The title phrase “contextual challenges” is equivocal. The Christian community in Korea was challenged by the socio-economic and political situation under the military dictatorship. How was the web of generative themes restructured by those who responded to these challenges and how did they tackle the relevance-identity dilemma (1)? The resulting Minjung theology challenged and was challenged in its turn in intercultural discourse, thereby putting the dialogue criteria into practice (2). Two themes recurred throughout these debates: who is the subject of theology (3) and what is the relation between truth and experience (4)?

1. Reweaving the Web of Generative Themes

Poverty, oppression and division of the country—or to put it positively justice, human rights, democratization and reunification—were the generative themes of the South Korean context in the 1970s and 1980s. How did they affect and interact with the web of generative themes of the Christian text? Taken together the five preceding biographical-theological sketches allow me to give an overview of how this web was rewoven in Minjung theology.

The discovery of Christ among the minjung made Christology the link from which the reweaving process got started. With his relecture of the Gospel of Mark, Ahn Byung-Mu elevated the life of Jesus to a constitutive part of Christology again, which had long focused only on his death and resurrection. All three aspects together constitute what Ahn calls the Jesus event. Jesus lived among the Galilean ochlos, the uprooted ‘little people’, whom Ahn sees as analogous to the Korean minjung. They were the primary addressees of Jesus’ mission.

1 Similar thoughts can be found in feminist theology. Cf. Kathryn Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity. A Brief Systematic Theology, Minneapolis 2001.
The interpretation of his death as a sacrifice is bypassed. Jesus is not suffering for but with the minjung. The hope for resurrection becomes the hope for liberation of the minjung.\(^2\)

The sacrificial interpretation that Jesus has suffered for humanity, presupposes that human sin cannot be overcome by human beings themselves. That the minjung are also sinners on a personal basis is not neglected by Minjung theologians, but is certainly not their major concern. Minjung ministers of the second generation who lived among the minjung had to cope with their factual shortcomings, like egoism, fraud and violence. Nevertheless they had deep experiences of conversion to the poor of Jesus Christ by living with them and reading the Bible together. By taking over the concept of “sinned againstness”, Minjung theologians highlighted the social dimension of the doctrine on human sin. The minjung are suffering under the “structural sins” of oppression and poverty, as Latin American liberation theologians would put it.\(^3\) Jesus Christ shares in the lot of the minjung, not only back then in Galilee and Jerusalem under Roman occupation, but also today through dying on the cross of the military dictatorship and the division of the country. The Jesus event is reenacted in the daily life struggle of the minjung. In practice this corporate interpretation of the theology of the cross fulfills a similar function than the sacrifice metaphor. Christ’s presence among the minjung reaffirms them in their human dignity before God and men against all hardships of their daily life. God’s rightousness restores the right of the minjung.

Suffering (\(\text{han}\)) is the generative theme at the core of Minjung theology. In the presence of God in Jesus Christ among the minjung text and context fuse. That God is acting in history through the Spirit and the risen Christ is present in the Spirit (\(\text{Christus praeens}\)) is taken for granted here. The presence of God amidst human suffering is a key idea already in Martin Luther’s Heidelberg disputation on the theology of the cross from 1518 in the birthing of Protestant theology. With his statement “God is to be found only in suffering and cross” (supporting argument for thesis xxi) Luther makes the cross of Christ the hermeneutical key to discover traces of God’s presence in history—“the theology of the cross names things by their right name” (Thesis xxi).

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