

## **Jesus Christ and the Minjung in Korean Liberation Theology**

**Abstract.** The history of Korean Christianity is actually a history of a specific liberation theology, which defined the images of Christ that are unique to the East Asian way of thinking. Koreans faced many troubles on national basis from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, so they tried to resolve these problems using their old religious and philosophical systems, but these proved to be inadequate in the face of fierce political regimes and hard social circumstances. Christianity was a new religion, which they understood as promising liberation not only in the afterlife, as some branches of Buddhism did, but also in this life. Reviewing the history of this process of liberation, the author explains each image of Christ that appeared in Korean theology since the very introduction of Christianity in 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although largely unknown in our theological circles, these Korean images of Christ are very important for understanding the way in which Orthodox Christianity might be introduced to the nation that is now more than 30% Christian.

**Keywords.** Jesus Christ, Christology, Korea, liberation theology, minjung theology, Confucianism, Independence Movement 1919, Korean Christian Declaration, Korean Protestantism, Korean Catholicism

It is always interesting and even useful to study the development of theology, and especially Christology, in different cultural, social, and political environments. This particular branch of theology – the history of Christology – helps us to gain a better understanding of the importance of the very image of Christ for those who embraced Him and His teachings, trying to resolve not only spiritual, but also political and social problems of their communities. In other words, some people did not just decide to meet Jesus Christ in the Divine Liturgy, as if He is not “applicable” in other circumstances. They applied His teachings in every situation in order to make their societies better, Kingdom of Heaven-like in a sense, for people to live in, not allowing social and economic differences to gain advantage over the Gospel. One might call this kind of Christology “the liberation theology”, but it does not actually

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need a special name, as if it is somewhat different from the original message of the New Testament. It *is* a message of Jesus Christ, for all are equal before Him.

One interesting development of liberation theology, or liberation Christology, might be observed in Korea. Throughout the history of this particular Christianity, one can notice the constant cry of people not just for a better society, but also for a better spiritual basis for the society or, to put it more simply, for a better God. The most humane of all humanist philosophies in the history, Confucianism, proved to be useless in the society that wants to advance further from the strictly juridical way of thinking. Surely, the teachings of Confucius were the best original East Asian ideology, but these teachings could not improve the bad social conditions of the lower classes, because Confucius himself never resolved this problem to the end. There was not some loving figure in Confucianism, such as personal God or saviors from the worldly evils, which means that people had to turn to other systems, such as primitive native religious systems or Buddhism, to find a condolence in the promises of afterlife. Naturally, this produced the feeling of confusion regarding the validity of old Korean religions. None of their philosophies and ideologies offered a definitive answer to the issues of an ordinary man.

The teachings of Christ were different. There was something promising in this new religion that Korean mandarins brought home from China, which met Christianity centuries prior to the evangelization of the Korean Peninsula. The very figure of Jesus Christ corresponded to the life conditions of most of the Koreans in the time when Christianity was first introduced to their land. Jesus suffered as they suffered, He was poor as they were poor, and He became one with the oppressed masses in order to save them. Buddha was not such figure, nor was Laozi. These two sages were primarily concerned with the individual, placing less emphasis on the society as a living organism that has more of a purpose than just to offer physical security. Buddha saw all worldly affairs as *dukha* (suffering), while Laozi was mostly skeptical regarding struggle for better social circumstances; both sages recommended an individual meditation, leading to the end of troubled existence, or to the physical immortality. Confucius was the only one who went further than that, but he was not able to find better role models for people than old Chinese (mythological) sage-emperors. These sages followed the way of Heaven, or *tiantao*, but Heaven (*Tian*) was not personal God. It was rather an impersonal principle. In other words, there was not an ultimate authority in these religious philosophies, nor there was an Ultimate (Loving) Being to answer the cry of the oppressed. Christianity offered such Being – Jesus of Nazareth.

The story of Korean Christianity is the story of people who fought for their liberation with an image of Christ the Savior in their minds. For them, He was not the same as old Asian sages. He was Asian, indeed, but He was also

universal Person, approachable and applicable in all cultures, and not only in Europe. It is quite fascinating, but largely unknown in our theological circles, how Koreans embraced Christ and freed themselves from the oppressors with Gospels in their hands and hearts. In this paper, one can follow the historical advancement of the images of Christ the Savior from the first encounter of Korea and Christianity to the formation of a unique Korean theology – the *minjung* theology. Furthermore, the story of Korean Christianity is the story of Christ the Minjung, i.e. Christ who is one with the oppressed masses. This fascinating image of Christ, therefore, stands as a reminder of His original message to us, and it is always good to silence the voice of scholarly loftiness in order to hear the voice of those who remind us of the companions of historical Jesus Christ – the voice of the poor and the oppressed.

### **Jesus the Reformer of Korean Confucianism**

Christianity reached Korea during the *Joseon* (also *Choson* or *Yi*, 1392-1897) dynasty, which accepted the Confucianism as the official state ideology and introduced Chinese culture to the Peninsula. The rule of the Joseon kings started gloriously, but the dynasty was later weakened by several foreign invasions from Japan and Qing China. Particularly devastating was the Japanese invasion (1592-1598), led by a warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, during which the vast areas of present-day South Korea suffered under the foreign rule. After the Japanese attack, the Manchurians invaded Joseon Korea two times, first in 1627, and then in 1636. Korea was forced to become tributary state to Qing China until 1894, when Japan defeated the Chinese in First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). The ruler Gojong assumed the title of Emperor in 1897, thus ending the historical period of Joseon Kingdom.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Neo-Confucianism dominated both China and Korea, a group of Korean scholar-officials, called *yangban*, realized that the abstract philosophy of Zhu Xi could not sustain the burden of modernization. In other words, they needed a more practical philosophy that would correspond to the new trends coming from the West. Naturally, Western learning seemed like the best solution. Due to their search for practical knowledge, the movement of these *yangban* was named *Silhak* or “Practical Learning” (*sil* – practical; *hak* – learning). China was enriched by scientific knowledge of the Jesuit missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci, Schall von Bell etc, but it was not easily accessible in Korea. Although there were several attempts made by missionaries in China and Japan to evangelize Korea, Jesuits never came there, neither did any other Catholic monastic order. Consequently, Koreans had to Christianize themselves.

Since the defeat of Joseon dynasty by the Chinese in 1636, Koreans had to send delegations to Beijing on annual basis. Therefore, the emissaries were the first Koreans to encounter the Christianity in China. One such emissary, named Yi Sugwang (1563-1628), allegedly came into possession of Matteo Ricci's work *Tianzhu Shiyi* and brought it to his country. According to another theory, emissary Chong Tuwon "took back with him many books on science, a pair of pistols, and a telescope, together with some other products from the West, including Ricci's book *True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*" (Kim 2003, 43). The Jesuit texts attracted the attention of the Silhak scholars, who found in them the best ideology to improve the social situation of the weakened Joseon Kingdom. Soon afterwards, several *yangban* accepted Christianity not only as the social philosophy, but also as their religion.

The first Confucian scholar-officials in Korea who embraced the teachings of Christ were Ik Yi (1682-1763) and his follower Jung-Bok Ahn. Even though they were not baptized, they considered themselves true Christians, seeing the religion from the West as the fulfillment of their personal spiritual seeking. "Ik Yi spoke earnestly of the 'Love of God'. He believed in a personal God as a source of life and held the idea of an over-ruling Providence. Jung-Bok Ahn also discovered a personal God through nature" (Kim 2003, 44). However, they did not abandon Confucianism; rather, they wanted to accommodate Christianity to the traditional philosophy and religion of Korea. They wrote several works, explaining the similarities between the two doctrines. Ik Yi wrote *Sunghak Jepyoo* (Summary of the Holy Teaching), and Jung-Bok Ahn wrote *Chunhak Mundak* (Confucian Answers to the Teachings of Catholicism). It is important to notice that Yi and Ahn thought that there is no difference between Confucian worship of *Sang Je* (the Ruler in Heaven) and Christian worship of *Cheon Ju* (the Lord of Heaven), which is not surprising, due to their primary sources for Christian doctrines being Jesuit tracts from China. The name *Cheon Ju* is actually equivalent to Ricci's *Tianzhu*, although the term that will prevail in later times is *Hanunim* or *Hananim*. This was the name of the Supreme Being in traditional Korean religion (Shamanism), who was identified with mythical ancestor *Tangun*.

In 1777, several Silhak scholars gathered to discuss the doctrines of Christianity, under the leadership of Chol-Shin Kwon (1736-1801). They were amazed by the Christian morality, which seemed to them equal or even higher than that of Confucianism. One of these scholars, Sung-Heun Lee (1756-1801), went to China in 1783 as a member of the annual delegation to the Chinese Court, and Catholic priests baptized him there. Thus, Sung-Heun Lee became the first baptized Korean. He returned to Korea in 1784 and baptized other sympathizers of Christianity, initializing the rise of the first Korean indigenous church. These first Korean Christians found the Catholic teachings quite similar to their Neo-Confucian beliefs. As the matter of fact,

there was no such big controversy regarding the ancestors worship (*chesa* rites) in Korea as it was in China. For Korean Christians, the Catholic prayers for deceased parents were similar, if not identical, to the *chesa* rites, because Christians were praying in front of the crucifixes and icons of Christ, while the Confucians prayed in front of the ancestral tablets. “They found that Christianity uses the cross or portrait of Jesus Christ as a means by which believers concentrate their minds and worship God, while an ancestral tablet is the image of the soul in the Confucian practice of ancestor worship” (Kim 2003, 47). Later, when the Catholic missionaries finally came to Korea, the *chesa* rites were forbidden, which caused the great controversy regarding Christians and their loyalty to the Joseon Kingdom.

As evident, the Koreans actually evangelized themselves. Lacking of Westerners to introduce them to the doctrines of the Church, they were dependent on their own understanding of the few Jesuit writings, brought to Korea from China by the emissaries. “Inasmuch as literary Chinese was the preserve of the *yangban* elite and all but inaccessible to the vast majority of the populace, Sinitic Catholic writings were often translated into the Korean vernacular, or *onmun* (later more commonly known as *han’gul*). In time, these translations inspired the converts to compose their own vernacular tracts and catechisms” (Cho 2006, 29). The Korean Christian writers composed many works on the themes of oneness of God, Catholic morality, sinful nature of man etc. Their catechisms made a surprising impact on the common Koreans, who massively embraced Christianity as their new religion. Another surprising fact is that the self-evangelized Koreans understood the doctrine of Salvation through Jesus Christ much better than Chinese Christians at the time, despite their sources on Christian teachings being from China itself.

The first Korean Christian writer worth mentioning is Yi Byeok, scholar and poet who wrote two important works: *Cheon Ju Kongkyeong Ka* (Hymn of Adoration to God) in 1779 and *Seongkyo Yoji* (Essence of the Sacred Doctrine) in 1785. The first is a short poem in which he expresses the faith in One God, and the second is catechistic tract. In this work, Yi Byeok interprets traditional Confucian values in the light of Christ’s teachings, as a new model for a better society. “The core values of Confucius’s teaching – particularly those regarding morality, filial piety and respect for elders, and sincerity – had to be maintained but refocused in the new perspective of Jesus Christ; God made man and the savior of the world had to be emphasized. Faith in God was to form the basis of new human relationships” (Iraola 2007, 224). Already in Yi Byeok’s texts, one can see the reason why the Korean people accepted Christianity much easier than other East Asian nations did. They were aware of the weakness of their country, but they were not blaming Japanese or the Chinese for such circumstances. Old Confucian system of government in Joseon Korea proved to be not only ineffective, but also quite disastrous for

the lower classes of the society. The need for reform was urgent, and the teachings of Christ seemed like the best supplement to the Confucianism. They saw Christ as an ideal Reformer, the only One who can improve the status of common people, but not as a God who will destroy the old tradition. The Korean society based on Christianity would be new, indeed, but the Confucian values would be improved, not nullified, by His teachings.

Other important figures of early Korean Christianity were the Chung brothers, Yak-Chong Chung and Yak-Yong Chung. Both wrote important tracts, in which they propose Christianity as the best solution for the problems of the Joseon Korea. Yak-Yong Chung's most important work, a commentary on the Confucian "Doctrine of the Mean", is entitled *Jung-yong kang-eui* (Lecture on Jung-Yong). He is notable for using specifically Chinese philosophical terms for interpreting Christian teachings of the One God. "He particularly defined God as the *Tao* of the truth, the way and the life for everyone. As Chung has said, *to know God (Tao) is a human being's ultimate task, and justifies his or her own existence. (...) Neglecting God is ignoring himself or herself*" (Kim 2003, 51). Chung also understood God as a Judge, the One who gives to each being according to his or her moral conduct in the world. The cause for such attitude is a hostile environment of the Joseon Korea, which persecuted Christians in his time. Therefore, an eschatological string runs through his entire work. "Accordingly, he points out the necessity for communion with other Christian members in order to build a more virtuous Christian community. For him, the Church is the place where the body of Christ must cultivate virtues such as obedience, humility, and filial piety. He understands Christ as the head of his body and the male as the head of the female; thus, his concept of church is hierarchical" (Kim 2003, 52). It may seem that Yak-Yong Chung bases his version of Christianity on Paul's teachings, but it is still strictly Confucian in nature. The hierarchical constitution of the society reflects Confucian teaching of social harmony, in which every human being knows its place and acts accordingly. Thus, Christ as the Head of the Church is rather Confucian expression of a Divine King who rules over all. Such was the attitude of all early Korean Christian-Confucians, who "explain God as the Lord of Heaven; Christ as the Head of his body; the Christian community as the body of Christ; male as the head of female, and elder as head of the younger" (Kim 2003, 52).

Yak-Chong Chung, Yak-Yong Chung's brother, wrote a work entitled *Chu-gyo Yo-ji*, or the "Essentials of the Lord's Teaching", in which he refutes Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional Korean Shamanism, advocating the faith in the Lord of Heaven as a true religion. His reasoning on the name of One God in Korean language is especially interesting. "Several names had been given to this ultimate reality in Korean, including *Ju* (Lord), *Sang Je* (Ruler in Heaven), *Cheon* (Heaven, in Korean), *Wangcheon* (Ruler of the heavenly

kingdom), *Myeong* (Commandment), *Taeju* (Supreme ultimate), *Do* (*Tao*, way) and *li* (principle)” (Iraola 2007, 246). *Cheon Ju*, a Korean equivalent to Ricci’s *Tianzhu*, was the favorite of the Korean Christians, while the Korean Confucians preferred the name *Sang Je* (Ruler in Heaven); Christians, however, identified the two terms as signifying the One God of Christianity. Nevertheless, Yak-Chong Chung stated that humans had to behave in accordance to *Sang Je*’s way, which is a principle similar to Chinese *tiantao* (heavenly way). Koreans called this principle *Myeong* or the “Commandment”. It presupposes the correct relationship between the ruler and the subject, and the mediator is necessary for this relation to be established. Yak-Chong Chung’s perfect mediator is Christ, due to the perfection of His moral conduct and relationship between Him and the Father, all of which is in accordance to traditional Confucian values. Chung describes the establishment of the correct relationship between the Divine and human in Christ as follows:

*“After the first parents sinned, all the world’s present and past humans had to suffer eternal punishment in hell. But because the Lord has an extremely kind heart and an utterly perfect virtue as a loving one, he says ‘let us forgive the sins of all humans’ . . . The Lord moved by extreme kindness and love came down to the earth in person, becoming a human, and atoned for our sins. The Lord’s plan to atone for human sins was told by the Lord to the first parents after their fall, and after that moment the Lord, generation after generation, sent many saints who spread the word of his coming to the earth and his plan to atone for our sins, and the Lord had all of this recorded in the Holy Scripture. The Lord’s birth at some time and place, his conducts and works were all meticulously recorded in the Holy Scripture. . . . In the time the Lord became human there was a woman (Yeo In, in Korean, a married woman) called Mary, who was extremely pure, and had an extremely pure conduct, and she alone was not stained by the original sin. . . and the Lord especially chose her to be his mother”* (quoted from: Iraola 2007, 249-250).

Jesus, the incarnate *Sang Je*, lived a perfectly moral life, and that is why He can be considered the realization of *Myeong*, Commandment of Heaven. Accordingly, He is the perfect Being to build a new society on. The idea seemed perfect to the Korean Confucian-Christians, but the Neo-Confucians found it ridiculous. The ethics of the Christianity was not that big of a problem as was the notion of One God, moreover the personal God, which was unimaginable in the Neo-Confucian philosophy. Their *Taeju* was as impersonal as Laozi’s *Tao*, so they immediately rejected the new doctrine from the West. However, Christianity was not so ridiculous to the common people.

Christian teachings had spread fast among the Koreans in the lower classes of the society, so the indigenous church of Korea grew rapidly. According to Confucianism, social differences should exist and that is a natural order of the world. Nonetheless, Christianity offered something

different. “The lower classes particularly found that the Christian teaching of equality as children of God appealing; there is neither slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ” (Kim 2003, 55). In their writings, Christian Korean writers transferred this salvific image of Christ to the common Korean people, who were poor and oppressed in the strict Confucian environment of the Joseon country. They did not abandon the Confucianism itself, but they knew that radical changes must occur in order for the society to live on. As the matter of fact, they wanted to find the solution in the dialogue with the old tradition, so they presented what they considered the best way out of the social misery. “Following the model of Christ, they offered a way for the benefit of the poor, which they understood as having political implications for the advancement of social transformation” (Iraola 2007, 227). This proposal did not entail colonialism, but the old-fashioned Korean scholars and officials were not ready for changes. In accordance to their conservative feelings, they were looking for the smallest mistake in Christian moral conduct in order to accuse them for treachery and disobedience to the Dynasty.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic missionaries entered Korea and initiated the same controversy that endangered Christians in China. In the time when the Koreans self-evangelized, the ancestral *chesa* rites were incorporated into indigenous Christianity and interpreted as prayers for the deceased members of the family. However, the Catholics did not want to tolerate this pagan custom, so they tried to replace it with some similar, yet original Christian rite. “This task could be seen in the most important prayer book of the time, *Ch'onju songgyo konggwa* (A Prayer Book of the Catholic Church), which included ‘An Incantation for Parents’, to be used as a substitute for traditional ancestral rites” (Cho 2006, 31). The problem was not in the meaning of the *chesa* rites, but in their very form that reminded the Catholics of idolatry. Those who stopped performing the rites for the ancestors were seen as social outcasts and, accordingly, disloyal to the Kingdom itself. Naturally, this was one of the main reasons behind the persecution of Christians in Korea.

The followers of Neo-Confucianism also engaged in intellectual debates with Christians, mostly regarding the monotheism, morality, and Incarnation of Christ. They were strictly against Christian interpretation of both Sang Je and Myeong, stating that Christian teachings negate the very transcendence of Sang Je, but they were actually unable to comprehend the notion of personal Supreme Being. For example, Confucian scholar Shin Hu-Dam stated that Christian teaching of Incarnation and God’s miracles are improbable and ridiculous. “If Moses was a saint, he asked, then why did Cheon Ju (Lord of heaven) give him the Ten Commandments? If he was not a saint, then why did Cheon Ju give them only to him and not to others? In other words, if Cheon Ju is absolute, how can he have an individual will deviating from

universality? Even if Jesus were God incarnate, his coming only to Judea was unfair. Also, Jesus had parents. How could it be said that Jesus was born by God's power if he had parents" (Iraola 2007, 251). These and various other arguments were used against Christianity in the severe persecutions for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when thousands of lives were lost at the hands of the declining Joseon dynasty.

Despite the fierce struggles between Korean Confucian and Christian scholars, the number of Christians constantly grew. When the first Catholic missionary, a Chinese priest Zhou Wenmo, came to Korea in 1795, he found about 4000 Christians there. In several years, the number grew over 10,000. However, the persecution started in 1801, when Zhou Wenmo and thousands of Korean Christians perished. "Part of the ferocity of this persecution was due to a letter written by Hwang Sayong in which he appealed for a Western navy and army to protect the fledgling church. In the eyes of the government, Catholicism both endangered the moral fabric of society by its refusal to perform the *chesa* rites and raised the question of the political subordination of the nation" (Grayson 2006, 10). The persecutions continued for the next seventy years: 1811-1814, 1815, 1827, 1839, 1846, and 1866-1871. After the last great persecution, Christianity in Korea was finally able to renew itself. "In 1882, there were 12,500 believers, an increase in the six years since end of the Great Persecution of 5,500 persons or 44 percent. By 1910, the number of adherents had grown to 73,000, a 500 percent increase over 1882. By 1900 there were ten Korean priests; ten years later there were fifteen, and fifty-six foreign clergy" (Grayson 2006, 12). In time, Christianity became equated with the nationalist feeling of the Koreans, especially during the Japanese occupation. There lies the main difference between Korean Christianity and Christianity in China and Japan. While the Chinese and Japanese saw Christianity as an instrument of colonialism, the Koreans accepted it as the best expression of their nationalist feelings and cry for freedom. Already in this period, one can see the beginnings of what would later be called a *minjung* theology of liberation.

### **Jesus the Liberator and Founder of new Korea**

After the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), Korea finally gained independence from China. King Gojong of the Joseon dynasty assumed the title of Emperor in 1897, but his rule soon faced with the unstoppable decline. Following the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), Korea became the Protectorate of the Japanese Empire. The Emperor Gojong abdicated in 1907, leaving the throne to his son Sunjong, but the Japanese eventually annexed Korea in 1910, leaving no place for any kind of independent Korean government. Many anti-Japanese movements arose during the period between

1910 and 1945, when the Soviets finally entered the Korea and forced the Japanese to retreat. These movements were mostly inspired by Christianity, predominantly in its Protestant form, so the spirit of liberation was nationalist and Christian at the same time. Such Korean attitude has its roots in the Protestant mission, which was initiated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the Koreans themselves primarily developed and applied it during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Protestants' missionary work in Korea greatly influenced the rise of Korean Christian nationalism. They actually used similar strategy to that applied in China by the figurists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, searching for the Jahveh-like characters in the traditional Korean spirituality. Therefore, Protestant missionaries recognized the Korean supreme deity from the folk religion, *Hananim*, as the equivalent to the One God of Christianity. "Thus, recognizing that the Christian absolute God has a cultural equivalent to the concept of God which already existed in Korean religious culture, many Koreans accepted Christianity without difficulties of understanding the Christian God in the time of Protestant mission. After they had become Christians, they tried to remove pantheistic and Shamanistic elements contained in the traditional concepts of God" (Kim, J. H. 2004, 143). Missionaries such as John Ross and H. B. Hulbert preferred the term *Hananim*, although they had to give it a more Christian meaning during the missionary work. That is how they escaped the debates with Confucian scholars regarding God as personal or impersonal Being, acknowledging the existence of faith in Jahveh in traditional Korean religion at the same time.

Another important contribution to the formation of Korean Christian nationalism by Protestant missionaries might be seen in the popular Christian tracts, translated into vernacular Korean from the Chinese language. For example, John Griffith wrote *Yinjia Guidao* (Leading the Family in the Right Way, 1881) and *Dehui Rumen* (The Primer of Virtue and Wisdom, 1879), which gained great popularity in Korea. The second tract deals with the nature of Christian God, opposed to the concept of Great Ultimate in Neo-Confucianism. He claims that God is personal, and not Tao, because Tao is emptiness, an impersonal principle. He also states that Buddha and spirits of Chinese folk religion are manmade gods, and therefore not the true ones. Griffith wants to show that Jesus is a universal God, not only Judean or Christian, and that is why "he pointedly makes note of the fact that in ancient times, sacrificial ceremonies were performed on behalf of people by Chinese sage-emperors. Jesus himself, he notes, offered a sort of sacrifice; unlike the emperors, however, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice, on the cross – moreover, not just for one kingdom or empire but for the entire world" (Oak 2006, 82). Therefore, Griffith claims that these sacrifices were not completely meaningless before the arrival of Christianity to the East Asia. The Chinese

performed sacrificial rites as an expression of gratitude to the One God, but they later forgot the true meaning of the ceremonies. Instead, they offered the sacrifices and performed rites to honor the nature and manmade gods, but the true sacrifices of the ancient sages were fulfilled when Christ came to the world. "Inasmuch as Christ's redemptive sacrifice fulfilled the divine law, all other sacrificial rites are unnecessary and useless. What God wants now, he argues, is nothing more or less than the repenting mind and sincere heart" (Oak 2006, 83).

William A. P. Martin's *Tiandao Suyuan* (Evidences of Christianity) expresses the view of Christianity as bringing the improvements of European (Christian) civilization to the entire world. That is also the expression of God's will and His leading of humans to both religious and technological perfection. "Human history, in this view, is an ordered process, under the governance of God and the lordship of Christ, moving toward the fulfillment of the purposes and design of the divine will" (Oak 2006, 86). Similar idea is present in Ernst Faber's *Zixi Cudong* (Civilization: West and East, 1884). He proposes Christianity as a reform movement to improve the Chinese society that was, according to his opinion, in the state of collapse. In this sense, Eastern dominant philosophy (Confucianism) should be an ally of Christianity. However, Confucianism is not complete; the real improvement brought by Christianity is the democracy, a brotherly relationship between the humans in the community of the believers in Christ. Such attitude did not exist in Confucian political and social philosophy, so it is completely natural that Koreans interpreted the Christian tracts as bringing them freedom that none of their ancestors ever enjoyed. As the matter of fact, Koreans felt the real unity of the classes of the society in the churches, when they were attending the weekly services. Confucianism was not able to create such harmony, so the Korean nation was divided. The new God, Jesus Christ, formed the basis for the unity of all Koreans, and that is how the nationalist spirit emerged from the Christian communities. "Enabled by a historically serendipitous partnership between Korean nationalism and Christianity against the threats of foreign colonialism and loss of sovereignty, the rise of democracy and Christianity profoundly transformed the political and spiritual landscape of modern Korea" (Pak 2006, 116).

Nevertheless, when the Japanese annexed Korea in 1910, the opinions of the missionaries and converts regarding the new political events were not the same. The missionaries welcomed the new rule, stating that Japan will rule Korea much better than Koreans themselves will. They actually advised their flock to be loyal to the Japanese, and not to engage into any kind of opposition. Perhaps the best example of missionaries' attitude toward the Japanese was that of Arthur Brown, who wrote: "*What is the attitude of the missionaries toward the Japanese? First, opposition; second, aloofness; third,*

*cooperation; fourth, loyal recognition. (...) The fourth, loyal recognition, is I believe, the sound position. It is in accord with the example of Christ, who loyally submitted himself and advised His apostles to submit themselves to a far worse government than the Japanese and it is in line with the teaching of Paul in Romans xiii*" (quoted from: Kang 2006, 98). However, the Japanese did not trust the Christian missionaries, so they arrested many of the Church's leaders as early as 1911. The converts, on the other side, were quite aware of the unfair Japanese rule. The spirit of freedom, which they enjoyed in the Christian communities, could not exist in the state of slavery. Instead of choosing the suffering Christ, the Korean Christians chose Christ the Liberator, seeing in Him the only way to a better society, free from the political, social, and religious oppression.

The Independence Movement in March of 1919 was the first open Christian protest against the Japanese oppressive policy, which ended in many Christian ministers being arrested and jailed, Christian schools were closed, and every Christian was endangered. The underground liberation movements appeared, most of them influenced by the Christian ideals of social equality and both spiritual and physical freedom, because the Japanese enforcing of false pan-Asianism and state Shinto (*Kokka Shinto*) jeopardized both of these ideas. Probably the foremost leader of Korean Christian-nationalists was Ahn Changho (1878-1938), who wanted not only to free his compatriots from the foreign rule, but also to create a new constitution, which would be an expression of high morality and heroism, based on Christianity. This is why he was called "Korea's Moses". "The Christian Ahn Changho extended the covenantal relationship between God and man to the constitutional relationship between brothers and sisters whose fundamental God-given rights and responsibilities allowed them to be the people of a nation of freedom, justice, and democracy" (Pak 2006, 141).

As evident, Ahn Changho based his political agenda on the Christian concept of society that corresponds to the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is Church. His sketches served as the basis for the future Korean Constitution. Moreover, he had found the inspiration in the teachings of the Apostle Paul, thus trying to create a blueprint for the Korean state with Jesus as the Head and the people as His body. "Paul sought to prepare God's people for works of service to build the unified body of Christ as mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4: 13). With a prophetic gaze, Ahn Changho too envisaged a sacred unity of compatriots as a collective body of togetherness in spirit and flesh for the blessed future of his homeland" (Pak 2006, 142). His approach to the problem was rather optimistic. He believed that there is no better way to found a new Korean state, more advanced and more democratic than before, than on the teachings of Christ, i.e. on Christian morality. Therefore, the image of Christ that Ahn Changho had in mind

was that of Jesus the King, although not heavenly, but the earthly one. His Jesus was the Founder of the new Korean state, a fair Ruler who brings both liberation and salvation to the oppressed people. However, not everybody was as optimistic as Ahn Changho was.

Kil Son-ju (1869-1935), nicknamed the “father of Korean Christianity”, was another important Christian-nationalist of the colonial period. “Though his theology owed much to evangelical missionaries from North America, who tended to preach an escapist gospel, his enthusiasm for scripture and spiritual renewal was a motivation for Korean Christians in the midst of political turmoil. He himself became one of the thirty-three signatories of the Declaration of Independence in 1919” (Kim 2008, 133). His initial engagement into the socio-political struggle against the Japanese rule was overshadowed only by his strict acceptance of the words of Scripture. One of Christian doctrines, which had an enormous impact on Kil’s thought, was that of the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, Kil’s Christian thought was mainly millennialist. As the matter of fact, Koreans believed that Maitreya Buddha would come to restore the human society and rule over it. Christianity proposed another messianic figure – Jesus Christ.

Being arrested by the Japanese after the protests of the Independence Movement in March 1919, Kil lost his faith in liberation from the Japanese colonialism and turned away from the politics. Instead, Kil preached the Second Coming of Christ and founding of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, he was not an optimist as Ahn Changho was. His teachings were exposed in the work entitled *Malsehak* (Eschatology). Kil founds his millennialist theology primarily on the Book of Revelation, but also mentions several contemporary prophecies from other religious groups about the coming of a savior who will establish the perfect empire on Earth, including Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim prophecies. “He points out that as all three religions oppose Christianity, the Buddhist should have prophesized about the coming of Buddha; the Muslim, the Prophet; and the Hindu, one of the deities. Nevertheless, the fact that they do not do so but rather leave the identity anonymous is a sign that God is using other religions to give evidence of the Second Coming of Jesus” (Kim 2006, 154). All these prophecies placed the coming of the Savior in 1960s or 1970s, so Kil concluded that there would be no liberation from the political oppression. Rather, the agony will end when Jesus come for the second time and establish the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Kil’s thought, Jesus will bring up the Kingdom of Heaven, but the reality will be divided in three spheres: heavenly paradise, earthly paradise (Eden) and hell. Jesus will reside in earthly paradise with the sages, including Confucius and Buddha. “Kil does not, however, leave Jesus permanently in this position. Jesus goes on to the ultimate destination, Yongsaeengguk, where the Eternal God the Father reigns – a kingdom built of precious metals and

jewels – and the only way to enter this kingdom is by believing in Jesus and following him” (Kim 2006, 156). Those who were good but not Christians, such as Confucius and Buddha, will temporarily reside in the earthly paradise, because they did not believe in Jesus, but they also did not deserve the eternal punishment in the fires of hell. After some time spent in the earthly paradise, the sages will enter the heavenly paradise and live there with Father and Jesus.

Another Korean Christian who thought that the only way out of the state of political and social oppression is to pray was Lee Yong-Do. His approach was not as radical as that of Kil Son-ju, but it included similar practice. He initiated the weekly meetings of Christians for prayer in 1928, and his legacy continued even after his death in 1933. In short, Lee Yong-Do wanted to present Christ as a Victor over the authorities of this world. “His theological basis was the personal experience of oneness with Christ, by which the believer could experience the transformation of the life and spirit of Jesus. This required complete self-denial and identification with Christ’s suffering. Lee’s methods evoked Korean mystical and shamanistic religiosity. He claimed that Jesus Christ had defeated the spirits and demons of popular Korean belief, and engaged in healing and exorcism” (Kim 2008, 135). Whatever consequences his teachings might have had in the time of Japanese enforced rule, Lee Yong-Do is still regarded as one of the forerunners of the future *minjung* theology of liberation in Korea. The experience of Christ’s suffering in the life of an ordinary man assumed the role of the primary source of Korean Christology, besides the Holy Scripture itself.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these feelings of oppression and suffering produced the images of Christ typical for each Christian community during the periods of persecutions by the earthly authorities. When the native Joseon dynasty strove to annihilate the Christianity, Christian-Confucians engaged into dialogue with scholar-officials and produced apologetic tracts, in which they express their hopes in Jesus as the Reformer of the declining society. However, when the foreigners conquered Korea, Christians hoped that Christ the Liberator and Founder of a new society will renew Korea and establish it on His teachings, while the others, disappointed in the justice of this world, yearned for His Second Coming and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever Kingdom they hoped for after the end of Japanese rule, Koreans soon faced with the enemy from within.

### **Korean liberation theology: Jesus as the Minjung**

Immediately after the conclusion of the Second World War, Korea was divided in two administrative zones, the northern one being under the strong influence of the Soviet Union. Communist government of the North Korea invaded the South Korea in 1950, thus starting the bloody Korean War, which

lasted until 1954. The country was inevitably divided, and the North Korea enclosed itself. However, the end of war did not mean the end of troubles for the South Korea. When the military leader Park Chung-hee rose to power, he tried to extend his authorities and to assume the permanent presidency. That caused the outbreak of the large demonstrations, but Park readily met the unrest and fought against the people until 1979, when he was assassinated. Naturally, the common people suffered the most, partially due to the political turmoil after the Korean War, but also due to the formation of large companies, whose capitalist economy practically victimized the poor populace.

Christian theologians soon understood that the new theology must be developed in order to meet the needs of Korean Christians, who were living in the time of great social and economic oppression and political turbulences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their attitude toward the awful state of the people was expressed in the “Korean Christian Declaration” of 1973: “*Jesus the Messiah, our Lord, lived and dwelt among the oppressed, poverty-stricken, and sick in Judea. He boldly confronted Pontius Pilate, a representative of the Roman Empire, and he was crucified while witnessing to the truth. He has risen from the dead, releasing the power to transform and set the people free. We resolve that we will follow the footsteps of our Lord, living among our oppressed and poor people, standing against political oppression, and participating in the transformation of history, for this is the only way to the Messianic Kingdom*” (quoted from: Kim 2003, 228). Soon afterwards, the Protestant theologians in Korea had developed a liberation theology, better known as the *minjung* theology. Although there are some other branches of Korean theology, *minjung* is the best expression of the authentic Asian and specifically Korean Christology, and it was exposed and developed by the most brilliant Christian minds in the Peninsula.

The word *minjung* comes from the two Chinese characters: *min* (people) and *chung* (masses), presenting the suffering people under the political regimes of the time. Already in its name, the *minjung* theology signifies the feeling of sociality, which greatly defines its systematic approach to the issues of the theological disciplines. However, “it is not the theology of one theologian but indeed a people’s theology worked out by a number of theologians connected with people’s organizations. In it suffering people find a voice” (Wielenga 1999, 47). Accordingly, all who are oppressed belong to the *minjung*, poor and despised, humiliated and neglected. In the first days of its formation, the *minjung* movement’s theology seemed to many South Koreans as the communist idea, but there are many important points of disagreement between the two. Being purely Christian social movement and ideology, the *minjung* theology “cannot be defined by socio-economic factor alone as Marxist theory does when it speaks of the proletariat. *Minjung* is a wider, more dynamic concept” (Wielenga 1999, 48). It includes not only the

oppressed Korean Christians or Christians in general, but rather all people in the world who suffer, regardless of their religion or nationality.

The minjung theologians see the primary cause of the people's suffering in the social and political circumstances, and not in the fallen state of human nature. Therefore, the individual repentance is merely a secondary factor that contributes to one's salvation, because the very condition of the minjung is what identifies them with Christ. "This point of view stems from the notion of 'social sin' that blamed the suffering of the *minjung* on social structures rather than on personal sin. The condition of the *minjung*, one from which they have to be saved, has to do with the suffering stemming from these social structures" (Chang 2006, 205). The Korean term for this state of suffering is *han*, which is a feeling of the depression and nothingness, but it also contains a hope for a better future, giving one a will to live in the awful conditions of the unjust world. An interesting fact is that the minjung theologians tend to deal more with the *han* than with the original Christian concept of sin. In other words, one should free himself primarily from the *han*. The way of surpassing the feeling of *han* is called *tan*. "Literally it denotes 'cutting away', but theologically, *minjung* theologians understood *tan* as a process of transcendence and transformation. Transcendence from the condition of *han* can only come about as the *minjung* actively struggle for their own liberation" (Chang 2006, 205). According to this statement, the significance of the minjung theology would end when the social conditions of the oppressed are changed and improved, i.e. when the process of *tan* is completed. The fact is that the minjung theology is still relevant in the Korean Christianity, although the *tan* seems to be finished, but that is so chiefly due to its contribution to the improvement of Korean society in general. In the time of wars and military regimes, Christianity emphasized its message of equality and liberation, "showing the poor and oppressed that they are not or should not be the objects of exploitation and that their protest was a legitimate one. Minjung theology has been good news to the poor and, like the gospel of holistic blessing, it was intended to uplift the poor" (Kim 2008, 140).

One might notice the similarity between the Korean minjung theology and the theology of God's pain, developed by Kazo Kitamori in Japan. Both theologies deal with the suffering of the people, but the Korean theologians do not welcome the entire Kitamori's thought. They actually assume an offensive stance against Kitamori, arguing that he does not pay enough attention to the historical crimes against Koreans and Chinese committed by the Japanese, which also contributed to the rise of the minjung theology. "It was argued that Kitamori's theological language of God's pain is meaningless without demonstrating repentance for the Japanese sins of oppression and genocide toward their neighbors. Here, minjung theology exhibits itself as a theology which represents the victim" (Chung 2009, 188-189). Regardless of the

disagreement between Kitamori and the *minjung* theologians, both thoughts influenced the development of the image of Christ as crucified people by the Taiwanese Choan-Seng Song. The crucified people, or the *minjung*, thus identify itself with the Suffering Christ, while the victimized people recognize the oppressors in foreign invaders, political authorities, and even in Church itself.

One of the best expressions of the *minjung* theology is the Korean poet Kim Chi Ha's play "The Golden-Crowned Jesus". In the play, Jesus is imprisoned in the concrete statue inside the church, and He asks the beggars to set Him free and to remove the golden crown from His head. Once they did this, the police arrested the beggars and returned the golden crown back on Jesus' head. "The poet thus suggests that the church has reduced Jesus once again into a frozen statue, a decoration. As Jesus longed for liberation from classical notions formulated by Western churches, the poor people became the liberators of the colonial Christologies" (Orevillo-Montenegro 2006, 37). It was already mentioned that the Asians could not accept the classic European image of Christ the King, and that image entailed the doctrinal formulations that did not correspond to the Confucian way of thinking. Criticizing the European image of Christ, Kim Chi Ha actually tends to warn the Christians that Jesus did not want to establish a school of philosophy, but rather a loving community of the faithful people. The poet does not stand against the dogma, but against the Church leaders who use dogma to oppress the *minjung* even in Church. His idea is further developed in the works of Suh Nam-Dong and Ahn Byung-Mu, both of which emphasized the *minjung* theology of liberation in 1970s, during the military regime of Park Chung-hee.

Suh Nam-Dong exposed his teachings two years after the "Korean Christian Declaration". His message is simple: Jesus came to the poor and oppressed, so His Gospel is also for the poor and the oppressed, for their liberation and redemption. Suh bases his theology on several key events from the history of salvation. "The two historical events of the Exodus and the crucifixion-resurrection, the history of the church, and the *minjung* movement in Korean history, are to be interpreted via the approach of the sociology of literature for the proper understanding and construction of the social biography of the *minjung*, with the aim of promoting the identity of the *minjung* in their striving to become the subjects of their own history and destiny" (Chi Chung Lee 2005, 523). As for the Exodus, Suh states that Moses had heard and felt the *han* of the people, while Jesus Himself was the *han* or the outcry of the *minjung*. In other words, the event of Exodus is a historical event, valid in its own time and place, while the crucifixion-resurrection is an ongoing process of the salvation of the people, because Jesus identified Himself with the *minjung*.

Ahn Byung-Mu is surely the most prominent among the *minjung* theologians. He is notable because of his interpretation of Jesus as *ochlos*,

and not as *laos*, because he finds the true meaning of the Gospel narratives in the notions of the common people (*ochlos*) gathered around Christ. In other words, he represents Jesus as *ochlos-minjung*. Kim Chi Ha's play "The Golden-Crowned Jesus" finds its doctrinal expression in Ahn's works, and that is why Ahn himself "portrays the Christ as imprisoned by Christian dogma, and the liberated Jesus as at one with the poor, the miserable, and the persecuted" (Chi Chung Lee 2005, 524). Similar to Kim, Ahn distinguishes between those to whom Christ came and those who imprisoned Christ in the "concrete statues" of traditional Christianity. His thought is still purely Biblical, although it is not traditional interpretation of the text, but rather the placement of Jesus into the historical and social context of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Judea and 20<sup>th</sup> century Korea.

The most important elements in Ahn's theology are the Biblical notions of *ochlos*, *Apiru*, and *am haaretz*. The *ochlos* is the God's people, enslaved by the Romans; *am haaretz* and *Apiru* signify the free herdsmen, enslaved by the Egyptians. The culmination of the Old Testament *minjung* theology is precisely the Exodus, interpreted as the liberation of the *am haaretz*, God's children. "Ahn Byung-Mu translates the *Apiru*, *am haaretz*, and *ochlos* into the Korean term: *minjung*. Ahn's *minjung* theology is a political theology of solidarity with the *massa perditionis* (the public lost multitude) in our contemporary context by proposing his Christological contour of Jesus' social biography with *ochlos*" (Chung 2009, 189-190). As evident, Ahn does not identify Jesus with the people who live happily in the Promised Land. His *ochlos-minjung* are only the enslaved people, all those who suffer in the same way the people in the time of Christ suffered in Roman Judea and Galilee.

Ahn found the Greek term *ochlos* in the Gospel of Mark, in which it is used thirty-six times. Mark uses the noun *ochlos* to describe the crowd gathered around Jesus, mostly poor, neglected, and despised individuals. Jesus spent most of His time surrounded by the *ochlos*, and not by the *laos*, which is a term that Ahn interprets as opposed to the *ochlos-minjung*, the friends of Jesus. "The *laos* (Greek 'people'), the chosen people of God, on the other hand, have kept a distance from Jesus" (Chi Chung Lee 2005, 524). This is not because Jesus Himself refused the company of the *laos*, but because the *laos* refused and crucified Him. Actually, the *laos* are all those who oppress the *ochlos*, mostly Pharisees, scribes, priests, and Romans in Jesus' time, identified with the political oppressors in South Korea in the time of Ahn. He claims that Mark was the first to understand the true meaning of the *ochlos*; moreover, he believes that Mark uses the term intentionally in order to denote the socially oppressed *minjung* of the Galilee, the majority of Jesus' followers, with whom Jesus identified Himself.

The identification of Jesus and the *ochlos-minjung* is, therefore, the most important feature of Ahn's theology. Accordingly, he states that the messianic consciousness of Jesus was not the same as the one Pharisees, scribes, and the

apostles had in mind. His messianic mission was to come to the *minjung* and suffer like them and for them. As evident in the Gospel narratives, Jesus was followed by the *ochlos*, and He preached primarily to the *ochlos*. Therefore, He identified Himself with the oppressed and poor people, i.e. with the *minjung*. “There is no Jesus without the *ochlos-minjung*, as conversely there is no *ochlos-minjung* without Jesus. Jesus is no longer the Christ of the Church with his golden crown. Jesus should be seen from the angle of the forsaken, naked, and castigated *minjung*” (Chung 2009, 190-191). The parable of a Good Samaritan is one of the best examples of this identification, but Ahn does not interpret it as the Westerners do. As the matter of fact, the Good Samaritan is not an image of Christ or of a good Christian; rather, the beaten man represent both *minjung* and Jesus. There lies the true meaning of Jesus as the Messiah: He is not the King or the Priest, but the oppressed people, and only by dying for the *ochlos-minjung*, He reveals His true identity as both merciful God and neglected Man. “For Ahn, and other *minjung* theologians, Jesus becomes the Messiah not because he is in fact God, but because as a fellow *minjung*, he carries on his shoulders the social sins of an unjust world. Thus the purpose of the parable of the good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke is not to reveal generosity and compassion of a Christian neighbor, but rather to invite the Christian to identify with Jesus and the suffering *minjung* robbed and beaten on the road to Jericho” (Chang 2006, 207).

By this radically low Christology, Ahn wanted to make a distinction between Christ of the *kerygma* and historical Jesus. His opinion is that the Christ of the *kerygma*, i.e. Christ of the dogmatic formulations, should not be an object of worship. Of course, Ahn does not break up with the dogma of Christ, but states that such Jesus has no relevance in the modern time, or for the contemporary *ochlos*. Rather, historical Jesus is the Person who can relate to the common people, the *minjung*, and that is why the theologians must go back to the roots of the faith. “To Ahn, the *kerygma* paradigm not only de-historicized the Jesus-event, but it also propped up the authority of the church. He criticized the paradigm because, in his view, *the Christology in this Kerygma has greatly served as an ideology to preserve the Church, but at the cost of silencing Jesus*” (Orevillo-Montenegro 2006, 38). This Ahn’s sentence summarizes the entire authentic East Asian Christology: Jesus is not European property, because He belongs to the world, regardless of nations’ color, ethnicity, or religion. Moreover, he belongs to the lowest classes of each society, to all those who are discriminated by various oppressors, even if the oppressor are the leaders of the Church themselves. If Jesus would come, He would go to the *ochlos-minjung*, and not to the political or spiritual authorities.

The *minjung* theology of Suh Nam-Dong and Ahn Byung-Mu is surely the revolutionary step forward (or backward) to the authentic Jesus of the Gospels, since the first images of Jesus in the East Asia were blurred by the

incomprehensible doctrines and short versions of His life, transferred in such form by the European missionaries. Due to the efforts made by the modern Korean theologians, one clearer image of Christ was uncovered – Jesus the Liberator of the oppressed *minjung*, or even Jesus the *Minjung*. However, the poor and oppressed *minjung* now live in one of the most advanced countries of the world – South Korea. In other words, they are neither oppressed nor poor any more. This fact brings the contemporary relevance of the *minjung* theology in question, because “the resources of *minjung* theology, which accumulated the grudges of *minjung* against the political-social suppression and made *minjung* a resistant dynamic power, has been exhausted in a considerable measure. The critical voices calling for more self reflection in the circles of the first generation of *minjung* theologians have come out. They assert that *minjung* theology has to go back to the Biblical text” (Kim, J. H. 2004, 145). Nevertheless, there is also another side of the coin, the one that presents the miserable condition of the various *ochlos-minjung* all over the world, including the oppressed masses in North Korea, India, Africa, etc. As long as there are the *minjung*, the *minjung* theology itself will be applicable.

### Conclusion

One can hardly justify the struggle of the Koreans for liberation and firmly reject their understanding of Christ at the same time. Some of aforementioned Christologies are truly problematic from the point of view of traditional Christianity in the West, but there are many reasons to admire them, too. In some circumstances, it seems that Westerners, who are now far from the necessity of liberation theology, forget that Jesus Christ is not contained in the theological and historical tracts about Ecumenical Councils, etc. Oppressed Koreans actually freed themselves with an image of Christ that is not only theoretical or seemingly relevant to the contemporary problems of humanity. The theological system of Saint Cyril of Alexandria, or that of Saint Leo the Great, was not relevant to the poor and oppressed subjects of imperial China or imperial Japan. Gospel was all they had. An image of Jesus with poor and neglected around Him was their primary source of Christianity, and they soon identified themselves with those masses around Jesus. They were *minjung*, and Christ was a *Minjung*.

However, the traditionalist critic of Korean Christology is not the topic or goal of this paper. It is actually an overview of the development of that Christology and its consequences in historical, economic, and social context of contemporary Korea. Hopingly, the paper achieved its primary goal, and that is to bring a western reader closer to the word of liberation theology in (traditionally or historically) non-Christian Asian countries. Korea is probably best such example. There is also a liberation theology in China and Japan, but

none of these countries produced theologies that are almost purely liberating in nature. Having historical continuity in mind, one might state that all theologies began evolving primarily as liberation theologies, and continued to develop in other directions after this initial problem was solved. In addition, Korean theology is relatively young, so there are still many issues waiting for an adequate solution. One such issue is the division of Korean people in two countries that are constantly hostile towards each other, while the second one is rapid westernization of South Korea and its loss of traditional values. These are, therefore, some of the questions waiting for minjung theology's definitive answer, and the time will show whether this particular theology is able to maintain its relevance in the contemporary world or not.

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### **Исус Христос и Минђунг у корејској теологији ослобођења**

**Анстракт.** Историја корејског хришћанства је, заправо, историја специфичне теологије ослобођења која је дефинисала слике Христа, јединствене за источноазијски начин мишљења. Корејци су се суочавали са бројним невољама на националном нивоу још од 17. века, па су ове проблеме покушали решити помоћу својих старих религијских и философских система, али су се они показали као неадекватни пред суровим политичким режимима и тешким социјалним стањем. Хришћанство је било нова религија која, по њиховом схватању, није обећавала ослобођење само у животу после смрти, као што су чинили неки огранци будизма, него и у овом животу. Излажући историју овог процеса ослобођења, аутор објашњава сваку слику Христа која се појавила у корејској теологији од увођења хришћанства у ову земљу у 17. веку. Иако су већином непознате у нашим теолошким круговима, ове корејске слике Христа су веома важне за схватање начина на који православно хришћанство може бити проповедано народу који је данас више од 30% хришћански.