

A Conversation with Minjung Messiah and Derrida's Messianic

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I. Introduction

The idea of “minjung messiah” has been the hottest issue in the history of minjung theology because the idea is inharmonious with the doctrine of Christology based on the traditional image of God who is transcendent. The aim of this paper is to enlarge my understanding about minjung messiah. In connection with this issue, I wish to address Derrida's messianic.

In traditional theology, the notion of the messianism is premised on the final judgment at the end of the world in the future. But both Derrida and minjung theology think differently from traditional theology on the matter of the messianic. Namely, for Derrida and minjung theology commitment to the messiancity is the necessary context for understanding of God. God is knowable only by making the truth by changing the world. It means that the messianic is not conceived but entered into the world through a certain praxical engagement. A major concern of them is the relationship between the present situation and the messianic event. This collaboration is intended to promote a legitimate messianic for the new era called as globalization.

In this paper, I will discuss the broad sense of their messianic by analyzing and comparing their theological significances. The remainder of the study is organized as follows: the first part deals with minjung messiah and minjung event from the first generation minjung theologians. In the second part, after summarizing Derrida's thought, I will explore Derrida's ‘the messianic without messianism’. And the conclusion, I will try to dialogue

between both minjung messiah and Derrida's messianic in order to give an alternate reading of minjung messiah in today.

II. The Understanding of Minjung Messiah

1. The Meaning of Minjung in the Bible and Korean History

Minjung theology is reflected in an experience of faith in the midst of political and religious worldviews. In the 1970s and 1980s the Korean economy developed very quickly under the military government. However, during this period dictatorship oppressed our democracy and the unification movement between North Korea and South Korea. For this reason, the Korean people were engaged in a great political struggle against the dictatorship. As a result, a new historical situational theology emerged for the first time during the 1970s, which is contextualized in an encounter with socio-political injustice.

Minjung appear in various forms of the biblical context. The minjung are the oppressed people in Egypt whose liberation is narrated in the story of the Exodus. The Hebrew word *am ha'aretz* (people of land) denotes the landlord blessed by God. Since the Babylonian invasion the concept changed, being associated with people of the lower class. Later in the rabbinic Jewish religion the word *am ha'aretz* was redefined as the sinners who stand outside the system of the law. In the Rabbinic Judaism *am ha'aretz* is referred to the poor and the powerless class which was despised and marginalized.¹ Especially, Ahn Byung-Mu, the founder of minjung theology, provides a biblical base through his interpretation of the Greek word '*Ochlos*' in the Gospel of Mark. *Ochlos* who were the religiously forsaken, and the economically alienated, and the politically oppressed are the minjung who followed Jesus.²

In the beginning stage of minjung theology, the adoption of the sociological concept of minjung generates an indigenous implication. That is, the idea of minjung obtains contextual-indigenous overtones: Minjung as the subject of Korean history could accomplish their own liberation by their power. In the process of Korean history, the nature of minjung would be understood as a self-redeeming subject who continuously overcomes their own historical

¹ The Christian Conference of Asia, ed., *Minjung Theology* (Hong Kong: C.C.A, 1983), 123-137.

² Ibid., 150

limits. In this understanding, minjung perform a messianic role for the entire history. This is the basic response of minjung theologians to the minjung phenomena in Korea history.

2. The Controversy Surrounding Minjung Messiah

In the beginning stage of minjung theology, minjung as the subject of Korean history could accomplish their own liberation by their power. According to Kim Yong-Bock,

The minjung are the permanent reality of history. Kingdoms, dynasties, and states rise and fall; but the minjung remain as a concrete reality in history, experiencing the comings and goings of political powers. Although the minjung understand themselves in relation to the power which is in command, they are not confined by that power. The minjung transcended the power structures which attempt to confine them through the unfolding of their stories.³

In light of this understanding, minjung acts as a messianic role for the entire history. In the process of Korean history, the nature of minjung would be understood as a self-redeeming subject who continuously overcomes his or her own historical limits. This is the basic response of minjung theologians to the minjung phenomena in Korea history.

Minjung messiah has been at the center of debate between minjung theologians and other theologians because this led to the idea of Jesus as the minjung and the minjung as Jesus. The former is acceptable to most theologians but the latter poses more of a problem for many theologians.⁴ For this reason, minjung messiah was criticized by traditional Western theologians.

Even Jürgen Moltmann, who was very hospitable to minjung theology, raised a question to this thought: “If Jesus is identified with the fate of the minjung in this way, is the minjung then identified with Jesus and his mission so that they acquire messianic features? If the Messiah belongs to the minjung, do the minjung then become the Messiah?”⁵ Those who opposed the idea of minjung messiah raise similar objections. Mainly they were able to grasp the idea of Jesus as minjung, but could not accept the idea that ‘Minjung is Messiah.’

³ Kim Yong-Bock, ‘Messiah and Minjung: Discerning Messianic Politics over against Political Messianism’ in *Minjung Theology*, 183.

⁴ Ahn Byung-Mu, *Stories of Minjung Theology*, (Chun-an: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1990), 32.

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, “Minjung Theology for the Ruling Classes,” in Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 257.

The tension between minjung theologians and Moltmann can be summarized as the dispute regarding the relation between power of future in the final consummation of history and power of minjung in the present circumstances of life. Moltman raises the question whether minjung are really capable of playing the messianic role in history as actual subjects and liberators of history.⁶

For Moltmann, the future is not determined by the present, but rather the future determines the present. Consequently, “God is not ‘beyond us’ or ‘in us,’ but ahead of us in the horizons of the future opened to us in his promise.”⁷ This passage provides me with Moltmann’s idea of revelation. Instead of conceiving revelation as the power of liberation based on human capacity, he describes revelation as the power of the future in which totally new and unexpected events that can be anticipated in the present.⁸

But, minjung theologians run counter to Moltman’s view. According to Minjung theology, Moltmann’s promise of hope is too vague and is unable to inspire concrete historical action and give concrete identification with the oppressed.⁹ On analyzing the resurrection of Mark, Ahn Byung-Mu believes the narrative of Mark sheds some light on the origins of minjung messiah. He says as following:

Mark states that the corpse of Jesus was not in the tomb, and that a young man says the executed Jesus of Nazareth will be in Galilee as he has foretold earlier. (Mark 16:5-7) His followers can meet him in Galilee, where he started his ministry for the minjung. The rest of the story is opened. What has happened to the Galilean minjung? In the other Gospels Jesus appears for a while, but what is most important is that minjung “rose again”(egeiro), minjung established a community of Jesus and went out into world. The young man said Jesus had arisen and gone to Galilee. The Greek word here implies “to rise.” As Jesus rose, so minjung rose from their despair and could testify, “Jesus did not die, but rose agains.”¹⁰

With regard to minjung messiah, above passage tells us about the matter of the messianic. A major concern of minjung theology is the relationship between the present situation and the messianic event. Rather than waiting to find the power of future, its major

⁶ Ibid., 127-128.

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, “Theology as Eschatology,” in *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, ed. Frederick Herzog (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 10.

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 85.

⁹ Ahn Byung-Mu, *Stories of Minjung Theology*, 125-127.

¹⁰ Ahn Byung-Mu, *Jesus of Galilee*, tr., The Christian Conference of Asia.(Hong Kong: C.C.A, 2004), 259-260.

concern is the relationship the present situation and eschatology as a future event. Minjung theologians insisted on minjung's action and change caused by the praxis toward the Kingdom of God here and now. That is the minjung messiah.

3. The Relationships Between Minjung Messiah and Minjung Event

1) My Minjung Event

In the preceding pages we have given an introduction to the concept of minjung messiah. In order to understand the nature of the minjung messiah, it is necessary to examine for the idea of event in minjung theology. For this reason, in the following page I would like to discuss 'minjung event.'

For minjung theologians, Jesus is the historical minjung; he is immanent with minjung, lives along with minjung, and equal to minjung.¹¹ They do not believe that the Jesus-event is the only messianic event in history. For them, the role of Jesus in messianic events was not unique, and this messianic role is not only confined to Jesus. It indicates internal relationships between the historical Jesus and his people, *ochols*.

Namely, Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection are symbols of minjung's death and rising. The messianic event in Jesus' death and resurrection could be possible to understand as a minjung event, their suffering, resistance, and resurrection. The Messianic events cannot be a unique event in the historical Jesus but have been reiterated in minjung events "like volcanic eruptions."¹² The event has been a never-ending process in Korean history: for example, the *Donghak* Revolution in 1894, the March First Movement in 1919, the April 1960 Movement, the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Movement (1980), and the people's revolution in 1987 etc. Through the minjung events, Korean minjung was to be the subjects of history.

In the following, I will try to show my experience about minjung event in Korean modern history in order to help to understand minjung messiah as like volcanic eruptions:

From the 1960s to 1990, a military government led by dictator ruled over South Korea. They

¹¹ Ahn Byung-Mu, *Stories of Minjung Theology*, 31-33.

¹² Ibid., 59.

oppressed democracy and the unification movement between South Korea and North Korea. So, many Korean citizens rose against the dictatorship in June 1987. In the course of the demonstration, one of the undergraduate students protesting against the government was shot to death by Korean police forces. His name was Han Yul Lee, a Yonsei University student. It was a huge shock to many Korean people. Almost a half million people gathered at the funeral. In the middle of the funeral, a pastor named Ik Whan Mun, who was an Old Testament Professor at Hanshin Theological Seminary and a Minjung theologian, appeared before the audience. Instead of a sermon, he cried out the names of twenty-three people, who were killed by the authoritarian regime. After crying out their names, he spoke to the audience, "Today is Han Yul's funeral. But, I am not crying. Although we bury Han Yul, he will never die. He will be resurrected with our justice, our democracy, and our unification between North Korea and South Korea." All who gathered cried together. It was a powerful moment that I could not forget.

At the time of the incident, I was only 18 years old. It felt as though I experienced the messianic event throughout the funeral. All the people gathered, about a million, had dreamt that the Kingdom of God had come down that day. Since then, I realized that the messianic event occurs not only with the historical Jesus, but it also occurs continuously in our history just like a volcanic chain eruption. The minjung event has provided me with energy to dream the Kingdom of God and seek for peace and justice. For those who experienced the minjung event, it will be all too same. The minjung events have grounded Korean minjung and made We who we are.

2) Minjung Event: Conversations with Alain Badiou's Event

At this point, I refer to Alain Badiou's understanding of event to reinforce a theoretical basis for minjung messiah. Trained as a mathematician, Badiou is one of the most famous French philosophers today. Influenced by Plato, Hegel, Lacan and Deleuze, he is outspoken critic of both the analytic as well as postmodern schools of thoughts.

Saint Paul, regarded as his masterpiece, starts off by asking this serious question: "what are the conditions for a universal singularity?" Badiou responds to this question in these words:

Since truth is eventual, or of the order of what occurs, it is singular. It is neither structural, nor axiomatic, nor legal. No available generality can account for it, nor structure the subject who

claims to follow I its wake. Consequently, there cannot be a law of truth.¹³

This sentence tells me that a universal singularity is not to be founded in some objective truth but in a specific and outstanding event. The event, according to Badiou, “compels us to decide a new way of being.”¹⁴ The event is something that exceeds its conditions of emergence and moreover in doing so radically reconfigures these conditions.¹⁵

When it comes to refer ‘the event,’ Paul pinpoints the ‘Christ-event’: “Jesus Christ is the pure event.”¹⁶ It was the Christ’s resurrection that made possible the Christ event: “the event has not come to prove something; it is pure beginning. Christ’s resurrection is neither an argument nor an accomplishment. There is no proof of the event; nor is the event a proof.”¹⁷ Under the Christ’s event, there is no difference between Jew and Greek:

For him who considers that the real is pure event, Jewish and Greek discourses no longer present, as they continue to do in the work of Levinas, the paradigm of a major difference for thought. This is the driving force behind Paul’s universalist conviction: that ethnic or cultural difference, of which the opposition between Greek and Jew is in his time, and in the empire as a whole, the prototype, is no longer significant with regard to the real, or to the new object that sets out a new discourse. No real distinguished the first two discourses any longer, and their distinction collapses into rhetoric. As Paul declares, defying the evidence: “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” (Rom. 10.12)¹⁸

Theodore Jennings explains above passage as following: “the messianic message is not private: it is directed to all.”¹⁹ To simply ask, “what does the Christ event mean?” is to establish a universal singularity that allows Christianity to extend beyond its particular conditions of emergence conditions, which widely assumed a Jew-Greek paradigm.²⁰

¹³ Badiou, Alain, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Translated by Ray Brassier (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 14.

¹⁴ Badiou, Alain, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Translated and introduced by Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2001), 41.

¹⁵ “Events are irreducible singularities, the ‘beyond-the-law’ of situations. Each faithful truth-process is an entirely invented immanent break with the situation. Subjects, which are the local occurrences of the truth-process (‘points’ of *trutz*), are particular and incomparable inductions.”-Ibid., 44.

¹⁶ Badiou, Alain, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹ Jennings, Theodore., *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul* (California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 24.

²⁰ Jennings says, “Alain Badiou notes the odd relation between a small band of messiah followers in a town or

Badiou believes that Paul's idea may shed some light on the contemporary postmodern issue: "a cultural and historical relativism"²¹ This problem parallels the first-century Jew-Greek paradigm with its prioritization of the Jew-Greek cultural difference. In the face of contemporary cultural relativism, Badiou proposes that we follow Paul by insisting on the overarching truths that transcend mere cultural forms and overturn everything.

As we have seen, the main purpose of this part has been to explore Badiou's 'event'. So, what can we do to find a contribution for minjung event from Badiou's event? The first generation of minjung theologians tended to confine minjung to the oppressed and marginalized people of Koreans. Given the classification of dealing with minjung in the past, minjung theology tries to reform the notion of minjung from national minjung to global minjung. There is no single discourse (nation, race, ideology etc) which caught our eye in today. Although minjung theology involves temporal-vertical minjung event in Korea, there is no a band of spatial-lateral sympathy with the changes of global context in minjung theology.

I expect that Badiou's idea enables minjung theology to have eyes to see the minjung in the era of globalization. In order to meet today's demands, minjung theology engages the concerns of global minjung who have a culturally diverse background. And then, minjung theology will have to create new global minjung event as a universal singularity.

III. The Understanding of Derrida's Messianic

In the preceding pages, we have explored the concept of Badiou's 'universal singularity' derived from 'messianic event.' Badiou's work trying to find universality in the postmodern world stands in sharp contrast to Derrida's deconstruction, with its emphasis upon difference, trace, dissemination, and specters etc. Now that we know something of universality in minjung messiah, the next step in opposition to the former is to deal with deconstruction in minjung messiah. Before turning to Derrida's messianic, I will deal with an overview of

city and the entire region of which they are a part. He notes that 'through their commensurability with a truth, anonymous individuals are transformed into a vector of humanity as a whole' (*Saint Paul*, 20). How much more true would this be of those who are situated in the very capital of the empire! Here we have the first of a complex set of relationships that Paul deploys between whole and part."- Jennings, Theodore., *Outlaw Justice*, 24.

²¹ Ibid., 6.

Derrida's thought.

1. A Trajectory of Derrida's Thought

First of all, Derrida tried to show how Western thinking has been dominated by logocentrism. Logocentrism is the idea that words can communicate fixed meanings between individuals who live in different cultures. For Derrida, this is one of the founding assumptions of Western thought, and one that his deconstruction was designed to call into question.

At the opening of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida states “everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under the name of writing.”²² For Derrida, logocentrism is based on the premise that the full meaning of a word is present to in our minds.

Derrida regards this idea as “the metaphysics of presence,”²³ and considers it one of the great illusions of Western thought. It exercises a hierarchical preference for one over the many, identity over difference, eternity over time, the same over the other, and speech over writing. Against such illusions of Western thought, Derrida tries to expose logocentrism as no more than a substitute or a supplement of their own absence:

It was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.²⁴

For Derrida, “no center” has occurred in our world. For me, it is read that “in the beginning, there was a rupture,” and the rupture is language's invasion of our universal realm of problems. Because this rupture has occurred, it is necessary for us to think through its

²² Derrida, Jacques., *Of Grammatology*. tr., Gayatri Spivak. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 7.

²³ Derrida, Jacques., “Structure, Sign, and Play” in *Writing and Difference*. tr., Alan Bass. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 281.

²⁴ Ibid., 280.

entailment-to recognize that there is no center. In short, signification does not present or represent some original presence. There is no foundation to guarantee meaning. There is no point of reference outside the text by which to interpret it. For this reason, Derrida claims, “there is nothing outside the text.”²⁵

Then, what does text make as text?²⁶ That is to say, how does language deconstruct the presence or self-identity of center? The answer to these questions is “*différance*”. For Derrida, what makes text is *difference*,²⁷ which is composed of two verbs, to *differ* and to *defer*.²⁸ When asked about difference, Derrida replies:

The gram as difference, then, is a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. Difference is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the a of difference indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the “full” terms would not signify, would not function. It is also the becoming-space of the spoken chain-which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming-space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from one to the other.²⁹

²⁵ Derrida, Jacques., *Of Grammatology*, 158.

²⁶ Deconstruction has its roots in textual reading: “To return deconstruction here to the history of philosophy is to revert to its place of formation as textual reading. Indeed, to put it in a nutshell, deconstruction is the reading of texts in terms of their marks, trace, or indecidable features, in terms of their margins, limits, or frameworks, and in terms of their self-circumscriptions or self-delimitations as texts. But, what does this mean? It means that deconstruction is concerned with offering an account of what is going on in a text-not by seeking out its meaning, or its component parts, or its systematic implications-but rather by marking off its relations to other texts, its contexts, its sub-texts. It means that deconstruction accounts for how a text’s explicit formulations undermine its implicit or non-explicit aspects. It brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. It highlights what remains indecidable and what operates as an indecidable in the text itself.”- *Continental Philosophy II: Derrida and Deconstruction*. Edited by Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 1989), 4.

²⁷ Derrida says, “It is a question, rather, of producing a new concept of writing. This concept can be called *différance*. The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each ‘element’-phoneme or grapheme-being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text.”- Derrida, Jacques., *Positions*, Translated and Annotated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 26.

²⁸ Derrida, Jacques., *Of Grammatology*, 27-44.

²⁹ Derrida, Jacques., *Positions*, 27.

It means that a meaning is no identity, nor correspondence, nor presence. Rather, the meaning emerges from difference, distance and interval. In Derrida's early work, Derrida's difference might have been accomplished by demonstrating that perfectibility is never definitively achieved. On the principle of difference, Derrida is equally determined to avoid replacing one kind of logocentric certainty with another and so he declares that even his own deconstructive terms such as difference, trace, supplement, dissemination, and indeed the very term deconstruction itself must themselves be placed 'under erasure' lest a new dogmatism takes place of the old. Derrida resolves accordingly to deploy his own deconstructive terms as 'undecidable.'

In his later work, Derrida is interested in many unconditionals: such as an unconditional gift, an unconditional pardon, an unconditional mourning, and an unconditional hospitality. As each of these is deemed 'impossible', impossibility takes on an increasingly strong resonance in his late work. For example, hospitality, gift, pardon, justice, and Democracy-to-come are not a pure ideal. It is impossible for them to come true. Derrida asks what political and ethical contribution a philosophy of impossibility can make in his later work. The idea of deconstruction in Derrida's later work finds its fullest expression in his famous aphorism: "the messianic without messianism."³⁰

2. The Messianic Without Messianism

Western traditional messianism, waiting for the arrival of messiah, is related to the final judgment and the end of the world in the future. When imagining the coming of the messiah it attributes a new kind of origin and centrism to a divine other. This issue also includes the imperfections of the present situation, urgency of the eschatological event, which calls for a positive moral action and repentance.

Derrida distinguishes his messianic from traditional messianisms, such as Jewish, Christian, and Islamic: "This messianic dimension does not depend upon any messianism, it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion."³¹ For Derrida this distinction is very important because all messianisms have produced violence and war while they encounter with the Other: "The messianisms have all the makings of a

³⁰ Derrida, Jacques., *Acts of Religion*, Edited by ankdjar (NY: Routledge, 2002) ,56.

³¹ Ibid., 56.

catastrophe, that is, of war. This they unfailingly provoke, with merciless regularity, under one of the most grotesque and terrifying names we know, that of a holy war.”³²

In contrast to messianism, Derrida took for himself the motto, ‘the messianic without messianism’ in the 1990’s. Derrida’s book *Specters of Marx* offers a detailed analysis of the messianic. In the book, responding to Fukuyama’s argument that history has ended because Western liberal democracy triumphed over communism, Derrida creates a new terminology, hauntology: “a ghost (of communism) never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back.”³³

When it comes to hauntology, Derrida mentions *the Communist Manifesto* as his inspiration.³⁴ The Manifesto starts out by uttering incantations as following: “A specter is haunting Europe-the specter of communism.”³⁵ This phrase is very interesting image in that communism was a specter even before it began. This metaphor enables us to expect that the specter still haunts a world ruled by global capitalism because the ghost has always haunted us. For this reason, the specter leads us back to the past or to a brighter future, making us aware of ‘the time is out of joint.’³⁶ This means that the ghost reality is constituted by traces, not words, ‘to come’: “they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.”³⁷

After publishing *Specters of Marx*, there was a controversy about Derrida’s messianic. The book, *Ghostly Demarcations* is a set of related pieces of writing about critic of Derrida’s messianic. Responding his critics, Derrida wrote an article entitled “Marx & Sons”. In this essay, Derrida expressed his messianic concisely: “Messianicity (which I regard as a universal structure of experience, and which cannot be reduced to religious messianism of any stripe) is anything but Utopia: it refers, in every here-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is, to the most irreducibly heterogeneous otherness.”³⁸ The messianic involves an openness to a thinking of the future as ‘the coming of the other,’ and it

³² Derrida, Jacques., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Edited with a Commentary by John Caputo.(New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 161.

³³ Derrida, Jacques., *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (NY: Routledge, 1994), 123.

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁷ Ibid., 221.

³⁸ Derrida, Jacques., “Marx & Sons” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx*. Edited by Michael Sprinker (NY: Verso, 1999), 248.

is, as Derrida has often said, ‘what happens.’ The messianic is the absolute future which will never be a future present. It becomes promise, hope, and justice in the impossible advent.³⁹

In conclusion, Derrida’s messianic gave me genuine insights into the reality of God. The central meaning of Derrida’s messianic focused on alterity is the turning point of God’s reality, no longer constrained by the modern logos. Derrida is no longer interested in the question of the divinity of Christ, implicitly allowing philosophy to define the word divinity. Namely, ‘what is God?’ is no longer our question but it is replaced by, ‘who is God for us today?’ For me the main aspects of Derrida’s message is that Derrida’s messianic is not conceived but rather entered into the world. This transition means that ‘the messianic without messianism’ now comes through the interruptive experience of suffering itself, the suffering of all those ignored, marginalized, and colonized by patriarchy, capital, racism, sexism, first world perspective, and homophobia etc.

3. When Does Minjung Messiah Meet Derrida’s Messianic

In its encounter with Derrida’s messianic, I expect that minjung messiah may be complemented with Derrida’s messianic. Minjung theology derives not only from minjung tradition in Korean history, culture, and religion, but also from minjung theologians’ participation with minjung in a street and a prison. In these struggles, they listen attentively to minjung stories and become part of these stories. Through their involvement in minjung struggle, minjung theology has change the oppressive social system of Korea. Namely, If God is real, then this God must be involved in the struggles of the present to bring about liberation from oppression. Minjung theology holds their justification of God by combining the oppressed God with human’s praxis. In this juncture, minjung messiah plays a significant role

³⁹ Derrida gave an amplification on his thought to us as following: “Although there is a waiting here, an apparently passive limit to anticipation (I cannot calculate everything, predict and program all that is coming, the future in general, etc., and this limit to calculability or knowledge is also, for t finite being, the condition of praxis, decision, action and responsibility), the exposure to the event, which can either come to pass or not (condition of absolute otherness), is inseparable from a promise and an injunction that call for commitment without delay[sans attendre], and, in truth, rule out abstention. Even if messianicity as I describe it here can seem abstract (precisely because we have to do here with a universal structure of relation to the event, to the concrete otherness o him who/that is coming, a way of thinking the event ‘before’ or independently of all ontology), we have to do here with the most concrete urgency, and the most revolutionary as well. Anything but Utopian, messianicity mandates that we interrupt the ordeinary course of things, time and history here-now; it is inseparable from an affirmation of otherness and justice”- Ibid, 249.

in mediating two realms.

In my opinion, minjung messiah is a kind of “meta-narrative,”⁴⁰ which is Lyotard’s term for a universal theory, such as Marxism or Hegelianism. Such theories conceived of history as a process of human liberation. Like them, minjung theology also sees all human history as the history of minjung’s struggle against Korean dictatorship, thus subordinating all other narratives, such as gender or racial ones, to this overriding consideration. The notion of the minjung as a collective and active subject actually comes right from this idea of history.

On the contrary, Derrida’s messianic is always “not now,” “not present,” and “to-come” so that this coming is neither fully incarnated nor historicized. In my view, a wonderful word in all of Derrida’s terminology is a meditation on the word ‘come’ because his later thought was based on imagination of ‘to-come.’ Likewise to the prayers of the early Christian,⁴¹ *Maranatha*, Derrida’s prayer is “come [*Viens*].”

“Come” appeared to me to appeal to the “place” (but here the word place becomes too enigmatic), let us say to the place, the time, and to the advent of what in the apocalyptic in general no longer lets itself be contained simply by philosophy, metaphysics, ontoeschatology, and by all the reading they have proposed of the apocalyptic.⁴²

‘Come’ is commitment to a future that is beyond every present life: “Come [*Viens*] beyond being, comes from beyond being and calls beyond being.”⁴³ ‘Come’ is also the absolute other who will never be a future present: “Come is only derivable, absolutely derivable, but only from the other, from nothing that may be an origin or a verifiable, decidable, presentable, appropriable identity, from nothing not already derivable and arrivable without *rive* [bank, shore].”⁴⁴ The messianic is opening to the future or coming of the other as the advent of hospitality, gift, pardon, and justice. In so doing, Derrida desires for

⁴⁰ Lyotard, Jean-François., *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

⁴¹ The witness to these things says: “Yes, I come quickly. Amen. Come, Adon Yeshoua. Dilection of the Adon Yeshous’ to all... [Rev 22:20]” - Derrida, Jacques., “Of an Apocalyptic Tone” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Edited by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 64.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 66.

the messianic to come, which is not fully embodied in the present. This makes a critical difference between minjung messiah and Derrida's messianic without messianism.

IV. Conclusion: Minjung Theology and Derrida in Dialogue

In this paper, I have tried to articulate my understanding of the messianic of Derrida and minjung theology. This final chapter is the heart of my paper as it focuses on the dialogue between minjung messiah and Derrida's messianic. With this consideration in mind, in analyzing Derrida and minjung theology, I will explore where they are able to interconnect.

I will pursue this task while asking the following questions: first, "What Does Derrida's thought Contribute Minjung Theology?"; second, "What Does Minjung Theology Contribute Derrida's Thought?"; and third, "what is the affinity between minjung messiah and Derrida's messianic?"

1. What Does Derrida's Thought Contribute Minjung Theology?

If someone were to ask, "what do you think Derrida could contribute to minjung theology?", I would say, "Derrida's messianic provides minjung messiah with the opportunity to extend its range of ideas of the minjung, and to come to a turning point in the development of minjung theology."

Basically, minjung theology is derived not by armchair theologians, but by practicing theologians who take part in the action of minjung struggles-street demonstrations, sit-in-strikes with workers, imprisonment, ect. In these struggles, they listen to the voice of the minjung and the story rapidly becomes an important part of minjung theology. Its strength, however, is also its weakness.

Many people raised the question how minjung theology can continue to be relevant and functioning in the present age when old economic problems and dictatorship no longer exist in South Korea. The economic situation and political structures have changed. Through these controversies, we become aware that the world is divided not by a single obvious boundary but by a number of boundaries, and therefore, there can be many minority subjects according to gender, generation, region, ability, and so on.

If Derrida were to encounter minjung theology at today, he would criticize it: minjung theology is too subjective and overly influenced by a subjective set of social, political, and

economic conditions. That is to say, minjung theology gives to its historical circumstances a determinative weight in theology and ethics. For this reason, when Derrida meets minjung theology, I think, he would suggest changing the question from “who is the minjung” to “how do minjung appear?” That is to say, “how are minjung created?” Or “How do minjung look?”

In my opinion, in its encounter with Derrida’s messianic, minjung messiah may learn how s/he meets the needs of the 21st century. In order to overcome her/his shortcoming, minjung messiah has to deconstruct his/her agenda which aims at a grand state power. Namely, it has to criticize not only state power characterized by the centralization of political power, but also individualizing power in life. It means that minjung messiah should not only focus on political choices or institutions, or on the kind of people who rule them, but should also incorporate the concrete practices such as hospitality and welcoming, for many others who are ‘to-come.’ Derrida provides insight into how for minjung theology may approach this issue.

2. What Does Minjung Theology Contribute Derrida’s thought?

On the other hand, if Derrida has encountered minjung theology, he would have been stimulated by the challenge. Minjung theology derives not only from minjung tradition in Korean history, culture, and religion, but also from minjung theologians’ participation with minjung in a street, and a prison. In these struggles, they listen attentively to minjung stories and become part of these stories. Through their involvement in minjung struggle, minjung theology has changed the oppressive social system of Korea.

For this reason, minjung theologians wouldn’t have agreed with Derrida, so they would have asked Derrida a painful, yet necessary, question: “What we need today is not radical openness to the Other and absolutization of difference but the solidarity of the Other for the sake of Justice. How does the relationship with the Other take place outside of history?” From minjung theology’s perspective, Derrida’s radical openness to the Other gives rise to a dilemma because minjung theology looks at the Other from its partisan position, the socio-political level.

In conclusion, originally, this part its target for minjung messiah contribution to Derrida’s messianic. I expect that a meeting between minjung theology and Derrida would

exert a favorable influence upon Derrida's messianic. What Derrida needs is to put theory into practice. Minjung theology provides Derrida with the opportunity to enrich his praxical capacity as much as possible to make up for what he lacks.

3. What is the affinity between Minjung Messiah and Derrida's Messianic?

By examining Derrida's philosophical similarities to and differences from minjung theology and *vice versa*, this paper hopes to contribute to the ongoing significant and positive conversation between minjung messiah and Derrida's messianic. However, the comparison between Derrida and minjung theology is very limited because it is difficult to find a common ground between minjung theology and Derrida.

Casual conversation in the academy is grounded in the assumption that minjung theology is Christian theology and Derrida is definitively rooted in Judaism. In addition, the former was influenced by modernity, with an emphasis on subjectivity, and the latter was influenced by postmodernity in that Derrida's thought was shaped by questions of openness to difference and the Other.

Though there are theoretical differences in the works of minjung theology and Derrida, it should be apparent that minjung theology and Derrida are indeed grappling with similar problems of Western theology. More specifically, discussing a thread of connections between the two can be said to be justifiable for two reasons: (1) Both of them are removed from the embodying predeterminism of historicism based on the bourgeois notion of time as a linear, continuous progress, (2) They affirm that every phase of history is open to a plurality of readings which overthrows any premise to certainty.

After careful examination of their thought, I posit that it is possible that these two dialogue partners. They could have learned a great deal from each other, and each of their systems of thought could have been enhanced by such a conversation. They responded to the human situation at least in one comparable way. Their respective works emerged in response to the twentieth century's tragic human situation. They searched for divine transcendence in a life of commitment to the Other. They both regarded the turn to the Other as opening new avenues for the re-imagining of the world.

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Abstract

This paper is intended to broaden my horizons of understanding about Derrida's deconstruction, which restore justice in a world plagued with suffering and overcome the problem of injustice. In connection with this issue, I wish to address minjung theology, Korean version of Liberation theology. Especially, the present research question emerged from the question: "what does the messianic mean in Derrida's deconstruction and minjung theology? " With regard to debate about messianicity perjury, they have somethings in common.

In traditional theology, the notion of the messianism is premised on the final judgment at the end of the world in the future. But both Derrida and minjung theology think differently from traditional theology on the matter of the messianic. Namely, for Derrida and minjung theology commitment to the messiancity is the necessary context for understanding of God. God is knowable only by making the truth by changing the world. It means that the messianic is not conceived but entered into the world through a certain praxical engagement. In this paper, I will discuss the broad sense of their messianic by analyzing and comparing their theological significances.

Keyword: Minjung Messiah, Minjung Event, Deconstruction, Difference,
The messianic without messianism