that we should no longer view North Korea as an enemy nation, but as a member of a fellowship of nations. Furthermore, Pres. ROH (Tae Woo) made this promise before the UN National Assembly, receiving warm applause for it. CHUNG Ju Young (an important South Korea business executive) visited the North, and a long stride was taken toward joint development of the Diamond Mountains as a tourist resort - in fact, not just as a dream.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Council meeting in Seoul in August will no doubt pass a resolution on peace and unification on the Korean peninsula. If the atmosphere is appropriate, the WARC will no doubt, following the lead of the NCK Declaration, the Glion Joint Statement and the Moscow agenda, urge its member Churches worldwide to pray for peace and unification of Korea. It is also highly likely that it will urge the release of Rev. MOON Ik Hwan and others, and urge that such laws as the National Security Law, which is anti-unification, be revised or repealed.

2. The Vested Interests Maneuver a Backward Step

On the one hand, the government was moving toward unification, but this seemed to bring difficulties. There were strong elements which opposed the July 7 Declaration and wanted to revert to the former stance. These were big business people, who were more comfortable and made more money when labour was prevented from seeking benefits. They were better off when there was always the threat of war. The more talk there was of ending the division the more they, mistakenly, felt their position threatened. This also applied to the military. The government made anti-communism

its reason for being, and used it to maintain power. The conservatives were also part of this group. The ultimate goal of industry is that all might live well. The proper spirit of industry is not to make those at the bottom pole of imbalance and inequality just quietly accept the situation. The military's fundamental purpose is to prevent war, but paradoxically, it is a necessary evil that it is expected to bring about a situation which makes its very existence unnecessary. In the same way, if the July 7 Declaration were put into effect, the military would lose its basis for existence. This same crisis was also felt by the anti-communist bureau of the police.

It was the people's pressure that forced the issuing of the July 7th Declaration, which in turn provided the opening for Rev. MOON Ik Hwan's and other subsequent visits to the North. Yet these were made use of to reverse the flow of history. This prompted some people to question whether or not the Declaration, from the beginning, was not a deliberate ploy to set a trap to crush all pro -communist elements which might be tempted to reveal themselves by the spirit of openness.

In any event, the president's August 15 Declaration reverted to the unification policy of the 1st Republic, a policy of conquering the North by means of power.

With the onset of such a situation, the conservative pro-government group began to rise up and try to show the anti-government forces as leftists and traitors, thus reverting to the situation that existed right after Liberation - conflict between leftists and rightists.

This situation, however, should not cause too great concern, since vested interest groups and a portion of the military are always a right-wing pro-government force. They would say nothing when a Declaration such as Park Chung Hee's July 4 Joint Communique is issued. To criticize it as leftist would get them in trouble. But if the government stepped back from such a position, they would immediately rise up in arms. Likewise when the democratic forces are seen as left-wing, there is strong protest. If the government changes its position, they hide themselves for the time being in the same way as they closed their eyes before. Thus this kind of power is not a cause for concern.

3. The Reality of the South is an Anti-Communist Stance

We are concerned about the reaction of our own group as well as that of people in general. A section of the Church has strongly rebelled against the NCCK February 29 (1988) Declaration, and even some of the member Churches have been quite negative to it.

The attitude is, "The North Korean communists are atheists, 'reds', how can we speak of unification with them? They persecuted us, and massacred us, and they are demanding that the U.S. troops pull out. Don't they still plan to effect unification by victory over us? When only we have pure motives, while they are plotting and maneuvering against us, can there be true reunification? Haven't the young people who didn't experience the Korean War and don't know the real character of communists fallen into their trap?" Many Church people see that unification is obviously an important national and mission task, but it is obvious that in the present

situation they cannot go along with the unification movement. This is especially true of people who escaped to the South from the North. It is also true of those who took part in the war. This has become a part of our culture and an emotion. The anti-communist culture and sentiment has, of course, brought about division among our people. Beyond that there is the "han" and heartache of many.

It is certainly true that immediately after Liberation, the Church in the North suffered unbearable oppression at the hands of Russia and the North Korean government. Christian leaders in the North, who had been Independence fighters, such as Revs. YOON Ha Young and HAN Kyung Jik, formed a Christian Social Democratic Party. Finally, there was an incident at Shinuiju in which 24 students who were struggling against the Communist Party were massacred, many more were injured, arrested or imprisoned. The Christian Social Democratic Party supported the students' struggle, and as a result Quaker elder HAM Sok Hon was imprisoned along with the students., and Revs. YOON Ha Young and HAN Koung Jik escaped to the South. Another result of this was that the Church became a strong anti-communist force, which resolutely fought against communism.

When, following this, the communists supported the decision for a Trusteeship over South and North, the Church immediately opposed and confronted it. The Church saw communism as the anti-Christ, and through revival meetings and all-night prayer meetings, fostered a spirit of anti-communism. There were such incidents as a memorial worship for the Independence Movement in Pyongyang and Uiju, where the pulpit was destroyed and trampled, ministers, with signs hung around their necks reading "national traitor" or "American tool" were put into carts and driven through the streets. In land reform also, it was inevitable that there would be confrontation between churches with much property and the Communist Party. The peak of the conflict arose over the issue of Sabbath observance. The North Korean government organized the so-called Christian Guidance League in which membership was mandatory; seminaries were requisitioned, and any Church leaders who refused to join were labeled reactionary, rounded up and persecuted. In order to avoid such persecution many Church leaders and Christians escaped to the South,

Each individual must judge as to whether the escape to the South and the life here was justified or right, but in any event, their bitterness against communism and their feelings of rejection are inevitable. In the worst cases their "han" can never be relieved or their heartache removed.

During the Korean War people in the South suffered vengeance and victimization at the hands of North Korean troops as the invasion moved from place to place. Some were thrown into wells and killed; some were buried alive, others were strung on wire like fish. People died in unimaginably merciless ways. It has been said that after the conquering troops withdrew the hills would be completely covered with white-clad corpses. Certainly the mountains in the South were covered with the melancholy of death - male and female, old and young.

Christians are the strongest anti-communist group. Church leaders, as the strongest supporters of the Syngman Rhee regime and of the U.S. Imperialists, suffered the greatest cruelty. Whether martyred or kidnapped at least 230 Church leaders died.

Rev. PAIK Nam Yong, father of Rev. PACK Do Ki of our own Church was tragically martyred, and Rev. SONG Chang Keun was taken off to the North.

There is no way to avoid feelings of "han" and bitterness against North Korea and Communism. Nor is this ancient history. These are stories handed down today. So long as we continue forming an anti-communist culture, and as long as our anti-communist feelings are spread deeply beneath us, the reunification mission movement will be blocked by feelings of repulsion.

I also lost my father due to the N. Korean regime during the Korean War. It was a month after the occupation by the North that we found his body. The unimaginable cruelty of his death was obvious from his body. The resentment and bitterness I had in my heart upon finding his body only increased as I grew up without a father.

Including the first Glion meeting of Christians of South and North in 1986, I have been invited to be a representative on each occasion of meetings between North and South, but each time I have held back and not attended.

The list of the S. Korean Church representatives for the second Glion meeting was printed in the newspaper. It so happened that my mother was staying at the home of my brother at the time. She phoned me and said, "I see by the newspaper that you're going to Switzerland to meet N. Koreans. When do you leave?" I replied briefly, "Oh, Mother, it's been decided I'm not to go." Mother's response was, "That's good. My son should not go." That was a complete conversation between mother and son. That short conversation included all that was necessary. It shows how full of "han" my mother's heart is from living 40 years as a widow. Yet ordinarily my mother is for unification, and is critical of the government's anti-unification stand. Both my mother and I are for unification and are in conflict with anti-communist sentiment. No one who lived through Liberation and the Korean War would deny that this kind of conflict exists.

4. In the North will there not be Anti-Imperialism Sentiment?

We know how deep is our resentment and heartache, but in these 40 years there is something we have never tried. We have never tried to view the situation from the other side. That is, we have not thought about how people in the North must have the same kind of bitterness and heartache as we have. Will the Church of North Korea not have experienced the same chaotic times following Liberation which our Church blames on the North, and will it not have felt that it was caused by the South? Will there not be people in North Korea who suffered the same injustices during the Korean war as we did, and will they not be filled with the same resentment and bitterness?

Unfortunately there is no material available to us to give this kind of facts. No such material has been legally made public. Even worse, if we suggest that we caused "han" and heartache to people in the North, we are immediately ideologically suspect. So we don't even try to learn the facts.

In South Korea the first ideological confrontation seems to have been in September

1946, in the form of a general strike, which turned into the so-called October Struggle. Some 3 million people took part, some 300 died, another 3,600 disappeared, 2,600 were injured and 15,000 were arrested. Several months before the uprising, U.S. troops claimed that 1,000 persons had "infiltrated" the South from the North, yet according to information about the incident.² "Thousands were arrested due to the uprising, every one of them was South Korean. In fact, information about the demands of the strikers is that they were all related to wages. They opposed a daily wage, and demanded a basic wage and compensation according to the size of the family. The reason for the strike was that "the minjung had believed that the U.S. troops were liberators, but in fact, rather than ridding the nation of the pro-Japan power, they nurtured it; rather than a unification force, they were oppressors. This brought about animosity of the minjung, who were gaining recognition, and this contributed to the failure of the U.S. military government's economic policies."³

The April 4 incident on Cheju Island developed out of the 1947 March 1 commemoration (1919 Independence Move't.), over a clash between leftist and rightist forces. Of course it came out of the Cheju committee of the South Korean Labour Party, but this incident resulted in 160,000 casualties.⁴ If the population of Cheju at the time was some 300,000, what a terrible tragedy this was! (Quotation omitted.)

The Yosu-Soonchun incidents also resulted in some 2,000 casualties, and there were many other similar instances. There may be distortions and exaggerations, but it is certain that N. Korean communists used great cruelty, so that the bitterness against them and the desire for revenge is quite understandable.

On the other side, North Koreans have even greater reason for resentment against the U.S. Besides continuing the division, they see the U.S. as having severely victimized them during the Korean War. We do not have any material evidence of this. It is not that it is completely unavailable, but since such material cannot be sold in Korea, I cannot quote it here. During the Korean War there were six million Korean casualties, of which 3.5 million were civilians. That means the 500,000 deaths in South Korea compare to 3 million in the North. If our deep anti-communist feeling is based on those 500,000 deaths, is it not reasonable that there would be a similar feeling among the 3 million family members in the North? I have suggested calling their feeling 'anti-imperialism sentiment'. That would seem to be a term which might suit their feeling. Their sacrifice, even more than ours, was in the context of combat, and for them, too, it is not an ancient story, but one that is remembered and passed on to their descendants through their culture.

I have no intention of slandering any individual who took part in the Korean War patriotically. Individually, obviously people risked their lives for their country. It is rather that I see the whole thing as a tragedy.

² Origins of the Korean War, by Bruce Cummings, translated by KIM Ju Han, published 1986

³ Modern Korean Social Movement Encyclopaedia: 1880-1972, Kang Man Kil et al, 1988.

⁴ Cheju Minjung Struggle, by the Arari Research Cttee., Pub. by Sonamu, 1988

5. Go and be reconciled.

Given the anti-communist sentiment in the South and the anti-imperialist sentiment in the North, it is impossible for the movement for unification to go forward smoothly. I don't know whether or not conceptual toleration is possible, but concretely, there is mutual rejection. Whatever the reason, it seems that the wall which had been building up is beginning to crumble. Without the July 7th Declaration, Rev. MOON Ik Hwan's visit to the North could not have been possible. What has been happening in the South must also be happening in the North. How can our feelings on both sides be overcome enabling us to move toward unification?

Let us listen to the Lord's word, "So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God." (Matt. 5:23-24)

Reconciliation among brothers and sisters comes before worship. In order for our worship to be acceptable to God, there must first be reconciliation among people. This is God's demand.

If reconciliation is a pre-requisite for worship, there are two premises. One is "thinking" about the resentment that I am holding in my heart. In truth, "thinking" is something neither South nor North wants to do, but from the place where we live, "thinking" is something both South and North have to do. We have to think about whether or not we are holding onto our resentment in our hearts. This is faith.

Thinking through this is a way of making the historical truth clear. It is not right to harbour hatred by hiding, distorting and exaggerating the facts. It may be embarrassing, but we must make the facts known. Neither South nor North must cover up the truth any longer.

To make the facts known from the other side's point of view is to bring about a miracle. ("Say, that's right!") It would make us see, for the first time in decades, the bitterness in the hearts of our brothers and sisters. It would make us realize that the 'han' in our brothers and sisters' hearts is the same as that in our own hearts. It would make the scales fall off the eyes of people in both South and North.

The other part is to "leave...and go." This is the concrete act of repentance. It is the concrete act of admitting a fault and asking forgiveness. This is the second premise for reconciliation. Without these two premises, it is reconciliation without reconciliation, which is a sort of illicit union. The July 4 Joint Communique is an example of this kind of illicit union, which we have experienced repeatedly. Such an illicit union is just a loud noise to vindicate oneself, and only piles up more enmity than ever.

Making the truth known and recognizing the resentment my brothers and sisters hold against me in their hearts and truly repenting allows reconciliation to come about. And at the same time, we receive God's forgiveness.

Who, then, can do this? It is impossible for the governing authorities. Only the people can take it on. The February 29 NCK Declaration which makes known "the principle of people-to-people first" does it. The people or the Church must take on this responsibility.

We have declared 1995, the 50th year of the division, the 'Year of Jubilee for Korean Reunification.' As the first step toward this year of Jubilee, we must make known the truth and repent.

I pray that exactly the same theological and faith acts will be taken by both South and North. However, as we are well aware, the Church in the North does not have full independence or autonomy. Thus the Church in the South has the important task of helping the Church of the North accept this historical duty along with the Church in the South.

In this way, when the Church of South and North share in today's history we will both rid our hearts of the 'han' and heartache; the South will overcome its anti-communist sentiment and the North its anti-imperialist sentiment. We are all being urgently entreated to make sincere efforts to bring peace and unification to the Korean peninsula.