

Encountering the Minjung through Three Symbols:
The Multitude, the *Inmin*, and the Subaltern

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I. Introduction

In this essay, I will discuss some of unspoken, but broadly taken-for-granted conceptions and beliefs about minjung in the present Korean society. Such conceptions lead to misunderstanding the reality of minjung. So I will suggest three important ideas or symbols that will help us explore the reality of minjung. They are multitude, *inmin* (人民, a people with a proletarian connotation), and the subaltern.

Each of the three symbols portrayed here, provides us certain insight into the reality of minjung. But it is limited and partial in disclosing the reality of the minjung. Thus, by evaluating and integrating all of the three symbolical understandings, one can hope to arrive closer to the reality of minjung.

In order to make clear the method I employ here, I should like to state that I will draw on the conception of symbol expounded specifically by the famous Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. His major idea about symbol is that every being must realize itself in others, that is, in symbols. This is an ontological requirement. I will regard each of the three ideas of the multitude, the inmin, and the subaltern as the symbolic that expresses the reality of minjung in its own way. Also, I will draw on the Indian dalit theology in my discussion on the subject matter. I learned and adopted the term subaltern from dalit theology.

The subaltern perspective was kept alive in the first generation minjung theology in the 1970's and 1980's, but it seems to me that new-generation minjung theologians including myself tend not to take it as seriously as their predecessors. The reason for this lies in the big change of our context and situation. The economic backwardness and political dictatorship and oppression, which had been a trade mark of Korea in the 1970's and 1980's, when minjung theology was first created, are today no

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longer dominant phenomena. The subaltern perspective, however, ought to be activated as an integral element for the reality of minjung. By subaltern, I mean the most marginalized and oppressed people in society. They are poorer than any other constituents of the minjung. I include in the category of the subaltern, temporary physical laborers, migrant workers, poor women and children, and chronically unemployed people in the Korean context.

Finally, I will show that the symbolic relationship of Jesus with minjung will help disclose the most important aspect of minjung: minjung as the subject of history and the messianic being for history.

The major purpose of this essay is to understand who minjung really are in the changed context. This is a theological matter. The Indian dalit theologian A. P. Nirmal stated thus: "We must note first of all that dalit theology is concerned with a people who are denied their essential humanhood. .. It is therefore a people's theology. The primary datum for doing this theology is people themselves. The word 'people' here becomes a theological category, a theological concept. It is both a theological concept and a sociological reality."² What makes Asian liberation theology such as minjung and dalit theologies distinct from Latin American liberation theology is that the latter focuses on an idea, liberation, whereas the former starts with and focuses on the real people. The late minjung theologian Suh Namdong emphasized that minjung is the major concern of theology and that even Jesus is a means to understand minjung.³ Another late minjung theologian Ahn Byungmu made a pioneer research on the *ochlos* (the multitude) in the Gospel of Mark in order to better understand the minjung in our context.⁴

II. Unspoken Popular Beliefs about Minjung

I will delineate popular beliefs about minjung in our times. My approach to this matter will be made by employing the concept of the "Big Other," a concept borrowed

² A. P. Nirmal, "Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective," *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, ed. Arvind. P. Nirmal, (Madras, India; Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1991?): 139.

³ Suh Namdong, *Minjungshinhak ui Tamgu* (Quest for Minjung Theology) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983), 53.

⁴ Ahn Byungmu, "Jesus and Minjung in the Context of Mark," *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, ed. Kim Yongbock, (London; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Zed/Orbis, 1983) 138-152.

from Jacques Lacan. Such expression as “It is said” and “They say” denotes the reality that we are under a heavy influence of the other being. This other being is not necessarily existent as an entity. It is rather an unwritten symbolic order. We live and think unconsciously in this order, and we cannot control it. It has power defining our world and our thought and belief. The Lacanian school calls it language. It is like the Trojan horse, which was a gift by the Greeks, but turned out a trick to capture Troy. Like the Trojan horse language is a gift for us, but it arrests us. It is a convenient tool for our communication, but it enslaves us by its determinate meaning system.

It is said (by the “Big Other,” to borrow the term from the book on Jacques Lacan by Slavoj Žižek)⁵ that the ordinary poor people (minjung) no longer play active role in historical and political arenas that is controlled by the neo-liberal capitalist symbolic system. Žižek says that “the Big Other operates at a symbolic level.”⁶ The predominant neo-liberal global capitalism as a system creates a symbolic world that sets a certain set of rules and presuppositions. In such a world it is commonly believed that minjung is not the subjects in history, but objects of the sovereignty. It is commonly accepted that lower classes and subalterns are inferior in many respects, including intelligence, morality, and spirituality. Such a symbolic world is a highly stratified one. Individuals and collectivities are classified in terms of the social statuses they are in. Dominant classes have their voices heard. The people at the bottom strata do not have voices in the public arena. It is assumed that they are simply objects, and that they are simply there to be disposed by the powers of the society. The minjung in this context are often regarded as passive, inactive, indifferent, and even obeying and rule-abiding, masses. Such minjung are thought to be incapable of realizing democracy and liberation. Very often, however, the silent masses turn to violent rioters and mobs destroying orders imposed upon them. That is why the counter-minjung surveillance system is operated all the time by central governments and powers.

Thus, there is not only a symbolic order that have effective power on us all, but also actual bio-political powers that put into effect the written or unwritten rules of the neo-liberal capitalist symbolic order. Governments, states, and imperial powers, global financial institutes (IMF, World Bank), the group of powerful states (G8 or G20) and many local governments, institutions, and their elite groups are agents of the bio-political power, which not only maintains and strengthens the present symbolic order, but controls all aspects of our life deep into our mind and body by its written and unwritten belief system and effective forces. The collective intellect facilitating the

⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 9.

⁶ Ibid.

global order comes from the top in hierarchy. In this case the collective intellect is no more than the sovereign will of Empire.

The spirit and power (in fact, spirit has an effectual power on us) of the present global capitalist world is imbued in, and effective on, the every corner of our life, in education, business, politics, and culture, and perpetuate the minjung in the state of passivity and voicelessness. In order to break up such an all-pervasive symbolic and political order, some thinkers proposed alternative worlds where minjung are considered as multitude, *inmin*, or subaltern, which I would suggest as refreshing ideas on minjung and useful in envisioning an alternative (symbolic) world.

III. Minjung as Multitude

Multitude is a useful symbol to express who minjung are today. Minjung are multitude, and multitude minjung. Minjung is composed of the two words: min(民, ordinary people) and jung(衆, multitude). So minjung by definition is multitude of ordinary people. In the past, minjung is referred to as an alliance of many different oppressed classes.

The idea of multitude emerged out of the examination of, and reflection on, the postmodern Western world. Simply speaking, the idea of multitude is a product of postmodern Western world, although this idea is indebted to Baruch Spinoza, the Jewish and Dutch philosopher of the 17th century. The particular idea minjung came out of the context of the modern but underdeveloped Korea in the 1970's-80's. I would argue that the concept of multitude can be applicable to the current postmodern society in Korea, and useful because it casts a new light on the current minjung.

In postmodern society the immaterial labor is an hegemonic labor, which will determine the characteristics of the future society; and intellectual workers constitute a leading group that creates communication within different groups and classes in the multitude and helps construct the commonalities such as common goals of the movement of the multitude.⁷ Of course, the poor migrant workers, informally employed workers, unemployed workers, and other poor people, who are traditionally called

⁷ The information (immaterial) workers and intellectuals were at the core in mobilizing massive candle light demonstrations in Seoul, in May, 2008, when they protested against the government that had permitted the import of the potentially unsafe beef from the U.S. Negri asserted that intellectual workers unite other exploited sectors in the struggle against Empire. Refer to Antonio Negri, *Empire and Beyond*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008) 49.

minjung, certainly fall under the category of the multitude. The idea of multitude is inclusive, involving into itself many different classes and groups, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, and immaterial workers and material workers, who are commonly exploited, though in different ways, under the domination and the so-called rationalization policies of Empire. The multitude points to the ordinary people under the dominance of Empire. In our post-modern times, *minjung* seem emerging into a new breed, multitude.

Empire here does not refer to a specific country like the U.S. It refers to overruling, global, sovereign, network power. Empire symbolizes a global political and economic sovereignty which has as its core rationality, order, efficiency, and dominance, aided by high and sophisticated technology and science, military forces, and bureaucratic and hierarchical systems. Empire is immanent in any country. It is widespread and controlling the world. Empire is a consensus or a network of global elite groups and countries. Empire employs its kin ideology such as neo-liberalism to control nations, groups and individuals under its control. It curtails the potentiality, creativity, and subjectivity of the multitude and *minjung*. It wants to leave the multitude as the object of government and rule. It never stops creating scapegoats. But, the multitude represents the power against Empire and its way of life.

Again, the transition from underdevelopment to development results in the emergence of the multitude out of the context of South Korea. In the Korean history, the modernity times fall into the period of the 1960's – early the 1990's. In the modernity, the term people or *minjung* could be identified with such classical categories as the social class and the nation. *Minjung* were then composed of the poor and industrial workers in general; they were also the people within the boundary of the nation and country. In the modern times, the consciousness of *minjung* was mainly that of class and nation. *Minjung* in the modern world was the people in the factory and within national territory. In the postmodern times, roughly since the 1990's and on, *minjung* no longer limit itself to a relatively narrow concept, but burst its outer boundary of the nation and the factory and expand its boundary into the globe and society; *minjung* is now multitude, which is the solidarity of many different and singular individuals, groups and classes, whose bodies and minds are commonly objectified, controlled and exploited by the systems of Empire.

Antonio Negri argues, the exploited subjects not only resist, but in the long run will contain the power of Empire.⁸ The major characteristics of postmodern labor are very negative ones: “mobility, flexibility, and precarity,” according to Negri. But these

⁸ *Empire and Beyond*, pp. 42-43.

negativities can be turned into a positive power to resist and transform the “capitalist bio-power, or Empire.”⁹ Negri asserts that the power for transformation of the world comes from the ability of the multitude to construct “common objects of struggle” among many singularities (singular groups and classes).¹⁰ The leading sector of the multitude is the intellectual working class.

The most crucial element that makes multitude transformers and protesters in the world is their ability to make the common. The common is already given to the multitude because the latter are commonly under exploitation by Empire. But in order for the multitude to actualize the resistance, the common must be constructed and created by concretizing the common objects of struggle. The ability to construct the common transforms the scattered sectors of the society, or singularities, into the multitude,¹¹ the postmodern minjung resisting and transforming.

Then, what is the role of the subaltern and the people most alienated and lacking people in terms of employment, citizenship or residence rights, the caste, and the race? The representative advocates for the idea of multitude, Negri and Hardt, seem rather optimistic about the situation of the poor and subaltern, the most oppressed and alienated. They affirm that “the poor do have an enormous wealth in their knowledge and power of creation.” They point specially to poor migrant workers who seek better opportunity in more affluent countries.¹² Hardt and Negri argue that although migrant workers are poor and disadvantaged, they are “full of knowledge, languages, skills, and creative capacities.”¹³ Negri and Hardt seem to think that the subaltern people such as the poorest and lowest classes and outcasts such as dalits, belong to the category of the multitude, and that the multitude are the only forces to bring Empire down and then to create an alternative society, by never-ending communication and cooperation among themselves.¹⁴ However, the weakness in the thought of Hardt and Negri lies in their treating the voiceless subaltern people in the world just like other constituents of the multitude such as cognitive migrant workers and affective laborers. Can the service a dalit housemaid provides for the family be categorized under an affective labor? They seem to consider the subaltern people simply as the poor. The subaltern people are lacking in necessary knowledge and skills to survive with in this high-tech, postmodern,

⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

¹¹ Cesare Casarino & Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common*, (Minneapolis, Min.: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 177.

¹² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2004), 129–134.

¹³ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴ Ibid., 194.

postindustrial world. On top of that, they are discriminated against along the lines of gender, caste, class, race, religion, and ethnicity. They could not receive education; they cannot afford to invest for their health, education, and other necessary things for their own life. They are situated in the most alienated condition in the society. However, their demands and voices are not delivered to the public. The situation the subaltern people find themselves in is much more tense and despairing than Hardt and Negri imagine.

IV. Minjung as Subaltern

I am adapting here the concept of subaltern to the purpose of my paper. Some postcolonial thinkers define it as a word to refer to marginalized groups and lower classes without social status in the context of postcolonial world.¹⁵ I would define the subaltern as the most oppressed, most marginalized, and most powerless. In other words, the subaltern are the most oppressed among the multitude and minjung. *Altern* is derived from the other, who is regarded as different and other. *Sub* is by definition below and inferior. Subaltern, in this essay, refers to poor and alienated people who constitute the lowest strata in a society.

In fact, as I have indicated in the above, multitude is comprised of various different classes and groups, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, and immaterial workers and material workers, who are commonly struggling for their human living. Because the multitude is many, it includes many components. But the subaltern refers to the particularly more oppressed and more isolated up to the point of being voiceless and non-being. Their ability to make voice is weakened and nullified by the absolutely dominant power of the hegemonic intellect in society. The suffering servant of God pictured in Isaiah 53:3 (“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not”) is most aptly applied to the subaltern in our times. Subalterns are the lowest people in society. They are regarded as non-being by domestic and global elites. Their voices are not heard. They are simply non-existent in political and public arenas. In the present context of South Korea, temporary workers and migrant workers can be seen as belonging to the category of subaltern. Those people are most discriminated against by neoliberal market system. The present neoliberal biopowers have succeeded in plucking the sprouts of self-consciousness of these subaltern people.

¹⁵ “Subaltern (Postcolonialism)” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

The category of the subaltern is necessary because people belonging to that category are constantly created in the global and postindustrial society. Cognitive labor is becoming a dominant type of labor. But the subaltern is outside the main stream.

The subaltern minjung are most oppressed; however, they are the site where the life-giving and liberating Spirit moves. The site and space of the truth is located in the subaltern minjung. Their situation and their hope and aspiration constitute the site. We are all invited to enter this space so that we may become collaborators of the truth and resistance. At least we can affirm that the place the subaltern people belong to is the site of truth and resistance.

The most typical subaltern in the world is dalits, the untouchable, in India. Dalits are treated as the untouchable, impure, and outcasts. In Hindu society, dalits are below the Sudra caste, the caste of slaves. Dalits suffer from dire poverty and the stigma of untouchability. They are engaged in physical labor as opposed to cognitive labor. Subaltern peoples are not able to make at home in a technologically fast advancing society. They are poor and powerless, and they are forced to be fatalistic about their destiny. Such an inhuman and unjust state of the dalits is justified and defended by the Hindu Religion, the dominant religion in India

Traditional components of middle class such as college students and young college graduates tend in our times to plunge into the status of subaltern. Many college students and graduates are employed as minimum-waged, part-time temporary workers. Their future is hardly bright and their present suffering will continue. In the past, poverty was the phenomenon of the deprived classes such as uneducated urban and rural poor. But now, poverty is far spread into the middle classes. Some of the middle class family members are poor, and have to be dependent on their parents. Although their poverty is much less serious than the typical subaltern, they have potential to become active protesters against neoliberal capitalism. The site of protest and struggle in the age of global market, however, is the site of the most marginalized and oppressed. All the marginalized and alienated groups and classes must be united in alliance. And when they are united overcoming differences, they must give precedence to the wellbeing of the subaltern and must demand it (the precedence) to the whole society, because subaltern is the most oppressed and the most disfavored.¹⁶

¹⁶ I would like to quote the renowned Indian national figure and dalit Leader Dr. Ambedkar (1891–1956) in this regard. He said, “In order that it may produce ...justice in society, different people have to be treated unequally... What we want is equity. This equity cannot be produced, if we propose to treat the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the intelligent on the same footing.” His subaltern viewpoint of the society differentiates him from Gandhi’s Hindu viewpoint, which resulted in

V. Minjung as *Inmin*

The Korean term *Inmin* (人民) is composed of two words: *in* (人) and *min* (民). *In* refers to human, and *min* people. *Inmin* is equivalent to minjung by meaning. But the term *inmin* has developed in a different context and attained different meaning in comparison to minjung. The term *inmin* is used and developed in the Communist Korea (North Korea), whereas the term minjung is used to refer to the people under oppressive governments in the Capitalist Korea (South Korea). Both *inmin* and minjung refer to ordinary people as opposed to ruling elites. Minjung in the context of South Korea attains a political meaning, that is, the subjects of history. As subjects of and in history, minjung participate in socio-economic matters, resist injustice, and create historical events of liberation. *Inmin* in the context of North Korea likewise attains a political meaning, that is, part and parcel of the self-reliant, nationalist, communist Korea.

Inmin is one of the basic components of the North Korean political subjects: the leader, the party, and the *inmin*. *Inmin* is in theory the subjects of the nation, historical actors, and the source of power. But in practice the leader with the support of his bureaucracy is the actual subject and holds the key to determine the destiny of the nation. In this framework of power arrangement, *Inmin* have to be in agreement with the leader and have to fully trust in the leader's personality, intellect, will, and decision-makings. It looks like that agreement and trust actually happening in North Korea. *Inmin*, I would say, is a people that are incorporated fully into the state. In North Korea the experience of the people (*inmin*) united with the state and especially with its leader has lasted more than 60 years. We can assume that the *inmin* culture has been stabilized and structured in North Korea. The corporate intellect of *inmin* has been incorporated to the intellect and will of the party and its leader.

Still there have been reports, official or unofficial, that some of the *inmin* desert their land and cross the borders, and that quite a few women and children are roaming around for food and shelter in neighboring Chinese towns and cities. There are political prisoners harshly treated in North Korea. The situation of human rights in North Korea has been deteriorating. It is obvious that there are subalterns in North Korea, too

Theoretically speaking *inmin* stands for a people who tend to be in unity and in

exacerbating the suffering situation of the dalits in India. Quoted from P. Arockiadoss S.J., "The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar for Theologising in India," *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, ed. V. Devasahayam, (Madras, India: Gurukul Summer Institute, 1996): 296.

agreement with the sovereign state (and its leader), give trust in it and are loyal to it. They became *inmin*, because they are favored by the ruling powers. We can imagine a state of perfect harmony and full agreement between the ruling power and the ordinary people (the *inmin*). Such harmony may occur when the intellect of the people (*inmin*) is fully integrated into the intellect of the government, and vice versa. Political theology and philosophy regard such a state as of an eschatological hope. But such a state cannot be achieved without prophetic critiques and transformational conflicts.

The phenomena of *inmin* were often found in South Korea under the rule of the democratic governments (Presidents Kim Daejung and Roh Muhyun). These governments so favored minjung and progressive activists that the latter put quite a good amount of trust in the former. So when those governments were collaborative with neo-liberal capital, minjung and their activists failed in raising prophetic voices. Minjung and the state were so close to each other that minjung could not maintain a prophetic distance and space before political powers (the state). We may be able to apply such analysis to the *inmin* in North Korea. Spontaneous and willing collaboration and solidarity of minjung with the political powers and state is not defective in itself, but rather desirable, because we can imagine a perfect society where the division line between leaders/people, men/women, black/white/yellow is blurred and all are equally favored and treated. However, political powers are ambiguous in nature and are easily trapped into self-centeredness, self-grandeur, and authoritarianism. The *inmin* perspective is also ambiguous in that it is not able to create a critical distance from political powers.¹⁷ The prophetic distance can be created when the subaltern perspective is kept alive. The subaltern perspective is necessary because the desire and hope of the subaltern people serves as a fundamental base for liberation.

VI. The Subaltern Minjung, the Symbol of Jesus

Viewing the society and history from the perspective of the subaltern and other sacrificed people will produce alternative ideas on how the present socio-political ordinations must be rearranged. If we did not consider the subaltern as important players in history, the present politic-socio-cultural status quo would remain intact. The viewpoint of the subaltern was adopted from the beginning by minjung and dalit

¹⁷ I discussed this matter in my recent article, "Doing Minjung Theology in the Context of a Developed Country: Some Discourses on Minjung," in Kang Wondon, et al. *Dashi Minjung Shinhak ida* (Again, Minjung Theology) (Seoul: Dongyon, 2010): 290-92.

theologians. Such a point of view allows theologians to witness to the sufferings of the subaltern minjung in various nations, to hear and read the unheard voices and words coming from them, and to participate in their sufferings and struggles. More importantly the viewpoint of the subaltern opens up a way toward a fundamental transformation of history and society.

The subaltern minjung are the people crucified by the worldly powers. They are sacrificed and forsaken by God like Jesus. They are crucified people. The cross of Jesus symbolizes the death of subaltern minjung. In the eyes of God, the crucified must be treated as the most favored. In the divine economy the crucified is risen and resurrected. A just society is a society where the divine economy is realized. Such a society was hoped for by Ambedkar. To quote him,

I honestly believe that equality of treatment to people who are unequal is simply another name for indifferentism. I, therefore, think the principle of favored treatment must be adopted in their case... the most favored treatment to be given to those who deserve it and need it most.¹⁸

In theology divine and human dimensions are interpenetrating each other. Minjung and dalit theologies are much more so. The subaltern is the symbol of Jesus, and Jesus the symbol of the subaltern. Dalit is witnessed to as Jesus in dalit theology, so minjung as Jesus in minjung theology. Then dalit is divine as much as dalit is close to Jesus. Jesus and the subaltern impact each other, because both find themselves in a symbolic relationship of the two. The theology of the subaltern has a mutually symbolic relationship as integral element, a relationship between people and Jesus Christ, immanence and transcendence, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and the lowest and the highest.

Then, what is a symbolic relationship? Here I am indebted to Karl Rahner and his conception of symbol. According to Rahner, a reality must realize itself in others. This is an ontological law of all beings. A being must realize itself in others (in plurality). And these others here are symbols. Thus, symbols are realizations of a reality.¹⁹ A

¹⁸ Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. II, 42. Quoted from Arockiadoss S.J., "The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar for Theologising in India," *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*: 296.

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *A Rahner Reader*, ed. Gerald A McCool, (New York, NY: Seabury, 1975) 120-130.

symbolic relationship is a relationship between two beings (symbol and the symbolized), where the two entities affect each other, and which realizes one in the other. So subaltern is a symbol of Jesus, and at the same time, Jesus is a symbol of subaltern.

The symbolized (Jesus) is realized in a symbol (subaltern) in a limited but meaningful way. For example, the textile worker Cheon Taeil, who by burning himself called for the protection of the rights of young textile workers in small factories in Seoul, Korea, in 1970, has become a symbol of Jesus. He is resurrected in workers and labor movements. He has become a Jesus and a Spirit for workers in Korea. Without Cheon Taeil, Jesus might not have been a meaningful and relevant to struggling workers. Jesus was realized in Cheon Taeil. Jesus as a reality must realize himself in history through and in real symbols like Cheon Taeil. Theology of the subaltern (minjung and dalit) affirms that the subaltern minjung is a real symbol of Jesus in our times.

At the same time, Jesus can be the symbol of the subaltern. The Subaltern as a reality must realize itself in the other (Jesus). What does it mean? For the Subalterns to realize themselves in Jesus is for the subaltern to become a Jesus. It means that they go through important phases of Jesus' life (ministry with minjung, struggle, suffering, death, and resurrection), and that their future is connected to the future of Jesus Christ, that is, realizing their full humanity and becoming the inheritors of the Kingdom of God. By minjung's jumping into such a symbolic relationship and by Jesus' becoming a real symbol of the subaltern, the subaltern is now an eschatological subject. Here by the eschatological I mean being in a state of being 'already, but not yet.' The subaltern minjung can live with eschatological hope and overcome the evil, because this hope is guaranteed amid doubts, difficulties and negativities.

When we, together with Suh Namdong and Ahn Byungmu, say that the subaltern minjung is Jesus, it does not simply mean that Jesus participates in the life of the subaltern minjung, but that the latter in the life of Jesus. The blessing endowed to Jesus as the Christ is also endowed to the subaltern minjung. For Jesus affirms thus: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God"(Luke 6: 20), and "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."(Matthew 5: 10) The Beatitude in Matthew 5 announces the subaltern, who are poor, hungry, mourning, persecuted, peacemakers, as the heirs of the kingdom of God.

Jesus was called to be the Messiah by God and to save the humanity by preventing the practice of the perennial predicament of advancing the human history by sacrificing the weak sectors of the society. Therefore, it is believed that he died for human sin a death once for all, so that there is no more any sacrificial death of the weak. So Jesus' concern goes to the subaltern, because they are forced to be sacrificed

to buttress the order of the status quo by worldly powers.

Jesus lived a life as a subaltern. Is it by accident that Jesus lived a life of the subaltern? Can we imagine that Jesus lived a luxurious life as a worldly power? The fact that the Logos is incarnated into the subaltern is not by accident. Then the subaltern-ness, marginality, or weakness has some meaning in it other than its wretchedness. Being in the state of subaltern is itself a shame and humiliation. It is, however, the place where resistance takes place. It is the place where the divine Spirit blows. Jesus became subaltern so that subaltern become like Jesus.²⁰

God gives hope to the subaltern by resurrecting Jesus. But the sacrificial death of the subaltern continues in their struggle for living, and the resurrection of the subaltern also continues in their awakened consciousness and in their participation into liberation movements. If the death of Jesus on the cross has a saving effect on people, the suffering of the subaltern has also a saving effect, because the cross and the suffering prepare for a way to resurrection, a total liberation. The suffering and death of the subaltern minjung must be seen as those of Jesus Christ. As far as I am concerned, there are two meanings for the cross and sacrifice of minjung. First, the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus and minjung has the component of 'once for all'. Therefore there must be no more sacrifice of the weak in the world. We are called to carry out this task. Second, the suffering and cross of Jesus is a decisive action for constructing an alternative world, the kingdom of God, and thusly the subaltern's suffering and death is a call for actions in the present context and an example for us all to follow today.

Jesus shows an example and a model for the life and destiny of the subaltern. Jesus is an eternal ideal and example for the minjung/multitude/subaltern to imitate on. The life and movement of Jesus is a frame of reference to which minjung must keep returning to reflect upon their own activities and movements, and from which they draw wisdom and spiritual resources.²¹

VII. Some Concluding and Summarizing Remarks

²⁰ Here I am paraphrasing the famous doctrine of Irenaeus (130–200) and Athanasius (293–373): “God became man in order that man might become god.” Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 134.

²¹ Kwon Jinkwan, *Jesu Minung ui Sangjing, Minjung Jesu ui Sangjing* (Jesus, Symbol of Minjung; Minjung, Symbol of Jesus) (Seoul, Korea: Dongyon, 2009) 75.

I have examined minjung from the perspective of the multitude, which was elaborated by Negri and his colleagues. I also examined minjung from the *inmin* perspective. The multitude perspective is illuminative for demonstrating distinct features of minjung in our postmodern age. So I demonstrated that the phenomena of the multitude are becoming more visible in the changed context of South Korea. The *inmin* perspective must be examined because the *inmin* is a reality in North Korea, and because the task of the reunification of the nation requires minjung theology to take a serious consideration of the *inmin*.

Another necessary idea/symbol that have been employed for a discourse on minjung is the subaltern. I suppose that without the idea of the subaltern we cannot do justice to the reality of minjung. As was stated earlier, the ideas of the multitude and the *inmin* and many others such as that of the citizens, are limited in getting us to the reality of minjung, because they do not refer directly to the subaltern people. The term minjung has accumulated certain meanings in it from the people's experiences in the process of Korean history. The core of the experiences of minjung is suffering and *han* (unresolved sentiments of the sufferings and oppressions that has lasted for a long time). Minjung theology has been formulated by theological reflections on the experiences of the most suffering and oppressed people, who are expressed here by the term of the subaltern. The term of the subaltern is useful for doing minjung theology, and especially for alternating the term of minjung, a parochial one, with a universal term.

So far I have played with three terms, multitude, *inmin*, and subaltern in order to encounter the reality of minjung as much as possible. I have done this because these three terms or symbols have expressed very important experiences of the minjung. Minjung as a reality fulfills itself, somehow limitedly but meaningfully, in those three others. The symbol of the multitude expresses the different and singular diverse groups and classes standing up in solidarity and coalition on the common causes and intellect in protest against Empire, neoliberal global market system, and its dominating ideology. The symbol of the *inmin* represents the experiences of people in North and South Korea who are in agreement with the state power or political leader. The *inmin* are not necessarily a reactionary people. In North Korea, they together with the state are against outside (the U.S.) interventions and threats. They are revolutionary toward the external powers, but collaborative toward internal powers. In the recent history of South Korea, they (minjung as *inmin*) collaborated with the pro-minjung political powers and governments, whereas they had struggled against dictatorship in the 1970's and 1980's. The symbol of the subaltern emphasizes the double marginality and powerlessness, and poverty of the minjung; and it is the site where we can confess

political-theological meanings of minjung as suffering and crucified messiah in history, by establishing the symbolic relationship of Jesus and minjung.

Key Words: minjung, dalit, multitude, subaltern, *inmin*, symbol, symbolic relationship, A. P. Nirmal, Ambedkar, Ahn Byungmu, Suh Namdong, Karl Rahner.

Abstract

The major purpose of this essay is to understand who minjung really are in the changed context. The question of the identity (who question) regarding the minjung is a theological and sociological question. This author suggests three symbols that will help us explore the reality of minjung. They are multitude, *inmin* (人民, a people with a proletarian connotation), and the subaltern. Each of the three symbols portrayed here, provides us certain insight into the reality of minjung. But it is limited and partial in disclosing the reality of the minjung. Thus, by evaluating and integrating all of the three symbolical understandings, one can hope to arrive closer to the reality of minjung. Finally, the author attempts exploring theological status of the minjung in history by establishing a symbolic relationship between Jesus and minjung as the subaltern of the society.