

Liberation and Reconciliation

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Liberation and Reconciliation

Feminist Theology's Relevance
for Korea

Meehyun Chung



**World Council
of Churches**
Publications

LIBERATION AND RECONCILIATION

Feminist Theology's Relevance for Korea

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Preface

Perhaps nowhere else do the complex history of Christianity and the many issues of peace and justice meet so poignantly as in Korea. Geographically and economically a part of the Global North, it nonetheless, like its many neighbours to the south, must work through the multiple legacies of a long, painful, violent colonial past. Long an isolated and homogeneous realm, it became a flashpoint of the global conflict of powers after World War II and remains starkly divided today. Steeped in deeply patriarchal Confucianism (and Calvinist puritanism), it became the most missionized of countries. Korea today sends more Christian missionaries than it receives and has become a place of strong and sharply contrasting Christian traditions.

In this context, my homeland, I ask: what can Christian religious reflection contribute to Korea, and to the emerging situation of world Christianity? In these short chapters, though it involves revisiting central points more than once, I maintain that Christian theology, and especially Korean feminist theology, can offer a unique critical lens on the historical

and religious experience of the Korean people. It can articulate values that contradict and repudiate those that have led to division and bitterness. And it can lift up a vision of collaboration, of justice, and of community that offers a better future. In short, Korean feminist theology can nurture liberation and reconciliation, two Christian ideals most pertinent to the whole body of Christ, indeed the whole world.

1. Constructing a Bridge with Crows and Magpies

The Development of Feminist Theology of Reconciliation in Korea

While other fears emerge as global concerns in the 21st century, the divided Korean peninsula still suffers greatly from the ideological conflicts of the Cold War.¹ There is a common element to both phenomena: the creation of a moral dualism used to demonize others and manipulate groups toward aggressive action they otherwise would not take. When using our freedom to more completely speak and listen, we perceive the fundamental nature of human commonality, and no longer find our differences repellent. When we let go of the constructed and manipulated fear of the other, the path to peaceful coexistence lies open before us.

In this current century the global mission is to free ourselves from a power-obsessed, rapacious ideology. We can achieve this by strengthening integrative thought and holistic actions. By doing so, we can also help the affluent release their fear of losing hegemonic supremacy.

In the case of the Korean peninsula, peace, reconciliation and reunification remain the highest priorities. This does not simply mean the absorption of North Korea by the

South through a triumphant expansion of capitalism. All too often reunification of the country, for South Koreans and US Americans, simply translates into the surrender of North Korea's socialist vision and status. Such an assumption stands as a block to both reconciliation and peace.

The Korean War, fought from 1950 to 1953, was a proxy war fiercely contested by the superpowers, which helped define the cold war era. The tragedies of that war, including the deaths of millions and the long-lasting cultural effects of total war on a vulnerable population, mustn't be repeated. However, since then, due to the moral dualism still dominant in people's thoughts, peace hasn't been re-established, and the peninsula is continuously racked by ongoing hostilities supported by both governments in the divided Korea.²

In this chapter I want to focus on several aspects within the historical development of Korean Christianity, and to place them within the historical context of Korea more generally. I write from a Korean Reformed point of view and attempt to acknowledge and explain the deep divisions within the Korean Presbyterian community, especially as they relate to both pro- and anti-communism. I end by identifying the role Korean feminist theology can play in the unification of Korea. Explaining how we might envision the movement toward peace and reconciliation, I use a metaphor rooted within popular Korean history, reminding us of how two lovers were reunited when crows and magpies worked

together to construct a much-needed bridge over the river that kept them apart.

Here is the traditional tale:

Once upon a time there was a princess, who was the daughter of a heavenly king. She could weave very well and worked diligently. This princess met a young man, who was a herdsman. They fell in love and got married. After the marriage both of them became lazy due to love.

Since they loved each other so much, they neglected their duties. Because of this laziness the king got angry and punished them. The herdsman was ordered to live in the Eastern sky and the weaver in the Western sky. Even though they pleaded with the king to let them be together, the king would not agree.

The herdsman and the weaver were forced to part. He went east and she went west. They were so sad that eventually the king began to feel sorry for them. Finally he decided to let them meet once a year on the banks of the Milky Way River.

All year long, the two lovers counted the days and nights while thinking of each other. Both now knew that they had been disobedient to their father and king. The day finally came when they were allowed to have their yearly meeting. With high hopes, each headed for their meeting place by the Milky Way River. But when they

reached it, the river had become so wide and the night so dark that they could not see each other.

The weaver and the herdsman stood on opposite banks of the Milky Way River and cried. Tears rolled down their cheeks and into the river. The water from their tears flowed down the river and then became rain. The rain then fell to the earth until the ground was all wet and soggy. The seas rose higher and higher. The fields and gardens of the kingdom were flooded. Not only that, the homes of the king's subjects were swept away by the waves.

The animals of the kingdom became very alarmed indeed. They all met to decide what to do. Each animal took turns telling everyone at the meeting what they thought would be a good way to stop the flood of tears. Some made low grunts and some made high squeaks. Some of them whistled when they talked. Finally one animal came up with a suggestion. "We must help the weaver and the herdsman get together again. Otherwise this rain will never stop." "Yes," said another, "let's build a bridge for them!" "That's it!" exclaimed another animal. "We must build a great bridge!" All of the animals agreed.

But none of them knew how to go about building a bridge. Animals don't usually know how to build bridges. They all lay around looking at one another, twisting their tails in silence. Finally some crows and magpies chirped up to the group. "Let us birds do it," said one. "We can

fly to the Milky Way River,” said another. “And make ourselves into a bridge.” So all of the crows in the world got together and made a big flock with their cousins, the magpies, and flew up to the Milky Way River. They flew tightly together holding on to each other with their talons. Soon they stretched from one bank of the river to the other. The Weaver and the Herdsman were very surprised to see a bridge of birds. “What is this?” they exclaimed. “Now we can cross the Milky Way River and be together again!” The Weaver and the Herdsman ran across the backs of the birds.

In the middle of the bridge of birds they met holding each other in tight embrace. Right around this time the heavy rains slowed to a drizzle. But then the two lovers had to return to their homes in the East and West for yet another lonely year. After that, on the seventh day of the seventh moon of every year, all of the crows and magpies would fly to the Milky Way River to form a bridge. The Weaver and the Herdsman would meet on that special day of every year by crossing the river on the backs of the flock of birds.”³

Development of Korean Christianity

Korea is often called “the land of morning calm.” Rarely, however—as a country with deep and fiercely contested social and political divisions—does it enjoy a quiet morning.

To look at an atlas is to quickly grasp the role of geography in our history. Korea is directly surrounded by large and powerful countries: China, Russia, Japan and the USA. It follows that our small country was frequently the victim of power struggles both with those countries and among those countries. On the other hand, and it's important to recognize this, Korea has long served as a cultural bridge of great historical significance, most notably from China to Japan.

In about 1882, the USA with major European powers—Germany, Russia, France—urged Korea to open its borders to unlimited trade.⁴ During the following period of enforced opening, many missionaries, both male and female, entered the country. In those years it was difficult for Koreans to differentiate between a true Christian mission and the threatening warships armed with cannons insisting on a new economic order.

A Protestant mission was initiated in 1883-1884 in Solnae—presently in North Korea—by a Korean named Suh Sangyoon.⁵ This was closely followed by a wave of initiatives by foreign Protestant groups, somewhat paralleling the path of the foreign Roman Catholic missions during the 18th century. The Presbyterians and Methodists came first, soon followed by Baptists, Anglicans and other denominations. The first Presbyterian missionary in the country was Horace Grant Underwood (1859-1916), who founded the first Korean Presbyterian church, in Seoul, in 1887. Originally

from Great Britain, but a resident of the United States prior to his arrival in Korea on April 5, 1885, Underwood was accompanied by his Methodist friend and fellow missionary, Henry G. Appenzeller (1858-1902), originally from Switzerland. The first Presbyterian theological seminary was founded in 1901 in Pyongyang, currently the capital of North Korea.

After the unexpected defeat of Russia in the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905, the USA, Great Britain, Germany and France agreed on a secret treaty with Japan to legitimize Japanese colonial interests in Korea. Subsequently, in 1910, Japan formally annexed Korea, thus beginning the tragedy which directly resulted in the presently divided state of the country. Japanese colonial rule lasted from 1910 to 1945 and has had a fundamental, long lasting and extremely unsettling effect on Korean society.

The 1945 liberation of Korea from Japanese colonialism was achieved through the military victories of foreign colonial powers, and not the unified efforts of Koreans themselves, a situation which allowed the country to be divided by the victorious colonial powers, allowing the USA dominance in the South, and the Soviet Union (and to a lesser extent, China) dominance in the North. The arbitrary division at the 38th parallel was a choice of political expediency reflecting neither the history nor the desires of the Korean people. Actually Japan could have been divided instead of Korea, because Japan had caused the war, not Korea. Germany was divided

as punishment and in order not to be united again. Korea was divided for another reason, not because it was the cause of the horrors of the war or an enemy, but because it was a part of the Japanese empire. The many independent movements and endeavours for self-determination of the Korean peninsula were just brutally ignored.

It was this untimely and unnecessary division which directly led to the Korean War of 1950-1953. The Korean War was a complete tragedy for millions of Korean families on both sides of the border, and the devastation of the country's infrastructure was immense. The after-effects of the war are still very much alive in the situation and culture of both Koreas today.

Throughout Korean history there has been a strong connection between periods of socio-political crisis and a popular interest in religion. It may seem ironic, but it's a fact that Koreans became intensely preoccupied with the gospel in the beginning of the 20th century, at the very time secularization became predominant in the west. Koreans had lost faith and interest in their traditional religions, which they considered to have failed them, and had an immense interest in western culture, particularly the nature of the recently reintroduced Christian faith. Koreans saw themselves in a hopeless situation and turned to the message of the gospel to provide new hope through the vision of God's reign. The longing for God was strong. Hence, Korean Christianity grew rapidly, and

given the preponderance of American missionaries, did so under the influence of American Christianity.

From the beginning the content of the Bible was attractive to the ordinary people who sought both a new earth and a new heaven, and it was never simply a phenomenon of academics or the intelligentsia. Because of the desperate political situation due to the loss of status of their country, the yearning for respect for the creator, sustainer and spiritual kingdom of God, which replaced the loss of statehood, was more immense. The number of churches and Christians expanded exponentially.⁶

Scott W. Sunquist described the success of Western missionary work in Korea as follows: “Of all of the Presbyterian missionary work in the world, Korea must be the most well-known: the jewel in the Presbyterian crown. Korea was given the title Hermit Kingdom because it was nearly completely cut off from the world until late in modern history . . . and Korea, which had been known as the Hermit Nation, is now one of the most outward-looking missionary nations in the world.”⁷ He also pointed out, “Today there are far more Koreans working as missionaries in the United States than American missionaries in Korea.”⁸

Although the roots of the Reformed Church in South Korea date back to Huldreich Zwingli in Zurich and John Calvin in Geneva, the influence of Martin Luther is much better known and appreciated than that of his Reformation

counterparts. While Calvin may be less celebrated than Luther, he had enormous influence within the church with his doctrine of predestination, his understanding of being a Christian, and his ideas on both ministry and church structure. Unfortunately, these teachings were introduced into Korean Christianity in a somewhat one-dimensional and at times corrupted form by churches strongly influenced by American Puritanism and fundamentalism, a phenomenon most clearly visible within those Korean churches “made in the USA.”

In fact Presbyterianism—which particularly stands in the theological mainstream for Calvin—came to Korea strongly shaped by Puritanism and fundamentalism, either from Switzerland via Scotland or from the Netherlands via the USA.⁹

There have been, and are still, many efforts by Koreans to investigate the origins of the Swiss Reformation directly, in an attempt to deepen our knowledge of Calvin from the original texts and in the light of his historical context, instead of simply adopting American Calvinism. It remains a contemporary task to read and interpret Calvin correctly, as Karl Barth did in his time by renewing the doctrine of election. It is not sufficient to accept and repeat previous understandings uncritically.

The Reformed Church in South Korea, in the act of building itself, placed strong emphasis on forms of piety, including house fellowship groups, Bible groups, and early

morning prayer.¹⁰ The church was, and is, also strongly characterized by such positive Calvinistic characteristics as hard work, disciplined living, and accepting one's profession as one's calling. The deep rifts within Korea's Reformed Church, however, remain a chronic problem and result, at least partially, from the competitive nature of American missionary societies. A renewed focus on common roots in Calvin's teaching could provide a needed impetus toward healing these divisions.

A popular Korean national consciousness was awakened during the Japanese occupation, perhaps most acutely in the 1920s, when the emerging national consciousness was strongly coupled with socialist ideals of an egalitarian society. But these ideas and the popular activism to support them were heavily oppressed during the Japanese colonial era. It is instructive to remember that the American missionaries who held such dominant positions of influence in Korean Christianity regularly displayed conservative political attitudes toward the foreign oppression, suggesting that the proper role of Christians is to obey the current ruler of the state.

Most foreign missionaries during the period of colonial rule, reflecting their fundamentalist leanings, opposed Korean national political awareness and movements which aimed at political independence. They stressed political abstinence and subordination to governmental authorities. It was

argued that politics and social actions were not the primary task of the church, being less important than the salvation of the individual through faith and the expansion of a ministry directly related to that. In this way, the native opposition to occupation was actually substantially weakened by the growth of the Protestant missions.

However, during the occupation, the unwelcome forcing of Christians to worship at a Shinto Shrine became one of most important and divisive issues, bringing sharply into play, as it did, the first commandment of the Decalogue.¹¹ Whether or not a group agreed to worship at a Shinto Shrine has, since the end of the occupation, become a key means of evaluating the level of accommodation or collaboration of that group with the Japanese occupiers. It is perhaps ironic, but historically true, that the politically and theologically more progressive groups, more concerned for national liberation through other forms of resistance, were less concerned about the public denial of worship at the Shinto Shrines. Nevertheless, after liberation, it was believed by many that the conservative groups active in rejecting the Shinto Shrine evidenced stronger righteousness and a greater commitment to Christian martyrdom and in this way were worthy and deserving of greater popular support.

Liberated Korea, despite early promises to the contrary, did not have free and open nationwide elections. Although South Korea had its own election in 1948, this only served

to cause further divisions between the two Koreas, and South Korea continued to move into a closer alliance with the USA, not only politically but also religiously. Between 1945 and 1960 the churches in South Korea were very closely aligned with and connected to American religious institutions.

It is important to note that Christianity contributed greatly to the educational and health sectors within Korean society. Many successful initiatives were achieved. These functioned to strengthen the hope and beliefs of the population. Interestingly, economic growth was seen as a cause of church growth and, reciprocally, church growth was seen as a cause of economic growth. They became intricately linked into an image of a better future, both material and spiritual.

Summarizing generally, from 1961 to 1990, the Korean church was seen as supportive of the capitalist model of development. However, in the late fifties and through the sixties (1958-1967), many missions were initiated that directly responded to the social issues caused by rapid industrialization and urbanization. The Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal churches, as well as the Salvation Army, felt a need to address the extreme social stress brought by rapid societal change, and they organized missions seeking both human rights in the workplace and social justice more generally.

In 1958, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), founded a social gospel movement for factory workers called the Yeongdeungpo Industry Mission.¹² The goals were to

proclaim the religious good news to both employees and employers; to work toward a more just sharing of economic progress; to better appreciate the value of work by providing rights for labour and labour unions; to improve the rights of temporary workers; and to network more effectively with other churches sharing similar values.

Founded in 1965 within the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK), the Korean Christian Academy became a vibrant centre for dialogue between labour and capital, employee and employer, and on issues of gender and sexuality. Well-known for its strong support of democratization, the Academy movement contributed to social research in various areas, including an early and growing awareness of environmental issues and intra/interreligious people's cooperation.

Such initiatives evolved quickly during the next period, from 1968 through 1972, through the help of professionally trained theologians and pastors. The term "mission" began to be consciously used to replace the term "evangelism." Indeed, the concept of *missio Dei* was introduced and expanded from a more limited evangelical movement into a broader social and ecumenical movement. The more evangelical churches struggled with this transition, and were reluctant to accept the broader approach.

This period was followed by a generation of social oppression, roughly from 1972 through 1993. During these

years there were many demonstrations against the dictatorship then in power. Progressive groups within the PROK, the PCK, and the Methodist Church were all active in this movement. Many people were arrested and tortured. The social causes were broad and fundamental, not limited to the rights of labour, as sometimes has been presented, but including the challenges of endemic poverty within an unjust social structure.

It should be remembered that these church actions, and the networking created to support them, were frequently considered as anti-governmental and pro-communist by authorities within the state and by an important segment of the population as well.

Since 1990 the Korean church has been much more stable. The rapid growth appears to be over. Concurrently, it is environmental issues which have increasingly moved to the forefront of popular concerns.

In the history of Korean Christianity it's important to recognize and acknowledge an important fact: both male and female missionaries, mainly American, were not separate from the drive for expansion by the colonial and capitalistic superpower of the United States, and this has had a great and lasting influence on numerous Korean churches and societies.

There were many missionaries who served with devotion in very humble circumstances. Therefore general expression about missionary work is inappropriate. It should be more

differentiated. Yet it is also true that there were many others who lived in luxury and valued their own interests and comforts first. They behaved like foreign diplomats or ruling officials, claiming not only that they represented the absolute truth of Christianity, but that Christianity found its fullest and most mature expression in contemporary western culture. They never intended, nor expected, the rise of a Christian interpretation of the gospel indigenous to Korea. In consequence, the middle-class lifestyles idealized in Western cultures became the standard, at least for some, of what the ideal Christian life in Korea should be. Such Korean Christians attached little value to their own culture and quickly oriented “westerly.”

The role of foreign missionaries, consciously or unconsciously, strengthened those elite native groups who worked most closely in propagating and strengthening the foreign culture of the missionaries, and it remains the case that indigenous support systems for foreign missionaries are used as leverage in the competing colonial ambitions of foreign powers.

It is necessary to critically evaluate the prestige and profit of the majority of missionaries who lived in luxurious circumstances. Many among them possessed and managed mines, or were involved with import and export business, and the God of Western Christianity became overtly associated with material blessings. For that reason alone it was difficult to

acknowledge structural social ills as unjust and sinful. In fact, affluence was glorified in and for itself, while poverty was simply cursed. The yearning for Western wealth, as represented by the missionaries themselves, proved strong and lasting. Native cultural values were underappreciated and weakened.

Simply put, due to the material attractions of Western culture and its spreading influence, early Christian Koreans sometimes unwittingly became representatives of the interests and life habits of the Western bourgeoisie.¹³

It is important to note, too, that Korea was not colonized by European or North American forces, but rather by the non-Christian country of Japan.¹⁴ It follows that one does not find the same resentment against Christian colonial powers in Korea as one does elsewhere within the world. Trust in the Christian God was not initially related to submissiveness to a worldly power.

Yet I believe, as a result of the widespread success of the American missions, that the Christian submission to God has in fact become linked to political submission to the United States as the dominant world power. The fear of, and trust in, God, have become emotionally associated with the fear of, and trust in, the USA. Fundamentalist and closed-minded conservative Christians in both Korea and America support this tendency, although it is destructive of Korean self-determination and impedes Korean political independence.

Wounds That Won't Heal: Ongoing Effects of Colonialism and War

The scars caused by Japanese colonialism, liberation through foreign power and the country's division at the end of the Second World War are sometimes hidden in today's Korea—and those not hidden are often ignored—yet nonetheless they remain fresh and open on the body of the people.¹⁵

Among them are the effects left by the multiple attacks against the civilian population in South Korea between 1948 and 1954, justified on the pretext of being against “communist enemies of the state.” They include the massacres in Yeosoo in 1948, in the Jiri Mountains in 1948 and 1949, in Cheju from 1948 through 1954, and in Nokunri in 1950. Ordered by the South Korean government, these actions all had the informed support of the US administration. Investigations are still ongoing in an attempt to throw light on what actually happened.

The worst events occurred on Cheju Island.¹⁶ It is a beautiful and traditionally isolated island, created through volcanic action, historically difficult to reach, lying off the south coast. It was used as a place of exile for banished dissident leaders. Perhaps as a result, the communities on this island have a long tradition of resistance to injustice and oppression.

The immediate background of the massacre was the proposed general election in South Korea which, in fact, did lead to the founding of the Republic of South Korea on May 10,

1948. These elections met a great deal of popular resistance, as many believed they marked an important and obvious step toward the permanent division of their country. In the whole country—not only in Cheju—there were waves of protest against holding the election. As a result, many of these protesters were immediately accused of pro-communist sympathies and were brutally murdered. Many of the killed died without having any concept of the nature of the crime they had supposedly committed.

The birth of the first Korean Republic happened against that background. Both the President and the government of the new republic were supported by the US administration until the early 1990s, when the first truly civilian Korean government ascended to power. Until then, however, no criticism of the Korean State was considered appropriate. Criticism was perceived simply as a function of “being pro-communist,” and under the National Security Regulations such protesters were denigrated both as traitors seeking to overthrow the government and enemies of the state. The families of the slain, fearing for themselves, only talked about the purges in secret. Nor were there any public ceremonies of mourning—let alone official apologies—for the deceased. Discussion of the massacres remained taboo for decades.

In private, many people—above all, the women—tried to heal their wounds and release their *han* (a distinctly Korean term used to describe a synthesis of both resentment and sadness),

and sometimes did so by turning back to their Shamanistic folk practices. The official, established churches did very little in public. However, the efforts of Christian men and women working underground shouldn't be underestimated, even if they were a minority. There were some who worked bravely to discover and preserve the truth and found ways to do so. They understood the need to make the crimes known and to make amends publicly. These groups played an important and historical role in the transformation of Korea from an authoritarian, military dictatorship into a democratic, civil state.

The persistence needed to recognize and honour the dead is evident in the prolonged struggles to do so on Cheju Island.

In 1950, on August 20 (July 7, according to the moon calendar) one hundred and thirty-two innocent people were murdered in the Songak Mountains on the island of Cheju on suspicion of being pro-communist. It was especially sad for relatives that these brutal murders took place on the traditional Day of Encounter, a time for families to gather. Due to the political situation it was impossible for relatives to collect the slain bodies for proper burial. In fact, it was not until seven years later, on April 8, 1957, that family members were allowed to look for the bodies. Since the bones and remains had been piled together, the mourners had no way to identify individual loved ones. They decided, therefore, to create a memorial for a communal grave. It was called "The Memorial

for 100 Ancestors” and emphasized the unity among those who shared the same tragic fate.

But even that was a step too far for the authorities. On June 15, 1961, under the regime of the third President, the dictator Park Chung-Hee, the memorial was destroyed—a futile attempt to efface the memory of a terrible deed. Finally, more than thirty years later, after years of ongoing struggle, the memorial reopened on August 24, 1993, again on the Day of Encounter, according to the moon calendar.

In the many associations formed to support victims and their families, Christian men and women took an early initiative in seeking the public truth of the historical facts. While it is important to give spiritual comfort to those whose feelings, painful and deeply hidden, could not be adequately expressed through shamanic or other religious rituals, the transformation of a society requires more. It was the repeated attempts of Korean Christians to determine the facts and deal with them publicly that finally forced the matter of state suppression into the arena of public discussion.

In that particular massacre, four-fifths of the victims were men aged between twenty and forty years old. Or to view this from a different perspective; most of the survivors were women, and many of them were left as widows. In addition, after their male relatives had either been killed or fled, they often had to suffer from both sexual violence and torture. The South Korean government is imbued through and through with an

anti-communist ideology. The very bodies of women assumed to be pro-communist were suspect, for wouldn't they bear pro-communist sons? In this way, sexual violence against the women was perceived as an acceptable expression of the State's official anti-communism.¹⁷ The bodies became the objects of anti-communist hatred, collectively misused as a way in which the patriarchy could discriminate against and punish the enemy.

In Confucian tradition and ideology—which has played a foundational role in Korean society—female “purity” is one of the highest virtues. Therefore the victims were forced, or shamed, to keep their experiences silent. This compulsion helped maintain a patriarchal system in the name of family honour. It was exceptionally difficult for the truth to be spoken. The prolonged silence—as though nothing had happened—is further evidence of the many ways in which the victims continued to suffer.

In the face of this persecution the widows entered into a very close community: helping each other and their children survive, rebuilding their houses and villages, keeping watch and sharing the farm work. It was not something they needed to formally discuss or record; they recognized their mutual suffering by caring for each other.

Neither the government of the day nor the society-at-large helped ease the burden of their tragic history. They were forced to remain silent, only gradually becoming more willing to make their history public.¹⁸ Having the courage to publicly

bear witness to what happened is an extremely important step in creating a general resistance against that male power which remains such an integral part of the state's structure.

There are other more recent yet related incidents in Korean history. Violence continues against the women who work as prostitutes near the US military bases. In 2002, two middle-school girls were hit and killed by a US armoured vehicle. Due to the US moving its military base in South Korea, farmers lost their land in the Pungtak-Daejuri district, and there is the ongoing, serious, environmental damage due to the Marine presence in Gangjeoung. These incidents reflect the ongoing uncertainty of the situation in Korean peninsula, reflecting its volatility, as well as the pressing need for more education toward peace.

The 1953 Armistice Agreement needs to be replaced by a Peace Treaty¹⁹ not only to ensure peace on the Korean Peninsula, but also to ensure security, more generally, in North East Asia. Given the ongoing world polarization, it is an issue of importance in the search for global peace.

Divisions within the Korean Presbyterian Churches and the Paradoxical Role of the WCC

Given the current situation and its historical causes, the questions that need to be asked include: how can we overcome the deep divisions between Korean churches; what is the meaning of *Missio Dei* in the Korean context; and how can

Korea become a positive example that genuinely contributes to world peace?

There are many reasons why Korean Presbyterian churches are so deeply split. It is impossible to explain the complexity of this issue within the limits here. Even the effects of the World Council of Churches, an ecumenical organization founded in 1948 to further Christian reconciliation in the post-war world, only served to deepen the divisions among Korean churches.

In about 1947, many missionaries who had been forced to leave Korea due to the Japanese colonial policy returned. Among them were US missionaries who, during the occupation, had objected to Shinto Shrine worship. Their objection had not been national or political, but rooted in religious convictions related to the first commandment. There were other missionaries, however, who had, in one way or another, participated in the worship in the Shrines. After liberation there was a tension between these two sets of Christian missionaries. Those that had more openly objected to Shinto Shrine worship gained status as Christians of higher conviction and standing, even though they had remained politically conservative and closed to nationalist liberation movements during the length of the occupation. A similar story holds with Korean pastors, and thus further divisions were created between conservative and progressive tendencies.

Since missionary activity began earlier in the North than the South, Christianity there was more developed, with both more churches and members. Many Christians who used to live in the North migrated to the South just before and after the Korean War. Especially in the immediate post-war period, many pastors fled as refugees to the South, some leaving behind their entire families.²⁰ These pastors and church members came to personally and fiercely hate the communist regime and anathematized North Korea. Their negativity played a critical role in the hardening of attitudes toward the North within South Korean congregations.

Their fierce anti-communism was shared by members of the South Korean government, who saw it as fundamental to their ideology. The democratic movement as it evolved, paradoxically, was considered both anti-communist in intent and yet a front for communism in its criticism of those in power. Given that political power was fused with religious and economic power, the critique of any aspect of the consolidated hegemony was perceived as dangerous and threatening. Therefore any demonstrations or social movements which supported democracy were vigorously oppressed as being either communist or communist-inspired. For the sake of economic growth of the nation, patriotic or nationalistic awareness has been underlined. In order to protect the country against foreign economic dominance, the security of the country is considered as the most urgent task for whole

nation. Therefore on behalf of economic success and security of the state, criticism of the ideology of anti-communism is defeated. Critics of the regime or reform movements were not allowed and immediately marked as state-hostility or communist.

Theological discussion also erupted in the early 1950s regarding the literal interpretation of the Bible. As a result of this debate and other underlying issues, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK)²¹ was founded. It became one of the most progressive denominations and played a significant role in the popular struggle for democracy, once again making the case that theological progressiveness is often a function of social and political openness.

It was, of course, the Korean War and the competing ideologies of communism and anti-communism that formed the larger context of the “McCarthy Era” in America. It is also true that the anti-communist rantings of US Senator Joseph McCarthy helped balkanize Korean Christianity. It was during his period of greatest influence when the membership debate of Korean churches within the World Council of Churches erupted.

During the Korean War the WCC supported the so-called Toronto Declaration, identifying the North as the sole cause of the war.²² Through the Toronto declaration, the WCC supported and approved the decision of the UN to protect South Korea. This decision was taken in the Central

Committee meeting in Toronto in July 1950. After the Toronto declaration was released, it evoked several debates among member churches of the World Council, according to their political direction. This declaration reached Korean Christians amidst the Korean War and encouraged them very much in a feeling of solidarity. The leader of the Korean church sent a letter of gratitude on September 1, 1950. Nevertheless in June 1951 a critical pamphlet was published. It was reported in *Christian Beacon*, published by the International Council of Christian Churches. Because of its fundamentalist leanings, this organization opposed the World Council of Churches. They didn't want to have any cooperation with ecumenical movements, because among member churches of the WCC were still some communist countries like China.²³ Unfortunately this kind of mindset affected the orientation of President Syngman Rhee. The political response to the event shows how he²⁴ combined his conservative pro-US policies with conservative Christian ideals. The incident occurred while the Korean War was raging, in 1951 in Pusan, then the temporary capital of South Korea. President Lee invited fundamentalist-oriented pastors and politicians to his residence.²⁵ He told them he considered the World Council of Churches to be a pro-communist organization and harshly criticized the Korea National Council of Churches for membership within it.²⁶ This was due, he claimed, to the Council's recognition of the Republic of

China and the Soviet Union, as well as its orientation in Africa and South America. Ironically, the World Council of Churches actually followed a rather anti-communist orientation during this period, due to the dominance of US American church interests after the Second World War, both in terms of ideology and financial importance. It was only after the WCC meeting in New Delhi in 1961 that awareness of so-called third world voices from countries shaped by the colonial period was more broadly recognized. In 1961 some Eastern Orthodox Churches of eastern European countries joined the WCC, which was helpful for the churches' keeping their identity under communist regimes through ecumenical solidarity in the WCC. However, this fact made the WCC look more communist-oriented.

One of the most influential theologians of the time arguing against the ecumenical movement was Hyungyong Park, a leading proponent of fundamentally oriented Presbyterian theology. He accused the WCC of being rooted in atheistic materialism and aligned to communism. He also insisted that the WCC, as a pro-communist organization, was extremely dangerous to Korean Christianity. He also suggested there were no real Christians among any of the delegates representing the communist countries. They were, he claimed, at best collaborators with the regimes and that the "real Christians" had not been allowed to participate.²⁷ In this way the world ecumenical movement itself became an occasion for yet

further divisions among the Presbyterian churches, delaying its hoped-for moment of dialogue and co-operation.

To see this in the broader historical context, we should keep in mind the criticism of, and reaction to, Josef Lukl Hromadka's statements at the time regarding the WCC. There were not many theologians who considered the Korean War as deeply as Hromadka. He said that it, and the international escalation of it, was a political power play supporting capitalistic expansion within Asia.²⁸ He criticized the declaration, calling it evidence of Western one-sidedness, and an error that served to diminish the moral prestige of the Council.²⁹ Karl Barth also criticized the document as unbalanced and one-sided.³⁰ Even though Barth had concerns regarding the support for Communist ideas among certain East European theologians, he evaluated socialist tendencies positively and expressed solidarity with them.³¹

To help overcome the separation of Korean churches it is necessary and important to have cooperation between the ecumenical line and the evangelical line for mutual influence, fair communication and constructive correction. It will lead to reconciliation of the society as well.

Women in Korean Churches

Throughout Korean history, women have played a variety of roles within society. Their role has not always been restricted to the private sphere. However, during the Chosun dynasty,

which lasted roughly half a millennium, from 1392 to 1910, women were systematically subordinated to men, losing all the public functions which they had freely practiced before the introduction of Confucianism as the state philosophy and dominant social ideology.³² Confucianism has been highly valued for its moral and ethical standards, but it has had a negative impact on Asian society in terms of gender relations. In Confucianism all leading functions are performed by men. This pattern has been followed within the churches with no decision-making functions reserved for women, either in church or in society.

The arrival of Christianity led to fundamental changes within the Korean Confucian order. Women discovered that, at least according to the gospel, they were equal with men before God. They regained their own names and dignity. As well, Christianity contributed considerably and practically to their health and education. Schools for women were established and, by reading the Bible, they became literate in the Korean script.

Yet Christianity did not lead to the complete emancipation of women. Rather, elements of Confucian thought, which continues as a national philosophy and serves as the basis of traditional religious ethics, have been reinforced by conservative Protestant fundamentalism. The Western patriarchal system of Christianity has fused with local Confucian patriarchy. This powerful dynamic is currently embedded

within the male-dominated practices and hierarchical constitution of the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Despite the biblical teachings that emphasize equality among people (cf. Gal 3:28), it deserves notice that the mainstream churches are not keen on propagating this particular liberating element of the gospel.

Certain aspects of foreign missionary work have, as well, reinforced the traditional dichotomy between female and male domains. In this respect, it must be said that Christianity has played an ambiguous role in women's liberation.

The first female missionary, the Methodist Mary F. Scranton (1832-1909), came to Korea from the United States in the year 1885. While accompanying her son, a missionary medical doctor, she saw the suffering of many Korean women and dedicated herself to improving their situation.³³ Female missionaries were, in the main, active in educating women and providing medical services. Their efforts to raise the living standard of all Koreans, male and female, should not be forgotten or minimized. Many of them dedicated their lives to such work and certain among them suffered personally due to the difficult living conditions in which they worked.³⁴ These women sacrificed themselves and the quality of their family life, frequently lacking suitable education for their children and health facilities, to free the women of Korea from restrictive traditions.

Besides the efforts and self-sacrificing works of female missionaries, the cooperation of Korean women should be acknowledged. The commitment and energy of the so-called “Bible Women” in Korean churches was more important to the spread of Christianity than the success of the so-called “Nevius method.”³⁵ Or, to present the historical conditions more accurately, we should say it was the women evangelists who built the foundation upon which the Nevius method succeeded. Due to the cultural convention of publicly separating women and men, it was impossible for the foreign male missionaries to visit Korean women in their private residences to tell them the Good News and distribute Bibles.³⁶ It was, rather, the efforts of the many evangelist Korean women which proved effective. While Korean women have played a decisive role in building the church, after it was established they lost their public functions within it. As soon as the Korean churches became better established, women were marginalized. As has happened so often in church history, women did the diaconal work while men assumed the leading functions. Women found themselves expelled from powerful positions with only men retaining executive power. This parallels what also happened in early Christianity, when after the institutionalization of the churches for which they had struggled, the women lost their official status in the church hierarchy.

Women want to do and can do more than they are presently allowed. Women’s activities were, and still are, mostly

limited to working in the kitchen or assisting in home visits and Sunday-school work. Women are still largely excluded from sharing the demands of preaching, carrying out the liturgy or decision making in church management boards in general. Quota regulation is not generally introduced in leadership or decision making bodies of the churches, though women are very poorly represented in these bodies. From the beginning of the establishment of Korean churches women have desired to fill more responsible positions, but they were originally even denied the right to participate in the election of elders and deacons. In 1907, a Korean male was for the first time confirmed as minister within the Presbyterian Church; later the synod established a church order stipulating that, in accordance with the Bible, the occupations of minister and elders were open only to male members. One finds this rule in other Protestant churches as well. The socialist ideal, however, which had brought Korean Christian women together to work for social equality and Korean independence, struggled and failed during the 1930s against the ruthless repression by determined Japanese occupiers.

A generally conservative culture is obviously at work behind such stipulations. Women with a feminist outlook, however, fought consistently and long against this male dominance. It took a long time for women candidates to successfully find appropriate positions in established congregations in the urban environment. It was almost 90 years after the

first application before a woman was ordained by the general assembly of a major Presbyterian church. Rather, they did find some success becoming leaders within prayer houses located in small congregations, remote rural or mountainous areas.

For example the very first Christian Women's association was formed in Pyongyang in 1898. After that, in 1928 the nationwide Christian women's association was created. In 1933 one of the women leaders began to apply for female eldership, which was rejected by every General Assembly until 1994. Women's ordination went also in a similar way. Finally in 1996 came the first female ordination accepted in a major denomination. Only after much discussion, the position of minister was made accessible to women in the largest congregation in the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the "Tonghap" church. The ordination of women had previously been allowed in smaller Protestant churches, as well as in the Methodist Church, since 1955. The most progressive Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), the "Kijang" church, approved the ordination of women in 1977, and since 2001 the Anglican Church also permits the ordination of women. This does not yet mean that female preachers are automatically placed on an equal footing with their male colleagues; many local congregations still prefer a male minister.

At present there are about 3,000 female pastors among all church denominations within the National Council of

Churches in Korea (NCCK), although only a few are in leading positions within their congregations. Most hold positions in Christian organizations and church-based NGOs as functional workers and staffs. Women also remain in the minority in the synods or presbyteries of the church. While comprising over 70 percent of church membership, they represent only 5 percent of positions within the higher bodies within the church. It remains necessary, therefore, to strive for structural changes that push for a reduction in the domination of men.³⁷ Not only are women underrepresented in the ministry, they are underrepresented in the seminaries. Among the few female professors of theology, some hold no feminist orientation at all, and others oppose feminist ideas, although the current number of female students enrolled in theological studies at universities and seminaries is almost equal to that of male students. One of the most important tasks for Korean feminist theology remains, therefore, to penetrate the hierarchical structures of the churches and the theological education system.³⁸ Feminist theology is not yet included in the curriculum, nor yet a required subject. The importance of a feminist hermeneutic with critical analysis and constructive theology is not yet well recognized.

The intent is not to replace patriarchal structures with matriarchal ones. What in feminist theology is called “empowerment” is not a desire to recreate the power monopoly with different participants; it is, rather, to struggle against

every form of popular suppression and disenfranchisement, aiming to reduce their occurrence. We are seeking a structure of inclusive circles, not a hierarchical pyramid with new faces at the top.

On the Path of Korean Feminist Theology

Korean feminist theology developed under the influence of Western feminist theology as well as liberation theology. However Korean self-determined awareness to create Korean feminist theology was strong, not just copying westernized feminist theology. Therefore in 1980, the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) was formed.³⁹ This was comparatively early in relation to other countries, including the Global North. In retrospect, after thirty years, we do not see feminist theology and feminist activities as having gained much interest and respect in the organized churches; many of its activities have been regarded as simply “women’s business” and therefore held in slight regard. However, while the church hierarchy as a whole is still a long way from embracing it, Korean feminist theology has strongly contributed to ecumenical cooperation at the grassroots level.

Even though the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) encourages different movements for social justice and reunification, the Korean church generally remains pro-capitalist and anti-communist. The significant characteristic

of Korea's larger reunification movement, however, consists of "three Mins": Minju = Democracy, Minjung = People, Minjok = Nation. In other words, the process and movement for reunification include different dimensions of popular action, which is not the same as anti-communism.

Korean feminist theology is occupied with problems stemming from the division of Korea. The theological project regarding reunification is the most important task for Korean Feminist Theology. Soonkyung Park,⁴⁰ the foremost pioneer of the early feminist theologians in Korea, and one of the founders of the Korean Association of Women Theologians, especially focuses on this issue. Park has declared that feminist theology does not only concern women, but occupies itself with the problems of the people, even though she is well aware that it is the women among the Minjok (the nation) and Minjung (the people) who are the most conspicuously oppressed.

Park became well-known for her actions opposing anti-communist prejudices in Korean theology and churches,⁴¹ She attempted to clarify the justified social criticism of the capitalist, militarist and global hegemony promoted by the United States of America. She developed the theme of Minjok, or Hanminjok,⁴² as a proper subject matter of Korean theology in general, and Korean feminist theology in particular. She stated, "Minjung is the suffering subject of Korean and world iniquities. Whoever speaks of, or represents, the unification discussion must face the problem of Korea and

the world from a Minjung perspective. In this sense, Minjung is the sign of a new unified Korean society. Minjung is itself Minjok, bearing the entire yoke of Hanminjok in the world. However, Minjok is a more comprehensive concept than Minjung, if the latter is defined as referring to part of the Minjok.”⁴³

The NCCK proclaimed in 1988 the “1995 Jubilee-Reunification of Korea” based on the biblical jubilee and focused on reconciliation between the two Koreas. Even though it was a prophetic movement, it lacked important feminist aspects. Therefore KAWT made their own “Declaration of Korean Women Theologians on the Peace and Reunification of Korean People.” This declaration made its case clear:

We find the ultimate cause of our national division in the patriarchal culture of domination. . . . When women farmers, women labourers and women in poverty, who are the victims of economic growth, struggle for their own survival against unjust economic structures, they are accused of being leftist and pro-communist. “The Anti-communist Law” or “the National Security Law” impede our industrial missions, the student movement, the youth movement, the women’s movement and the democratization movement. The anti-communist ideology has dried up the conscience and human love of the

people and breeds hostility and hatred in the minds of the younger generation, forming distorted personalities that are against peace. . . .⁴⁴

Since this declaration, KAWT has regularly led seminars and workshops for the reunification of Korea from a Korean Christian feminist perspective.

Park criticized the South Korean and Christian concept of democratic freedom more generally, since it is rooted in Western capitalist bourgeois individualism or liberalism. She insisted on considering North Korean socialism an important element in the discourse toward reunification. The third way of unification, implied in the July 4 declaration in 1972,⁴⁵ is unification by transcending the divergent thoughts and systems of South and North. Park envisioned the third way as a means to overcome the limitations within both states, and to work toward “a republic of South-North Confederation.”⁴⁶

On April 3, 2005, the 57th anniversary of the outbreak of violence on Cheju Island, KAWT held a Service for Peace with the theme, “Reconciliation and Unity.” There are still many events, like this massacre, hidden from public view. The people involved are still afraid to talk about them for fear of revenge, or of accusations that they are pro-communist.⁴⁷ Korean Feminist Theology needs to help ensure that these stories are heard and understood. As politically oriented

contextual theology, Korean feminist theology could contribute for creating cultural change of reconciliation.

Jesus Christ broke through a barrier and opened a door for all of us (Eph. 2:14-18), but the Korean churches and Korean Christianity are still very much affected by a strident and unproductive anti-communism. Animosity against North Koreans still dominates. Christianity needs to engage in a renewed self-criticism regarding issues of social justice. The church, in a post-Marxist society, should be a place where the “Good News” of the search for social justice is proclaimed and encouraged, rather than a place resounding with curses on those who support it.⁴⁸

The primary issue on the ecumenical agenda of the National Council of Churches in Korea has remained the unification of the two Koreas. Therefore some Korean feminist theologians have complained that women’s issues are not taken seriously enough due to the focus on reunification. Women’s struggles to improve their status in the family or within society have been pushed aside as if they were luxuries which only Western society can afford.⁴⁹ However, gender can’t be separated from the issue of the reunification of the entire Korean nation. To promote gender justice and struggle against sexism in church and society is an important task of Korean feminist theology directly related to the issue of reunification, because the gender issue is not merely related to discrimination between men and women. It is an issue of power

and distribution of power. The core message of this issue is having power over others vs. empowering others. There are women who acted politically based on their own ideological convictions during the war. However, many more suffered or died due to the political activities and ideological convictions of fathers, husbands or brothers. For the women, it was more important to hold life in the present. “Under the traditional gender hierarchy, women were commonly marginalized in ideological battle.”⁵⁰ Though women are marginalized and the margin is a space of otherness, “the importance of the margin as a place where women took action was noted.”⁵¹ In effect, “women changed the margin into a space or state of possibility where a new culture could be born.”⁵²

Theology is dependent on context. Though multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural issues were not comparatively urgent issues because Korea has remained a relatively homogeneous society, that has changed in current Korean society. But the issue of reunification is more urgent, and the related struggle against American-centred militarism and promoting peace, does, and must, occupy Korean feminist theology. The division of Korea is not only a family tragedy throughout the Korean peninsula,⁵³ it is a structural barrier to world peace.

It will not be easy to build a bridge between the two Koreas, yet Korean feminist theology must attempt to do so, committing to the healing of multiple layers of historical trauma. In attempting this, the feminist theologians become

like the crows and magpies of the traditional story, making of their lives a bridge upon which the Weaver and the Herdsman can meet.

Healing and Reconciliation in a Divided Korea

Regarding bridge making, I would like to underline the aspect of blessing for all by considering the last chapter of the story of Jonah.

The Book of Jonah, the story of a minor prophet, has become well-known not only through the dissemination of the Bible itself, but through the many popular versions of it within children's literature. Although set in the reign of King Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE), it was probably written in the post-exilic period, reflecting issues of the late 6th to 4th centuries BCE, including the captivity of the divided Israel within the Babylonian Empire.

The people of the great city of Nineveh—the capital of the ancient Assyrian empire and, in terms of size and affluence, the symbol of imperial power and dominance—are called to repent. In spite of their disobedience, however, God shows them merciful love. God reveals patience and forgiveness in a cosmic vision of salvation which includes Jonah, the people of Ninevah and all living things. The story makes it clear that captivity need not be considered an eternal imprisonment, but rather a stage prior to liberation.

The last chapter of the book, structured like a parable, is a rich resource when considering how to overcome the bitter hostility that holds back Korean reconciliation.

In the final chapter God protects Jonah with a tree that gives him shade. Jonah is at first pleased, but becomes very angry when he discovers the tree has died. The sun is again so strong that Jonah suffers, even wanting to die. God intervenes and explains: “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jonah 4:10-11 *ESV*)

Jonah swings between repentance for his own disobedience and anger at God for the unearned mercy shown the people of Nineveh. Although rescued from the fish, finding safety on dry land and experiencing God’s forgiveness, he doesn’t want to share God’s grace with others. Fear of universalism worked out strongly there. However, the demanding God of the first chapter has turned into the merciful God of the fourth.

Similar things happen in Korean peninsula that relate this story to the Korean context.

People of both North and South Korea regularly defame each other. They use a vocabulary that is black and white, either a curse or a blessing, without modulation or gradation,

projecting an unforgiving mindset equally at home in the private sector as in the public sector. This has, in fact, become a defining characteristic within Korean culture, and has become deeply embedded within Korean Christianity. The “other” is too easily identified and judged to be diabolical. Blessing is my possession, while curses belong to others.

Like Jonah, we fiercely complain of others, judging them as unworthy, even as it is we ourselves who need correction. We are harsh toward others and lenient toward ourselves, always exaggerating their faults while ignoring our own. Nor do we find it easy to recognize and accept that the compassion of God is greater than his wrath.

In the South, North Korea is commonly called the “impossible state.” Without recognizing the causal, historic reasons apparent in the current situation, those who define North Korea as part of the Axis of Evil only serve to diminish our understanding and further isolate both communities. How can we transform this fixed thinking and stagnant dynamic? How can we avoid judging others and consider them blessed by God, rather than cursed?

Jesus Christ didn’t judge people. Rather, by taking away our punishment, he removes judgment as an obstacle to God’s compassion. The message of Jesus, however, requires that we listen to each other with compassion, and in this way dismantle that dualism. The captivity of Jonah in a whale’s belly for three days and three nights has also been taken to

symbolize the captivity of Jesus after crucifixion, a period leading not to death but to resurrection (Matt. 12: 39-41). We don't know how long our captivity, the division in Korea, remains. One is sure that this captivity will lead to liberation, as it did for Jonah and Jesus.

Korea as a bridge

Korea has historically suffered due to its geographical situation, but for exactly the same reasons Koreans can play an important role as a bridge between the Global North and the Global South.⁵⁴

The Korean people have experienced colonialism, war, poverty, military dictatorship and the democratization processes, and are well positioned to understand those in the Global South with similar experiences. Moreover, traditional Korean culture is based on agriculture, similar to that of other majority countries in the Global South. On the other hand, due to its rapid technological development and modernization, it is also relatively easy for Koreans to relate to industrialized countries. Written culture, which is generally associated with the Global North, as well as oral culture, associated with the Global South, are very much entwined within the Korean cultural heritage. As well, Korea as a collective is increasingly capable of maintaining its own independence and clarity of voice. It enjoys a high educational level in the service of a people interested in their own cultural

preservation, not just linguistic and political, but including such diverse elements as a distinctive nutritional basis and home construction and layout.

Cold war ideology and anti-communism remain strong in Korean Christianity. Yet the priority of our mission should be peace-making.⁵⁵ The partitioning of the mission field, executed with blind enthusiasm and zeal,⁵⁶ resulted in a splintered church. Denominationalism, tribalism, family centrism and salvation egoism are all factors that separate Christian people. Thus, the Korean church has become a paradigmatic example of the fragmentation of Protestantism. This is not only a domestic problem within Korea, but also a problem within the so-called mission field as a whole. Due to the lack of shared, ecumenical practices there is an ongoing lack of cooperation. People are objectified as targets for conversion and all that remains is the zeal and diligence to win over “the yet unreached.”

One of the most pressing challenges faced by a holistic mission in Korea, as elsewhere in the world, is the spread of Christian ethics, especially needed to overcome moral dualism, and to work toward a community sharing a vibrant ethos of a common good.

Christian mission in Korea didn't only bring the message of liberation; it also brought the mechanics of fear. Claims for a Christian “absolute truth” have worked to strengthen that moral dualism which allows unrestrained separation between

those blessed and those cursed, those who are friends and those who are enemies. Whoever lives in constant fear of hell is not easily healed from feelings of guilt or fears of punishment. This religious intimidation, which hinders the natural development of both the individual and the society, must be critically evaluated. It encourages blind acceptance of unjust social political systems and encourages believers to make villains of others both within and outside of the church. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult to clarify and withstand the lies and misrepresentations which are used to support morally unjustifiable actions.

It has become more important than ever to overcome a culture of death and alienation and to promote a culture of life and reconciliation. Our memories of the negative aspects of mission regarding colonialism and imperialism need to be investigated and confessed, in order to avoid idealizing our history and accepting an extreme form of moral dualism. Similarly, we must investigate and recognize the transformative energy within the movement's accomplishments.⁵⁷

The theme of 10th General Assembly of World Council of Churches "God of life, lead us to justice and peace!" joins the reality of God's subjectivity with our own human objectivity. God is subject and we are object. God is active and we are passive. God is the leading subject and it is we who are predicated.

This theme is reflected in *Missio Dei*, the concept of which is rooted in Karl Barth's theology, as shown by Karl

Hartenstein. Hartenstein, in fact, derived his understanding of *Missio Dei* from Barth.⁵⁸ As Barth perceives it, God is a “Missionary God.” God is “alone the acting and directing subject—both offering and offered—of the reasonable service of God.”⁵⁹ In this way, human beings are equal in humility regardless of individual achievement and deed. “No one else, not even the community in her corresponding missionary existence, accomplishes this for him (God).”⁶⁰

God speaks while humans listen. God gives, as humans receive. It is God’s revelation, then, which is the basis of reconciliation. “In the knowledge of God there is real objective change: God calls human beings to become his witnesses. It is life under, with, and by the promise of the Spirit, in which the Christian community is conformed and conforms to the realism of Easter.”⁶¹

This revelation considers and situates human passivity. “In Jesus Christ, the human act of mission is grounded in the being of God. The Christian community remains, as recipient of this gift, contingent upon the act of God, and so must be active in supplicant movement following the trail of Jesus Christ under the compulsion of the Spirit. The missionary act, as a properly human response, is one of receiving, but it is a receiving in an active corresponding evangelistic movement.”⁶²

In this definition of mission, human passivity continuously transforms into human action, while never losing sight

of the universal grace of God, bestowed not by us but by God. And this act is only possible through receiving the Spirit.⁶³

Mission rediscovered

By overcoming an obsession with proselytizing to capture souls to support the institutional growth of the church, by seeking to create unity within an active pluralism, by refocusing on the necessity and relevance of Christian ethics, mission can discover a new integrity within a new vision.⁶⁴

Mission is an act of healing, a delivery of hope, an encouragement of life. It can't be redefined strictly as leverage for quantifiable church growth, nor used as a screen to hide ongoing social and domestic problems. The blind anti-communism in South Korean Christianity, fused as it is with a triumphal capitalism within a colonial heritage, needs to be corrected.

In fact, there are weaknesses and strengths within the ecumenical perspective as well as within the evangelical perspective.⁶⁵ In order to pursue a new perception of mission, it is important to achieve the combination of both streams, finding the relationship between individual and social salvation. Issues of social justice are not exclusively a matter of the ecumenical approach, nor is individual salvation a monopoly of the evangelical approach.⁶⁶ Both approaches need to listen closely to each other for a broader and more coherent mission to emerge.

The historical situation leading up to and including the Korean War needs to be re-evaluated.⁶⁷ North Korea remains an active target for nuclear weapons and mass destruction.⁶⁸ The process of demonization of North Korean leaders as members of the “axis of evil” retards efforts toward peace. The Korean nation must determine its own destiny and not be manipulated by the self-interests of other governments.

Indeed, a permanent peace treaty between the US and North Korea needs to replace the armistice cease-fire agreement of 1953. The National Security Law and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the US and South Korea also need to be re-evaluated and modified.⁶⁹

More generally, the inherent problems within advanced capitalism need to be vigorously and openly analyzed in ongoing feminist theological discourse. How to address the issue of peace and social justice and to find proper language and action for social development is the question.

The original idea of communism is not evil. It is an idea shared by early Christianity (Acts 4:32-37). The communist system as realized was problematic, but so too is the realization of unfettered capitalism. To slander communism and celebrate the victory of capitalism after the collapse of the eastern bloc countries is not the goal of Korean feminist theology. Our goal, rather, is to work toward gender, economic, and ecological justice within a broad and active ecumenical movement. Given this goal, we aim to broaden the awareness

of women in the church who remain oriented solely toward individual salvation.

Against a New Cold War in the Current Global Architecture

The Korean people are currently forced to live apart, just as the Weaver and the Herdsman were; the 38th parallel acting as an insurmountable barrier now just as the Milky Way River did then.⁷⁰ However, the traditional interpretation of the story, that they were separated as a punishment for having neglected their duties, doesn't help us in our current situation. Korean feminist theology needs to correct the traditional understanding of suffering as punishment, to seek a new Christian understanding of it. Under revealing the Good News of blessing for all instead of punishment, it could be illuminated that the legacy of hatred and hostility between the two Koreas can be ended through the power of the Spirit, a Spirit that seeks self-critical reflection for *meta-noia* and mutual understanding and thereby moves toward, and achieves, reconciliation.

Since Korea never attacked other countries and nations and rather was victimized through history, it offers a different creativity for transformation for peace and reconciliation. It should be compared to the policy of other big countries which are involved in colonialism, war and imperialism. Korea and many other non-European and non-North

American countries share the experience of colonialism, war, dictatorship and militarism. Korea has overcome all these hardships and accomplished remarkable development. In this sense Korea can be a living example for other countries, even though there are still many things to improve within the Korean context.

The goal is not idealizing of victims. Nevertheless to recover the story of victims is important, and it should become public discourse. Korean women are the most oppressed of the oppressed. They are victimized both by male domination and the division of the country. Their voices, on both sides of the 38th parallel, need to be heard as we and they seek both individual healing and collective reconciliation.⁷¹ Korean feminist theology has an historic role to play in this regard. It is tasked to diminish hatred, to build a bridge over that which separates us, weaving our experiences into a living platform upon which we will move toward each other, recognizing that there is room for all within the embrace of God's blessing.