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MINJUNG THEOLOGY AND INCULTURATION IN THE CONTEXT  
OF THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN KOREA

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Inculturation in the Korean Context</i> . . . . .	1
<i>Introduction of Christianity into Korea</i> . . . . .	4
<i>Korean Minjung Theology</i> . . . . .	14

*Inculturation in the Korean Context*

Inculturation is a process which always takes place in a particular context of the local church. Theologically speaking, another way of saying virtually the same thing is that the Gospel seeks to become more and more a part of an individual community of believers. Therefore, efforts at evangelization are not directed towards some generic group which could just as easily be exchanged for some other group with little or no corresponding change in the means used for evangelization. Both *Ad gentes* and *Evangelii nuntiandi* stress the necessity for adaptation as an intrinsic part of evangelization. According to the former decree, not only theological investigation, but also revelation contained in Scripture, the teachings of Church Tradition, as well as the Magisterium, must all be

submitted to a new examination in the light of the tradition of the universal Church. In this way it will be more clearly understood by what means the faith can be explained in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people, and how their customs, concept of life and social structures can be reconciled with the standard proposed by divine revelation. Thus a way will be opened up for a more profound adaptation in the whole sphere of Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

If evangelization is done in this manner then, as *Evangelii nuntiandi* avers, we can no longer conceive the task of spreading the Gospel as being confined to merely preaching "in ever extending territories and proclaiming it to ever increasing multitudes of men."<sup>2</sup> Rather, the Gospel must be announced in such a way that it can

recast the criteria of judgment, the standard of values, the incentives and life standards of the human race which are inconsistent with the word of God and the plan of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

This is radical evangelization, i.e., a proclamation that seeks to go to the very roots of a particular human community. In reaching to the roots of this community the Gospel message does not seek to tear out the roots of this community's culture, nor does it intend to just add a "Gospel veneer" as one might flock a Christmas tree.<sup>4</sup>

The task of evangelization is intimately linked with not only the individual person, but also with the community in which that person lives. To quote *Evangelii nuntiandi* once more:

This work [of evangelization] must always take the human person as its starting point, coming back to the interrelationships between persons and their relation with God.<sup>5</sup>

In the same way the genuine inculturation of theology must take as its starting point both the individual and the community. Each community of believers is joined together with the other communities to be sure, but the focus of the present discussion is on how best to inculturate the Gospel message in one particular community. Therefore, logically more attention must be devoted to the uniqueness of this particular community, rather than seeking out only some set of common denominators with all the other Christian communities in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Again, *Evangelii nuntiandi* legitimizes this stance when Paul VI says that the individual churches

must make their own the substance of the evangelical message. Without any sacrifice of the essential truths they must transpose this message into an idiom which will be understood by the people they serve and thus proclaim it.<sup>7</sup>

Transposition of the Gospel into the idiom of the Korean culture requires first trying to read the Gospel message with Korean eyes, and to hear the Gospel proclamation with Korean ears. Too often in the past not only foreign missionaries, but also many Koreans themselves, have endeavored to have the Korean Christians understand the Western mentality first as the best way of receiving the Gospel. In order to appreciate the Korean context better let us turn to a brief consideration of the history of the introduction of Christianity into that land. The whole complex picture of the development of Christianity in Korea obviously cannot be painted in minute detail, but the broad strokes of that history need to be seen in order to envision possible directions for theological reflection in the future. In connection with my treatment of the history of the development of Christianity in Korea, I also briefly will discuss the particular brand of Korean Liberation Theology, known as *Minjung*<sup>8</sup> theology. This *Minjung* theology is one clear example of theological inculturation which may aid further efforts at inculturation in Korea.

### *Introduction of Christianity into Korea*

Korea is unique in Christendom in that her primary initial evangelization was not done by foreign missionaries coming into the land, but rather through the efforts of several Korean Neo-Confucian scholars who first became acquainted with Christianity through the writings of Matteo Ricci and other missionaries who had labored in Ming China. Direct contact with Catholic priests in Peking came on the initiative of the Koreans themselves, on the occasion of ambassadorial visits to the Chinese court.

The Catholic Church in Korea celebrated the Bi-Centennial of Christianity in Korea in 1984, in accordance with the tradition that Christianity was first introduced into the land in 1784 by a native son, Peter Yi Seung-hoon, who had been baptized while on a diplomatic mission with his father in Peking.<sup>9</sup> The context of Yi Seung-hoon's conversion deserves some additional comment because it illustrates well the importance of a Confucian hermeneutics for Christian theology in Korea.

Though Yi Seung-hoon is traditionally called the first Korean Christian, the Bi-Centennial Commemorative Committee reserves the title, "Founder of Christianity in Korea," to an older contemporary of Yi Seung-hoon, Yi Byok.<sup>10</sup> Yi Byok came from a well-established family and he received the traditional training in the Chinese classics. By this time several books about Christianity, such as Matteo Ricci's The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven,<sup>11</sup> written in Chinese, had made their appearance in Korea. Several Korean scholars studied these books, but "as a curiosity, viewing them merely as new and noble theory, but nothing more."<sup>12</sup>

When Yi Byok was twenty-five years old he joined a group of students who had studied under the renowned *Silhak* scholar, Yi Ik. *Silhak*,<sup>13</sup> which literally means "practical learning," was an intellectual movement within Korean Neo-Confucianism which criticized the way those in power were administering the government and economy of the nation. Though the *Silhak* movement merits study both in reference to Korean history and Neo-Confucianism,<sup>14</sup> its relevance to Christianity is found in the history of several of the young scholars who had gathered around Yi Ik.

In December of 1779, Yi Byok joined some other disciples of Yi Ik who had withdrawn to a Buddhist temple outside of Seoul called Chon Jin Am. These men engaged in a study seminar which discussed the Chinese Classics, Buddhist and Taoist teachings, and also some of the Christian works that had come from China. This group that met at Chon Jin Am formed themselves into an association called the *Kang Hak Hoe*.<sup>15</sup> They continued to meet and spent regularly scheduled days together in meditation, discussion, study and fasting.

In 1783 the father of Yi Seung-hoon, Yi Tong-ook, was appointed Korean envoy to the Chinese court at Peking, and Yi Byok seized this opportunity to acquaint the *Kang Hak Hoe* better with the teachings of Christianity. Therefore, Yi Byok asked his friend Yi Seung-hoon to meet with the foreign missionaries resident in Peking, seek instruction and baptism in Christianity, and to obtain from them more books and other religious articles, such as crosses and rosaries.

Yi Seung-hoon and his father arrived in Peking in December of 1783 and Yi Seung-hoon made his way to the North Catholic Church where he made the acquaintance of a French Jesuit priest, Louis de Grammont.<sup>16</sup> Shortly before the Korean delegation's return to Seoul in February of 1784 de Grammont baptized Yi Seung-hoon, giving him the name of Peter. This was to be the rock upon which the Korean Church would have its foundation.

Upon his return to Seoul, Yi Seung-hoon baptized several of his associates, including Yi Byok to whom the name John the Baptist was given in recognition of his efforts in organizing this small group of the first Korean Christians. Yi Byok in turn baptized several others and organized regular Sunday celebrations.

It did not take long either for resistance to develop against this early group of Christians in Korea. As early as 1785 there is evidence of persecution against the group since they were viewed as espousing a "heretical" interpretation of Neo-Confucianism in adopting Christianity.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the Catholic teaching was dubbed *Sohak*, or "Western learning" by its detractors who held power in the government.

For their part, several of the early Christians sought to explain and defend the truth of Christianity and the Catholic doctrines by writing short treatises which discussed these teachings in reference to both Confucian philosophy and Buddhist religious beliefs. Thus, right at the moment Christianity was introduced into Korea there were already numerous attempts to "inculturate" the faith in terms which would be familiar to a significant portion of the Korean people. One Korean scholar, Rev. Jean Sangbae Ri, who did his doctoral dissertation on the writings of Yi Byok, gives the following evaluation of Yi Byok's basic approach:

But Yi Piek [Yi Byok], on becoming Christian and on working out his doctrine for the use of the members of the first Korean Christian community, did not give in to the pressure of the western culture, for which he nevertheless had a real admiration. His Christianity is deliberately Far-Eastern, "Confucian," in the sense that Western theology can be called platonic or aristotelian.<sup>18</sup>

In an odd way one factor which encouraged the efforts at developing a Korean theology was the total absence of clergy in the country during this period. Requests were made to the bishop of Peking for a priest to be sent to minister to the community, but it was so difficult for a foreigner to cross the border that was not until 1794, ten years after the baptism of Yi Seung-hoon, before a Chinese priest, Chu Mun-mo, was smuggled into the country. Thus, the early band of Christians had to carry on as best they could without benefit of guidance, or interference, from a trained clergy.

As a means of both explaining their faith and trying to win further adherents several members of the little band of scholar-Christians wrote various hymns, apologia, and even a catechism. Yi Byok wrote several pieces, including the "Hymn in Praise of God."<sup>19</sup> Another important opus was the catechism, the *Chu-gyo Yo-Ji*, or The Essentials of the Lord's Teaching, composed by Augustine Chong Yak-jong.<sup>20</sup> The son of Chong Yak-jong, Chong Ha-sang, who was to be martyred in the persecution of 1839, wrote an apologia, the "Letter to the Prime Minister" shortly before his death, in which he held that Christian ethics were not at odds with Confucian ethics, but that they held similar beliefs in benevolence, justice and propriety, including filial piety. All of these writings spoke of Christianity in relation to Confucian philosophical concepts in order to show both the superiority

of Christianity, and the basic compatibility of this new doctrine with the fundamental beliefs and virtues of Confucian ethics.<sup>21</sup>

However, Christianity would not establish itself without a considerable amount of tribulation. The entrance of the first priest, the Chinese Rev. Chu Mun-mo, sparked another, more violent anti-Catholic persecution than those of 1785 and 1791. In the authorities' efforts to locate this foreign intruder connected with those spreading the so-called *Sohak* "heresy," several Korean Catholics were tortured and three were killed.

Nevertheless, it was not essentially xenophobia that occasioned this anti-Catholic persecution, but rather the perception that the new movement threatened the very fabric of traditional Korean society. The adherents of Christianity did not practice ancestor rites, once they learned in a 1790 letter from the Bishop of Peking, Alexandre de Gouvea, that the Church forbade these commemorative rituals. This "non-practice" was seen as unfilial behavior that was so blasphemous that it threatened the social stability of the public order.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, many of the early Christians were also members of a faction of the *Silhak* movement called *Namin*.<sup>23</sup> The *Namin* group often opposed and criticized government policies, and therefore received unfavorable official treatment in return. This fact has some bearing on the subsequent persecution of Korean Catholics. As Sangbae Ri observes,

Many Confucianists meanwhile considered Christianity to be a heresy and attacked it with increasing violence. ...The conflict between Confucianists and Christians will become more and more pronounced, and it was aggravated by the struggles between the political parties.<sup>24</sup>

In 1800 the political fortunes of the Catholic group worsened as Queen Chongsun came to power as regent for her eleven-year-old great grandson, King Sun-jo. The Queen ordered a general persecution of all Catholics in an attempt to consolidate her power and wipe out political opposition. The Chinese priest, Chu Mun-mo, and some three hundred Korean Catholics were martyred in 1801. With Chu's death the Catholic community was to be left bereft of clergy until 1837, when three members of the Paris Foreign Missionary Society--two priests and Bishop Laurent Marie Joseph Imbert arrived. They had managed to smuggle themselves into the country by wearing the wide-

brimmed mourning hats, which obscured their Western faces and also simplified entry procedures, since it was Korean custom to respect absolutely the privacy of someone in mourning.

With the arrival of the Western missionaries the development of Korean Catholicism entered a new phase. To be sure, these three French clergy were not able to exercise their ministry for very long before the government succeeded in rooting them out and beheading them in September, 1839. However, they were replaced by other foreigners, and Korean seminarians in turn were sent away to seminaries outside the country and then smuggled back in upon completion of their training.

The first Korean priest, Andrew Kim Tae-gon, was ordained a priest in 1845 and he managed to re-enter the country later that year.<sup>25</sup> However, Fr. Andrew Kim's ministry also was short-lived as he was arrested and executed in September, 1846. Other Koreans were ordained priests, but control of the young Church had now passed largely into French hands.

While the period of growth of the Catholic Church in Korea from 1836 through World War II merits greater attention than it has presently received, I will pass over this phase almost entirely.<sup>26</sup> Native clergy increased, but as noted above, direction of the hierarchy remained under foreign control. In fact, Korea would not have her first native bishop until 1942, when Msgr. Paul Ro Gi-nam became bishop of Seoul. Even at this writing there still remain two non-Korean bishops as ordinaries out of fourteen dioceses in South Korea.<sup>27</sup>

In 1886 Korea concluded a treaty with France which ended government persecution of Catholicism and give limited freedom to evangelize. Nevertheless, the earlier efforts towards inculturation of the faith made during the era of Yi Byok, Yi Seung-hoon, and the generation of Korean Christians which immediately succeeded them, for the most part had already died out.

Towards the end of the 19th century Korea became a staging ground for a power conflict between China and Japan, with the eventual result that Korea was run as a colony by Japan until the end of World War II.<sup>28</sup> The dream of liberation turned into the nightmare of the Korean War as immense new suffering was inflicted on the land. Following the Armistice in 1953, the Catholic

Church in Korea entered a phase of phenomenal growth. In the South the number of Catholics grew from around 200,000 in 1945 to 1.5 million by the time of Bi-Centennial Celebration in 1984.

Nevertheless, the Church in Korea, as well as Korean society in general, were faced with new problems brought about by the increasing "Westernization" of the country. Korea had been given little time or opportunity to recover from the effects of the Japanese occupation, and now found herself anew in the unenviable position of being smack in-between two hostile superpowers. Paul Sye, S.J. offers the following summary of Korea's situation:

After the 1945 liberation traditional culture was discredited, and did not reflower in Korea because we have absorbed foreign culture without reflection. Clearly we can cite various reasons which were at the origin of these phenomena. The most important is the colonial policy of Japan which sought to impose the Japanese culture, that is, a western imitation on Korean intellectuals without affording them the opportunity to rediscover and adapt traditional culture, which separated Korean intellectuals from the traditional culture. That is why they were unable to assimilate western culture while critiquing it and thus preserve their national identity when the culture of the superpowers invaded our country after the liberation. Moreover, this propagation of the western culture took place smoothly without resistance or revolt because Christianity with a European or North American stamp had certainly played an historical role, but because above all the government's political decisions were taken under the influence of those who had studied abroad and who consequently, being toadies even though they made up the principal foundation of the ruling class.<sup>29</sup>

Fr. Sye goes on to give an excellent analysis of the complexity of the situation and demands facing the Korean Church today, and concludes that one important approach to inculturation would be greater attention to the riches of Korea's cultural heritage:

Right from the start one should say that to work for the inculturation of Christianity in a Korean context requires familiarity with the treasures accumulated through the past of its people. And this past is richly steeped in Confucian and Buddhist thought. To be at ease with this heritage of the past two thousand years means that one appropriates its wealth as a means of bringing forth linguistic expression and that with this background of traditional expression one elucidate the essence of the Christian message clearly in good contemporary Korean. This is necessary in order to assure a grounding in the past and a commitment to modern problems.<sup>30</sup>

So, though the road ahead is challenging, it was with great joy and justifiable pride that the Korean Church celebrated two centuries of the history of Christianity in their land. Extensive preparations were carried on by the Bi-Centennial Committee which involved thousands of the faithful and touched nearly every area of Catholic life in the Peninsula. The climax of the celebrations was

the historic visit of Pope John Paul II to Korea in the first week of May, 1984. The main event during the Pope's visit, the canonization of the "103 Korean martyrs" in a huge open-air Mass on Yoido Island in Seoul, was attended by over one million people.<sup>31</sup>

Looking back at the history of Christianity in Korea, Sr. Kim Sung-hae outlines three basic periods. The initial period, from the baptism of Yi Seung-hoon to the arrival of the French Paris Foreign Mission Society fathers, Sr. Kim describes as a time when "Asian resources were creatively used."<sup>32</sup> Here she refers to the writings of men like Yi Byok, Augustine Chong Yak-jong, and his son, Chong Ha-sang.

The second period extends from the arrival of the French missionaries up to Vatican II. Sr. Kim concludes that during this next 120 years,

the Church was led by the missionaries from France whose training reflected the strict Catholic orthodoxy of that time. The Western theological mold, therefore, was accepted with minor adaptations.<sup>33</sup>

The third period runs from Vatican II to the present, and has "been a time for rethinking, re-orienting and accumulating experiences for the future."<sup>34</sup> As one major resource for aiding the task of inculturating theology in Korea, Sr. Kim sounds a note similar to Fr. Paul Sye by stressing the importance of the first period of the founding of Christianity in Korea:

This founding period [i.e., the first 60 years], I believe, can offer us an inspiration or a guiding principle which proves to be most true to the spirit of the Gospel since those early Christians were most immersed in both traditional thought and present realities of their time. This fact indicates where the heart of inculturation lies and which direction we should go in our effort of doing theology with our own resources, traditional and contemporary.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously neither Sr. Kim, nor Fr. Sye are calling for the catechism of Augustine Chong Yak-jong to replace current catechetical materials. Rather, they are underscoring the importance of a dialectical approach which would use creatively all the riches of Korea's five-thousand-year-old cultural heritage.

*Korean Minjung Theology*

Though the term *Minjung Theology* only dates from the 1970's its historical antecedents reach far back into the feudal times of Korea's past when as many as one-half of the Korean peasants found themselves in some sort of *de facto* slavery. In the historical overview of the development of Christianity in Korea I omitted some events which nevertheless have had considerable impact on both Catholics and Protestants in the country.<sup>36</sup> I will only touch on two here: the first is the so-called *Tonghak* Revolt of 1894 and the second is the March 1, 1919 popular uprising against Japanese colonial rule.

*Tonghak* means literally "Eastern Learning," and the name was chosen partially in reaction to the growing influence in Korea of Christianity, or *Sohak* ("Western Learning"). The founder of the *Tonghak* movement was Ch'oe Che-u, who sought to combine elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and native Korean shamanism into a teaching which supposedly would be more in tune with the Korean psyche than the Christian *Sohak*.

Ch'oe Che-u's teachings also included a social reform movement which appealed to the peasant class very much. Part of the reforms preached by Ch'oe Che-u included a call to rid the government of corruption, and this ultimately led to his arrest and execution in 1864. After the founder's death the *Tonghak* movement waned, but did not die. A generation later, in 1892, the followers of the religious arm of *Tonghak*, the *Ch'on-Do-Kyo* ("Heavenly Way Religion"), began a drive to have the government officially clear the name of Ch'oe Che-u. Within two years this drive mushroomed into a popular uprising aimed at ending the oppression of the peasants by the government and the noble class, the *yangban*. Another stated goal of the *Tonghak* Revolt was the expulsion of all foreigners from Korea--particularly the Japanese and the Westerners. Christian missionaries figured prominently in the latter group.

The *Tonghak* peasant army reached a number of around 10,000, and a panic-stricken government appealed to China for military assistance. China promptly sent troops, but so did Japan, and thus Korea found herself caught between these two Asian superpowers. The ultimate result of this confrontation was victory for Japan and her colonization of Korea. Though the *Tonghak* peasant

revolt was crushed, the demands for social reform, plus the rancor caused by the Japanese intervention, were not to be obliterated so easily.<sup>37</sup>

As noted above, Korea became a Japanese colony when she was annexed by the latter in 1910. Despite the strict Japanese control over political life in Korea, several independence groups were formed both in the country and abroad. Christians in particular were identified with the *Shinminhoe*<sup>38</sup> organized in 1907 by An Ch'ang-ho, and the *Choson Kungminhoe*<sup>39</sup> begun by Chang Il-hwan in 1917.

Abroad, the principle of national self-determination advocated by the American President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points provided additional hope to the Korean independence movement that foreign powers might pressure Japan to leave Korea. However, as Japan was on the winning side in World War I, such foreign intervention on behalf of Korea was not forthcoming.

Though Korea's hopes for support from the international community were dashed, the desire itself for independence erupted in a series of demonstrations which began on March 1, 1919. A group of thirty-three men, organized around leaders from the *Ch'on-Do-Kyo*, Christian and Buddhist religions, utilized the occasion of the funeral rites for Korea's last monarch, King Kojong, to publish a Declaration of Independence from Japan. This proclamation sparked an uprising throughout the country which was brutally suppressed by the Japanese.<sup>40</sup>

The March 1st movement (*Samil*<sup>41</sup> in Korean) failed in its immediate intent to secure Korean independence, but the event is still remembered yearly in a national day of commemoration. Moreover, the March 1st movement, like the *Tonghak* uprising and similar popular movements in Korea's history are good examples of the growing consciousness of the Korean people, the *Minjung*, of their situation as subjects of history.

According to the theologian Hyun Younghak, the term *Minjung Theology* was first used in 1979 by a group of Protestants preparing position papers for an Asian theological conference. This theological reflection in turn was being done in reference to the politico-economic situation in the 1970's during the dictatorship of President Park Chung Hee. Part of the theological reflection on the

contemporary situation included a historical investigation into the current state of affairs, but done from the point of view of the *Minjung* rather than from the perspective of the ruling class.

The term *Minjung*, as Hyun Younghak recounts, is not easily defined, though its meaning can be approached by a contrast with some related terms:

It does not mean "Paiksung [*Baeksong*]<sup>42</sup> (subjects in monarchy)." It does not mean "Daejung" (mass) which implies impersonal and non-political nature. "Inmin" (meaning people in the sense when used in the People's Republic of ...) does not fit because it is too narrowly ideological and political. "Proletariat" is no good either because again it is too narrowly ideological and economic. The term *minjung* has more personal as well as broader historical connotations in the Korean usage.<sup>43</sup>

The "more personal as well as broader historical connotations" which Hyun ascribes to *Minjung* relate to the theological interpretation of the situation in which the oppressed in Korea find themselves. The oppressed have a history, such as the events connected with the *Tonghak* movement described above, but they also have individual stories.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, doing "social biography"--recounting the individual stories of oppression--becomes an important aspect of doing *Minjung* theology.<sup>45</sup>

An intrinsic element which is found in all of these social biographies is what Koreans call *Han*.<sup>46</sup> Again, this word cannot be defined with precision, but Hyun Younghak describes *Han* as

a sense of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, as sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against, a feeling of total abandonedness ("Why hast thou forsaken me?"), a feeling of acute pain of sorrow in one's guts and bowels making the whole body writhe and wriggle, and an obstinate urge to take "revenge" and to right the wrong--all these combined. We Koreans often think of ourselves as a "han-ridden" people.<sup>47</sup>

Another pioneer *Minjung* theologian, Suh Nam-dong, points to four chief historical factors which taken together have produced this national sense of *Han*:

(1) Koreans have suffered numerous invasions by surrounding nations so that the very existence of the Korean nation has come to be understood as *han*. (2) Koreans have continually suffered the tyranny of the rulers so that they think of their existence as *baeksong*. (3) Also, under Confucianism's strict imposition of laws and customs discriminating against women, the existence of women was *han* itself. (4) At a certain point in Korean history, about half of the population were registered as hereditary slaves and were treated as property rather than as people of the nation.<sup>48</sup>

As Suh Nam-dong observes, Korea's long history of being at the crossroads of struggles between her more powerful neighbors has caused her intense suffering. Internally, her Confucian feudal system also led to much oppression and inequality among the social classes. All of these historical forces have helped to create the cultural attitude towards oppression which Koreans themselves call *Han*.<sup>49</sup>

However, *Han* also carries with it a definite sensitivity to the gospel message of salvation. As another Korean theologian, Cyris H.S. Moon, contends,

*Han*, however, is a starting point for a new human history. Through the experience of *han* one's spiritual eyes are opened and one is enabled to see the deep truths about life. In *han*, we come to see the infinite value of personhood and are able to assert our precious rights as human beings. In *han* we see clearly what is good and evil and learn to hate evil and love good. In *han* we encounter God who comes down to the *han*-ridden people and justifies their plight. With *han* as our point of departure we begin to dream of a new, alternative future and to dedicate ourselves to the cause of making that future a reality.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, *Han* should not be seen in purely negative terms, and in fact most Korean *Minjung* theologians would agree that it is in the recognition of one's oppression that one can also be profoundly touched by Jesus' proclamation of the proximity of the Kingdom of God. *Han* has both a personal and a communitarian dimension. An individual experiences *Han* as a result of personal suffering and oppression, but the entire people--the *Minjung*--experience *Han* collectively as well.

According to Suh Nam-dong, the principal task of *Minjung* theology

is to testify that in the Mission of God in Korea there is a confluence of the *minjung* tradition in Christian and the Korean *minjung* tradition. It is to participate and interpret theologically the events which we consider to be God's intervention in history and the work of the Holy Spirit. To participate in and to interpret these events we need to maintain both traditions.<sup>51</sup>

Another important *Minjung* theologian is the well-known Catholic *Minjung* poet, Kim Chi-ha.<sup>52</sup> He tries to combine the traditional *Minjung* elements with Christian belief in his literary works. Kim Chi-ha maintains that it is the *cycle* of oppression, violence and revenge expressed in *Han* which must be ended through the resolute step of *Dan*, or "cutting." *Dan* requires that the vicious circle of suffering, *Han*, be transformed through a revolutionary social movement whereby the *Minjung* themselves seek their own liberation. The community of the Church is crucial in consoling the

*Minjung*, while helping them establish their identity as "subjects" of history, rather than "objects" oppressed by a ruling class.

Though this essay on *Minjung* theology in the context of the history of Christianity in Korea has only sketched briefly some of the aspects of its theological approach, I believe *Minjung* theology does offer real promise for the ongoing inculturation of the gospel in Korea. Certainly at the very least it is worthy of greater interest among Christians who live outside the Korean Peninsula as well.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Ad gentes*, #22. Quotations from Vatican II and Post-Conciliar documents are taken from the two volume edition prepared by Austin P. Flannery, O.P., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Pillar Books, 1975), and *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982).

2. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, #19.

3. *Ibid.*

4. "All this may be summarized thus: evangelization is to be achieved, not from without as though by adding some decoration or applying a coat of colour, but in depth, going to the very centre and roots of life. The gospel must impregnate the culture and whole way of life of man, . . . ." *Evangelii nuntiandi*, #20.

5. *Ibid.*

6. I do not mean to suggest that searching for these common denominators is a worthless or misdirected task. It does have its place and can be helpful, for example, in achieving a greater precision in our understanding of the natural law. But merely seeking some set of universal moral norms is not the best approach for inculturating the Gospel in a *particular* community in my opinion. For a good example of an approach to moral theology and culture from the standpoint of seeking out universal norms, see Eraldo Quarello's Morale cristiana e culture, Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose, 28, (Roma: LAS, 1979).

7. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, #63.

8. *Minjung* means the "common people" or "the masses," although neither of these expressions captures completely the nuances of the Korean--Chinese word.

9. The exact dates and nature of Christianity's entrance into Korea is currently a matter of some debate. Juan Ruiz-de-Medina, S.J. of the Historical Institute of the Society of Jesus, argues that his research shows that Christianity in fact arrived in Korea not in the late 18th century, but much earlier--in the 16th century. As these dates would put Christianity's appearance in Korea in the context of the Japanese Hideyoshi invasion of the Peninsula, Fr. Ruiz-de-Medina's research has been rejected by most Korean church historians.

Obviously, this dispute can not be resolved in these pages, but in terms of approaching the inculturation in Korea it is important not to ignore the *received* tradition on the history establishment of Christianity, even if that tradition should prove ultimately to be somewhat inaccurate from an historic standpoint. I would argue that part of the value that the traditional version of the introduction of Christianity into Korea has for theology today is that it gives both definite encouragement and some direction to the utilization of Korean resources in inculturation.

Fr. Medina has published his research in a variety of publications and languages, but the most complete treatment is found in his Origenes de la Iglesia Catolica Coreana desde 1566 hasta 1784, (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1986).

10. The difficult problem of transliteration from *Hangul*, the Korean alphabet, into the Roman alphabet becomes absolutely chaotic in respect to proper names. Korean custom allows each individual to choose the transliteration he wishes for his own name, irrespective of any of the recognized systems for Romanization, such as that of McCune-Reischauer. This problem is compounded by other authors who take similar liberties with rendering names of their subjects in still different forms. Often even internal consistency is lacking: for example, within a single article I have found Yi Byok's name given as Yi Byok, Yi Byiok, and Yi Piek. Other spellings include Lee Byeok, I Pyok, I Piok, etc.

11. For an English translation see Matteo Ricci, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i), trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J., ed. Edward J. Malatesta, S.J., (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985). In this work, Ricci had sought to explain Christianity to those coming from a Confucian philosophical background.

12. Committee for Bicentennial Commemorative Projects of the Catholic Church in Korea, The Founding Fathers of the Catholic Church in Korea: 1779--1831, (Seoul: Committee for Beatification and Canonization, 1984), p. 20. This book contains a biography of Yi Byok, plus a short history of the Catholic Church in Korea, written in Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Italian, French, German, and

Spanish.

13. *Silhak* is also sometimes transliterated as *Shilhak* and *Sirhak*.

14. For an overview of *Silhak* see Lee, Wu-song's "The Rise of *Silhak* Thought," in Korean Thought, Korean Culture Series 10, ed. International Cultural Foundation and Chun Shin-yong, 55-64, (Seoul: Si-sa-yong-o-sa Publishers, 1982). Lee Wu-song gives a good explanation of *Silhak* as a philosophical movement, but he does not locate it very well in the context of Korean socio-political history. For a brief treatment of *Silhak* in its historical context see pp. 232--243 of Professor Lee Ki-baik's A New History of Korea, trans. Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz, (Seoul: Ilchokak Publishers; Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1984).

15. *Kang Hak Hoe* could be loosely translated as "Study Group."

16. As the Society of Jesus had been suppressed by this time, de Grammont is usually referred to as an "ex-Jesuit" missionary in the Korean literature.

17. This first persecution was confined to exiling one or two members of the group. The first martyrs would come in the relatively small persecutions of 1791 and 1795, but widespread persecution of Catholics began in 1801.

18. "Mais Yi Piek [Yi Byok], en devenant chrétien et en élaborant sa doctrine à l'usage des membres de la première communauté chrétienne coréenne, ne céda pas à la pression de la culture occidentale, pour laquelle il avait cependant une réelle admiration. Son christianisme est délibérément extrême-oriental, «confucéen», dans le sens où la théologie de l'Occident peut être dite platonicienne ou aristotélicienne." Jean Sangbae Ri, Confucius et Jésus Christ, La première théologie chrétienne en Corée d'après l'oeuvre de Yi Piek, lettré confucéen, 1754-1786, Beauchesne Religions, no. 10, (Paris: Beauchesne Editeur, 1979), p. 17.

19. A French translation and commentary of this work is given in Jean Sangbae Ri's work cited above.

20. An English translation of this work, plus a discussion of its theological significance is found in Hector Diaz, M.G.'s A Korean Theology--Chu-Gyo Yo-Ji: Essentials of the Lord's Teaching by Chong Yak-jong Augustine (1760-1801), (Immensee: Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, Supplementa, vol. 35, 1986).

21. For an overview and brief evaluation of some of these early Korean--Confucian catechisms see Kim, Chong-su's "Inculturation in Korean Catechetics," Inculturation 4 (Spring, 1989): 5-11. Fr. Kim, who is Secretary of the Korean Bishops' Conference, gives an evaluation which is not wholly positive, noting that "The early catechisms ignored Scripture and laid down unchangeable doctrines which disregarded history and the local situation, thus leaving the Christians without a social conscience to touch their actual lives or culture." P. 9.

22. See Donald L. Baker's article, "The Martyrdom of Paul Yun: Western Religion and Eastern Ritual in Eighteenth Century Korea," in the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch 54 (1979): 33-58 for a fuller discussion of this part of the history of the early Korean Catholic community.

23. Though the Chinese characters for *Namin* would seem to identify this group as "people from the South," this party was constituted more on ideological rather than strictly geographical lines.

24. "Beaucoup de confucianistes, cependant, traitaient le christianisme d'hérésie et l'attaquaient avec une violence croissante. ... Le conflit entre confucianistes et chrétiens deviendra de plus en plus profond, et il fut envenimé par les luttes entre les partis politiques." Sangbae Ri, Confucius et Jesus Christ, p. 29.

25. For a brief, but interesting biography of Andrew Kim Tae-gon, which places him the context of the mid-19th century Korean political situation, see Martin Jarrett-Kerr, C.R.'s "André Kim (Korea)," Ch. 8 (pp. 101-114) in Patterns of Christian Acceptance:

Individual Response to the Missionary Impact, 1550-1950, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). This same book also contains chapters on Chinese Christians.

26. A comprehensive, critical history of the development of the Church in Korea in a Western language still remains to be written. Charles Dallet relied on the letters and reports sent back to France from the Paris Foreign Mission fathers to compose his two-volume Histoire de L'Église de Corée (Paris: Libraire Victor Palmé, 1874). The work is interesting and valuable, but virtually no scholar today considers it to be a critical work on the history of the Church in Korea. Joseph Kim, Chang-mun and John Chung, Jae-sun's Catholic Korea: Yesterday and Today, (Seoul: Catholic Korea Publishing Co., 1964) is probably the most comprehensive work available in English. Almost all other works publications are short articles or monographs devoted to just one or another phase of this history.

27. Namely, Msgr. Thomas Stewart (Irish, Columban) of Chunchon; and Msgr. William McNaughton (American, Maryknoll) of Inchon. Msgr. René Dupont (French, Paris Foreign Mission Society) of Andong retired in November, 1990 and was replaced by a Korean. There are three archdioceses in South Korea: Seoul, Taegu and Kwangju. Stephen Cardinal Kim is archbishop of Seoul and Primate of Korea.

There remain three dioceses, without resident bishops, in North Korea. There is practically no religious freedom in communist North Korea, and the Church there is referred to as the "Silent Church." For a recent overview of the Church in North Korea see Lucio Brunelli's article, "North Korea: Survivors Under the Rule of Kim Il Sung," 30 Days 2 (January, 1989): 28-31.

28. From 1894 onwards Japan's power grew quickly in Asia. She defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, and one provision of the Treaty of Portsmouth of 1905 made Korea a protectorate of Japan. However, in 1910, in explicit violation of that Treaty, Japan formally annexed Korea into her Empire. Japanese rule in Korea was quite harsh. For example, it was a crime to speak Korean in public, and the Japanese followed a program of virtual cultural genocide and economic exploitation was followed. The American and Russian forces "liberated" Korea by accepting surrender from the Japanese troops on August 15, 1945. However, at the same time, by dividing the Peninsula arbitrarily at the 38th Parallel the "liberators" set the scene for the tragic Korean War (1950-1953) and the painful separation of the country which continues to the present day.

29."Après la libération de 1945, la culture traditionnelle s'est flétrie et elle n'a pas refléuri en Corée, parce que nous avons, inconsidérément absorbé la culture étrangère. Evidemment, nous pouvons citer quelques causes qui ont été à l'origine de ces phénomènes. La plus importante est la politique coloniale du Japon qui voulut imposer la culture japonaise, c'est-à-dire une imitation occidentale aux intellectuels coréens, sans leur offrir l'opportunité de retrouver et d'aménager la culture traditionnelle, ce qui sépara les intellectuels coréens de la culture traditionnelle. C'est pourquoi ils ne purent pas assimiler, en la critiquant, la culture occidentale et préserver ainsi l'identité nationale quand la culture des super-grands envahit notre pays après la libération. En outre, la propagation de la culture occidentale se produisit sans heurts ni résistances, ni révoltes parce qu'un christianisme avec le visage de l'Europe ou de l'Amérique du Nord y avait joué certainement un rôle historique, mais parce que surtout les décisions politiques du gouvernement étaient prises sous l'influence de gens qui avaient étudié à l'étranger et qui, par conséquent, étaient des flagorneurs bien qu'ils aient formé le soutien principal de la classe dirigeante." Sye, In-Syek Paul, S.J. "Essai sur les Problèmes de L'Inculturation de la Foi Chrétienne en Corée," in L'Inculturation et La Sagesse des Nations, Inculturation: Études sur L'Actualité de la Rencontre entre la Foi et les Cultures, no. 4, ed. Ary A. Roest Crolius, S.J., (Rome: Centre "Cultures and Religions" -- Pontifical Gregorian University, 1984), pp. 22-23. Fr. Sye is an Old Testament Scripture scholar, and the former president of Sogang University in Seoul.

30."Il faut dire tout de suite que pour travailler à l'inculturation du christianisme en contexte coréen, il faut être à l'aise avec les trésors accumulés par le passé du peuple. Et ce passé est tout chargé de la pensée confucéenne et bouddhique. Etre à l'aise avec cet héritage du passé deux fois millénaire, cela signifie que l'on s'approprie ces trésors pour en tirer les moyens d'expression linguistique et qu'avec ce bagage d'expressions traditionnelles, qu'on élucide l'essence du message chrétien clairement en coréen courant moderne. Ceci pour assurer l'enracinement dans le passé et l'engagement dans les problèmes modernes." Ibid., p. 26.

31.Andrew Kim Tae-gon, the first native Korean priest, has pride of place among the 103 Korean Martyrs. Ten French Paris Foreign Mission Society clergy are among the 103, including three bishops. The remaining 92 are all Korean lay people (including 47 women) who represent a good cross-section of the Korean society of that period. The martyrs come mainly from three major persecutions: 1839, 1846, and 1866. For a brief biographical sketch of each

martyr see the Lives of 103 Martyr Saints of Korea published in Seoul in 1984 by the Committee for Beatification and Canonization.

32.Kim, Sung-hae, "Liberation and Inculturation, two streams of doing theology with Asian resources: The Catholic Experience in Korea," East Asian Pastoral Review 24 (1987): 379. Sr. Kim Sung-hae is a Seton Hall Sister of Charity who holds a doctorate in comparative religions from Harvard University and is currently professor of comparative religion at Sogang University in Seoul, Korea.

33.Ibid., pp. 379-380.

34.Ibid., p. 380.

35.Ibid.

36.I omit here discussion of the history of Protestant evangelization of Korea. This movement was handled mostly by American Presbyterians and Methodists, but did not begin until 1884. Most of its initial efforts were concentrated in education and medical work. For an excellent and concise discussion of this history see Everett N. Hunt, Jr.'s Protestant Pioneers in Korea, American Society of Missiology, no. 1, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980).

37.Today the *Ch'on-Do-Kyo* sect claims some 600,000 followers in Korea, and the "List of Demands" drawn up at the time of the Tonghak peasant are still invoked in various social reform movements.

38.*Shinminhoe*: New People's Association.

39.*Choson Kungminhoe*: Association of the Korean People. *Choson* was another name for Korea during the Yi dynasty, and was the name by which Korea was officially known to the world during the Japanese

colonial period.

40. According to figures from the Japanese colonial authorities 46,948 demonstrators were arrested, 7,509 people were killed, 15,961 were injured, and 715 houses, 47 churches, and 2 schools were killed. In one instance, 29 people were burned alive in a church in the village of Cheam-ni, near Suwon. As the noted Korean historian Lee Ki-baik observes, "in reality the numbers in all these categories far exceeded those officially reported." A New History of Korea, p. 344.

41. *Samil* is simply Korean-Chinese for "3--1," which is how dates are rendered. Therefore, the 3rd month, 1st day is March 1st.

42. *Baeksong* is the more common transliteration for these Chinese ideograms.

43. Hyun, Younghak, "Three Talks on Minjung Theology," Inter-Religio 7 (Spring, 1985): 4.

44. For a discussion of the "social-biography" aspect of Minjung theology see the following articles: Kim Young-bock's "Minjung Social Biography and Theology," Asia Journal of Theology 1 (October, 1987): 523-530; Kim, Young-sook's From the Womb of Han: Stories of Korean Women Workers, (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia--Urban Rural Mission, 1982); and Lee, Oo Chung's "One Woman's Confession of Faith," International Review of Mission, April, 1985.

45. Traditional Korean performative folk-art forms such as *T'al Chum* (Masked Dance), *Pansori* (Common people's song), and the shaman's *Kut* have all been utilized as ways of doing this "social biography" in Minjung theology. For example, Korean university students use *T'al Chum* in a particularly effective way to communicate their social grievances during campus demonstrations. For a discussion of the Minjung elements of the *T'al Chum* see the following two articles by Hyun Younghak: "The Cripple's Dance and Minjung Theology," Ching Feng 28 (1985): 30-35; and "A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea," ch. 3 in Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History, ed. Commission on Theological Concerns of the

Christian Conference of Asia (CTC-CCA), (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), pp. 47-54. This book contains a number of excellent articles by various Korean theologians on aspects of Minjung theology.

46. Though this is a Chinese ideogram which could be translated as "hate" or "resentment," Han in Korea has a more nuanced meaning.

47. Hyun, Younghak, "Three Talks on Minjung Theology," p. 7.

48. Suh, Nam-dong, "Towards a Theology of Han," in Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History, p. 58.

49. For a brief treatment of the relation among Han, Minjung theology and Korean history, see Suh Nam-Dong's article "Historical References for a Theology of Minjung," ch. 9 in Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History, pp. 155-182.

50. Cyris H.S. Moon, A Korean Minjung Theology: An Old Testament Perspective, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 2.

51. Suh, Nam-dong, Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History, p. 177.

52. For a brief biography of Kim Chi-ha see Fumio Tabuchi's article, "The Theologian in Prison: Kim Chi Ha," Concilium 115 (1978): 84-91.