

“Kimchi Theology” and “Kimchi Reconciliation” as a Coherent “Kingdom Culture”

by Sang Jin Choi

1) Kimchi mediation and reconciliation

Through the “Kimchi mediation and reconciliation program,” APPA has served Kimchi, along with other Korean foods, such as *bulgogi* and steamed rice to African-Americans and other ethnic groups in D.C. It has become one of APPA’s successful programs of racial harmony and conflict resolution. According to U.S.-based *Health* magazine, “Kimchi (or kimchee)” was chosen as one of the top five “World’s Healthiest Foods,” along with olive oil (Spain), soy (Japan), yogurt (Greece), and lentils (India).¹ As a traditional Korean food, Kimchi was popular among the Kogureou People during the period of the Three Kingdoms (57 B.C. - 668 A.D.).² Kimchi, as one of the main “soul food” for early Korean People, has various historical meanings and uses. It has been served during worship, for instance, to convey “longevity and happiness,” in communion meals during which slaves, widows, orphans, the elderly and homeless have been invited, to share the “suffering (*han*)” of the Korean people (Minjung, *ochlos*) and to promote the liberation from the colonial empires of China and Japan (Kim, 1981; Ahn, 1985).³

The Korean minjung suffered 500 years from the Chinese, Mongolian, and Japanese invasions and the Korean War. Through the accumulation of chronic oppression, the Korean minjung experienced *han* physically as well as spiritually (Adams, 2002). During that time, Kimchi and rice as the main staple of Korean traditional food became a part of the country’s journey towards justice, freedom and liberation.

Kimchi, as a “high-fiber” and “low-fat” diet, is a reddish “fermented” cabbage dish made with a mix of powdered red pepper, garlic, salt and fermented fish paste. Kimchi is laden with vitamins A, B, C, and minerals, such as calcium and iron. During fermentation, “healthy

¹ The Health Magazine (March 2006) named “Kimchi” as one of top five “world’s healthiest foods.”

² See “Origins of Kimchi,” in the Korean website of *Life*, <http://www.lifeinkorea.com/Culture/Kimchi/Kimchi.cfm?xURL=origin>.

³ For a more in-depth understanding of “Minjung,” see Kim Yong-Bok, “The Minjung (People) as the Subject of History,” *Living Theology in Asia*, John C. England, editor, SCM Press, 1981, p.25-31 and Ahn Byung Mu, “Jesus and the Minjung in the Gospel of Mark,” *Evangelism and the Poor: A Third World Study Guide*, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, editors, Regnum Books, 1987, p.57-80.

bacteria” (called lactobacilli) is formed in Kimchi (Kim & Chun, 2005). Like yogurt, such bacteria in Kimchi can help fight against cancer and produce weight-loss effects (Raymond, 2006).

Kimchi has also helped in the understanding of “Kingdom culture” or “Kingdom ethics.” What do the basic nutrients of Kimchi mean? What does “healthy bacteria” mean? We may define vitamins A, B, C and calcium and iron as “mainstream culture” and bacteria lactobacilli as “Kingdom culture.” The interaction of the basic nutrients in Kimchi can be seen as symbolizing mainstream (or sometimes secular) culture, but the healthy bacteria are an analogical example of “Kingdom culture.” Healthy bacteria are the positive result acquired from the transformation of fermentation, just as Jesus went through a process of crucifixion and resurrection.

2) Jesus’ Mediation Skills as a Coherent “Kingdom Culture”

We can also apply the “benefits” of Kingdom culture and ethics in socio-cultural pluralistic societies, especially in poor urban community settings. Basic factors of Kingdom culture include public or social “responsibilities,” which are rooted in “Kingdom ethics-oriented communities.” The Kingdom ethics or Kingdom responsibilities are to be the “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).”

The Kimchi, a traditional Korean food, has been used for bridge-building between the African-American and Korean-American communities in Washington D.C. Therefore, Kimchi “can be defined as a “transformational mediator” through “self-transformation” or “self-fermentation.” This is the “core principle” of “Kimchi mediation” and “Kimchi theology.” We may apply it to Jesus’ mediation skills. The process of fermentation is like Jesus suffering the passion of crucifixion. Jesus also became a “transformational mediator” through “self-transformation.” This is a core principle of Jesus’ mediation and reconciliation (1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Hebrew 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). Therefore, the “mediation of Jesus” is one of the clearest Kingdom cultural values and an accomplishment of his responsibility of Kingdom ethics.

3) Messianic Mediation and Urban Transformation as a Coherent “Kingdom Ethic”

In order to define “kingdom ethics,” it is important for us to know what Jesus himself understood about the reign and the kingdom of God. The reign of God is actually the process of realizing Jesus’ coming; the kingdom of God means “both to the present beginning and the much bigger dramatic overcoming in the future (Stassen & Gushee, 2003: 20).” Therefore, kingdom ethics is pure consciousness and behavior derived from the public or social and individual or group “responsibilities” for building God’s kingdom community. It is an apocalyptic and eschatological vision and dream. Namely, kingdom ethics acknowledges the transformational Christian compassion through Jesus Christ as the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world (Stassen & Gushee, 2003: 36).”

Kingdom cultures can be categorized as specific theories and policies to transform conflict structures and rituals to strengthen the compassion of self. For example, Kimchi theology is a kingdom culture-based theory and Kimchi mediation can be a means through which the love of the kingdom can be demonstrated.

Why are Messianic mediation skills important in urban postmodern societies? Generally, modern mediation and reconciliation have ignored their roles in poor neighborhoods, ghettos, and slums. The main beneficiaries of “traditional” mediation programs have traditionally been the middle or high classes, business groups and in some cases, low-income ethnic groups. However, serious and numerous conflicts have occurred in the inner-cities of the world as well as in the U.S. The main benefit of action research in community settings is the fostering of community transformation through quality social consultancy. For this reason, the purpose of kingdom ethics-based community development is to plant “God’s new order” in a postmodern *chaos* society.

4) Transforming the Virtues of Kingdom Mediation and Urban Contextualization

The Messianic ministry of Jesus as the anointed one is “the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy” (Davies and Dale, 1998: 466). According to Stassen and Gushee, the virtues of Jesus’ dramatic role as Messiah in which we can imitate and realize them in our communities are as follows:⁴

⁴ I adopted this table from Stassen and Gushee (2003: 47, 59).

Table 1

Kingdom Virtues	Kingdom Cultures	Transformational Mediation	Community Settings
We are ‘humble’ before God	Identify with the humble, the poor, and the outcasts	Serving the community, living a simple life, following Jesus’ life evangelism, etc.	Simplicity and spiritual-based community or house-church movement, Servant leadership school, Prayer house, Community-based animal and organic vegetable farms, etc.
We “mourn” with a sincere repentance towards God	Comfort others who mourn	Counseling the wounded, intercessory prayer, listening voices, etc.	Low-income and multiracial-based community counseling , Intercessory prayer and care groups, etc.
We are “surrendered to God”	Commit ourselves to follow God’s way and make peace	Imitating Jesus, Discipleship, Bible teaching and seminar/ workshop, Children Education, etc.	Community-based discipleship center, Bible school, Urban ministry track, After-school program, etc.
We are “hungry” and “thirsty” for deliverance	Community-restorative justice	Victim-offender restoration, Community dispute resolution, etc.	Restorative justice programs, Economic justice action, Prison ministry, Legal aid program, etc.
We “practice compassion” in action	Covenant-faithfulness towards those in need	Advocacy, Worship, Prayer Virgil for peace, Confession faith movement, etc.	Covenant worship center, Community-based prayer Virgil for peace, Meditation training programs, etc.
We “seek God’s will” with holistic integrity	In all that we are and do	Apocalyptic and eschatological kingdom visions and dreams, Making a beloved community, Multiracial harmony, etc.	Faith-based community development, Building affordable housing for the poor, Community-based flower planting program, etc.
We “make peace” with our enemies	As God shows love to his enemies	Forgiveness, Preventing violence, Conflict resolution, etc.	Non-violence movement, Multicultural mediation, Teen-to-teen mediation for school conflict, etc.
We are willing to ‘suffer’	(Just as Jesus suffered) because of our loyalty to Jesus and to justice	Healing the wounded, Street evangelism, Communion meals Fasting for the poor, etc.	Medical clinic programs, After care programs, Fasting for the poor, Walk-a-thons for the poor/ the homeless, etc.

Stassen and Gushee applied holistic “character ethics,” adopted from the virtues of the role of Jesus, as the Messiah. The virtues consist of four dimensions of character: reasoning, basic convictions, passions/loyalties and perceptions. It looks like the spiral interaction among them for getting desired outcomes to give ‘transforming initiative.’ It is very similar with my adopted dimensions of kingdom ethics: instilling kingdom virtues, identifying with kingdom cultures, supporting transformational mediation, and practicing and executing such virtues in community settings. My paradigms of kingdom ethics are focused on mediation and community

settings because my intention is to apply the transforming initiative to multicultural poor urban communities. As John H. Yoder mentioned, “we need to invest extra energy in trying to understand the meaning of simple cultural practices, such as eating together, from culture to culture and century to century (Yoder, 1992: 21).”

For planting kingdom ethics and cultures based on the “mediation of Christ” in multicultural conflict societies, the church, which has been identified as a “problem-solving community” (Bonhoeffer, 1978), “alternative community” (Yoder, 1998) and “redeemed community” (Sider, 1993), has a role to play in driving a kingdom community-based life of “being conformed to Christ” and of “participating in Christ’ through dramatic ‘transforming initiative’ seeking for conflict resolution.