

KOREA - SITUATION REPORT

I am glad that we are holding this Consultation between the Korean and German churches on the theme "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation," which is a more inclusive theme than that of the 5th Consultation in 1984 on "The Church's Ministry in the Political Context of National Life." I believe that it is significant to have this serious consultation at this juncture of history when the Korean and the world churches are working closely together for peace with justice, especially on the Korean peninsula.

I. International Relations of NCCC

1. Exchanges with the Asian Churches

In many ways, it was a stimulating opportunity to host the General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia in June of 1985. Traditionally, the Korean churches had held exchanges mainly with the U.S. and European countries, so I was happy to share our friendships with Asian churches through the General Assembly of CCA. It was a remarkable thing to see the changes in Korean understanding of the Asian churches, and to see more people positively support and participate in the CCA. We also held consultations with the Japanese NCC six times, and we will have a Korea-Philippines church consultation this year.

2. North and South Relationships

During this period there have been great developments in North-South relations. On the part of the governments, North Korea proposed and sent us food and other supplies for the flood victims in the South, in September 1984.

In the summer of 1985, the Red Cross in both North and South again held a consultation. The divided and separated family members had a chance to visit each other, and performing artists were exchanged. All these were dramatic and unexpected events. Within the Korean churches, there were several developments right after the WCC meeting in Japan in 1984.

In November 1985, the Director of the Churches Commission on International Affairs of the WCC, and the Deputy Director paid visits to Pyongyang and Seoul. In April 1986, contacts between North and South were further developed by 10 delegates from NCCC USA who paid visits to Pyongyang and Seoul. The more dramatic event was that Christians from the North and South met and participated in holy communion together, at the WCC meeting at Glion, Switzerland. This event was evaluated as one of the most meaningful events in the 40-year history of the division of North and South. The theme and discussion contents of the Korean Peninsula Peace Consultation by the NCCC USA at Stony Point, U.S.A., in December 1985, and the Korea-North American Church Consultation at Hawaii in September 1986, shared the same spirit and direction as the Dozanzo consultation in 1984.

3. Korea-North American Church Consultation

In March 1984, we had the third consultation, and in September 1986 the fourth consultation was held in Hawaii. NCCC USA adopted statements on "Peace and the Easing of Tensions on the Korean Peninsula" at its General Assembly in November 1986. Through this process, both churches established the common understanding that the Korean problem is not a

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regional one, but a part of the politics of world hegemony, and that Korea is not the crux of the problem, but that North American countries, especially the U.S., are part of the Korean problems. At the Hawaii consultation, many people shared and accepted positively the theological insights of Prof. Suh Kwang-Sun on "Repentance for Peace."

4. Relations between Korean and German Churches

In April 1984, the fifth consultation between the Korean and German churches was held. Today, we are having the 6th Consultation here. The Korean-German Church Consultation began with a main theme of the problems of Koreans working in Germany. The thesis of "coexistence" between the two different national groups in Korea with the two different ideological and political systems became not only the problem of the two states involved, but the task of the international society.

II. Movements for Democratization

1. Movements for the Freedom of Speech

With the understanding that the most important and quickest way to democracy is the freedom of speech, NCKK has organized various movements. The boycott of fees for KBS-TV, the government broadcasting system, has been successful with strong popular support, and is ongoing. The movement is to protest the distorted and prejudiced reports by public broadcasting and to press KBS to be fair in its reports. The movement has been positively supported by the newspapers, and the Catholic Church, YMCA and other opposition organizations have participated actively and willingly, so it has turned out to be a nationwide movement.

The movement to normalize the functions of the Christian Broadcasting System has been supported by a wide range of various denominations, and is actively continuing. The confrontation between the government, which tries to limit the range of the broadcasting role within the sphere of religious issues, and the church, which tries desperately to protect the right to broadcast the news by CBS, has turned into a debate on missiology, namely, "What is the task of mission of the church?" The goal of the movement for the freedom of speech is to eliminate the so-called "Basic Law on the Freedom of Speech." We know that democratization will be very difficult without freedom of speech.

2. Movements for the Revision of the Constitution

NCC protested immediately against the government position of 1986, which was to talk about revision of the present Constitution after the Olympics, around 1989. NCC began the petition movement for the revision of the Constitution. After that, the opposition parties and the opposition groups joined this movement. Finally, the government withdrew its plan and now plans to revise the Constitution before 1988. This issue of revision raised the question of whether we choose the president-centered political system or the parliamentary cabinet political system. The popular choice, starting with NCKK, is to elect the president directly by the people with a president-centered system. Another focus of the revision of the Constitution is to clearly legislate in written form the people's basic rights. Secondly, through the revision of the election laws, the opinion of the people should be fairly represented.

3. Student Movement

The student movement in Korea has a long history of struggle for the national tasks and issues by righteous means. Student movements have persistently raised the question of the responsibility for the Kwangju incident in 1980, and finally this has come to the point of anti-American movement in relation to the perceived responsibility of the U.S. Criticisms of Korean-American relations, criticisms of the capitalist system, and criticisms of militant anti-Communism are the challenges to the political and social myths prevailing for the last 40 years in the Korean society. Analytical criticism of the present system by the student movement has led them to think about ideological alternatives. The resultant position of the student movement, based on democracy by the people, national autonomy of the people and the minjung (people) as the point of reference, was an anti-dictatorship, anti-foreign hegemony/invasion, and anti-bourgeois movement. The suppression of the student movement rather accelerated their efforts to seek alternatives. The logic of the radicalized student movement was labeled as pro-communist by the government. In this vicious circle, the churches began expressing their worries over the radicalizing tendencies of the students. Churches firmly protested against the merciless suppression of the student movement by the government. The so-called Konkuk University incident of autumn 1986 ended with the arrest of 1,300 students by the police, who accused them as a "movement of communists", but most of the students were subsequently released.

4. Movements from the Bottom

The movements by the peasants, workers and urban poor were very active till the first half of the 1980's. In the second half of the 80's, because of the increasing persecution and suppression, these movements went underground again. The workers' movements broadened their base-structures, going far beyond the sphere of influence of the Christian churches. Peasants and urban slum dwellers' activities were strengthened by their own powers and abilities; the student movement and workers' movements were organized with the spirit and tactics of solidarity and reinforced strongly; demonstrations, sit-ins and meetings were organized cooperatively. The phenomenon of ideological struggle in the student movement intruded into and surfaced in the leading ideology of the workers' movements, and turned out to produce conflicts in the workers' movements. There is still the task remaining, that the labor movement should be able to formulate a supportive sphere of common feeling by the workers in general.

The peasants' "cattle war", which recorded the worst situation in 1985, was caused by the indiscriminate import of beef by the government, but the peasants had to bear the burden of the failure of the government policy. The peasants persistently protested against the lowering of the prices of farm products under U.S. pressure to open the market.

The Asian Games of 1986 and the Olympic Games of '88 were used to remove urban slum dwellers. The removal of the slum dwellers in the capital city was forcefully carried out in 1985 and 1986, and the Mok-Dong district and Sanggye-Dong incidents were typical ones.

III. Human Rights Movements

The human rights situation was not improved in the last term. On the contrary, it was worsened. By the end of 1986, prisoners of conscience numbered over 3,000. Arrests without warrant (habeas corpus), the forcing of false confessions from defendants, house arrests, and searches of private houses and offices, were increased. Ordained ministers and priests were treated the same as ordinary criminals, as it became habitual practice to jail them for 7-10 days through the summary court, an abridged form of trial.

1. The Problem of Torture

In many countries of the world, torture is defined as the most inhumane and evil act, and there has been an increasing effort to eliminate torture by the power of the state. But torture has been commonly and continuously practiced in Korea. NCC, having tried to gather concrete evidences and witnesses in the various incidents, organized the Ad-Hoc Committee on Torture, and has been working hard to eliminate torture. In September 1986, the brave witness of Kim Keun-Tae, the former chairperson of the Federation of Youth for Democracy, exposed the government torture to the daylight. In June 1986, a woman student activist was sexually tortured in the police station, which was exposed by the victim herself. At last, on January 14, 1987, Park Jong-Chul, a student of Seoul National University, was killed by police torture, by the special anti-Communist investigation section. NCC will develop programs and movements together with other religious organizations, in order to eliminate torture.

2. Problem of "Groundless Rumor-Mongering"

On February 25, 1987, the family of the late Kim Yong-Kwon petitioned to find the cause of his death, and NCC made a public statement. As a result, because the government said it is a crime to spread groundless rumors, Rev. Kim Sang-Keun, chairperson of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Torture and general secretary of the PROK, Rev. Kim Dong-Wan, secretary of the Human Rights Committee of NCC, and NCC staff Yu Tae-Son were all three imprisoned for 7 days, then released. The General Assembly of PROK immediately organized a protest rally for the freedom of mission and pointed out the wrongdoings of the government. The Methodist Church also held a protest rally for the freedom of mission activities, and NCC called a special Ad Hoc Steering Committee, publicized a statement, and decided to hold prayer meetings for the elimination of torture and violence in every region of the nation. We will have these protest prayer meetings as planned.

IV. Reunification Debate and Peace Movement

There have been many difficulties when NCC tried to carry out debate on unification and tried to form a consensus on this issue. NCC has persistently claimed the right to discuss the national task of reunification, even though there was intentional foul play and physical attack by the government. We were successful in having a National Consultation on Unification in August 1986, and we will continuously work for this. Unification means the whole process toward the establishment of a peaceful and united society by overcoming the anti-peaceful division. Unification means the realization of peace. Peace is the method for unification, the goal of unification, and the ideology of unification. Therefore, we do not want the Vietnamese style of solution by and through war, by killing some people or deporting people from the Korean peninsula for unification.

We want to seek only the unification which will result in peace and justice. This sort of unification is what our nation wants, legitimately, as the norm of our lives. Therefore, no one, either from the South or from the North, would reject this kind of unification. The Korean people, no matter where they live--north or south, absolutely desire unification. This absoluteness of the desire and the will for unification has come from understanding the tragedy and the agony of being divided into two nations, and from the conviction that unification will bring peace, prosperity and independence. According to the statistics of the government (Ministry of Reunification), 98% of South Koreans eagerly want unification, and I believe the same will be the case for North Koreans.

For the last 40 years, in the north and the south, the non-compromising, closed and self-justifying anti-communistic capitalism and the totalitarian communism have been rooted as the ruling ideologies. The separation between the two systems and the hostile and militant confrontations have worsened and deepened the gap since the Korean war, with subsequent occasional military attacks and unrelieved tensions. We have turned out to be the enemies of each other. We cannot travel to each other's territory, there are no letter exchanges, no communications. The two countries became the farthest apart of any two nations on this earth. For our own survival, we must destroy others (Koreans). Of course, this Korean division and confrontation was caused by the cold war system of the U.S. and Russia in North East Asia. But the Korean land is frozen like an ice field, and the hatred and the confrontational enemy relationship remain. The U.S. and Russia are the responsible parties for the division, but the responsible parties for deepening the anti-rational fanaticism are the ruling power groups, both in the North and the South. Not only the ruling class, but we Christians are also responsible for the deepening of this gap. One of the causes of the fanaticism is the experiences of being persecuted and martyred, and also the ideological confrontation of historical materialism with theism. Christians in South Korea have not rationally reflected upon ourselves and tried to be reconciled with the communists and realize Christian love. Rather, we have defined the north Koreans as the Devil and the enemy, seeing ourselves as crusaders to conquer the north. We have believed that to be our faithful action as Christians.

More research and reflection will reveal, with historical sources, the degree to which Christians have contributed to the deepening of tensions between North and South, and to which we have reinforced the image of enemy and the enemy relationship. In the 80's, it is certain that the effort for peaceful and reconciling unification has been confronted with realistic obstacles and difficulties, which come from the government and/or powers outside of the churches. But these obstacles also come from our Christian brothers who share our faith in the reconciling and peaceful gospel.

The statement and resolutions of the Dozanzo Consultation, those of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and of the NCCC USA, proposed concrete and constructive methods for moving toward reconciliation, but the Korean churches are not ready to accept and practice these. My honest confession is that our attitude and position is not yet ready for this. In the situation of these conflicts, the ecumenical churches clarify the meaning of the theme "Peace with Unification", easing the tensions between the North and South. Nowadays, more Christians confess the fact that the Gospel of peace and reconciliation is the content of their faith. In Korea, more and more people understand the fact that the most important task is to achieve reunification and reconciliation, and to overcome the division of North and South. This is our mission task--in our practice of the

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gospel of peace in Christ. "Shalom" in the Old and New Testaments has various meanings. Most of all, shalom means healthiness and abundance of life. Therefore, the peace movement is understood as an anti-nuclear and anti-war movement. Also, it is understood as a human rights movement and a reform movement to establish the equalitarian, peaceful society. Therefore, today, peace on the Korean peninsula will only be realized by overcoming the division and moving toward reunification.

Proposals

1. Peace and unification of the Korean peninsula

I want to see the German churches give significant support and make endeavors for the reunification of Korea and the easing of tensions on the Korean peninsula. To resolve the problems, we need a new ordering of international politics. The government should work very hard on these issues. We need to think seriously about what the role of the churches should be. Sharing of information, efforts to eliminate or lessen the mutual prejudices, and hundreds or thousands of other tasks must be undertaken by the churches.

2. Issues of the Korean churches in Germany

There are now five pastors working for the ministry of the Korean churches in Germany. It is difficult to cover the whole of Germany with five ministers, and more and more Koreans are getting permanent residency. Therefore, like the churches in the U.S., Canada and Japan, we need your cooperation to establish a settled Korean church for the residents there.

We should also resolve the issues and problems of the Korean ministers in Germany who are affiliated with denominations related to NCKK. Some of them were sent directly by the recommendation of the denomination, to serve the churches there. It is our task to resolve their special problems and issues.