

# An Examination on Ahn Byung-Mu's Hermeneutics Today

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## 1. Introduction

The 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches(WCC) held during 30<sup>th</sup> October ~ 8<sup>th</sup> November Busan in Korea, under the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”. The members of assembly discussed about the contemporary issues which the world churches were challenged from the waves of globalization and neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is characterized in terms of expansion of free trade, monopoly of financial capitalism, deregulation, enhanced privatization, and an overall reduction in government control of the economy.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of neoliberalism are producing massive number of temporary employees under the promoting the polarization of wealth. In this social, economic and political situation recalls the necessity of re-examination on minjung theology because the issues of minjung theology becomes again the valid agendas today. Therefore, this paper aims to re-examine minjung theology in the context of contemporary situation that neoliberalism dominates.

Ahn Byung-Mu is considered as a representative minjung theologian with Suh Nam-Dong and Kim Yong-bok. As the first generation of minjung theologians, they announced that Jesus was a minjung of his time of Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Ahn presented a new perspective in interpretation of Bible throughout his own hermeneutical framework in terms of the minjung's social biography,<sup>3</sup> As Suh Nam-Dong developed minjung theology based on the minjung's historical tradition and ‘han’ that had been revealed in the

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<sup>1</sup>) Chang Yoon-jae, “The End of Neoliberalism”, *An Era of Neoliberalism, Mission for Peace and Life* (Seoul: Dongyen, 2008), 12-16.

<sup>2</sup>) Kwon Jin-Kwan, “A Preliminary Sketch for a New Minjung Theology”, *Madang* vol. 1 (June 2004), 56.

<sup>3</sup>) Kwok Pui Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin* (New York: Orbis Book, 1995), 298.

struggles for liberation of minjung.<sup>4</sup> The word of *han* can be defined as a complex sentiment or feeling that arises in the minjung who have suffered from injustice and deprivation throughout historical experiences.<sup>5</sup> Ahn's hermeneutics is distinguished from Western theology in studies of the historical Jesus by emphasizing that the 'Jesus-event' was an event of '*ochlos*' of his time,<sup>6</sup> and it also continues in the history of minjung until even today.

As a characteristic nature of the contextual theologies, Ahn's idea of minjung theology also did not emerge from the lecture room, but from socio-political reality of Korea. From the beginning of 1960s, the rapid industrialization was promoted by the powerful dictatorship of South Korea.<sup>7</sup> During that time, the basic rights of the people were completely ignored under the goal of development of state. Theologians, as like other intellectuals of those days, did not pay any attention to the dreadful reality of the poor labourers, until one young labourer, named Chun Tae-il, burnt himself in protest of their desperate situation in 1971.<sup>8</sup> However, this event seriously shocked some conscientious group of Christians and intellectuals including Ahn, and led them to a deep reflection to consider minjung's reality in their academic works. In this context, Ahn's theological transition to minjung theology began by participating positively into the struggles of minjung against the dictatorship. Eventually, he was dismissed from his university by the state authorities, and he was arrested in 1976, tortured and imprisoned with his

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<sup>4</sup>) Chung Hyun-Kyung, "*Han-pu-ri*": *Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology* (New York: Orbis Book, 1994), 55.

<sup>5</sup>) Kwon Jin-Kwan, op. cit., 57., Suh Nam-dong, "Towards a theology of Han", *Minjung Theology: People as the Subject of History*, ed. Kim Yong-bock (Singapore: A CTC-CCA Publication, 1981), 54. Also see Kang Won-don, "The Priest of Han as a Theme in Christian-Shamanist Interfaith Dialogue", *Madang* Vol. 16. December 2011., 69.

<sup>6</sup>) The Greek word '*ochlos*' was used in Bible to indicate the poor people of Galilee followed Jesus. Ahn employed it in consideration of that it could be identified to minjung in the context of Korea. Ahn did not clearly distinguish the usages of the words of '*ochlos*' and 'minjung' in Korean publications.

<sup>7</sup>) Between in 1960 and in 1985, the structure of the industrial population of Korea changed dramatically. The agricultural population had formed 62.2% before industrialization in 1960, yet it decreased to under 23.9% in 1985. ed. Kim Kyeng-Jae, *The Minjung Theology of the Transition* (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1992), 25.

<sup>8</sup>) Chun Tae-il had lived a very self-sacrificing life for the little girl labours. Before he demonstrated the suicide, he appealed to every authority and even Churches leaders to keep the standard labour laws in order to save the little girls' health in their works. But the officers and even Churches leaders ignored his appeal. Ahn Byung-Mu, *The Narratives of Minjung Theology* (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1991), 329-330.

comrades together for announcing a statement against the dictatorship. He confessed that, through his personal struggles and sufferings under an unjust power, he could strongly confirm the realities of minjung, as well as he could be confident of his 'Jesus-minjung event' theories.

## **2. Bible, the Book of Minjung**

### **2. 1. From Kerygma to Event**

Ahn grasped the concept of 'event' in his earlier time because he had used the concept of 'event' in his doctoral dissertation in 1965,<sup>9</sup> but it was in 1972 that he applied it into his first essay about minjung theology.<sup>10</sup> Ahn captured the Jesus-event through his studies in the issues of historical Jesus. His theological motivation started by the interest in the issues of historical Jesus, especially the methodology of form criticism and redaction criticism, the results of his research brought out a conversion of the kerygma and the historical event.<sup>11</sup> For instance, in interpreting Mark 2: 23-28, 'the narrative of the lord of sabbath', the verses 27-28 had been emphasized as a kerygma in form-criticism, while the other parts had been neglected. The form-criticism scholars considered that the kerygma is a primary source, and the other parts are the secondary source which came later just to explain the kerygma. They clarified this narrative as an apophthegm. Apophthegm is a sort of the literary genre in Greek, an anecdote about the famous philosophers and saints. According to the form-criticism, certain core words existed originally in apophthegm, while the other parts of narratives were inserted into the anecdotes.<sup>12</sup> Bultmann adopted the notion of apophthegm in interpreting the Bible.<sup>13</sup> He regarded that verse 27 was the original words of Jesus as well as the core of Gospel, but other parts were added later.

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<sup>9</sup>) A. H. Richter, *The Concept Of 'Event' of Ahn Byung-Mu*, ed. Hwang Sung-Kuy, *Jesus, Minjung and Nation* (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1993), 754., trans from. A. H. Richter, *Ahn Byung-Mu als Minjung-Theologe*, Doctorial Dissertation (Heidelberg Univ, 1988). In here, he presented an argument that God's will demonstrated through an event of Jesus's activities.

<sup>10</sup>) The essay, '*Jesus and Minjung*' is regarded as the first minjung theological research of Ahn to link the concept of 'event' and 'minjung'. *The Narratives of Minjung Theology*, 25.

<sup>11</sup>) ed. Karl Muller, *Dictionary of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1995), 248.

<sup>12</sup>) *The Narratives of Minjung Theology*, 60-61.

<sup>13</sup>) *Ibid.*, 30.

However, Ahn argued that verses 23-24 should be given more important attention. The event was historically primary, but the words of Jesus came later.<sup>14</sup> The order between the kerygma and the event is reversed in this interpretation. Ahn criticized that the form-criticism allowed the superficial point of view by ignoring reality in interpreting Bible. Ahn argued that this narrative, ‘the lord of sabbath’, must not be read as a metaphysical story, but reconsidered as ‘the first declaration for the right of the poor’ by moving our viewpoint from the others to the poor people’s side who had to pick the heads of wheat because of their starvation. He insisted that it is a sort of social biography about the conflict between the poor and the power. The poor ought to have broken the laws for their life, but the power judged them to keep their vested rights.

Facing a shocking event of Chun Tae-il’s self-sacrifice, Ahn started minjung theology, and could identify the *ochlos* of Bible and the minjung of present days. Also, he raised a question that which side we should stand in the midst of conflicts between the poor and the power, between the third world and the powerful countries. Whenever the conflicts happen between two group, the powerful group always has propagate that their opponent is illegal, either in dimension of the society or international relationship. In the era of globalization, today the wave of neoliberalism is getting higher, and the polarization of wealth has become more and more serious dividing the world into two groups. Although the little girl labourers do no longer exist now, today the concentration of wealth is rapidly promoting on the one hand, and the hopeless reality of non-regular employees is aggravating more on the other hand. In consideration of this situation, Ahn’s minjung theological point of view on interpretation of Bible is again called today necessary and effective hermeneutics.

## **2. 2. The Context of Gospel according to Mark**

The form-criticism scholars agree with together that Mark 1: 14-15s are the integration of Mark gospel,

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<sup>14</sup>) Ibid., 30-31.

and these form the keynote of Mark's theological basis.<sup>15</sup> They were concerned only with verse 15, as a summary of Jesus' kerygma. W. G. Kummel, E. Klostermann and J. Gnllka, took no notice of verse 14 because they clarified it as a verse inserted later, just for setting the words of Jesus into the proper time and place.<sup>16</sup> The form-criticism regarded verse 14, as a redactional frame to explain the circumstance, and as such a worthless verse to interpret.

However, Ahn argued that we should give serious attention to the redactional verse. He debated that verse 14 is important as a quite intensive expression about the context. Firstly, there was much in common between John the Baptist and Jesus. Both stood on similar background, the prophetic movement tradition, the anti-Jerusalemism, the relationship to Essene.<sup>17</sup> Both were put to death by a political power. Secondly, Galilee was a most struggling place between the poor and the power. Herode's annual income through the tax from Galilee reached one thousand talents which is equivalent to the daily living costs of ten million families.<sup>18</sup> Due to excessive exploitation, the rising in arms against power continued in Galilee. Thirdly, the site of Mark was similar to the site of Jesus, Galilee. The site of Mark placed with the huge mass of Jewish refugees after A.D. 70 when Jerusalem fell under Rome.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the above studies, Ahn reached the conclusion that verse 14 is not a merely redactional frame, but a significant implication to explain Jesus's identity. He supposed that people in the site of Mark might grasp easily the meaning of the verse 14. Ahn interpreted that verse 14 calls us into the areas of struggles and oppression in our situation, like Jesus went to Herode's region, as soon as John the Baptist had been

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<sup>15</sup>) ed. Ahn Byung-Mu, *The Materialistic Interpreting* (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1991), 212.

<sup>16</sup>) *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>17</sup>) *Ibid.*, 213-214., Ahn Byung-Mu, *Jesus of Galilee* (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1993), 66-80.

<sup>18</sup>) *The Materialistic Interpreting*, 222.

<sup>19</sup>) *Ibid.*, 205-206., During the Jewish wars from A.D. 66 to A.D. 70, the tragedy of the Jews reached extremes. Rome liquidated Jewish guerrillas from Galilee to Berea, and Jerusalem. Eighteen thousand Jews were slaughtered in only Damascus at that time.

arrested.

### 3. *Ochlos* and Minjung

#### 3. 1. Jesus and *Ochlos*

Ahn could formulate minjung theology through the works of analysis of *ochlos* which enabled to grasp the original meaning of the Jesus event.<sup>20</sup> Ahn analyzed the usages of *ochlos* in the Gospel according to Mark where includes two words to indicate 'crowd' in Greek, '*laos*' and '*ochlos*'. The word *laos* is generally used to indicate the 'people of God' or the 'people of Israel'. It means the ordinary people who belong to a certain group, so it may be properly translated as 'people' today. However, the term '*ochlos*' indicates 'the slavery', 'the hired mercenaries' or 'the draftees'.<sup>21</sup> *Ochlos* can be distinguished from *laos* in that they have no civil right, no duty, and they cannot be protected under the law of the state.

People of Galilee where was the main stage of Jesus crowded around Jesus, and Mark, the first Gospel often mentioned about these kinds of people.<sup>22</sup> Ahn argues that Mark intentionally selected the word '*ochlos*' instead of the word of '*laos*' by presenting that Mark always used the word '*ochlos*', thirty-six times all over the text with the exception of two cases(7: 6, 14: 2)<sup>23</sup> while the Septuagint mostly used the word of '*laos*'.<sup>24</sup> Ahn explained the relations between Jesus and *ochlos*, based on the above analysis. First, *ochlos* accompanied Jesus wherever he existed, and Jesus of Galilee without *ochlos* cannot be

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<sup>20</sup>) ed. Karl Muller, 248.

<sup>21</sup>) *Jesus of Galilee*, 137.

<sup>22</sup>) The crowd were not described by the word *ochlos* until Mark 2:4, but it was expressed by the words 'people', 'many' or 'altogether'. Ahn Byung-Mu, *The History and Interpretation* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1993), 209.

<sup>23</sup>) The word *laos* use twice in quotation from other's expression. *Jesus of Galilee*, 137., On the other hand, Matthew used the word *ochlos* fifty-one times, and used *laos* thirteen times. Luke used *ochlos* forty times, and *laos* thirty-five times. This implicates the emphasized membership of which their new community's member would be belong to the new ecclesiastical kingdom., Ahn Byung-Mu, *Jesus and the Minjung*, ed by. the Commission on Theological Concerns of CCA, *Minjung Theology* (Maryknoll: Zed Press, 1983), 139.

<sup>24</sup>) Ibid., 139. "The term *laos* is used around 2,000 times in the Septuagint."

imagined.<sup>25</sup> In the same way, we cannot imagine *ochlos* of the Gospel without Jesus. Second, Jesus enjoyed meals together with the *ochlos*.<sup>26</sup> This means that Jesus identified himself socially with the *ochlos*. He was a close friend of the *ochlos*. Third, Jesus demonstrated a solidarity with the *ochlos* against the leaders of Jerusalem, those who were oppressing the *ochlos* of Galilee.<sup>27</sup> Even they cried to kill Jesus in Jerusalem, it could not break the solidarity of Jesus and *ochlos* because it was due to the offering of a bribe by the leaders of Jerusalem. Fourth, the *ochlos* were judged as the sinners by the leaders of Jerusalem, as well as a threat to them. Fearing the binding of the *ochlos* and Jesus, they planned to give a death to Jesus. Fifth, Jesus had compassion on the *ochlos* as for sheep without a shepherd. This suggests that Jesus condemned the leaders, especially in relation with the other biblical contexts.<sup>28</sup> Sixth, Jesus declared that *ochlos* is his mother and brother.<sup>29</sup> Seventh, Jesus had never condemned the *ochlos* for ethical, or religious reason.

### 3. 2. Jesus and Minjung

Through the researches about *ochlos*, Ahn argued that *ochlos* did not play a supporting role in the drama of the life of Jesus, but they were living subject and active co-star.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, he argued that Jesus is merely a mirror of minjung. Ahn's arguments were also supported by other minjung theologians. Jesus should be understood not simply as an individual person, but as a corporate personality.<sup>31</sup> The Gospel according to Mark is not a personal report about Jesus, but the minjung's social biography. Ahn criticized that the Westerner's theological point of view which always divides subject and object, heaven and earth,

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<sup>25</sup>) Mark 2: 4, 13,/ 3: 9, 20, 32,/ 4: 1,/ 5: 21, 24, 31,/ 8: 1,/ 10: 1, etc.

<sup>26</sup>) Mark 2: 13-17

<sup>27</sup>) Mark 2: 4-6,/ 3: 2-6,/ 22-35,/ 7: 1-2,/ 8:11,/ 11: 18, 27-33, etc.

<sup>28</sup>) 1Kings 22: 17, Ezekiel 34: 5., Ezekiel strongly impeached the leaders of Israel through using the expression of 'sheep and shepherd'

<sup>29</sup>) Mark 3:31-34.

<sup>30</sup>) ed. Karl Muller, *Dictionary of Mission*(New York: Orbis, 1995), 248.

<sup>31</sup>) Kim Yong-Bock, *Jesus Christ Among Asian Minjung- A Christological Reflection*, ed. Dhyanchand Carr, *God, Christ and God's People in Asia* (Hong Kong: CCA, 1995), 8.

men and women cannot observe the real meaning of the minjung-Jesus event. In Ahn's minjung theology Jesus-minjung cannot be separate as the subject and the object becomes one in the minjung-Jesus event. Jesus led minjung, on the other hand, minjung fated Jesus. For instance, the reality of starvation that four thousand hungry minjung faced(Mark 6: 38) resulted out Jesus' miracle, not by Jesus' power alone. Ahn gave another instance from John 1: 29 to prove the homogeneity of Jesus and minjung.<sup>32</sup> The 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of world' can be applied to express the minjung of Korea, those who were taking on their back away all political, economical and moral problems and sufferings. He argued that all these problems fundamentally came out for our sins. Therefore, the minjung who take away the sufferings are the Jesus today.

Ahn's arguments on the relationship between Jesus and minjung can be encapsulated like this: 1) Jesus was a minjung in terms of social class, behavior and identity, 2) Jesus and minjung exist together in his works of Galilee, 3) Jesus always spoke minjung's language, 3) the crucifixion of Jesus was minjung's crucifixion, 5) the resurrection of Jesus was very minjung's resurrection.<sup>33</sup> The statement, "the subject of history is Jesus", can be substituted with that "minjung is the subject of history". We can meet Jesus not only into Galilee, but also in our contexts where minjung is suffering, crucifying and resurrecting.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the Gospel of Mark is not a merely 'book written in the past', but a 'living Gospel today' to speak our minjung's event.

## **4. The Critics**

### **4. 1. The Achievements and Contributions**

Ahn observed the Bible as a social biography of the Jesus-minjung event. This observation enabled us to move our concern in interpreting Bible from kerygma to the context of Jesus. The argument of kerygma

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<sup>32</sup>) *The Narratives of Minjung Theology*, 32-33.

<sup>33</sup>) Ahn Byung-Mu, *Minjung and Theology of Korea* (Seoul: The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1982), 180-185.

<sup>34</sup>) The Angel told the disciples in the tomb that "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him"



of the western theologians in form-criticism could not give any relevant interpretation to the third world people who were struggling under contemporary neo-colonialism and unjust dictatorship. Ahn brought out a bridge to link between Gospel and minjung's realities through new eyes see Jesus as an event. If we read the Bible as the stories of Jesus simply conveying Kerygma, then they remarkably lose vitality, and become the abstract stories when we bring them to today context. However, Jesus as an event is no longer an event of the past, but it can be reinterpreted as a simultaneous event of today. Ahn gave an insight to us to observe the minjung's pathos which continually stream up from human history. We can learn from Ahn's arguments about the pulse of history of which God reveals himself as a pathos in the midst of liberation events, from Exodus of Hebrew, Jesus-*ochlos* and to the minjung's struggles of the marginalized people today, refugees, migrant workers and even non-regular employees in neoliberalism system. Through Ahn's perspectives, we can also see Jesus who is standing the centre of the pathos, as a representative of minjung, a most bright and intensive pathos as well.

Ahn's researches guides us to the recognition of simultaneity between the past and the present through the minjung events. Ahn brought out to us the significance of Mark 1: 14 which had been hidden and ignored in the Western hermeneutics. He contributed to open our sight to notice the political and social nature of Jesus' decision to go Galilee.

Minjung theology had awakened many students to participate into the minjung's struggling situation in the midst of the democratization movement in Korea. More than one hundred communities named as 'Minjung Churches' were established in the industrial or the slum area between in 1980 and in 1995 in Korea.<sup>35</sup> These communities were started mainly by theological students or ministers those who had been deeply influenced from minjung theology. Ahn's minjung theology also moved the democratic leaders including non-christians. Many of them had belonged to churches until the middle of the 1980s in order to avoid the persecution from the dictatorship, and they were naturally immersed in minjung theology during

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<sup>35</sup>) Kim Young-Ja, *The Analysis Of Minjung Churches*, ed. *Minjung Churches Movement Association, Jesus of Galilee* (Seoul: Hansin Univ., 1996), 158-159.

that time. Therefore, it can be said that minjung theology remarkably contributed to the democratization movement of Korea which achieved step by step defeating the dictatorship until 1990s.

#### 4. 2. The Issues in Definition of Minjung

The identity of minjung was a core question in Ahn's minjung theology. As we examined earlier, Ahn used the word minjung as an equivalent term to *ochlos*. Then, how the identity of minjung can be defined?

The word, 'minjung' is a compound word of two Chinese characters 'min(民)' which means 'people' and 'jung(衆)' which means 'the mass'. Thus, 'minjung' means 'the mass of people'.<sup>36</sup> However, it is not used in the minjung theologians as a neutral concept like the original radixes, but it indicates the specific people those who are economically disadvantaged and socially, politically oppressed.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it is not equivalent to the word proletariat. In the context of Korea, it has been used more and less in terms of a vague notion which indicates a middle and low class people, as a midterm between a nation and people.<sup>38</sup>

Ahn was called to define the concept of minjung by two groups, from both the right wing and the left wing. One group raised the question to refute minjung theology based on the conservative standpoint.<sup>39</sup> Another group raised it later, in midst of class struggle, from a progressive group in the beginning of 1980s. They needed more concrete terms of social scientific definition about minjung for their strategy in

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<sup>36</sup>) Suh Kwang-Sun David, *A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation*, ed. The Commission on Theological Concerns of C.C.A., *Minjung Theology* (Maryknoll: Zed Press, 1983), 16.

<sup>37</sup>) Chung Hyun-Kyung, 61.

<sup>38</sup>) In South Korea where the anti-communism has dominated, it cannot be allowed to use the word of 'people' in Korean language because North Korea already used the word of 'people' as a political meaning. South Korean usually use the word of 'nation' instead of 'people'. Therefore, 'minjung' has been used in term of a social scientific terminology, as a replacing word with 'people' in the contrast to 'nation'.

<sup>39</sup>) Kim Hujung-Hyo, *About Truth in Confusing Era, Literature Thought*, 1975. April. 45., A conservative scholar, Kim Hujung-Hyo, argued in 1975. "What means minjung? Is the word minjung a sort of abstract fabrication, but no substantial existence?" recite from. Kim Sung-Jae, *Past, Present and Future of Minjung Theology, The Theological Thought* Vol. 100, 1998 Spring, 14.

fighting against anti-minjung power.<sup>40</sup>

In response to the first question, Ahn indicated the low class' struggles with the examples of the real life of minjung in the history of Korea to protect their nation or their right against colonial or tyrant power. He tried to present the cases of the substantial existence of 'minjung' through the indirect expressions in the contexts, "the people those who struggled against colonial power"<sup>41</sup>, "the sorrowful people those who are oppressed, exploited and deprived by the colonial and upper class power"<sup>42</sup> By the way, when he met the same question from the Western context during a invited lecture in Heidelberg, he took an example, the Turk migrant workers in Germany.<sup>43</sup>

Relating to the second question, Ahn intentionally rejected to define minjung in scientific terms. This rejection was due to two reasons. If we define minjung in a scientific term, minjung will become a sort of object, and the substantial figures will disappear into an abstract idea. He said that "Maintaining proletariat's partisanship is right in terms of Jesus support of the poor. However, the social scientific definition for class struggles may causes a danger of generalization which limits minjung as a term of the proletariat. The misusages of generalization will result in a new subordination by the power, just as in the cases of communism countries."<sup>44</sup> He also did not forget to warn that the generalized definition of God, Farther, Son and Holy Spirit, resulted in the dogmatism and systematization in the Roman Christianity instead of the spiritual vitality.<sup>45</sup>

### **4. 3. The Difficulties in Ministry**

Jesus as an event was stressed rather than Jesus as a kerygma in Ahn's minjung theology. In the prospect

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40) Kim Sung-Jae, *Past, Present and Future of Minjung Theology, The Theological Thought* Vol. 100, 1998 Spring, 45.

41) *Ibid.*, 20.

42) *The Narratives of Minjung Theology*, 38.

43) *Ibid.*, 285-286.

44) Kim Sung-Jae, 48.

45) *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21., *The Narratives of Minjung Theology*, 284-285.

of minjung theology the Jesus-minjung events are continually taking place over the history as the pathos of pulse, while kerygma just devitalizes Christian belief. Ahn's view poses some serious problem in the dimension of the practical application in the pastoral context. If we acknowledge Ahn's argument, the crucifixion of Jesus will become no longer an unique salvation, but there could be somehow multitude events of salvation in the history of minjung.

There is a question in Ahn's minjung theology that if Jesus and minjung could be identified, then minjung also can be an object of faith as Jesus Christ. One could point out that even though we could acknowledge the messianic roles of minjung in history as a subjective force to bring out salvation by liberating people from the oppression, but, after all, minjung is merely a group of people who are relatively marginalized or oppressed in terms of economical, political and social hegemony. A political standpoint is always changing as we can suggest many cases in history that the oppressed group becomes a new tyrant power when they grasp the power. Indeed, it is a theological question whether an unstable existence such as a social group of people could be an object of faith.

This problem was clearly exposed in the area of ministry, even at minjung churches. Some minjung church's ministers claimed that they could hardly use Ahn's viewpoints in teaching Bible. They confessed the difficulties. "I think that Christian faith bases on belief in Jesus as Christ. However, Ahn's teaching causes some confusion to members of minjung churches in maintaining their faith. Sometimes, speaking frankly, the teachings from minjung theology are not helpful at all in terms of ministry."<sup>46</sup>

A possible response from Ahn's theology may be that we should not search an object of faith from outside but be aware of the messianic power of minjung inside as the subject of salvation in history. Nevertheless, a fundamental question is remained whether it is possible to maintain faith without a certain absolute being. A faith to believe in minjung through self-recognition as subject of history is seemed likely Buddhist method rather traditional Christian theology in terms of soteriology. However, Ahn's

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<sup>46</sup>) Noh Chang-Sik, *The Reports of Grand Forum: The Way of Minjung Theology in Changing World*, from. ed. Kim Keyng-Jae, *The Minjung Theology of the Transition*, 50-51., "Noh was one of the senior and experienced ministers among hundreds of minjung Church ministers in 1980s-90s."

minjung theology did not progressed to this dimension of religious quest and speculation.

Also minjung theology suggests that every evil thing comes from the unjust social structure, but it does not mention problems from individual fault. One young pastor who had devoted in the minjung Church movement for more than ten years, claimed that “minjung theology neglected the fundamental sins of human being... The communities can be embodied and strengthened by each individual’s efforts and devotion. However, because of the lazy responsibilities of individuals which are allowed in minjung churches, building community based on the confession of faith was often failed.”<sup>47</sup> In relation to failure of minjung churches, we should give serious attention to the voices from the fields of minjung Churches: “The radicalism of minjung theology neglecting trinitarian belief brought out a failure of minjung churches to root in the ground of the Christianity of Korea.”<sup>48</sup> Although this confess from the pastoral experiences expressed the difficulties from the field, yet I do not think that recalling traditional trinitarian theology could not be the final answer. However, this criticism remind us that Ahn’s minjung theology was enabled them to find Jesus in the minjung event of today on one hand, but it could not provide somehow appropriate systematic theological framework such as ecclesiology which was needed for minjung church in order to maintain and to build up the community on the other hand.

## 5. Conclusion

Ahn provided us a new insight in interpreting Bible to close up the reality of Jesus event based on the studies of historical Jesus. He also brought a new perspective through a methodological term of social biography which was different from the Western theology. It enabled us to recognize Jesus, as the disciples did on the road to Emaos when they shared bread with Jesus, in the midst of minjung events of today, who is participating into the struggles against the unjust power. Through Ahn's hermeneutics, the

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<sup>47</sup>) Lee Jae-Ho, *The past and Present of Minjung Churches* (Diss. Univ. of Hansin, 1997), 29.

<sup>48</sup>) Lee Won-Don, *The Mission and Pastoral Care for Minjung, The Churches of Minjung and Hope of Nation* (Seoul: The Minjung Churches Association, 1996), 258.

voice of Bible could be shifted from the sermon for the dominating power of the first world to the outcry for the oppressed of the third world.

However, there were lots of change between the time of Ahn and today. It is the time that the massive waves of globalization are overwhelming every side of the world, and it is characterized by neoliberalism or neocolonialism. The binary frontline of Ahn's time between the oppressor and the oppressed has been distorted, and complicated in today world. According to this context, the reality of minjung has also been changed to more diverse situation which requested re-interpretation of Ahn's minjung theology. Even though the main cause of the people's sufferings are obviously due to the polarization of property, but the aspects of suffering are changing with so diverse and subdivide forms in the world. Since JPIC conference in 1990, justice, peace and integrity of creation became the main agendas of WCC. Among these themes, Ahn's theology mainly focused on justice. Today minjung theology is calling to develop theological reflection on the issues of peace and ecological crisis as well as justice. Peace is an issue to be inevitably related to justice because the most cases breaking peace are caused by injustice, it may say that Ahn's theology could also cover the issue of peace. However, ecological issue may be hardly included in his theological framework because it was an anthropo-centric theology. Therefore, in order to expand the horizon of minjung theology, and to promote a dialogue with ecological theology, minjung theology needs to develop the issue of nature or life, for instance the relationship between minjung and nature.

The result of globalization produces diverse forms of minjung today in the political, social, economical, cultural, gender, and religious context, such as refugees, migrant workers, irregular employees, the poor, the marginalized and various groups of minority. So, the issue that Ahn's theology raised has not disappeared, yet more getting serious. Therefore, minjung theology is still useful, and the task is to bring appropriate theological response on this diverse situation as listening carefully to the voices from the irregular employees in Korea, the Dalit women in India, the disabled boys lost their arm or foot during the civil war in Rwanda and Sudan, and the homeless juveniles in Europe and U.S.A. even.

KEY WORDS: Minjung, *Ochlos*, Jesus Event, Hermeneutics, Globalization, Neoliberalism.

### **ABSTRACT**

Today the world is overwhelmed by the waves of globalization and neoliberalism which is characterized in terms of expansion of free trade, monopoly of financial capitalism, deregulation, enhanced privatization, and an overall reduction in government control of the economy. The consequences of neoliberalism produces diverse forms of minjung today in the political, social, economical, cultural, gender, and religious context such as refugees, migrant workers, irregular employees, the poor, the marginalized and minorities.

Ahn Byung-Mu is considered as a representative minjung theologian. He presented a new perspective in interpretation of Bible throughout his own hermeneutical framework in terms of the minjung's social biography. Ahn's theology was distinguished from Western theology in studies of the historical Jesus by emphasizing that the 'Jesus-event' was an event of '*ochlos*' of his time, and it also continues in the history of minjung until even today. Therefore, the issue that Ahn's theology raised has not disappeared, but more getting serious today. Hence, this paper argues that the theological perspective of Ahn's hermeneutics is still useful in spite of some limitations of it such as anthropocentrism, and the task of minjung today is to bring useful theological response on their voices for today's minjung who are situated

in such diverse contexts.

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