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AN APOLOGETIC TO SUN HWAN PYUN'S DIALOGUE THEOLOGY AS A  
LIBERATION THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

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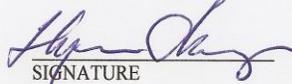
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## ABSTRACT

### AN APOLOGETIC TO SUN HWAN PYUN'S DIALOGUE THEOLOGY AS A LIBERATION THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Young Chan Kim

Liberty Theological Seminary, 2012

Mentor: Dr. Fred Smith

Sun Hwan Pyun was a professor at Methodist Theological University. As a theologian, he grappled with two important theological questions: “Is Christianity an exclusive religion?” and “Is Christianity only a religion for the upper class?” Regarding the exclusivism of Christianity, Pyun searched for an answer in ecumenical-religious pluralism. As an answer for “is Christianity for the poor”, he accepts Minjung liberation theology. Pyun wanted to combine these two theologies and, subsequently, referred to his dialogue theology as a liberation theology of religions. The purpose of this thesis is to search for the theological and biblical answers to these theological questions by giving an apologetic to Pyun’s theology.

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I want to give all glory to my Lord and my Savior, Jesus Christ. I want to worship Him and commit to Him, and proclaim Him as the only Savior.

**Y. C. K**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Korean church enjoyed unprecedented growth in the last century. One of the many causes of this growth is the conservative political tendency that resulted from the confrontation against North Korea. Another cause of growth is conservative faith fostered by the influence of conservative missionaries. Nevertheless, some churches and theologians who stand on Minjung theology<sup>1</sup> and indigenous theology have maintained liberal theological beliefs. While they were the political and religious minority, they took the initiative in protesting against the military dictatorship government. As a result, they contributed to the democratization of South Korea.

Currently, growth in the Korean church has plateaued. Furthermore, the Korean church faces attacks from young people, netizens,<sup>2</sup> the intellectual class, and other religions.<sup>3</sup> The negative awareness of young people has created a decline in the growth of the Korean church while, at the same time, the polemical writings of the netizens against the Korean church on the internet aggravate the atmosphere of anti-Christianity.

Additionally, the works of the intellectuals are undermining the conservative faith of

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<sup>1</sup> Minjung is a Korean word which literally means “the mass of the people.” Minjung indicates those who are politically oppressed, economically exploited, socially alienated, and culturally uneducated by supernational groups. Minjung theology is a type of contextual, indigenous Korean liberation theology. It started from theological concerns with the evil of social injustice and the dehumanization of the poor in Korean context. (Jung Yong Lee, *Minjungsinhak: Bipanjukipmun, Minjungsinhak, Segaesinhakgwa Daehwahada*, (Seoul: Dongyun, 2010), 23-28.)

<sup>2</sup> A user of the internet, especially a habitual or avid one.

<sup>3</sup> These phenomena are negative comments about Christianity on the internet. (*‘Gidokgyopyumha’ Intunet Deachaek Siguphada*, <http://news.kukinews.com/article/view.asp?page=1&gCode=kmi&arcid=0005274736&cp=ny> (accessed January 10, 2012))

Christianity, and the people who have other religious traditions criticize the exclusive and aggressive evangelism of Christianity. They all criticize the conservative tendency of the Korean church in politics and faith. According to them, the Korean church is exclusive and becomes a religion for the established.

Among major denominations in South Korea, Methodist theologians have been relatively open-minded toward liberal theology. One of these theologians, Sun Hwan Pyun learned Western liberal theology in the United States and Switzerland and became interested in Asian religions, especially Buddhism. While a theologian of a major conservative denomination in Korea, he resolutely had relationships with liberal theologians and scholars of other religions. He appraised indigenous theology and Minjung theology as an “*avant-garde* and polarity of Korean theology.”<sup>4</sup> He pursued a theological complement and supplement with the religious traits of indigenous theology and the political traits of Minjung theology.<sup>5</sup> The goal of his theological efforts is dialogue theology as a liberation theology of religions. Sun Hwan Pyun struggled with two issues: “[I]s Christianity an exclusive religion?” and “Is Christianity a religion for the established?”<sup>6</sup> Even though Pyun was excommunicated from the Methodist Denomination in 1992, his disciples still follow in his theological footsteps. The theological questions that Pyun raised are still crucial issues in Christian theology and on the mission field.

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<sup>4</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Tajonggyowa Sinhak,” *Sinhaksasang*. Vol. 47 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyunguso, 1987, Winter), 687.

<sup>5</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*. (Seul: Daehangidokyoseohui, 2003), 187.

<sup>6</sup> Knitter states that the experience of the *many poor* and the experience of the *many religions* are the main challenges to the churches today. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 178. Emphasis in original.)

### Purpose of Research

The purpose of this thesis is to search for the theological and biblical answers to these theological questions by giving an apologetic to Pyun's theology. To accomplish this, Pyun's religious theology will be related to the problem of pluralism in Christianity, and his liberation theology will be examined in light of the problem of the Christian church's public good deeds. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the two aspects of his theology as separate units, not as a united whole, and the problems that occur when they are fused together.

### Way of Research

Sun Hwan Pyun's theology has many changing processes. His theology is like a theological journey and a struggle against traditional theology for his liberation theology of religions. Chapter two will deal with Pyun's life and theological journey. Chapter three will research his dialogue theology as ecumenical-religious pluralism. It will be systemically organized in order to clarify it more. As a conclusion of this chapter, an apologetic will be given to it. Lastly, chapter four will study his dialogue theology as Minjung-liberation theology. It also will be systematized and an apologetic will be given. The conclusion will briefly evaluate the united liberation theology of religions and propose biblical answers on crucial elements of the Christian faith as compared with Pyun's theology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SUN HWAN PYUN AND HIS DIALOGUE THEOLOGY

#### Sun Hwan Pyun's Life and Theological Studies

##### Jinnampo: The Cradle of Theology

In 1928, Sun Hwan Pyun was born as a son of a farmer on the outskirts of Jinnampo, an outer port of Pyongyang. To him, Jinnampo was not only a harbor city, but a tribal society mixed with myths and symbols. It was there that he learned mystery, awe, and the futility of life; it was also where he found religion.<sup>7</sup> The beautiful landscape of his hometown, in which he had played, did not just teach him the truth of nature, but also revealed to him the existence of the ultimate reality. He confessed, "Nature was God's bosom bearing me."<sup>8</sup>

When he was in fourth grade in elementary school, he read a book titled, *Sunghyunwegeolmuleo* (聖賢偉傑物語) of *Suyangjunjip*.<sup>9</sup> Living in the mythical and shamanistic world outside of civilization, he met Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, and Jesus in the book. The sages revealed to him the mystery of life and gave him new eyes to lead world religions and a third set of eyes to see new life. Pyun valued them as the persons who gave him the standard of life and who led him to the philosophical faith as the

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<sup>7</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *I.Nae Sinhakui Yoramji (Eorinsijul)* <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph01.html>. (internet homepage dedicated to the memory of Pyun-Sun Hwan, accessed January 10, 2012) *Christian Newspaper*, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> In English: *The Stories of Sages and Great Men* in *Collected Works for Cultivating the Mind*

universal foundation of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

When he was eighteen years old, he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord through his spiritual father, Methodist pastor Suk Gu Sin. Sin was converted to Christianity as a scholar of the Chinese classics. Sin was convinced that the only way to deliver Korea from Japanese imperialism was for the nation to believe in Jesus Christ. Sin, one of thirty-three who signed the Declaration of Independence and the Notice of Independence during the 3.1 Movement in 1919, formed an organization of twenty four persons for independence against Japanese imperialism. In 1950, Sin was executed by the North Korean regime for treason against the Communist Party. Pyun learned about the relationship between loving his nation and believing in Jesus Christ and of religion and politics through his mentor, Sin. However, Pyun saw more value in Sin's efforts of trying to interpret the Gospel and give an apologetic in the context of Asian religions. Pyun evaluated Sin's sermon as the original form of the Korean indigenous theology, preaching to carry on a dialogue with Asian religions and the Gospel. Pyun professes that his hometown Jinnampo was his theological cradle and says, "I was destined to be a theologian who has an assignment to form Korean theology: how I could reinterpret the Gospel in the context of Asian religions."<sup>11</sup>

#### Theological Studies in Korea: Meeting Karl Barth's theology

In 1948, Pyun enrolled in the Sunghwa Methodist Theological College in Pyongyang with Sin's encouragement. Pyun remembered that he was shocked by the

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<sup>10</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *I.Nae Sinhakui Yoramji (Eorinsijul)* <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph01.html>. (accessed January 10, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

study of historical criticism in the introduction to the Old Testament and introduction to the New Testament classes. It was then that he was first introduced to Karl Barth's theology through Young Ryun Kim, a systematic theologian.

Due to the Korean War, Pyun fled to Busan and studied again at Methodist Theological College. At that time, professor Sung Bum Yun showed him a new possibility with philosophical theology using Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. Pyun realized the fact that philosophy has had a crucial role in the process of the formation of theology. Professor Hyun Sul Hong instructed him in Richard Niebuhr's theology, building a bridge between doctrine and ethics, religion and culture. While Hong insisted on a change of society like that of Niebuhr and John C. Bennett, he criticized the radicals for being uncritical of the secularity of the churches and ignoring humanity's existential questions about the meaning of life beyond the social class.

In 1958, Pyun visited Dr. Bong Rang Park of the graduate school at Hanshin University and learned the essence of Reformed Theology and Barth's theology. Under Park's instruction, he felt that the "Human-Oriented Tower of Babel Liberal Theology" was completely destroyed and the new world of the Bible was revealed.<sup>12</sup> However, Pyun saw that Park's theological stance stands against the philosophical theology of Nam Dong Seo, who was teaching Paul Tillich in the same school. Pyun also saw the difference between Park's theology and that of Yun-Sung Bum, the Methodist theologian who was building the Korean theology through connecting the revelation of the Bible with Korean culture and traditional religions. From here, he began to utilize the principles of dialogue and tolerance, which is the idea of recognizing and understanding each other's

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

differences.<sup>13</sup>

### Theological School of Drew University: Meeting Existential Theology

Pyun had studied twice (1962-1963, 1966-1967) in one of the most famous Methodist theological schools, the Theological School of Drew University. He was interested in the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten and Gerhard Ebeling, as well as the existential hermeneutics of S. Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger, who were strong influences on this school.

Professor Stanley Romaine Hopper taught him that the study of religion is not through the logos of logic, but through poetry. Hopper insisted that one should try to see as God sees, not try to see God, and should try to see the world from the perspective of the Cross, not try to see the Cross.<sup>14</sup>

Carl Donald Michalson, Jr. was a crucial influence on Pyun. Michalson, as a systematic theologian, tried to rebuild theology with the concept of history, without dealing with nature. To Michalson, nature is a reality as long as it is history, which involves the question of the meaning of man. He divides history into existential history and the history of the eschaton.<sup>15</sup> The task of his historical hermeneutics is to distinguish and separate historical intention from the non-historical expression for conserving and elaborating the intention. According to him, the meaninglessness of existential history

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<sup>13</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *3.Siljonjuk Sinhakgwau Mannam (Miguk Yuhaksijul)* <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph03.html> and *Theopoiesis: A Perspective on the Work of Stanley Romaine Hopper by David L Miller* <http://theopoetics.wordpress.com/2008/02/07/theopoiesisa-perspective-on-the-work-of-stanley-romaine-hopper-by-david-l-miller/> (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>15</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Naeui Sinhak Suub, *Hyundae Sinhakgwa Munhak*, PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 6 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1999), 354.

could be overcome by connecting it with the history of the eschaton. He divided the history into the history of the Bible (salvation-history) and history of the eschaton (the event in salvation-history), and then insists that salvation-history is not ultimate and should be interpreted by the event in salvation-history through Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> Michalson criticized Tillich's symbolism to make the revelational event of Christ unnecessary by overemphasizing existence. He also evaluated that Ott's dependence on Heidegger caused him to regress back to ontology. He tried to reconstruct his theology with the concept of the historicity of existence started by Bultmann.<sup>17</sup>

#### University of Basel in Switzerland: Meeting Zen Buddhism

Through a meeting with Fritz Buri, a professor of Basel, Pyun was introduced to Orientalism. While Buri was teaching in Drew University as a guest professor, he gave a lecture with a textbook written by Karl T. Jaspers as a theologian of Jaspers' school. Buri's new theological approach presented Pyun with the possibility of existential theology with two viewpoints. First, Pyun could solidify the stance of existence, not kerygma, in Bultmann's theology. Second, he could learn and study about Asian religions, especially, Mahayana Buddhism. Buri and Pyun started to read the classics of Zen Buddhism, like *Jungbupanjang (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye)* and *Byukamrok (Blue Cliff Record)* of Dogen, and the writings of Buddhist philosophers of Tokyo school. At that time, while Pyun felt that his own self-identity was Asian, he came and went

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<sup>16</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph03.html> and Steen, Peter J. Book Review of Carl Michalson's *Worldly Theology* <http://www.freewebs.com/petesteen/OnCarl%20MichalsonWTJ.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>17</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*, 174.

across the border of the West and the East.

Karl Rahner's lecture and concept of "Anonymous Christianity" shocked Pyun. At this time, Pyun made the acquaintance of William Johnston, the author of *Christian Zen* and John B. Cobb, a Methodist theologian who pursues Buddhist Christianity. Pyun wrote a thesis entitled, "The Problem of the Finality of Christ in the Perspective of the Christian-Zen Encounter; Carl Donald Michalson, Seichi Yagi, and Fritz Buri." Pyun presented the research from his meeting with these three theologians of Zen Buddhism and Christology. He believed that the plural religious situation of the orient, making a fluid unification through Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, could be characterized by the concept of absolute non-existence of Zen Buddhism.

#### Methodist Theological University: Searching for Interreligious Dialogue

In 1967, Pyun started teaching systematic theology as a professor at Methodist Theological University after returning to Korea from the Theological School of Drew University. In 1980, Pyun became a dean of the Graduate School of Methodist Theological University. Pyun attempted to have a dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, pursuing indigenous theology and religious pluralism. He had several heated arguments with conservative theologians who see other religions not only as the object of exchange and dialogue with Christianity, but as objects of mission by Christianity.

In 1992, Pyun was excommunicated from the Seoul Annual Convention of the Methodist Denomination due to his thesis, "Buddha and Christ". He lost his professorship, ministry, and qualification as a believer. In his final statements, while he criticized the activity of missions based on proselytizing as religious imperialism, he

insisted that Christianity should no longer be a conquering religion, but should destroy the wall between religions for the salvation of all humankind.<sup>18</sup> In 1995, Pyun died at his house while writing an article at his desk. However, his followers and disciples still look upon his memory and remember him as an influential Korean theologian.

### Journey towards Building a Korean Theology

#### Beyond Karl Barth's Theology of Revelation

In his first theological study, Pyun was introduced to the theology of Karl Barth. Pyun met Barth's theology through Young Ryun Kim of Sunghwa Theological College even though Kim was not a strong Barthian. Pyun, afterwards, earnestly started to learn Barth's theology through Dr. Bong Rang Park of Hanshin University. Pyun highly appreciated that Park denied verbal inspiration, which was the cause of the division of the Korean Presbyterian denomination into the Jesus Party and the Christ Party, which was based on the distinction of the Bible and God's revelation.<sup>19</sup> It is clear that Barth's theology influenced Pyun; as Pyun once said, "I studied among the 3 B's, Barth, Bultmann, and Buri."<sup>20</sup>

The point of Park's view of indigenous theology is that the starting point is the event of the salvation of God as it appeared in history; not culture or religions, but only Christ. Park insisted, "The problem with nationalization is that it is not concerned with how the Gospel of Christianity can be applied to traditional culture, but how we can

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<sup>18</sup> Jongyodawonronja Pyun Sun Hwan, *Sahu 10 nunmane Sasilsang Bokgundoida*, [http://www.pressian.com/article/article.asp?article\\_num=40050905165354&Section=](http://www.pressian.com/article/article.asp?article_num=40050905165354&Section=) (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>19</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/pho1.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Bultmannui Bisinhwahwawa Tochakhwau Gwaje. Sinhakgwa Sege Vol 3.* (Seoul: Methodist Theological University, 1977) 83.

change traditional culture according to the pattern of the Bible.”<sup>21</sup> Pyun was influenced by Park and, in his master’s thesis about “Ordo Salutis (order of salvation) in John Wesley’s theology”, negatively tried to erase spiritual experience and Wesley’s Christian Perfection by reinterpreting Wesley through Neo-orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

However, he later stood against Barth’s theology. He criticized Park’s theology because Park lacked the vision to see the new theological climate; that the theology of revelation was being challenged by the identical religions and culture. Pyun believed that the testimony of the Bible about Jesus Christ was already interpreted and testified by separate cultural and social situations.<sup>23</sup> At the Theological School of Drew University, through works of Michalson, Pyun learned the existential theology of Heidegger and Bultmann and found a way out of Barth’s revelation theology, emphasizing the transcendence of God.<sup>24</sup> Michalson criticized that the natural elements in Barth’s theology of revelation are too strong; to the point where it hides the historical elements of the Christian faith.<sup>25</sup> After studying at the University of Basel in Switzerland, Pyun felt the need to emancipate Wesley’s theology from the “Babylonian captivity of Neo-orthodoxy.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bong Rang Park, *The Northeast Asia Journal of Theology*, September, 1969, 111. (2.Barut *Sinhakgwau Mannam (Sunghwa Gamsin, Sinhaksijul* <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph02.html>.)

<sup>22</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph02.html>. (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*. 174.

<sup>25</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph03.html>. (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>26</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph02.html> (accessed January 10, 2012)

## Beyond Bultmann's Theology of Demythologization

In 1977, Pyun wrote a thesis about the relationship between Bultmann's demythologization and the nationalization of theology in Korea. According to Pyun, the contribution of Bultmann's demythologization is that Bultmann understood Christ's cross as the Eschaton Event and a judgment from God to break the "Magic Garden" of Asia, and to give them freedom from the power of supernatural fate. Pyun thought that Bultmann's demythologization was calling pantheistic and monistic Koreans to a dualism of resolution and historical world, to being 'the Original Self' who stands and fights against the fatal world.<sup>27</sup> This shows that Pyun still took the position of the inclusive fulfillment theory, which is where other religions are in the process of becoming Christian.<sup>28</sup>

However, he gradually consented to the stance of Karl T. Jaspers, Fritz Buri, and Schubert M. Ogden who criticized that Bultmann's demythologization was not completely achieved. Jaspers thought that objectifying and generalizing an absolute truth in the incarnation of Christ's revelation, confining God to one point in history, is exclusive idolatry. Buri insisted that Christ's kerygma and the Christ myth, the last vestige of Christian faith, should be abandoned. According to Buri, Jesus is just a symbol manifesting the nature of grace. Grace is already given to humans as an internal possibility without involving Christ's kerygma. Ogden thought that the possibility of original existence, the possibility of faith, cannot be exclusively confined to the Nazarene Jesus because humans are responsible beings. According to Ogden, the only basis for

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<sup>27</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Bultmannui Bisinhwahwawa Tochakhwau Gwaje*. 90-91, 93-95.

<sup>28</sup> Hun Kim, "Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo," *Th.M.*, (Gwangju: Honam Theological University, 2006), 7.

salvation is the unchangeable love of God, not the special revelation of Christ. However, Pyun points out that Ogden forgot the fact that God's love is also a myth. Therefore, Pyun thought that Buri's symbolic Christology, which seeks grace in the possibility of human existence, not in the event of salvation of Christ and God's love, is complete demythologization.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, for Pyun, who wanted to develop an Asian theology concerning the spatial and soil of the Gospel, the existential interpretation of Bultmann, who brought existential questions into submission to the cross as an objective and historical fact, has limits.<sup>30</sup>

#### Beyond Carl D. Michalson's Theology of History

The purpose for Pyun wanting to study at the Theological School of Drew University was to learn under Michalson, an existential theologian. Michalson doubted Paul Tillich's theology of ontological existentialism for the reason that, in the case of Tillich's analysis of human existence, the revelation of Christ as the answer is not needed anymore because the ultimate question of Christ as a symbol already has an answer in relationship with being. Like Bultmann, who believed that the important thing in the event of Jesus Christ is not mythical expression but the meaning of salvation, Pyun did not deal with any reality that is not involved in questioning the meaning of life, abandoning speculative supernatural metaphysics.<sup>31</sup> According to him, Wesley believed that anything in the text which deviates from holiness is subject to judgment. A

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<sup>29</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Bultmannui Bisinhwahwawa Tochakhwau Gwaje*. 91-92.

<sup>30</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*. 177-178.

<sup>31</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph03.html> (accessed January 10, 2012)

Christian's holiness is possible in history, but not in nature. Holiness makes the world mature and secularized.<sup>32</sup> Michalson's existential interpretation about Wesley crucially influenced Pyun's theology.<sup>33</sup>

However, Pyun pointed out Michalson's radical tendency to deny the transcendence of God. According to his extreme existential interpretation, the concept of God, as a necessary Being, has disappeared in history. Furthermore, as an Asian theologian, Pyun doubted Michalson's theology because, although very radical, Michalson's theology has the character of an extremely closed, conservative Western theology. Pyun criticized that, even though Michalson's book, *Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology*, was famous, Michalson was close-fisted about learning Japanese Buddhist philosophy and, moreover, he understood Zen Buddhism as an object that should be conquered. Pyun was disappointed that Michalson almost ignored the problem of nationalization and that he denounced Sung Bum Yun's indigenous theology as an anachronism of Korean theology.<sup>34</sup>

#### Beyond Fritz Buri's Theology of Existence

Ik Sang Shin evaluates that the theme of *existence* is the basis of Pyun's theological journey. This theme led Pyun through a process which added to the influence proceeding from R. Bultmann to C. Michalson, and to F. Buri and F. Jaspers. Jaspers injected the concept of the "speculation full of human touches" into the theme of

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<sup>32</sup> Carl Michalson, *World Theology: The Hermeneutical Focus of an Historical Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 148-158.

<sup>33</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*. 175.

<sup>34</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph03.html>. (accessed January 10, 2012)

existence.<sup>35</sup> It is an obvious fact that Buri, *inter alios*, who taught Pyun in Drew University and the University of Basel, greatly influenced Pyun. Pyun's attempt to have dialogue with Buddhism started off with Buri's existential theology.

Pyun confessed that Buri gave him a solution for the theological *aporia* of Michalson and Yagi. Buri showed him the possibility that the name "Christ" is a mythical expression, indicating the non-restriction of human responsibility,<sup>36</sup> not the one and only eschaton event, as Michalson stated, or a revelation of place as the absolute nothing, which Yagi believed.<sup>37</sup> Buri criticizes that Bultmann's theology is not completely demythologized or existentially interpreted. According to Buri, demythologization cannot be compatible with kerygma because the completion of demythologization leads to the deconstruction of the kerygma.<sup>38</sup>

Shin summarizes what Pyun was taught by Buri's existential theology as follows: (1) thoroughness of self-understanding as a non-restricted responsible being, (2) banner of "struggle for love" and "humanization" as eschatonic and practical ethics of self-understanding, (3) completion of demythologization, and (4) understanding the dualistic real world in relation to dialectical tension.<sup>39</sup> Existentialism is a dualistic view in which the subject and object are totally separated into the relationship of "human beings and

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<sup>35</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun-Sun Whaneui Sinhak; Siljoneui Jagi Eehae Yujungeurosu, *Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhak*, Pyun-Sun Whan Akaiv and Dongsusinhakyunguso pyun, (Seoul: Dosuchulpan Mosineunsaramdeul, 2010), 142.

<sup>36</sup> According to Sung Yong Park, For Pyun, as truth is not separated from liberation (Jn. 8:32, NIV), responsibility is not separated from non-restriction. (Sung Yong Park, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Baksa Sarmgwa Geueui Yiyagi, *Olgoonee Sunsaengnim Pyun-Sun Hwan*. (Seoul: Sinanggwa Jijungsa, 2010), 31.

<sup>37</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Naeui Sinhak Suub, 362.

<sup>38</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun-Sun Whaneui Sinhak; Siljoneui Jagi Eehae Yujungeurosu, 148.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

transcendence”, epistemologically, and “self and Being”, ontologically.<sup>40</sup> According to Shin, Pyun did not abandon the theology of existence, but re-evaluated the fourth point, dualistic understanding. By overcoming a dualistic worldview, he established his indigenous theology by accommodating Asian and Korean religions and culture and revising and reconstructing the remaining three points.<sup>41</sup>

On his stance of dualistic existentialism, Pyun criticized Yagi’s epistemology of “subject, that is object” as a mysticism of nothing.<sup>42</sup> According to him, because of the denying cognition of the subject-object, Yagi’s epistemology makes rational theory impossible and causes an ethical problem by making subjective, responsible, and personal existence impossible.<sup>43</sup> However, he defended “the ex-personal existence” of John B. Cobb although before, he criticized it from a dualistic stance. He pointed out that Western existentialism, by excessively emphasizing personal existence, causes many problems such as split personality and a crisis of ecology.<sup>44</sup> Shin points out that the meeting with Gi Young Lee caused Pyun to overcome dualism. Pyun admitted that Lee helped him understand mysticism in oriental religions. Pyun started to see Buddhism not

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>42</sup> Yagi proposes an understanding of the distinction between the self and the ego. According to him, as Christ is both Paul’s ultimate subject as well as the object of Paul’s faith (Gal. 3:29f.), Christ is the Son of God insofar as the ultimate subject of the Son is the Father, but also insofar as the Father and Son are distinguished from each other. The son of God is real only in and through empirical human beings who are aware of the son. In the depth of the human *self*, the divine and the human are one. He calls this reality (self) the incarnate Logos. This antitheses (ultimate subject and the object of faith) do not provide social norms (morality or ethics) for the ego, rather, they show what is in the *self* under the reign of God. (Seiichi Yagi, ““I” in the Words of Jesus,” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 118. 121. 127. 130.)

<sup>43</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun-Sun Whaneui Sinhak; Siljoneui Jagi Eehae Yujungeurosu, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 159.

as a “mysticism of nothing” of monism, but positively evaluated it by “Bodhisattva-ism.”<sup>45</sup>

## The Dialogue Theology of Sun Hwan Pyun

### Dialogue between Other Religions and Christianity

Pyun’s conviction of religious pluralism was expressed by the theology of interreligious dialogue.<sup>46</sup> Pyun supports his own stance of religious pluralism with Arnold J. Toynbee’s statement, “Four world religions are four variations of one theme, and the four components of the music are the harmony of love, not dissonance.”<sup>47</sup>

For Pyun, dialogue includes the will of open, intimate, and unconditional fellowship with world religions and atheistic humanists. He especially points out the problem that the Protestant church has not been more concerned with the dialogue with world religions than the Catholic Church. Because the Protestant church stands in the prophetic tradition, they have had more positivity toward the struggle for human rights and with atheistic humanists who believe and follow secular ideology. Pyun highly

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 154.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the concept of Bodhisattva has developed from the “enlightened being (Buddha, Nirvana)” to the “seeking being of enlightening” and has expanded to general believers who take the Bodhisattva vows of compassion. In Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattava vow replaces nirvana, the supreme goal of Theravada Buddhism. This path can be achieved by whoever wants to take the bodhisattava vow, a promise to strive for buddhahood or awakened mind both for oneself and for the benefit of all other beings and postpone entering into nirvana until all other beings have also been saved. (Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Fremont, CA: Jain Publishing Company, 1994), 51.)

<sup>46</sup> Eric Sharpe classifies the current debate involved in dialogue as four major dialogues: discursive dialogue learning about other religious traditions, human dialogue learning about followers of other religions, secular dialogue concentrating on the situation of humankind, and interior dialogue involving the primacy of religious experience. (Eric J. Sharpe, *The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religion*, ed. John H. Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 77-95.

<sup>47</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa,” *Gidokgyosasang*, Je 291 ho. (October 1982), 157.

criticized that the church of Christianity interprets the cross of Jesus as an anathema against culture and traditional religions; as a result, the church has a role as a destroyer of culture. According to him, however, the mission of the Protestant Church has been changed lately toward dialogue from the World Council of Churches (WCC) conference (1961) in New Delhi, India and in the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).<sup>48</sup>

Pyun supported the indirect propagation of Christianity on the position of dialogue. According to him, the indirect propagation does not ignore the errors and limitations of other religions, but finds positive elements in life.<sup>49</sup> According to Pyun, this concept is based on universalism, in which God wants the universal salvation of all human beings (1 Tim. 2:4-6) and where Christ achieved universal atonement for all human beings (1 Jn. 1:9; 1 Jn. 2:1-2).<sup>50</sup> For him, the spirit of universalism is connected with Wesley's teaching that the grace of Christ's atonement can sufficiently save all human beings in light of God's prevenient grace or sufficient grace.<sup>51</sup>

His universalism is similar to the statement of the Second Vatican Council: even though someone does not know the Gospel and the church of Christ, if they faithfully search for God and make an effort to do the will of God under the history of grace according to the commandment of conscience, they can arrive at eternal salvation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>52</sup> The Second Vatican Council states, "The Catholic Church encourages and cooperates with moral and cultural values in other religions and the believers of other religions; finding truth in the other religions and honoring all true and good things in them." (Ibid., 166.)

He acknowledges that Christians cannot help testifying about God and Christ.<sup>53</sup> However, Pyun defined the mission of Christianity as follows: “no one, not even God and Christ, can enforce conversion. True conversion is meeting with God and being ruled by God while searching for truth, living a life of love and service, and proceeding toward God.”<sup>54</sup>

#### Dialogue between Eastern Religions and Western Christianity

Through the meeting with Buri, Pyun was introduced to Asian religions and fully realized his own Asian self-identity and he reflected on the remains of Western theological prejudices inside him. Afterwards, he insisted that Asians need to be freed not only from political colonialism, but also from theological colonialism. He often said that in doing theology, Asian religions should be the text, and the content of Western theology should be used as the footnotes.<sup>55</sup> According to him, Christianity has universality beyond one religion and one civilization because Western Christianity is a combination of religions. It has become self abundant by absorbing elements of Judaism, Greek, Roman, and German religions. Therefore, Christianity should receive the Asian way of thinking and, through this, become clear and abundant.<sup>56</sup> Now, after being challenged by Hellenism, Christianity is currently being challenged by Asian religions. Pyun urges that

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>55</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Asia Jonggyo Sinhakja Pyun-Sun Hwan: Tochakhwa Sinhakgwa Minjungsinhakui Yanggeuksungeul Numuhsu*. . <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/ph01.html>. (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>56</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa,” 167.

Christianity, in God's universal providence of salvation for all human beings, should acknowledge that sages of Asia, like Buddha, Lao-tzu, and Confucius, are as important as Greek philosophers as mediators of God's truth.<sup>57</sup>

According to Pyun, Asian religions are not inferior to Western Christianity. Western Christianity, based on a religion of "desert," following "the logic of Logos (λόγος)," asks for choosing either "this or that" and urges a decision. However, Asian natural religions grown in the culture of "a wet and paddy field," follow the "logic of Rhema (ῥῆμα)". It claims to support inclusive tolerationism, spreading a concept of suspension for choosing, such as "either this or that" and "neither this nor that". Logos-centered Western logic has been developed with the law of identity and the law of contradiction. It excludes the middle and originates exclusive dualism. However, the logic of Rhema is logic of peace that expresses truth and tolerance together.<sup>58</sup> Pyun states, "Asian religion is the flower and fruit of conscience and reason in Asians."<sup>59</sup> Further, according to him, in the history of God's salvation, the hidden Christ is omnipresent in Asian religions.<sup>60</sup>

However, Pyun did not completely deny Western theology. Pyun, who studied both in Korea and the Western world, wanted to rebuild Korean Christianity and theology

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 168.

Panikkar said that the discovery of Shankara's philosophy and Ramanuja's philosophy is as important for Christian theology today as the influence of Plato and Aristotle was in ages past. (Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 167.

<sup>58</sup> Gwang Sub Sim, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Sinhaksasangui Chegye. *Hanguk Munhwasinshakhoe Nonmunjip*. Vol. 9. (Seoul: Hanguk Munhwasinshakhoe, 2008), 277.

<sup>59</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 158.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 173.

as a Korean theologian.<sup>61</sup> He said that Asian theology must not be negligent in dialogue with the theology of the First World, in the sense that Asian theology must have a window of open fellowship with the First World Church.<sup>62</sup> According to Pyun, this could be started through the self-reflection of Western Christianity. He supports the insistence of Toynbee that Western Christianity should break old customs and traditional dogma combined with Greek scholastic metaphysics, which is useless today.<sup>63</sup> Pyun also honored Jaspers' belief that we are in the process from the dusk of Western philosophy to the daybreak of world philosophy.<sup>64</sup> Toynbee and Jaspers believed that the day in which the West learns from the East will come, and that light comes from the East.<sup>65</sup> While Pyun made an exchange with Indian theologian Raimundo Panikkar Alemany and Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris, he insisted that Asian religions should no longer be a tool for building Western theology.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Pyun evaluated the literary greatness of Shusaku Endo, who won the Nobel Prize for literature with "Silence", which was produced from the anguish of being a "dual alien." Pyun thought that Endo observed and criticized the East and the West objectively as a dual alien: a Roman Catholic (the West), according to his mind (spirit), and Japanese (the East) according to blood (body). (Sun Hwan Pyun, "Dongyangjuk Yesuui Munhakjuk Gaechuk," *Gidokkyosasang*, Je 218 Ho. (Seoul: Gidokkyosangsa, 1965), 65.) In Pyun's evaluation of Endo, it seems that he confesses his anguish as a dual alien.

<sup>62</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Asia Grisdoronui Yumyung, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 1 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1999), 131.

<sup>63</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 158.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>66</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Hanguk Gaesingyo Junwe Tochakhwa Yeongu*, 186.

## Dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity

Even though Pyun pursued dialogue between Christianity and Oriental religions, his concern and study focused on Christianity and Buddhism. Pyun was interested in Mahayana Buddhism by Buri and together they read the classics of Zen Buddhism in the University of Basel. His doctoral thesis was about the problem of the finality of Christ from the perspective of Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Pyun also made the acquaintance of William Johnston and John B. Cobb, who pursued Buddhist Christianity. Therefore, it is not coincidental that he tried to have a dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism among Asian religions.

Ik Sang Shin emphasizes the fact that “the logic of Rhema (*ῥῆμα*) or Not Two” rediscovered through meeting with Lee-Gi Young, a Buddhist scholar, made Pyun overcome a dualism of existentialism learned through meeting with Buri.<sup>67</sup> In Mahayana Buddhism, “Not Two” consists of the following four logical propositions: (1) affirmation, A, (2) negation, non-A, (3) absolute negation (neither), neither A nor non-A, and (4) absolute affirmation (both), A and non-A.<sup>68</sup> The third and forth declarative sentences are

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<sup>67</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun-Sun Whaneui Sinhak; Siljoneui Jagi Eehae Yujungeuros, 161.

<sup>68</sup> The four logical propositions were in Vedas and Upanishads. Mostly, they were logically restructured with the thinking of Sanjaya Belatthaputta, an Indian agnostic, ascetic teacher (the 5th or 4th c. BC). (Sun Hwan Pyun, Yunkkotgwa Sibjaga, Rhemawa Logos, *Bulkyowa Kidokkyui Mannam*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 2 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1997), 143). These four logical propositions are attributed to Nagarjuna (ca. 150-250 A.D.). According to Shin-Ik Sang, tetralemma of Nagarjuna is different from Sanjaya's. Sanjaya's tetralemma is separated into four logical propositions, but Nagarjuna's can be divided into two parts. The first and second are secular logic, while the third and fourth are true logic. Nagarjuna's philosophy of the “Middle Way” is not similar to the epistemological skepticism of Sanjaya, but with the “Middle Way” of Gautama Buddha, denying ‘Be’ and ‘Nothing’ (Ik Sang Shin, Pyun-Sun Whaneui Sinhak; Siljoneui Jagi Eehae Yujungeuros, 163-164). While Panikkar evaluates that the correlation between *macanthropos* (ecumenic dimension at the history of consciousness) and *microcosm* (economic dimension) is one of the pillars of the Upanisadic experience, he proposes the holistic experience as the comotheandric dimension. According to him, the cosmotheandric intuition integrates the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of identity. It results from a mystical experience and is ineffable. In the cosmotheandric intuition, the three are not the same, but they are also not separable. (Raimondo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993) 26, 65, 67, 72, 75.) Samartha believed that genuine plurality is possible by

against the three classic laws of thought attributed to Aristotle: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle. According to Pyun, even though the law of identity was criticized by Kant and the law of non-contradiction was critically reversed by Hegel, it is just a development of the three classic laws, but ultimately failed by not reversing the law of excluded middle and the freedom from obsession with being.<sup>69</sup> However, Pyun searched the Third Logic, which can criticize and reverse aporia of the “law of excluded middle,” from the “logic of Rhema.”<sup>70</sup> He thought that this oriental tolerance, “logic of Rhema”, could put an end to the Western dualistic and exclusive, “logic of Logos”.<sup>71</sup>

Pyun agreed with Toynbee and Jaspers who focused on Mahayana Buddhism of the East and Christianity of the West, supporting dialogue between Western Christianity and Eastern religions. Toynbee was convinced that Christianity and Mahayana Buddhism

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accepting the Mysterious Center of Brahmanism: that Truth or Being is One, while at the same time, sages call it (One) by different names. He proposed a new, pluralistic Christology through the acceptance of a sense of Mystery. It cannot be described as “one,” but “not-two,” indicating that diversity is within the heart of Being itself. (Stanley J. Samartha, *The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture*, in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 73. 75.)

<sup>69</sup> Sun Whan Pyun, *Yunkkotgwa Sibjaga, Rhemawa Logos, Ujurongwa Jongmalron*, 142.

<sup>70</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung, *Olgoonee Sunsaengnim Pyun-Sun Hwan*. (Seoul: Sinangwa Jijungsa, 2010), 169.

<sup>71</sup> The opposition to the use of Western logical principles in religions is being found in Western Christian theologians, especially pluralistic ones. Simith insists that truth lies not in an either or but in a both -and (Wilfred Chantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, (New York: Mentor, 1965), 17.) Knitter asserts that all religious experiences and language must be two-eyed, dipolar, and a union of opposites. (Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitude toward the World Religions*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 218.) Robinson states that religious truth may come from refusing “either-or” and accepting “elliptical or bi-polar”, or “multi-polar”. (John A. T. Robinson, *Truth is Two-Eyed* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) , 22.) Like Nagajuna’s tetralemama divided into two parts, in religion Schuon distinguishes between exoteric truth and esoteric. Unlike exoteric truth, esoteric truth is a high level truth and cannot be expressed propositionally, rationally, or logically.(Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984), xii-xv, 8-9. Cf. Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World’s Religions*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 37.

are the final ways that all of humanity can obtain salvation. It is not concerned with a confession of faith, but with a testimony of self-sacrificing love with action.<sup>72</sup>

However, according to Pyun, who follows Jaspers, dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity also includes the reformation of the two religions. While Jaspers was saying that these two religions are facing the same problem, whether facing their end or performing their fundamental change, he proposed that they have to stand on the relationship of indispensable supplement. For this relationship, Jaspers urged Western Christianity to abandon three elements: (1) faith in the two natures of Christ, (2) the incarnation of revelation, because revelation is a sign of a supernatural Being, and (3) exclusiveness of revelatory belief by dogma.<sup>73</sup> Pyun also insisted, “The only way that the two religions could be coexistent and co-prosperous is rooted in the dialogue and cooperation between them.”<sup>74</sup>

#### Dialogue through Maitreya Buddha and Jesus Christ

When Pyun argued Korean theology, he distinguished between the radical, political Minjung theology and the religious, indigenous theology. Pyun criticized that Minjung theology, established by Nam Dong Seo and Pyung Mu Ahn, lacks the religious nature flowing in the Korean mind. Pyun also criticized Korean indigenous theology which, established by Dong Sik Ryu and Sung Bum Yun, lacks concern for the suffering of the grassroots. Pyun wanted to balance and complement theological polarity with his

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<sup>72</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa,” 157-158.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 163.

liberation theology of religions or dialogue theology.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, his dialogue theology is not only about dialogue with religions, but also the freedom of Minjung (the grassroots).

In Korea, dialogue and cooperation between Buddhism and Christianity started in the 1970s when Minjung Buddhism and Minjung Theology were advocated to protest against the *Yusin System* of Jung Hee Park's military dictatorship. In 1975, three Presbyterian theologians, Nam Dong Seo, Pyung Mu Ahn, and Young Hak Hyun, presented their papers, advocating Minjung Theology. In the next year, Buddhist Jae Sung Jun read his paper, "Minjung Bulgyo Undongron" (1977), and Eun Go presented his paper, "Mireuk Sinanggwa Minjung" (1979).<sup>76</sup>

Pyun was not the first theologian who focused on Maitreya Buddha<sup>77</sup> of Buddhism as the contact point between Buddhism and Christianity. Nam Dong Seo, a Minjung theologian, made an effort to find a source of freedom for Minjung in Korean history. He finally found the source in Messianism, which is found in Buddhist and Christian millenarianism.<sup>78</sup> According to him, Buddhist Messianism appeared in

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<sup>75</sup> Jung Bae Lee, *Yidaehan Sungyoja Pyun-Sun Hwan Baksau Sinhakyujung*. <http://www.nathanjo.net/ph/pho8.html>. (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>76</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun. Minjunhaebangul Jihyanghanun Minjungbulgyowa Minjungsinhak; Mireuksinangul Jungsimhayeo. *Hanguksasangsahak*, Vol. 6 (Seoul: Hanguksasangsahakhoe, 1994), 190.

<sup>77</sup> Maitreya is a unique figure who is made up of the natures of both Buddha and Bodhisattva. Buddhists believe him as a Buddhist messiah and look forward to his coming back. He is worshiped by both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists. In the Northern Buddhist countries, he was occasionally revered more than the Sakyamuni Buddha. (Inchang Kim, *The Future Buddha Maitreya*, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd, 1997), 1.)

<sup>78</sup> As Sang Taek Lee, in his work *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianism*, uses the term "milennialism" as referring to the belief in the Biblical teaching regarding the millennium, "millenarianism" refers to the sociological millennium, which will be established on the earth. According to Lee, in the first centuries the church Fathers largely held to a belief in an earthly millenium. However, in the third century Origen began a shift in focus from a millennium in time and space to an eschatology of the individual soul. Lee insists that the shift was suited by the organized, official,

Maitreya Buddhism.<sup>79</sup> He thought that the millennium movements, through Messianism in Buddhism and Christianity, should cooperate in the field of Minjung.<sup>80</sup>

While pursuing interreligious dialogue and freedom for Minjung, Pyun realized Maitreya and Jesus Christ, as messiahs for Minjung, could be the best source and contact point for dialogue between the two religions. Therefore, he developed a dialogue through the Messianism of Maitreya and Jesus Christ as the best example of his liberation theology of religions.

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and powerful church. (Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianis*. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 7,10.

<sup>79</sup> Maitreya is spending his life as Bodhisattva in the Tusita realm, preparing for his descent to earth in human form in the distant future. *Miruk Ha Sang Sung Bul Kyung*, one of the six Maitreya scriptures that came to Korea, states that Sakyamuni's teachings will disappear, but at that time, Maitreya will appear, bringing with him the Yonghwa world. It will come when this world ends, five billion six hundred and seventy million years after the death of Sakyamuni, at which time Maitreya will descend and preach three times under a Yonghwa tree. After this, nine billion six hundred million people will become enlightened, then nine billion four hundred million and nine billion two hundred million people respectively. All will become Buddhas, and then the Yonghwa world will begin and lasts for sixty thousand years. This era is the millennial time, the golden age of Maitreya. (Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianis*, 96.)

<sup>80</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunhaebangul Jihyanghanun Minjungbulgyowa Minjungsinhak*; Mireuksinangul Jungsimhayeoseo, 196.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**AN APOLOGETIC TO DIALOGUE THEOLOGY**

**AS ECUMENICAL–RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

Pyun thought that Korean theology should take off the clothes of Western culture and put on Korean clothes. Further, he believed that the polarity in Korean frontier theologies, the religious, indigenous theology and political Minjung theology, should be balanced. The ultimate goal of his theological journey is a “liberation theology of religions”.<sup>81</sup> More specifically, his theology is dialogue theology, his religious theology is ecumenical religious pluralism,<sup>82</sup> and his liberation theology is Minjung-liberation theology. Therefore, he developed dialogue theology as ecumenical-religious pluralism by way of Minjung-liberation theology. This chapter will deal with dialogue theology as ecumenical-religious pluralism, systemize dialogue theology as ecumenical-religious pluralism, and attempt to give an apologetic to dialogue theology as ecumenical-religious pluralism.

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<sup>81</sup> The term, “liberation theology of religions” was used by Sun Hwan Pyun in his *A Letter of Explanation about Indictment* in Geumran Church in 1992. He was the first Korean who used it to identify himself. (Dae Gwang Choi, Hyundaeui Jongkyoeehaewa Jongkyohaebangsinhak, *Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhak*, Pyun-Sun Whan Akaiv and Dongsusinhakyunguso pyun, (Seoul: Dosuchulpan Mosineunsaramdeul, 2010), 180.)

<sup>82</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, in his *a Letter of Explanation about Indictment*, stated, “When The United Methodist Church expressed pluralism as the principle of mission and accepted the theology of religious pluralism of W.C.C., standing on the stance of theological pluralism, I, with eccumenical theologians of Korea, have made a theological study of religious pluralism.” (Dae Gwang Choi, Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Wehan Byunjung, *Olgoonee Sunsaengnim Pyun-Sun Hwan*. (Seoul: Sinanggwa Jijungsa, 2010), 240.

## Dialogue Theology as Ecumenical-Religious Pluralism

For Pyun, Korean theology taking off Western clothes means not just taking off Western culture conveyed by missionaries, but removing exclusive elements of Christian theology caused by Western philosophy. According to him, even though the theory of inclusive fulfillment has made some advancement in overcoming exclusivism, they still bear exclusive elements. While he tried to have a contact point with other religions through Minjung theology, he criticized Minjung theology for being too political and ignoring religious spirituality. He proposed that Korean theology should pursue ecumenical-religious pluralism resulting in dialogue with other religions on an equal footing.

### Beyond Exclusivism

According to Pyun, people of exclusivism build an isolated and closed fortress in the secular world to extend their religious imperialism. This is done by a conquering spirit, zero tolerance, a biased absolutism, and a self-righteous idea that only they have the truth.<sup>83</sup> Pyun insists that an exclusive religion would not lengthen the span of its life

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<sup>83</sup> While Newbigin acknowledges, in Christian mission history, that proselytizing the unbeliever in positions of power and privilege may be corrupted, he points out the fact that most of the evangelism in our contemporary world has no such power or privilege. (Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: WCC Publications, 1989), 158.) Even though the situation of Korean Christianity is better than Asian Christianity as a whole, which is a minority of 3 %, Christianity is also regarded as a foreign religion, and traditional religions are regarded as the main domain in Korea. Unlike religious pluralism in Western society, the religious pluralism of Korean Christianity means not only tolerance but also an apologetic to traditional religions and society. (Jin Hui Kim, Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhakgwa Jongkyogan Daehwaeui Gwajewa Junmang, *Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhak*, Pyun-Sun Whan Akaiv and Dongsusinhakyunguso pyun, (Seoul: Dosuchulpan Mosineunsaramdeul, 2010), 228-229.)

due to the exclusive mission policy in the postmodern age.<sup>84</sup> According to Pyun, unlike ideology,<sup>85</sup> which makes absolutization and idolization have historical momentum, true Christianity does not make it absolute and expresses inclusivism and tolerance without losing its identity. He said, “The original sin, in the society of religious pluralism, is the crusader mentality which exclusively holds a fanatical mission without dialogue and which totally curses non-Christians, people of other religions, and adherents of secular ideology.”<sup>86</sup>

In a situation of religious pluralism, Pyun asserts that Christianity must give up its past proselytism<sup>87</sup> and should have an open mind in order to have dialogue with other religions, standing on an equal plain. In the Asian climate, especially where various religions and sects coexist with absolute tolerance, the exclusive assertion of the absoluteness of Christianity has become a vestige of the Western colonial age, which only promotes discord.<sup>88</sup> While Pyun insists that God, since he forbids idol-making, is not happy at all with absolutizing and idolizing symbols which are related to particular

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<sup>84</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun. “Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri,” *Gidokgyosasang* Je 419 ho, (November 1993), 160.

<sup>85</sup> Knitter supports the “hermeneutics of suspicion” of liberation theologians who suspiciously attempt to reinterpret the interpretations of scripture and formulations of doctrine that become *ideology*. According to him, traditional theology of religions, especially its christological basis, served to cloak an unconscious, ideological desire to maintain superiority, or to devalue other traditions culturally or religiously. He insists that the christology that Christ has to be the final norm for all other religions has been used to justify the subordination and exploitation of other cultures and religions. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 182. Emphasis in original.)

<sup>86</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa,” 173-174.

<sup>87</sup> According to Netland, proselytism is when evangelism uses morally unacceptable methods. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 311).

<sup>88</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology, Sinhakgwa Segae*, Vol. 11 (Seoul: Methodist Theological University Sinhakgwa Segae, 1985), 19.

cultures, he proposed that Korean theology should help the Korean church escape from the Western prejudice against indigenous religions.<sup>89</sup>

According to Pyun, in the history of the Korean church, most missionaries were propagandists of Western culture under the pretense of the Gospel, and religious cultural imperialists who tried to make copies of the denominations and dogmas of Western (American) Christianity. These conversion missions, of the proselyte type, made Korean Christians become cultural half-breeds, marginal beings, and cultural orphans who were neither Western nor Korean because they were cut off from the roots of traditional religions and Korean society.<sup>90</sup>

Pyun urged the Korean church to get away from the old-fashioned, exclusive evangelism.<sup>91</sup> He also insists that the Korean church should open windows towards Asian frontier theology and incorporate the powerful streams of other faiths and secular humanists in their struggles for the recovery of humanity.<sup>92</sup>

## Beyond the Theory of Inclusive Fulfillment

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>91</sup> Netland insists that Christian exclusivism does not entail that all faiths of other religions must be false and are completely without value, or that Christians cannot learn anything from adherents of other faiths. Furthermore, Christian exclusivism is not the only kind of exclusivism. Most religious traditions are exclusive. Even Hinduism, hailed as the apotheosis of tolerance, is no exception. According to him, the major religions have radically different perspectives on the religious presuppositions. Any attempt to produce an essential unity among the many religions will result in distorting some of the actual religious beliefs. He points out *toleration* has an element of disapproval toward the objective in its meaning. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 35, 37, 307.)

<sup>92</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology, Sinhakhwa Segae*, Vol. 11, 26.

According to Pyun, referring to theology in relation to other religions, the most serious problem is how to overcome religious imperialism (or exclusivism), which demonizes and condemns other religions. Pyun criticizes inclusivism for committing an error of hidden religious imperialism, which tries to absorb and dissolve other religions into its own religion under the pretext of tolerance and universality.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, he believed that the theory of inclusive fulfillment, which regards other religions as *preparatio evangelica* (preparation for the Gospel) and gives an apologetic to the unbeliever, must be overcome.<sup>94</sup>

Pyun insists that Christianity should not condemn other religions for being incomplete or for their shortcomings and should not condemn other religions as if they are limited to the realm of general revelation. Christianity should not negatively understand other religions as “preparation for the Gospel” until the full story of the Gospel is proclaimed. According to Pyun, because Christians and non-Christians have the same religious experience of the transcendent, Christians should try to have dialogue with non-Christians and join together for the humanization of the world, according to the universal salvation of God.<sup>95</sup>

Pyun criticizes Hendrik Kraemer’s warning against Asian theologians at the Tambaram Conference (1938), where Asian theologians fell into the error of syncretism, which confuses other religious elements thoughtlessly. According to Pyun, for Kraemer, who tried to understand Asian theology from the perspective of Western theology, the

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<sup>93</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri,” 160-161.

<sup>94</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 19.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

Gospel was not strange to Asian religions, but Asian religions and culture became strange. In Kraemer's theology of mission, a religious-cultural colonialism was concealed in a disguised form: the Western world would introduce culture to the uncivilized barbarians in the non-Western world; and Christianity would proselytize and conquer the pagans using a crusader mentality.<sup>96</sup>

Pyun also criticized Karl Rahner's notion of "anonymous Christians," saying that there is still a concealed, hidden religious imperialism which is trying to proselytize pagans and accept them through the back door of the church. Pyun consents to Pieris' thought that "a theology that does not speak through non-Christian people is an esoteric luxury of a Christian minority."<sup>97</sup>

#### Beyond Contextualized Minjung Theology

According to Pyun, the Korean church has received a noble theological heritage from indigenous theology and Minjung theology. The polarity in Korean frontier theology has been made by the Korean religious and political situation. The indigenous theology appeared at the beginning of the 1960s and Minjung theology was formed in the 1970s. Pyun regarded both theologies as a struggle to theologially express the awakening of the Korean church. According to him, while indigenous theology is a theology of religions which attempts to reinterpret the Gospel on the basis of traditional religions and culture, Minjung theology is a theology of contextualization which attempts to respond to the Gospel within the struggle of liberation for the grassroots and in the face

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 11. 21.

<sup>97</sup> Aloysius Pieris, S, J., "The Place of Non-Christian Religion and Cultures in the Cultures in the Evolution of a Third-World Theology," *CTC Bulletin*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (August 1982), 57. (Ibid., 20.)

of the challenges of science and technology.<sup>98</sup> He searched for a synthesis of the polarity between these two Korean theologies.

While Pyun negatively appraised that there have been few religion-affirming theologians among the supporters of indigenous theology, he criticized that the opponents of indigenization generally follow the path of the theology of Christ-against-religions. An example of this would be the hard-liners (Barthians) who judge other religions as sinful in the name of revelation and the moderates (secular theologians) who neglect religion in the name of politics.<sup>99</sup>

Pyun analyzed that Minjung theology differs from the antireligious liberation theology of South America by attempting to unite the people's original form of religion and culture with social and political records of biblical religion. According to him, Minjung theologians are different from secular theologians who condemn religion as the "opium of the people." However, he criticized as follows: "Minjung theology treats religion as meaningful only in its function as the political and social biographies which contain the leaven for the liberation of the people, without positively trying to understand religious phenomena. What is important for Minjung theologians is not religious experience itself, but the political and social function of religion."<sup>100</sup>

Because Pyun thought that the mind of Koreans originally did not distinguish between religion and philosophy, religion and politics, or sacred and secular, he criticized that Minjung theologians are confined to Western dualism. Therefore, he asserts that

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

Minjung theology cannot achieve the total liberation of the *Minjung* (the grassroots) until it starts with the soteriology of the non-Christian religions of Korea and makes a sincere attempt to understand religion.<sup>101</sup> He states,

True liberation of Minjung should pursue total freedom and salvation by honoring not only political, economical, and social liberation but also religious, spiritual requests. Liberation for Minjung can be achieved in the presence of God in a historical field and in the human soul, i.e., the living experience of God and spirituality of Asia.<sup>102</sup>

### Ecumenical-Religious Pluralism

Pyun attempted to have dialogue between Christianity and other religions in accordance with his conviction of religious pluralism while he criticized the risk of relativism with religious pluralism. He denied exclusivism and the theory of inclusive fulfillment, essentially pursuing the christianization of other religions. His dialogue theology is ecumenical-religious pluralism by pursuing the restoration of global humanity and peace, the common goal of humanity.

According to Pyun, the task of global ethos for global humanity is not based on secular ethics, made by human rationality, but on religious ethics, which is a responsibility connected to transcendence.<sup>103</sup> Pyun adduced four global historical cases which led world religions to interreligious dialogue: (1) surmounting of distance by the development of transportation and communication, (2) wide knowledge about world religions for the development of the study of religion, (3) multi-cultural and multi-religious phenomenon from the movement of the population in modern industrial society,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>102</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 243.

<sup>103</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri," 158.

and (4) nihilism of Europe by mental inanity and meaninglessness of life in the process of secularization.<sup>104</sup>

Pyun highly evaluated the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 in Chicago as the most important Christian ecumenical event in the nineteenth century, one of the most monumental events in world history, and a milestone in human history.<sup>105</sup> However, Pyun criticized that John H. Barrows, the manager of the General Committee on the Congress of Religion, was restricted by the optimism and triumphalism of American Protestantism. According to Pyun, Barrows believed that Christianity should be the one universal religion among world religions because Christianity is the ultimate religion in the process of religious progress.<sup>106</sup>

Pyun observed that Western Christianity needed one hundred years to come from a place of closed monologue, a Christian-centered worldview, to a place of wide dialogue.<sup>107</sup> Pyun highly analyzed the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 in Chicago and Bengal, India as a milestone of the coming ecumenical age. The declaration of the conference, with the Principles of Global Ethics appended, was based on the *Global Ethics Project (Projekt Weltethos, 1990)* of Hans Küng. Küng said, "There is no world peace without peace between religions, and there is no peace between religions

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 150.

Netland proposes seven facts that undermine an exclusive approach to other religions: (1) the unprecedented exposure of Western people to adherents of other faiths, (2) the pervasive influence of skepticism about religion, (3) the growing impact of relativism, (4) the sharp distinction between the public realm of facts and the private world of values, (5) the pragmatic view of religion, (6) striving for harmony and cooperation among various cultures and tradition, and (7) the doctrine of soteriological universalism. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 28-33).

<sup>105</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri*, 147.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

without interreligious dialogue.” According to Küng, the way to salvation for the global village (the world) depends on the direction of world religions, which claims that humanity and ethics should be connected to transcendence (religion). However, there should also be a wide ecumenical movement that is connected to people with goodwill and atheistic humanists, because a religious minority is not enough.<sup>108</sup>

Pyun supports Küng’s stance against the old exclusivism, but also consents that Küng denies religious pluralism, which falls into the relativism of all truth. According to Küng, there would be a risk of ignorance, relativism, and syncretism in which religious pluralism abandons the Christian truth.<sup>109</sup> In Pyun’s opinion, due to overlooking the differences and contradictions of every religion, religious pluralism can easily commit the error of falling into parallel relativism, and ignoring the distinctiveness, individuality and diversity that every religion has.<sup>110</sup>

However, Pyun criticized Küng’s inclusivism as an infantile allergenic response against secular religious pluralism. He also insisted that the paradigm of pluralism is more reasonable and persuasive than inclusivism. According to Pyun, universal, Christ-centered inclusivism is only a new substitute of exclusivism and soft exclusivism. Even though Küng criticized Pope John Paul II (1982) longing for Christian world culture (Corpus Christentum) and the world culture of the Middle Ages, Pyun maintained that

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>109</sup> Netland proposes four problems of relativism if relativism is true: (1) it is “relatively true,” (2) there is no criteria to determine which of the beliefs are true, (3) truth cannot be defined, and (4) the right to make any judgments about worldviews, positive or negative, would be forfeited. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 175-177. 138-141.)

<sup>110</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri*, 161.

Küng still had not been freed from the historical limitation of Christian-centered and Western-centered concepts.<sup>111</sup>

Pyun insisted that other religions do not exist to be cursed, conquered, or absorbed by Christianity anymore. According to Pyun, truth is not absolute, steady, monological, and exclusive, but relative, dynamic, dialogical, and relational.<sup>112</sup> Pyun also insisted that true religion must yield good fruits of love and compassion, firmly standing on their fundamental religious tradition. True humanity is a prerequisite for true religion, and the nature of true religion becomes the transcendent basis of humanity. In this sense, interreligious dialogue is a path to world peace. The physical and spiritual survival of humankind depends on interreligious dialogue.<sup>113</sup> According to Pyun, there is no restructuring (change) of a new global-order without a formation of global ethics, and global ethics cannot be achieved without interreligious dialogue.<sup>114</sup> Pyun believed true ecumenical theology should prepare a wide, joint square in which all religious people can meet, have dialogue, and cooperate in pluralism and openness, pursuing goodness and truth, and seeking self-criticism and self-change. The ecumenical interreligious dialogue that Pyun sought is possible by achieving a balance through self-change and by achieving tolerance through self-criticism.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 162-163.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 162.

## The System of Dialogue Theology as Ecumenical-Religious Pluralism

### Theology of the Bible

Pyun's belief, which runs the foundation of Pyun's total theology, is that living God's word is never confined to the letters of the Bible and dogma.<sup>116</sup> Pyun urged the Korean church to escape the old fashioned fundamental anachronism which encloses God into the Bible and doctrines.<sup>117</sup>

Pyun expressed sympathy with the view of Seichi Yagi, a Japanese theologian and a subject of Pyun's thesis of the University of Basel. Yagi denied literal scripturalism and relativized kerygma to overcome the exclusive historicity of Christianity. Yagi claimed that even though the theology of atonement, resurrection, and love are different, they are united in the universal fact, i.e., religious reality. That is to say, religious reality is understood as *Logos* and is found in Buddhism too, namely, that other religions can be united through this religious reality.<sup>118</sup>

According to Pyun, in reality, the term *church* appears twice in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 16:18; 18:17), while the phrase *the Kingdom of God* appears a hundred times in the synoptic Gospels. However, in the process of building churches, which replaced "the Kingdom of God" with "church", the disciples were replaced with Christians.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 174.

<sup>117</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 27.

<sup>118</sup> Jin Hui Kim, *Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhakgwa Jongkyogan Daehwaeui Gwajewa Junmang*, 217-218.

Pyun did not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, but in the Bible as something that should be reinterpreted, demythologized, and criticized. He insisted that most of the New Testament, except the synoptic Gospels, was corrupted by Western philosophy. He also believed that the authors or early Christian community arbitrarily changed the teaching of Jesus and built ecclesio-centric and Christo-centric Christianity, focusing on the deity of Christ.<sup>120</sup> Ironically, it shows that he followed Western liberal theologians, influenced by the Western philosophy of those days.

### Christology

Park Sung Yong says that Pyun's Christology of is a theocentric non-normative Christology.<sup>121</sup> Theocentric, non-normative Christology ignores Jesus as the normative criterion of the salvation truth of Christianity and replaces Christ centered theology with God-centered theology.<sup>122</sup> According to Pyun, the traditional concepts of the church are problematical, but its understanding of Christology becomes all the more difficult in the formation of the theology of other religions.<sup>123</sup> Pyun urges the Korean church to learn

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<sup>119</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 29.

<sup>120</sup> Dunn states that the New Testament (NT) is like a theology in motion (theologizing) or a living tradition as an expression of interaction within the tradition of the church. According to him, the ongoing tradition of the church is also in the same stream of theologizing within the NT. (James D.G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009). 127.) If this is so, contextualization, interpretation in a specific context, is important. However, theologizing itself cannot ignore specific periods of the theologizing process. Therefore, Korean theology would not exist without a theology from a specific period in Christian history, like Western theology.

<sup>121</sup> Pyunsunhwan Archive Ed., *Pyunsunhwan Sinhak Saero Bogi* (Seoul: Daehangidoksuho, 2005), 49.

<sup>122</sup> Hick, who calls a God-centered model the idea of a "Copernican revolution" in theology of religions, supports the idea that divine incarnation is to be understood metaphorically rather than literally, namely, as a poetic expression of the Christian's devotion to his Lord. (John Hick, *God Has Many Names*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, c1982.), 18-19).

<sup>123</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 35.

wisdom from the theology of other religions in order to rid itself of the exclusive claims of the absoluteness of Christology. Pyun also insisted that the last theological aporia of Western theology is the absoluteness of Christology.<sup>124</sup> According to Pyun, what the Christian mission needs most acutely, in order to get rid of the propagandist conversion mentality, is the theological insight into how to overcome the exclusive claims of the absoluteness of Christology.<sup>125</sup> Even though the radical theologians who try to form a new theology in dialogue with other religions have differing viewpoints, they try to make the finality, the uniqueness, and the absoluteness of Jesus Christ relative, in an attempt to show how the Western traditional theologians have falsely absolutized Christ.<sup>126</sup>

Pyun appraised Raymond Panikkar's universal Christology as a revolutionary attempt to overcome the problem of the corporeality of revelation, which restricts the original revelation to the one point of the historical Jesus. According to Panikkar's universal Christology (Logos), the axiom, "Jesus is Christ," cannot be replaced by the axiom, "Christ is Jesus." To restrict Christ to a historical Jesus is to essentially deny His divine nature. This is because he believes that "Christ is not a historical person, but a divine person." According to him, as long as Hinduism is a religion of truth, Christ is in Hinduism. Even though it is unconsciously done, whoever lives his own religion is devoted to Christ.<sup>127</sup> In universal Christology, Pyun insists that all religions and

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

ideologies are related to the cosmic covenant or “the Cosmotheandric Principle”,<sup>128</sup> and that all people pursuing truth (whether religious or not) are fellow-travelers who, together with Christians, are walking towards the realization of the kingdom of God. Pyun also highly evaluated Panikkar’s universal Christology as making a great contribution to theology today, in the sense that it illuminates and complements the limits of the non-religious Christology of the Korean Minjung theology around Jesus, the liberator of Minjung. According to Pyun, universal Christology makes a clear distinction between the historical Jesus and the universal Christ and opens the way to dialogue with other religions and secular ideologies.<sup>129</sup>

### Theology Proper

Pyun agrees with Karl Jaspers’ interpretation about Friedrich Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God. Nietzsche’s declaration is not a “negative confession for negation”, but a passion for searching for God. The God who can be killed by humans is a god covered with the ontology of Plato. According to Pyun, Christianity is Platonism for the people. Therefore, the unfortunate history of Christianity is that they have

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<sup>128</sup> As one of the principles proposed by Raimon Panikkar, the Cosmotheandric Principle is an intuition that kosmos, theos, and anthropos cannot be conceived separately. Unlike the discriminating process of individualization of nature, man, and the divine, it is a type of holistic experience. However, it is not amorphously mixing and vaguely differentiating them. He thought that it is a spiral, positive (and not merely dialectical, because everything has trinitarian structure) middle way between the paranoia of monism and the schizophrenia of dualism. (Raimondo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, 54-77.)

<sup>129</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 46.

identified “Being itself” with the Christian God under the influence of the ontological concept of Greek philosophy for a long time.<sup>130</sup>

To Pyun, one of the biggest obstacles regarding dialogue between Christianity and Asian religions is that Christian theology tenaciously holds to a transcendent and personal God. The first step of open dialogue is for Christianity to acknowledge the fact that the God of Christianity is not only a transcendent being, but also exists in everything. The second step is that there are some understandings of an impersonal God in the Christian view of God: the Meister Eckhart’s “attainment of divine nature beyond personal God”, John B. Cobb’s “dipolar concept of God”, and Hans Waldenfels’ “empty God”.<sup>131</sup> Pyun explains as follows:

When the colonialist’s missionary God is de-idolized thoroughly by us, we can come to know the fact that God has been working for all mankind, for a long time within human history. Although all the different names which symbolized the ultimate reality point to materialistically different gods, all the different gods have been the same One God, Yahweh. The experience of the Transcendent of the other religions allows us to draw nearer to the mystery of God in all the mutually different experiences of the same One God. The mystery is ultimately identical.<sup>132</sup>

Pyun supported that Panikkar turned from a Christ-centered salvation to theocentricism, which appeared in Jesus’ kerygma or the Christ kerygma of the primitive church. Pyun also reached toward the inclusive standpoint of *Missio Dei* and toward a theocentricism, which removes traditional ecclesio-centricism and Christo-centricism.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Du Yuhyungui Musinronja,” *Gidokkyosasang Je 90 Ho*. (Seoul: Gidokkyosasangsa, 1965), 88-89.

<sup>131</sup> Gwang Sub Sim, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Sinhaksasangui Chegye. 283-284.

<sup>132</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 31.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42

Theocentricism is that God is the ultimate reality of all religions beyond Christ, regarding the confession of Christ as a mythical expression. Pyun consents to Aloysius Pieris' thought that both the theology of the "Christ-of-religions" model and the theology of the "Christ-against-culture" model are crypto-colonialist theologies.<sup>134</sup> Pyun also supported John H. Hick's theocentricism that the universe of religions revolves around the sun of divine reality, but not around Christianity and Christ.<sup>135</sup> According to Hick, the tradition of every religion is a way to or a place for salvation, in which all humans can find their salvation, freedom, and completion.<sup>136</sup>

Dae Gawng Choi criticizes Pyun's diagram of "God-Christ (or other religious sect leader)-faith" as the frame of religious pluralism. According to Choi, Pyun also was not free from the frame of cultural-imperialism, the concept that all religions should be included in God's domain. Further, even though there is no god in Buddhism, Pyun forcefully postulates god and claims theocentric pluralism. Choi contends that this is a turn to the frame of Christian philosophy and dogma and that Buddhism cannot accept it.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>135</sup> Newbigin criticizes the theocentric and sotiocentric stance of Hick as follows: "It is the final triumph of the self over reality. A "sotiocentric" view makes "reality" the servant of the self and its desire. It excludes the possibility that "reality", as a person, might address the self with a call which requires an answer. It is the authentic product of a consumer society." (Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 169.)

<sup>136</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri*, 163.

<sup>137</sup> Dae Gwang Choi, *Hyundaeui Jongkyoehaewa Jongkyohaebangsinhak*, 185.

## Soteriology

According to Pyun, salvation is the restoration of a new humanity. He reinterpreted Wesley's prevenient grace and concluded that salvation can reach people both outside of the church and outside of Christian belief.

According to Pyun's interpretation of John Wesley, not one soul is excluded from the grace of Christ. Between Gentiles and Christians there is not a quality difference, but a quantitative difference; between those men who receive a little grace and those who receive abundant grace, respectively. The prevenient grace (*gratia praevenientia*) or the sufficient grace which God gave all humans is that the universal providence of God for saving all humankind is sufficient with the help of God's grace. Wesley insists that the grace of Christ is sufficient to save all humankind under the light of the universality of Christ's atonement.<sup>138</sup> The prevenient grace which God gave freely through Christ is not only in the heart of Christians but also in Muslims and heathens, as well as barbarians.<sup>139</sup>

Pyun insisted that searching for the theological development of an "implicit Christianity" in the theology of Wesley is an anachronistic expectation. However, according to Pyun, the concept of "an implicit Christianity" is in Wesley's theology that offers a proleptical extension of Christ's grace to people outside or before Christianity.<sup>140</sup> According to Wesley, the contribution of Christ's death is given to unbelievers as well as

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<sup>138</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 169.

<sup>139</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 44.

<sup>140</sup> Pyun, in his *a Letter of Explanation about Indictment*, stated that Wesley believed in the salvation of people of other religions, like in Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity" and Raimundo Panikkar's "the unknown universal Christ". (Dae Gwang, Choi, Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Wehan Byunjung, 240.)

believers.<sup>141</sup> Pyun acknowledged the fact that the concept of the anonymous Christian cannot indiscriminately apply to all non-Christians. This name can be applied to a non-Christian with goodwill who seeks ultimate reality and truth and continually serves others with love. According to Pyun, those who do not cooperate in prevenient grace are just potential Christians. However, Pyun believed that those who are outside the church and who do not know the name of Christ can still be saved. He believed that they are covered by the unlimited love and grace of God by participating in the mystery of Christ's resurrection and eternal life of God by the Holy Spirit.<sup>142</sup>

According to Pyun, the heart of the Gospel is the restoration of a new humanity, pursuing the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).<sup>143</sup> Therefore, this is also possible with the other religions. He believed that the core elements of the Christian faith are faith, hope, love, and being a new, true self in Christ. He professes, "I want to testify of the Gospel of Christ, reinterpreting core elements of the Christian faith for the human family living in the political and religious situation in the here and now."<sup>144</sup> Therefore, determining which religion is superior depends on whether the religion shares more love and shows the experience of a transcendent being or not.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, John Wesley Sinhakui Jaebalgyun; Wesley Sinhakgwa Sunhangeunchong, *Sinhakgaw Segae*, vol 7, (Seoul: Methodist Theological University, 1981), 83.

<sup>142</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 172.

<sup>143</sup> Unlike Pyun's insistence, the crucial, emphatic point of the text is not "new creature," but "in Christ" because "being new creature" depends on "whether he/she is in Christ or not." Therefore, Paul uses the subjunctive mode, "if anyone is in Christ, ..."

<sup>144</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 176.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

## Ecclesiology

For Pyun, the church is a community of love and fellowship for the believer. The goal of the church is not the Christianization of the world, but serving the world and helping unbelievers restore their new humanity.

Pyun insists that Korean theology should set up an iconoclastic movement in order to free the Korean church from an idolized notion of church for the church's sake. The Korean church should leave the ecclesiastical fundamentalism and the ecclesio-centricism which absolutize the forms of the church as organization and institution.<sup>146</sup> According to Pyun, the true church is grounded where neighbors become brothers in love. Wherever love is actualized, there is the church of Christ. The people of goodwill outside the church are anonymous Christians or implicit Christians. Even though it is problematic to talk about anonymous Christians and implicit Christians, Catholic theology has already reached this point; Pyun evaluated that this acceptance is really a miracle of this age which is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>147</sup>

According to Pyun, Wesley considered the true church a community of service (diakonia) and fellowship (koinonia) of the love of believers.<sup>148</sup> Pyun changed Wesley's motto from "I look on the entire world as my parish" to "my parish is just this world". He believed the Christian church must go beyond "the church rejecting the world (Montanism and Maenadism), the church assimilating into the world (cultural Protestantism), the church overcoming the world (Greek and Roman church), the church

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<sup>146</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 27.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>148</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Gyohoegeachukronui Sinhakjuk Geungu, John Wesley Sinhakgwa Sungyo*. Pyun-Sun Hwan Jeonjib, Vol. 4 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1998), 152.

and the world as the paradoxical relationship (view of Paul and Luther), and the church changing the world (view of Neo-orthodoxists).” The church should not try to Christianize the world, but help the world to be the world. According to Pyun, a desirable church is the church serving the world as a servant by dislodging the devilish power which dehumanizes the world. Pyun insisted that “God-Church-World” should be changed into “God-World-Church” according to the model of J.C. Hoekendijk.<sup>149</sup>

Jin Hui Kim says that there are three differences between the pluralists Seichi Yagi and John Hick, who influenced Pyun: (1) Christ-centered and God-centered, (2) known and agnostic views of God, and (3) no criteria and ethical, practical criteria. While Kim points out that Pyun later turned from Yagi’s stance to Hick’s, he criticizes that Hick’s religious pluralism neither has a missiological view nor positively develops one. According to Hick, people maintain and develop their recognition scheme by their cognitive limitations. Therefore, all religions are relative to each other and should supplement each other.<sup>150</sup> While Kim acknowledges that Hick’s concept gives equality among the different recognition schemes, he criticizes that it also causes discrimination. In other words, for someone who has grown up in a particular recognition scheme, that scheme gives them a better understanding about ultimate reality than others who have grown up in a different recognition scheme. If so, there is no need to believe other

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 159

<sup>150</sup> According to Hick, among our concepts, only formal concepts and negative concepts apply to the Real. He also adds that there is a substantial tradition or there are substantial properties about the Real within religions. Hick insists that this tradition is not literally true, but mythologically true. According to Plantinga, if religious traditions are only mythologically true, no one will accept them. Plantinga argues that if the Real is an all-powerful and all-knowing being and initially has a causal relation with human beings, like Hick’s idea of experiential contact with the Real, nonformal and positive concepts can apply to the Real. It is impossible to avoid serious disagreements among religions which cannot be both right or wrong. (Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6-7, 43-63.) Cf. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1945), viii, and Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World’s Religions*, 54-59.

religions are different from their traditional religion at all, experiencing cognitive impact and confusion.<sup>151</sup> Kim points out the fact that Hick's thought could be a discrimination that causes them not to believe in a religion of a different recognition scheme.<sup>152</sup>

## An Apologetic to Dialogue Theology as Ecumenical-Religious Pluralism

### Contribution of Dialogue Theology as Ecumenical-Religious Pluralism

The first contribution of Pyun's dialogue theology to Korean theology is that Pyun pointed out the vulnerable point that Minjung theology, Korean contextualized theology, neglects religion. Furthermore, Pyun attempted to synthesize indigenous theology and Minjung theology. Pyun emphasized the importance of religion even though the Gospel of social salvation and ethics and humanistic theology are flourishing. Pyun believed that people cannot expect to recover lost humanity until the meaning of life is clarified in the dimension of religion.<sup>153</sup>

Pyun also challenged atheism and skepticism, the spirit of this age. Pyun said that Christianity should not hate aggressive intellectual atheists like Nietzsche, but rather the popular atheists who believe in the death of God and support the extermination of faith in God. Pyun challenged those who live in self-absorption in atheism and religious

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<sup>151</sup> Jin Hui Kim, *Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhakgwa Jongkyogan Daehwaeui Gwajewa Junmang*, 222-223, 229.

<sup>152</sup> According to Netland, because Hick premises that each tradition ascribes ultimacy by its own particular conception, it is Hick's insistence that humanly experienced personae of the Real, such as Yahweh, Allah, or Shiva, are merely penultimate images of the Real. Netland criticizes that Hick removed the possibility that God reveals himself in any tradition. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 222-225.)

<sup>153</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 17.

insensitivity in an irreligious age.<sup>154</sup>

The second contribution of dialogue theology to the Korean church is that Pyun proposed the need for interreligious dialogue.<sup>155</sup> Most Korean churches are conservative and exclusively follow the Gospel of Christo-centricism. Pyun diagnosed that this bellicose propagation will be obstructed in a religiously pluralized society today. According to Pyun, this directive propagation will no longer have an effect because it seeks errors and limitations in other opinions and exaggeratedly propagates and censures them.<sup>156</sup> Even though Pyun's opinion also exaggerates and is aggressive, it is true that many people are repulsed by directive propagation and that many young and educated people negatively regard Christianity as the most exclusive religion. According to Pyun, dialogue is not a contradictable relation of "you and I", understanding other religions with intellectual space, but is sharing communal experiences, assignments, convictions, and visions about a new future.<sup>157</sup>

The content of the Gospel must not be changed, but the method of testimony can and should be changed. Even though the content of the Gospel is exclusive, it is not necessary to convey the content of the Gospel as exclusive. The exclusive attitude

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<sup>154</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Du Yuhyungui Musinronja," 88.

Huston points out that the irreligious and scientific spirit of the times cannot provide the things that religions give to humans, such as values, purposes, life meanings, and quality. (Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions*, 8-18.)

<sup>155</sup> Netland proposes that it is helpful to distinguish between what might be called formal and informal dialogue. Formal dialogue consists of an organized gathering of representatives from different religions. He insists, whether it is formal or informal, that dialogue is not incompatible with a commitment to evangelism. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 295, 301.)

<sup>156</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa," 157.

<sup>157</sup> Pyunsunhwan Archive Ed., *John Wesley Sinhakgwa Sungyo*, PyunsunhwanJeonjib, Vol. 4, 178.

admonished by the Apostle John is about Christian cults like Gnosticism.<sup>158</sup> If Christians have an exclusive *attitude* toward unbelievers or people of other religions, Christians cannot follow Jesus' commandment to testify about him and make disciples.<sup>159</sup> In that sense, the Korean church should consider formal and informal dialogue as a type of testimony.<sup>160</sup> Extreme bipolarity in propagation for the Gospel would be an exclusive way to either fight a battle or do nothing and have peace with unbelievers and the people of other religions.<sup>161</sup> By presumption of 1 Pet. 3:15, dialogue could be a kind of propagation: "To give an answer" (NIV) or "make defense" (NASB) to anyone who asks Christians to give a reason for their hope, with "gentleness and respect" (NIV), "meekness and fear" (KJV), or "gentleness and reverence" (NASB). Asking and answering with meekness and reverence implies a dialogue.

### Critics against Dialogue Theology as Ecumenical-Religious Pluralism

Pyun's theology is completely based on Wesley's theology. However, Pyun was not a legitimist who literally interpreted and received Wesley's theology; rather, he tried

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<sup>158</sup> 2 Jn. 10 "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him (NIV)."

<sup>159</sup> Matt. 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (NIV)." Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>160</sup> David Hesselgrave suggests that evangelicals can and should be involved in five kinds of formal interreligious dialogue: (1) discussion of the nature of interreligious dialogue itself, (2) the promotion of freedom of worship and witness, (3) human physical and social needs, (4) breaking down barriers of prejudice, distrust, and hatred in the religious world, and (5) mutual comprehension of conflicting truth. (David J. Hesselgrave, "Interreligious Dialogue-Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives," in *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation*, no. 1, ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 235-237.

<sup>161</sup> Huston, a scholar of religious studies, says that understanding can lead to love, and that love also brings understanding, and he emphasizes *listening* to other religions and even secularists for understanding. (Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 391-392.)

to interpret it within the viewpoints of other religions.<sup>162</sup> On the basis of Wesley's prevenient grace, Pyun insists that all world religions are related to the grace of the impartial universal Christ.<sup>163</sup> Pyun used Wesley's prevenient grace to support his religious pluralism, in which all people can be saved without believing in Jesus and his cross. However, Wesley preached the Gospel so that sinners can only be saved by the faith freely given through God's grace.<sup>164</sup> Wesley preached the Christian faith for salvation as shown, "[the] Christian faith is not only in agreement about the whole Gospel of Christ, but also totally trusting in Christ's blood; namely, it is that sinners believe in the contribution of Christ's life, death, and resurrection and totally trust in Christ, our atonement and life, who both gave up his life for us and lives and works in us."<sup>165</sup> In the end, Pyun, as a self-Wesleyan, either did not understand Wesley's convictions or misused Wesley's thought to build his own theology.

According to Pyun, John Wesley provided the ideas: from his thought of prevenient grace, the possibility of salvation is open even to pagans and, from his priority of religious experience; the religious experiences of other religions can be respected. He summed up the spirit of Wesley as follows: "Christianity is not dogma (opinion), but is based on (religious) experience."<sup>166</sup> However, according to Newbigin, dogma is not a unique peculiarity of the church. Every kind of systematic thought (coherent thought) has

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<sup>162</sup> Hun Kim, "Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo," Th.M., 54.

<sup>163</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 44

<sup>164</sup> Hung Guk Song, *John Wesley Sinhakgwa Guwonron*, (Seoul: Daehangidokgyosuhoi, 1975), 19.

<sup>165</sup> Jong Nam Cho, *John Wesley Sulgyosunjib*, (Seoul: Seurosarang, 1998), 13.

<sup>166</sup> Sung Yong Park, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Baksa Sarmgwa Geueui Yiyagi, 43.

to begin from some starting point (presuppositions).<sup>167</sup> The dogma of the church is a confession of their faith<sup>168</sup> and creates their identity. If they deny their dogma, the church cannot exist. According to Newbigin, Pyun also had his own convictions, and they are his dogma.

Even though Pyun struggled with balancing the uniqueness of Jesus and religious pluralism, according to him, the belief in the uniqueness and absolution of Jesus is just a mystical and literary expression and needs to be reinterpreted by the frame of scientific thought and situation of religious pluralism today.<sup>169</sup> As a result, Jesus is not a person of the Trinity, but a model or leader who very clearly manifested the presence of God in his life.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, like other religious pluralists,<sup>171</sup> Pyun insisted on using theocentricism to escape the “stumbling block” of Christo-centricism, yet the Bible clearly says that no one can honor God without honoring Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:23) and that no one goes to God except through Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6).

The problem with Pyun’s attempt to have interreligious dialogue is not the type of dialogue, but the content of the dialogue. Pyun gave up the essence of the Gospel to have interreligious dialogue. According to Pyun, when Christianity has a dialogue with another

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<sup>167</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 8.

<sup>168</sup> Plantinga emphasizes that Christian faith is not just a cognitive affair, but a matter of *will*, *affect* (or the *executive* function of the will), and belief-producing process, given as a supernatural gift by virtue of the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit. (Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 206, 244-245, 256.)

<sup>169</sup> Newbigin denies that the situation of today is a radically new situation that the Church has not faced before. He contends that the world into which the first Christians carried the Gospel was a religiously plural world. (Ibid., 157.)

<sup>170</sup> Hun Kim, “Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo,” Th.M., 20.

<sup>171</sup> Knitter insists that Jesus’ universality and uniqueness is not exclusive or inclusive, but complementary with other unique liberators and other universal saviors. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 194.)

religion, it accepts the religion as a leaven of liberation for recovering humanity and receives the spirituality of the religion.<sup>172</sup> While Pyun insisted that dialogue is respecting the essence of other religions, he ignored the essence of Christianity.<sup>173</sup>

Pyun believed that the uniqueness and absolution of Jesus Christ is not the truth of Christianity. According to him, only the Johannine and Pauline epistles particularly had a role in deifying Jesus as the Christ.<sup>174</sup> Like leaders of Christian cults and liberal theologians, Pyun's belief is based on his theological conviction that the Bible cannot be accepted inerrantly. Pyun believed that the parts of the Bible that were mythicized by the early church should be demythologized and reinterpreted. He often interpreted the Bible through his own pluralist convictions.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, he ignored or reinterpreted the implicit verses about Christ's uniqueness and absolution in the Bible for the sake of

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<sup>172</sup> Pyunsunhwan Archive Ed., *John Wesley Sinhakgwa Sungyo*, 180

<sup>173</sup> Newbigin emphasizes the distinction between religions for dialogue: "as we work together with people of other commitments, we shall discover the places where our ways must separate. Here is where real dialogue may begin." He points out that interreligious dialogue is not just sharing religious experience, but sharing the meaning and goal of the human story. (Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 181.)

<sup>174</sup> Dunn states that "the historical Jesus" and "the Christ of faith" are not antithetical. According to Dunn, the christological motif has come from Jesus' mission and experience. Dunn says as follows: "But the fact that the bulk of the Synoptic tradition retains the teaching he gave (without significant modification) and bears the clear impression of the impact he made assuredly confirms *the substantial continuum from Jesus' own implicit christology to the explicit christology of the NT writers.*" (James D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*, 28, 61, 69.157 Emphasis in original.) According to him, the impact that Jesus had on many people, especially his disciples, has been conveyed throughout history. Jesus' mission moved their lives in a completely new direction: it lasted. It was a faith-creating impact, and they were already believers in Jesus prior to the cross or Easter. (James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 23.)

<sup>175</sup> For example, while Paul states the corruption of human beings and the wrath of God regarding the general revelation through nature (Rome 1:18-31), Pyun acknowledges, based on chapter one of Romans, John Hick's thought that God gives human beings his other names through other religions. While Paul says God wants all people to be saved *through* Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man, who gave himself as a ransom (1 Tim. 2:4-6), Pyun insisted that the providence of the salvation of God, who wants to save all human beings, is clearly revealed *in* Jesus Christ based on the same text. (Sun Hwan Pyun, Daleunjongyoeui Haneunim, *Gristorongwa Sinron*, PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 5 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1998), 238-239)

religious pluralism.<sup>176</sup> However, whether or not Christianity is the only true religion is ultimately based on the authority and belief in the fact that the Bible is the only true, inerrant revelation.<sup>177</sup> This does not mean that the Bible is rationally or mystically superior to the scriptures of other religions, but that the Bible is the revelation of the true, living God. Without this revelation from God, other world religions have grappled with ultimate truth and Reality and struggled in various ways: Hinduism in an ontological aspect, Buddhism in an epistemological aspect, Confucianism in a social, moral aspect, and Taoism in a tranquil aspect. Like Pyun, if someone denies the ultimate authority of the Bible as a revelation of God, for them, these world religions would have superior merits to Christianity.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, in Christian theology and Christian beliefs, whether the Bible is the only true, inerrant revelation of God is crucially important. Therefore, John warns not to add to or take away from the words that he received from Jesus Christ

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<sup>176</sup> John 14:6, “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (NIV)”. Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (NIV)”. 1 Cor. 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (NIV)”.

<sup>177</sup> Feinberg proposes a definition of inerrancy as follows: “Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.”(Paul D. Feinberg, *The Meaning of Inerrancy, Inerrancy*, Ed. Norman L. Geisler. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 294.)

<sup>178</sup> According to Pyun, which religion is the most superior depends on whether the religion shares more love and shows the experience of a transcendent being or not (Sun Hwan, Pyun, “Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa,” 159.) Hick also has the pragmatic criterion, which can be applied to comprehensive religious traditions whether it is soteriologically effective or not, namely, does it make possible the transformation of human existence from self-centreness to Reality-centreness? (John Hick, *On Grading Religions, Problems of Religious Pluralism*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 80.) Netland points out, however, that these pragmatic criteria cannot function without considering the question of truth. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 160, 162.)

(Rev. 22:18-19). Wesley, whom Pyun followed, explained the foundational feature of the Methodist denomination as the belief in the truth that all Scripture is inspired by God.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> John Wesley, *Grisdoinui Wanjun (Christian Perfection)*, translated by Lee Gaejun, (Seoul: Junmangsa, 1994), 169.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**AN APOLOGETIC TO DIALOGUE THEOLOGY**

**AS MINJUNG-LIBERATION THEOLOGY**

Dialogue Theology as Minjung-Liberation Theology

Pyun's dialogue theology combines ecumenical-religious pluralism and Minjung-liberation theology. He used ecumenical-religious pluralism as interreligious dialogue and Minjung-liberation theology as a contact point of dialogue. Chapter three explored dialogue theology as ecumenical-religious pluralism, and chapter four will study it as Minjung-liberation theology.

Beyond Religious Pluralism

For Pyun, Minjung-liberation theology is a theology that is beyond the limitations of religious pluralism. Pyun said that the possibility of achieving global ethics and global humanity depends on world religions emphasizing the importance of religion. Pyun thought that the task of global ethos for global humanity,<sup>180</sup> the core theme of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993, is not based on secular ethics, which is made within the limitations of human rationality, but on religious ethics, which is a responsibility connected with transcendence. However, he insisted that the prerequisite and purpose of true religion is in the dignity of humanity. According to Pyun, the golden

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<sup>180</sup> As a religious pluralist, Hick advocates a 'global theology' that consists of theories or hypotheses designed to interpret the religious experiences of mankind. According to him, dialogue of world religions is basic to this work. A global theology is the awareness of a common human history and a common human relationship to the mysterious transcendent reality. (John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 21-22.)

rule exists in the scriptures of all world religions. Furthermore, in the golden rule, humanity is not the means, but the goal of religion.<sup>181</sup> Based on this, he insisted that ethical questions about goodness are no less important than the question of truth in religions.<sup>182</sup>

For awhile, Pyun supported Stanley Samartha's fulfillment Christology of "the larger Christ" and Raimundo Panikkar's "unknown Christ"<sup>183</sup>, but later, he criticized them as ahistorical approaches because they lost the changing power of calling people to social responsibility and did not consider the affliction of Asian Minjung.<sup>184</sup> Pyun pointed out that a problem of religious pluralism is that it could not properly respond to the problem of religious truth, the standard of truth, and the relationship between religious truth and social conduct, especially the relationship between oppression and discrimination. Religious faith must insist upon a truth about reality because it is an ultimate interpretation about reality. Ultimately, this insistence must influence and define social, political, economical, and personal life.<sup>185</sup> If a religious belief supports colonialism, totalitarianism, discrimination, and racism, interreligious dialogue should change this false religious faith and false social conduct. The purpose of the interreligious

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<sup>181</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri*, 158.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>183</sup> Based upon Acts 17:16-34, Panikkar says that the presence of the unknown God is equivalent to proclaiming the presence of the unknown Christ. Throughout his work, he presents the hidden Christ in Hinduism through *Isvara*, a philosophical concept in Hinduism. (Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 162, 168-169.)

<sup>184</sup> Ik Sang Shin, *Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung*, 131.

<sup>185</sup> Pyun agreed with Yagi's view that different theologies of atonement, resurrection, and love are united in religious reality and all religions can be united through this. However, Pyun criticized Yagi's concept that religious reality is just a type of reality. Pyun contended that religious reality should be practical and decisive subject for ethical responsibility. (Jin Hui Kim, *Je 3 Sedae Tochakhwa Sinhakgwa Jongkyogan Daehwaeui Gwajewa Junmang*, 218.)

dialogue is not just to acknowledge other religions, but to support a transforming practice by criticizing both itself and others.<sup>186</sup> Pyun insisted that religious theology must be expressed through practice-centered liberation theology because true dialogue can only occur in practice, not as a dialogue of two different dogmas.<sup>187</sup>

### Beyond Indigenous Theology

Pyun's Minjung-liberation theology is based on humanity beyond religious spirituality. Therefore, in Korean theology, he tried to complement the limitations of religious indigenous theology with political Minjung theology. According to Pyun's appraisal, while Minjung theology tends to neglect religions, the indigenous theology still has a tendency to neglect politics. He also criticized Korean indigenous theology because it lacks concern for social issues.<sup>188</sup>

According to Pyun, even though Korea's indigenous theology has tried to escape from the shadow of Western theology, it still remains only as an extension of first world theology. Indigenous theology did not fully comprehend the task of third world theology.<sup>189</sup> For Sung-Bum Yun's theology, the sincerity (Sung, 誠) of Neo-Confucianism is completely fulfilled in the Cross. Dong Sik Ryu tried to translate,

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<sup>186</sup> Gwang Sub Sim, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Sinhaksasangui Chegye. 296.

While Knitter supports Hick's "grading the religions" and Lonnergan's "understanding for judgment," he insists that criteria, such as Hick's "Sotriological effectiveness," Samartha's "global ethic," and Küng's "*humanum*", has to be formulated in the praxis of liberation for the oppressed. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 188-189.)

<sup>187</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Bulgyojuk Hanguk Sinhakui Yumyung, Bulkyowa Kidokkyui Mannam*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib. Vol. 2 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1997.) 271.

<sup>188</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 16-17.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 20.

reinterpret, and incarnate the Gospel into Korean culture. However, according to Pyun, the approaches of these two indigenous theologians, being influenced by Hendrik Kraemer's biblical realism, were also developed from the theory of inclusive fulfillment, which says that other religions are in the process of becoming Christian, following the perspective of Western Christianity.<sup>190</sup>

### Minjung-Liberation Theology

Even though Pyun criticized Minjung theology for ignoring elements of religion, he still stood on a foundation of Minjung theology because he thought that the common ground of religions is the restoration of humanity through the freedom of Minjung.<sup>191</sup> According to Pyun, Western theology could become a true Asian theology by reforming Western theology and accumulating Asian spirituality to the situation of Asian Minjung, who are under social alienation, political oppression, economical exploitation, cultural alienation, and religious condemnation.<sup>192</sup>

Even though Pyun's existential theology initially accepted Minjung theology, the meaning of Minjung earnestly entered his theology in the early 1980s. In his writing, *Bulgyowa Gidokgyoui Daehwa*,<sup>193</sup> Pyun confessed his passionate love for Minjung (the

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>191</sup> While Knitter admits that it is not easy to find a preestablished common ground for dialogue, he insists that there is a common *approach* or a common *context*. He proposes that this common context would be the *preferential option for the poor and the nonperson* (Minjung). (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 185. Emphasis in original)

<sup>192</sup> Gwang Sub Sim, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan *Sinhaksasangui Chegye*. 291.

<sup>193</sup> In English: *Dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity*

grassroots).<sup>194</sup> By sharing his ideas with Aloysius Pieris and W. Ariarajah, Pyun became interested in Minjung theology. Pieris was developing his theology on the special situation in Asia (in the field of Minjung), and Ariarajah was insisting that the Christian mission for Asia failed because it focused on the dogma of Christ instead of the life and instruction of Jesus<sup>195</sup>

Even though Minjung theology and indigenous theology have a common vision of de-missionizing and de-westernizing, according to Pyun, they did not free themselves from Western dualistic thinking because they are divided into the two extremes of religion and politics. Pyun criticized Minjung theology as a disguised reprint of the old colonialist theology of the “missionary Christ”, which cursed indigenous religions and treated them as demonic.<sup>196</sup> Pyun proposed that Minjung theology needs to become more mature through the process of religious study for dialogue and cooperation.<sup>197</sup> However, Pyun also acknowledged that Minjung is the subject of reformation. According to him, the Minjung are the people of God who were permeated with a religious heart.<sup>198</sup> Pyun insisted that the freedom of Minjung should be based on mystical intensification of consciousness as well as conscientization.<sup>199</sup> According to Ik Sang Shin, this could be possible by developing a practical base which proceeds from the development of the existential realm. The development of the existential realm can be achieved by moving

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<sup>194</sup> Hun Kim, “Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo,” Th.M., 8.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>196</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 17.

<sup>197</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 242.

<sup>198</sup> Hun Kim, “Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo.” Th.M., 8.

<sup>199</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Bulgyowa Kidokgyoui Daehwa*, 130.

from dualism to the realm of nonexistence. Overcoming Western dualism was possible by understanding the Buddhist concept of “Not Two.”<sup>200</sup> According to Shin, Pyun understood the concept of “Not Two” as a dimension of practical experience, not as a dimension of metaphysics. Further, he believed the concept of “Not Two” was a preceding task for interreligious dialogue.<sup>201</sup>

Pyun, who thought of himself as a Wesleyan, said that Wesley seemed to know the spirit of the mission of God (*Missio Dei*) and ran into the world with the Gospel to find alienated laborers, orphans, widows, and prisoners on the other side of the thick wall of the church and without high apostolic authority.<sup>202</sup> He states as follows: “The Wesley’s passionate religious feeling aimed the practice of love toward social purity... Wesley is a priest of *Han* (恨, the pain of victims or abyss of pain)<sup>203</sup> and love, cutting the Minjung’s feelings of suffering by ‘faith working through love.’ ... Wesley’s theology is a field theology and a practical theology because if it is away from the field of the event, it cannot exist.”<sup>204</sup>

According to Pyun’s analysis, even though Wesley emphasized service, this service ended up practicing love toward the poor and alienated people. Wesley was not at the level where he could squarely see and transform the political, social, and economical “structural evil” at that time. Pyun pointed out that Wesley lived within the historical

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<sup>200</sup> see dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity of Chapter Two.

<sup>201</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung, 162, 164, 166.

<sup>202</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Gyohoegeachukronui Sinhakjuk Geungu, 247.

<sup>203</sup> Nam Dong Seo, a Minjung theologian, defined that han is a burden of anger and sad feeling of Minjung in their inner side. (Nam Dong, Seo. *Minjungsinhakui Tamgu* (Seoul: Hangilsa3., 1983), 162-163.

<sup>204</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Wesleywa Minjung, *John Wesley Sinhakgwa Sungyo*, PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 4 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1998), 106.

limitation of the pietistic and individualistic Victorian dynasty. Nevertheless, the spirit of social service emphasized by Wesley acted as a fuse for William Wilberforce's emancipation of the slaves, Carey's liberation of the West Indies, and the Industrial Labor Movement in England, which deeply influenced humanistic leaders in the United States and England.<sup>205</sup> In the stance of Minjung-liberation theology, Pyun states the following:

There is no salvation for Christians alone until all mankind can be saved. Japan and newly industrializing countries (NICS) cannot be happy until all Asians can be happy. Why is half of the global village, the people in the Third World, struggling with absolute poverty and hunger? Let's go to Galilee together! Galilee, the field of the event walking toward the freedom of Minjung! Let us remember the last words of Minjung theologian, Seo-Nam Dong, on his deathbed, "Let's meet in Galilee."<sup>206</sup>

#### Dialogue through Jesus and Maitreya

For Pyun, the question of whether Buddhism contains an element of historical consciousness is important. He often criticized that Buddhism does not have a historical consciousness because it teaches reincarnation, *Nirvana*, and emptiness.<sup>207</sup> However, he finally found it in Minjung Buddhism. He believed that millenarianism in Minjung Buddhism is evidence of historical consciousness.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, Pyun thought that Jesus

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<sup>205</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *John Wesley Sinhakwa Sungyo*, 155.

<sup>206</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Asia Inru Gicho Gongdongche, Hyudaemunmyunggwaw Gidokgyosinang: Pyun-Sun Hwan Jeonjip, Vol 7*, (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1999), 285.

<sup>207</sup> Pyun acknowledged later that the dynamic of revolution is inherent in all religions. He insisted that a responsible attitude is even found in the emptiness concepts of Buddhism and *Wu-Wei* of Daoism, denying the real world and positively making history. (Sun Hwan Pyun, Ryu Dong Sik oi 3 myung, "Simpojium: Hangukmunhwawa Grisdogyo Gwangaeui Saeroun Bansung," *Sinhaksasang*. Tonggwun 52 ho (Seoul; Hanguksinhakyunguso, Spring 1986), 86.) According to Ik Sang Shin, Pyun started to positively see Buddhism in "Boddhisattva-sm," namely, Pyun understood the concept of "Not Two" as a dimension of practical experience, not as a dimension of metaphysics. (Ik Sang Shin, *Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung*, 156, 164, 166.)

<sup>208</sup> Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianis*, 97.

of Minjung theology and Maitreya of Minjung Buddhism form a common ground as the messiahs for the freedom of the Minjung people. As a result, he tried to have dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism through them.

Pyun proposed that Minjung theology needs to be baptized in “the Ganges of Mahayana Buddhism”, especially Minjung Buddhism, in order to reach dialogue and tolerance by presenting an interest in other religions and escaping from conflict with other religions.<sup>209</sup> According to Pyun, practicing love is an open square in which all religions can communicate, teach, and learn from each other. Like Minjung theology, the Minjung Buddhist movement advocated that Buddhism should be changed to practical Buddhism for the freedom of the Minjung, leaving behind Sangha-centered Buddhism.<sup>210</sup>

Nam Dong Seo tried to find the source of the Minjung-liberation through the Messianism of millenary Buddhism, which appeared in Maitreya Buddhism. The Minjung, filled with *Han*, hope for and expect the new world (*Yonghwa* World) which will be established by the descent of Maitreya into the present world. Seo thought that the millenary Movement, insisted upon by the Messianism of Buddhism and Christianity, should be joined in the dark field of Minjung in Korea. Go-Eun, a Minjung Buddhism agitator, deeply addressed the millenary Minjung movement, which appeared in Maitreya Buddhism, in his thesis, *MirukSinanggwa Minjung* (1979).<sup>211</sup>

While Nam Dong Seo was interested in Maitreya Buddhism from the perspective of the Minjung-liberation movement, Pyun was concerned with Maitreya Buddhism and

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<sup>209</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 242.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

<sup>211</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 196.

Minjung theology as interreligious dialogue and the practice of truth, the essential instruction of religions. Pyun was interested in Asian religious theology and Asian liberation theology.<sup>212</sup> Pyun also pursued the complement and supplement of Korean indigenous theology and Korean Minjung theology which corresponds to religious theology and liberation theology, respectively. According to Gwang Sub Sim, Pyun's interest in the Asian liberation theology of religions resulted from research<sup>213</sup> on Pieris and research<sup>214</sup> on Maitreya Buddhism.<sup>215</sup>

The faith in Amitbha Buddha<sup>216</sup> is the political Messianism of the higher classes with faith in the Pure Land (Amitbha Buddhism) being achieved by someone else's (Amitbha Buddha) contribution. However, faith in Maitreya Buddha is the Messianism of Minjung with faith in the new world being achieved by Minjung's efforts.<sup>217</sup> Nam Dong

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<sup>212</sup> Pyun came to know about the "revolutional practice" of Maitreya Buddhism by Aloysius Pieris in 1984 (Ik Sang Shin, Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung, 119.)

<sup>213</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Biseoguhwawa Jesamsegyesinhak- Tukhi Seurirangkaeui Aloysius Pieris Sinbuleul Jungsimhayu," *Sinhaksasang*, vol 46 (Autumn 1984), 536-566.

<sup>214</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue-Towards the Liberation of Minjung," *SinhakgwaSegye*, no. 16 (Spring 1988), 197-247.

<sup>215</sup> Gwang Sub Sim, *Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Sinhaksasangui Chegye*. 291.

<sup>216</sup> Amitbha is a representative future Buddha like Maitreya Buddha in Buddhism. The meaning of Amitbha is endless lifespan or endless light. Amitbha is symbolic of a compassionate Buddha who saves humankind. One thing that humankind has to do for salvation is just chant Amitbha's name, "*Namo-Amitbha Buddha*," because the promise of compassion, that everyone calling Amitbha's name will be rebirthed in the Pure Land, was fulfilled. (Chan Su Lee, *Bulgyowa Grisdogyo, Gipiesu Mannada, Dongsu Jonggyoeui Mannamgwa geu Mirae*, (Seoul: Pyun-Sun Whan Akaiv and Dongsusinhakyunguso pyun, Seoul: Dosuchulpan Mosineunsaramdeul, 2007), 37-38.)

<sup>217</sup> Pyun insisted that Western scholars have studied only aristocratical and elite Buddhism, which teaches the extinction of the desires of Minjung: nirvana, emptiness, and academic meeting with absolute nothing. According to Pyun, some Western scholars, like Karl Barth and John Cobb, Jr., had an interest in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism (Amitbha Buddhism). However, Western scholars have ignored Fork Buddhism or Lay Buddhism. Pyun insisted that the Western scholars' attitude has caused Buddhist messianism and millenarianism to be seen in a negative light. (Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 203-204, 223.)

Seo insisted that the antagonistic relationship of ascent faith and descent faith<sup>218</sup> in Maitreya Buddhism is very similar to the antagonistic relationship of the kingdom of God and Millennialism in Christian eschatology. According to Seo, like almost all failing revolutionary movements in Christian history have been involved with Millenarianism, almost all failing revolutionary movements in Korean history have been connected with faith in Maitreya.<sup>219</sup>

However, while Pyun agreed with Seo's thought of millenarianism through Maitreya and Jesus, Pyun warned that millenary movements must not become rigid ideology. To keep this from happening, Minjung religion as an ideology should not ignore and reject the originally super-ideological nature of religion. The Maitreya messiah movement and Jesus messiah movement should not use their religions to negatively rationalize political ideology. In Korean history, the Maitreya, millenary, Minjung movements and Minjung have often been deceived by ambitious leaders insisting on a coming new age and new nation.<sup>220</sup> Therefore, according to Pyun, a good religious person should keep their super-ideological composure and flexibility for the

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<sup>218</sup> In ascent faith, Buddhists seek to join Maitreya through rebirth in the Tusita heaven; in descent faith, they hope to be reborn at the time when Maitreya as a Buddha will come back to earth. In these faiths, there is a switch from place to time; from Maitreya's location in the Tusita heaven to his future arrival on earth. (Sung Taek Cho, "On the Trail of Two Competing Buddhas from India to Korea: A Study of the Daynamics of Cross-cultural Assimilation," *Korea Journal*, (Spring 2001), 269.)

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-235.

<sup>220</sup> As an example, Kung Ye (?-918) established the "Later Koguryo Kingdom". He claimed to be Maitreya and promised to bring deliverance from his suffering world. He said that Miruk Sang Saeng Kyung foretold that Maitreya would be born in Korea, implying that this referred to himself. (Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianis*, 103.)

sake of choosing a different ideology according to the field of events, struggling for human rights.<sup>221</sup>

## The System of Dialogue Theology as a Minjung-Liberation Theology

### Theology Proper

Pyun believed that God is not a transcendent being, but a historical One who has a relationship with human beings. According to Pyun, the God of Exodus is not an ontological being, but *hāyāh*. Even though the Septuagint translated *hāyāh* in Hebrew (I AM WHO I AM, Ex. 3:14) as “*ὁ ὄν, ὄν*” in Greek, the meanings of the two are essentially different. While *ὄν* means existence or being, the God of *hāyāh* is not a being itself who exists only in the metaphysical world beyond the material world. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob exists in the historical, real world. Pyun insisted that the God of Christianity cannot exist by ontology, but only by “yahwehology.”<sup>222</sup>

Concerning the Trinity, Pyun, based on Indian theologian Appasamy’s thought, said that the relationship between God and Jesus is not an identity in essential substantiality, but a union of business and love. God manifests his own will and love through Jesus.<sup>223</sup> As Israel is the true son of God and the prophets are the servants of God, Jesus is the son of God who also has all the power of God. Jesus is the agent who makes

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<sup>221</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 243-245.

<sup>222</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, “Du Yuhyungui Musinronja,” 89.

<sup>223</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Araerobuteo Gristoron, *Gristorongwa Sinron*, PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 5 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1998), 215.

it possible for humanity to truly realize God. Even though Jesus looks like the selected one, He is the special reflection of God's personality and character.<sup>224</sup>

### Christology

To Pyun, Jesus as a great human being is more important than the Christ developed by the early church. Jesus is a savior who gives freedom to the Minjung. His salvation is the restoration of the true self and all broken relationships. Jesus is the great model and the son of God because he fulfilled this mission of God.

Pyun insisted that, for a long time, the Korean church has indiscriminately accepted the Western theologians' image of Jesus. The Western image of Jesus must be reinterpreted and restructured through the hermeneutical process into the context of Korean culture because those who existentially believe in Jesus from the Bible and because of dogma are not Westerners, but Korean. According to Pyun, if Korean Christians do not become existential human beings in relation to Jesus, Jesus will be meaningless to them.<sup>225</sup> Pyun says,

Christ is working for the freedom of the Minjung to terminate *han* (恨), the pain of victims. Having the same pain as Minjung, Jesus is walking on the red clay road, wet with the tears of Minjung's *han*. We have come to the point where we must testify of the faith of the holy Mother Earth of Korea and Asia, and the faith of the Minjung in Asia and Korea, who embrace God through an Asian and a Korean context, but not Judaic, Greek, or Latin contexts.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>225</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Dongyangjuk Yesuui Munhakjuk Gaechuk," 52-53.

<sup>226</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Manil Sini Jonjaehaji Anneundamyun, *Gristorongwa Sinron*, PyunSunHwan Jeonjib, Vol. 5 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1998), 336.

Pyun's Christology follows that of F. Buri. According to Buri, the symbol of Christ is a cipher calling human beings to authenticity and responsibility, endeavoring to form a responsible human community. Buri's "Christ, the Lord of true self" can have concrete power when it is based on the life of the historical Jesus, namely his teaching, works, and the event of the cross.<sup>227</sup> Pyun considered the Symbolic Christology of Fritz Buri as the full development of Bultmann's demythologization. Buri did not search for grace in the salvation event of Jesus or God's love, but in the possibility of human existence. Pyun thought that Buri's theology was correct theology, which makes Christianity absolutely free from supernatural, magical fatalism.<sup>228</sup>

Pyun's Christology is not a Christology from above, in which Jesus has ascended as the Christ from the early church, but from below. Christology from below is not a theoretical and speculative theology, but a living theology in the center of Minjung's life and in the field of life.<sup>229</sup> However, Pyun acknowledged the limitation of his Christology from below as follows:

In my view, I am not saying that Jesus is a human like Minjung. I am saying that only the human nature of Jesus can free Asian Minjung who are groaning and crying in absolute poverty. My "Christology from below" is still a "high Christology" for humanistic intellectuals who are saying that Jesus was a human.<sup>230</sup>

Considering that Pyun stated his "Christology from below" is still a "high Christology," In Chul Han assumes that Pyun left lingering imagery that he finally

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<sup>227</sup> In Chul Han, Pyun Sun Hwanui *Gidokrongwa yuksajuk Yesu, Pyun Sun Hwan Sinhak Saero Bogi*. (Seoul: Daehangidokgyoseohoe, 2005), 255-257.

<sup>228</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Bultmannui Bisinhwahwawa Tochakhwau Gwaje*, 93.

<sup>229</sup> Hun Kim, "Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo," *Th.M.*, 23.

<sup>230</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Araerobuteo Gristoron*, 218.

understood Jesus in the stance of the latter, although Pyun understood Jesus in the stance of the former until now.<sup>231</sup> However, Pyun's stance on Christology from above and below is not clear; Pyun seems to try to balance the two.

Pyun insisted that Asian religions always include the concept of "suffering" as an essence of religion. According to him, the uniqueness of Jesus is not based on a metaphysical theory (Christology) in which Jesus is the son of God, but a practice (Jesusology) in which Jesus is a friend of tax collectors and sinners, namely a friend of the Minjung. Jesusology shows a balance between not falling into soteriological relativism or indifferentism.<sup>232</sup> Pyung Mu Ahn, a representative Minjung theologian, insists that there are Minjung in whom Jesus exists and there is Jesus, in whom the Minjung exist. To Ahn, Jesus is Minjung and the Minjung are Jesus. Therefore, the Minjung can be saved by their own efforts. However, unlike Ahn, Pyun seems to avoid the theological issue of Jesus' uniqueness in Minjung theology.<sup>233</sup>

According to Pyun, It is clear that the concept of *Messiah* is not confined to Jesus. As he pursued the dialogue between Maitreya Minjung Buddhism and the Minjung theology of Jesus, he stated that Maitreya is the Messiah to the Minjung in Korea: "Maitreya Buddhism is Minjung Buddhism (*Maitreya = Miruk Messiah*)."<sup>234</sup> Although the process of forming the Buddhology of Mahayana Buddhism and forming the

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<sup>231</sup> In Chul Han, Pyun-Sun Hwanui *Gidokrongwa Yuksajuk Yesu*, 272.

<sup>232</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue-Towards the Liberation of Minjung," 234.

<sup>233</sup> While Pyun positively handled Ahn's Minjung theology, he seemed to avoid evaluating Ahn's christology. To Pyun, who had struggled with the theological issue of Jesus' uniqueness for his entire life, the fact that he did not criticize it may seem as though he is agreeing with Ahn's christology indirectly. (Sun Hwan Pyun, *Asia Grisdoronui Yumyung*, 131-132.)

<sup>234</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 221.

Christology of Christianity is very similar, Pyun emphasized that Mahayana Buddhism did not idolize and absolutize one point of history, unlike Christianity. Therefore Mahayana Buddhism does not insist upon exclusive absolution or ultimateness.<sup>235</sup>

### Soteriology

For Pyun, salvation is the restoration of the true self, humanity, broken relationships, and the freedom of Minjung. On the basis of this soteriology, he pursued dialogue and cooperation between religions because the essential truth of all world religions teaches this instruction. According to Il Jun Park, Pyun thought that the salvation of human beings is the purpose of religion. However, for Pyun, salvation not only refers to religious salvation, but also to true liberation of the lives of human beings. Therefore, Pyun understood that salvation and liberation are not two completely different aspects, but are two sides of the same event.<sup>236</sup>

According to Pyun, after the Renaissance, from Descartes to Hegel, Christianity attempted rational interpretation on the basis of the proposition, “I think, therefore I am (*Cogito, ergo sum*),” and after Kierkegaard, Christianity connected with the existential interpretation on the basis of the proposition, “I exist, therefore I am (*Existo, ergo sum*).” However, the modern era is challenged by a new humanism which is involved with Heinemann’s proposition of: “I respond, therefore I am (*Respondeo ergo sum*).” Heinemann diligently questioned humanity’s strength beyond existentialism. Therefore,

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<sup>235</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Asia Inru Gicho Gongdongche*, 283.

<sup>236</sup> Il Jun Park, *Juhanggwa Taljueui Momjiteuroseo Jonggyohaebangsinhak, Olgoonee Sunsaengnim Pyun-Sun Hwan*. (Seoul: Sinanggwa Jijungsa, 2010), 307.

according to Pyun, Christianity encounters the problem of how the Gospel can reach the people of the new age using humanity's strength as a contact point.<sup>237</sup>

Pyun positively introduced Pieris' soteriology that proposed concretely solving the confrontation between the theologies of the "Christ-of-religions" model and the "Christ-against-culture" model. According to Pieris, a theology of other religions is grounded on neither a Christology, which argues about whether the Christ is in the other religions or not, nor a theology of God-talk, which tries to make it clear how the other religions know God. Pieris insists that a theology of other religions should be grounded on soteriology. Pyun also agreed with Pieris' thought that the soteriological experience of the individual soul, rising from the experience of the encounter with the trans-phenomenal Absolute, is a leaven for transformation directed toward a structural revolution in the social and political sphere.<sup>238</sup> According to Pieris, the cosmic dimension of Asian religions, which was connected with the will of people for political and social transformation, has always been directed towards the transcendent Absolute (Tao, Dharma, Suchness, Brahman, and Nirvana). Two dimensions of Asian religions, the cosmic dimension (the sphere of politics) and the trans-cosmic dimension (the sphere of religion), are connected with the Buddhist distinction between the secular realm (*lokyia*) and the trans-secular realm (*Lokattara*), secular truth and holy truth.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Du Yuhungui Musinronja," 87.

<sup>238</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 18.

<sup>239</sup> Aloysius Pieris S.J., "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," Virginia Fabella, ed., *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, Orbis Books, New York., 1980; Virginia Fabella, Jack Clancey John Ma, eds., *Theology Reflection on Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity, Hongkong, 1982, 95* (Ibid., 18.)

According to Pyun, the theology of other religions must start from non-Christian soteriology. Christianity can meet with other religions in Asia in the open square of soteriology, which has fought for the restoration of all humanity. Pyun acknowledged that the truth of salvation could be found in “the womb of Asia”, in the religions and history of suffering and revolution of Asia.<sup>240</sup> Pyun encouraged Christianity and other Asian religions to not only have a dialogue, but also to cooperate with each other for the restoration and achievement of all humanity. The ultimate standard for measuring salvation in a multi-religious situation is not only Jesus Christ, whom Christian history presents, but the experience of God, namely, the experience of salvation and freedom, which is the common ground of dialogue and cooperation.<sup>241</sup> The meaning of Jesus’ salvation is not local exclusiveness or universal inclusiveness, but the transforming practice of Christ’s vision. Jesus’ life should continue to function as the “Christ symbol” to transform humanity. This is achieved by revising the “Christ symbol” as an ideology.<sup>242</sup>

Pyun related Wesley’s thoughts on the rebirth to a dynamic religious experience and interpreted Wesley’s thoughts on sanctification through a connection with Minjung theology and liberation theology. As stated earlier, according to Pyun, John Wesley provides the ideas: from his thoughts on prevenient grace comes the possibility of salvation which is open even to pagans, and from the priority of religious experience, the religious experience of other religions can be respected. Added to this, since Wesley’s

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<sup>240</sup> Gwang Sub Sim, *Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Sinhaksasangui Chegye*. 290.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

thought on sanctification is that true spirituality proceeds to true practice, through sanctification all religions can work together to restore all of humanity.<sup>243</sup> According to Park-Sung Yong, Pyun thought of sanctification as the unification of individual sanctification and social sanctification (social structuralization of the grace).<sup>244</sup>

### Ecclesiology

To Pyun, the church is a servant that serves the world. This service is not simply doing good deeds for the Christianization of the world, but the mission of the church should also strive to reform structural evil for the freedom of Minjung.

Pyun insisted, on the basis of Wesley's thought, that the church is only subordinated to God, and that the church sent by God to the world is to be distinguished from the world. When a church fulfills the promise and task of God, it will then become the true church. Like Jesus Christ, the church should be a servant serving the world not by Christianizing the world, but by making the world into the true world and expelling the evil power that is dehumanizing the world.<sup>245</sup>

This concept of the church as a servant comes from the theology of "the mission of God (*Missio Dei*).” According to Pyun, the purpose of the mission is not to convert pagans, establish the church, or expand the church, but to contribute to the humanization of the secular world. Therefore, the church should not become an existential structure, a structure calling people to the church for safety, but a dynamic branch or outpost

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>244</sup> Sung Yong Park, Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Baksa Sarmgwa Geueui Yiyagi, 39.

<sup>245</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Gyohoegaechukronui Sinhakjuk Geungu, 160.

advancing toward the secular world.<sup>246</sup> The mission is not the Christianization of others or an extension of its religion, but fellowship in *Shalom* and testimony of *Shalom*.<sup>247</sup>

Pyun asserted that *Shalom* in the mission is not only about individual salvation, but social salvation as a whole. Due to a narrow understanding of love, the Korean church has not tried to identify or solve the cause of structural poverty, but instead has expressed cheap sympathy through shallow good deeds. The Korean church is not familiar with structural reformation or love, but has largely seen individual and sentimental love and charity.<sup>248</sup>

According to Pyun, the major reason for the decline of the American Methodist church was that the church abandoned the mission for Minjung, became a middle class church, and was satisfied with a large church building. He warned that if the Korean church does not consider the Minjung's field of life of as a mission field, the Korean church would also follow in the footsteps of the American Methodist church.<sup>249</sup>

### An Apologetic to Dialogue Theology as a Minjung-Liberation Theology

#### Contribution of Dialogue Theology as a Minjung-Liberation Theology

The first contribution of Pyun's dialogue theology to Korean theology is that Pyun, as a Wesleyan, magnified the importance of the Gospel's social and political role by accepting and supporting the "Christ from below" concept of Minjung. Developing

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<sup>246</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Oneului Sungyowa Grisdooinui Jayu, *John Wesley Sinhakgwa Sungyo*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 4 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1998), 202-203.

<sup>247</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Jongyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 1 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1999), 23.

<sup>248</sup> Hun Kim, "Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Tonghaesu Bon Sungyo," Th.M., 52.

<sup>249</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *John Wesley Sinhakgwa Sungyo*, 141.

elements of existential theology in his theology,<sup>250</sup> attempting to complement indigenous theology and Minjung theology as Korean frontier theologies, and agreeing with Pieris' thought that religious mystic experience is connected to the social and political transformation movement, caused Pyun to accept Minjung theology. Even though he found the meaning and importance of practicing love in the foundation of Wesley's sanctification, Pyun looked to liberation theology to overcome the structure of social and political evil and go beyond the level of only good deeds.

Strictly speaking, Pyun is not a Minjung theologian. Still, it is important that Pyun, as a religious theologian emphasizing the mythical experience of religion, positively accepted Minjung theology in order to create a supplement to religious indigenous theology and social, political Minjung theology. Having an open mind and attitude toward social, political Minjung theology is not easy as a theologian and a person of religion. Ultimately, Pyun was excommunicated by the Korean Methodist denomination to which he belonged because of his religious pluralism and Minjung-liberation theology.<sup>251</sup>

Yong Gi Cho and Dong Won Lee<sup>252</sup> were the pastors of mega churches and representative leaders of conservative and evangelical denominations. They confessed their sins in front of their church and Korean Christians when they faced retirement. They

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<sup>250</sup> According to Sire, theistic existentialism had two different steps from traditional theism. The first step stopped believing in the accuracy of recorded history while the second step lost interest in its facticity and emphasized its religious implication or meaning. (James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, (Nottingham: IVP Academic, 2009), 139-142.

<sup>251</sup> Strictly speaking, he was excommunicated because he believed in religious pluralism. (Dae Gwang, Choi, Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Wehan Byunjung, 186.)

<sup>252</sup> Yong Gi Cho served as senior pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church (1958-2008) in Korea. Dong Won Lee served as senior pastor of Global Mission Church in Korea.

confessed that they did not try to have dialogue with other religions or try to reach the oppressed and the alienated. Yong Gi Cho, the pastor of the biggest Pentecostal church, confessed that he had lived excessively by misusing grace and that it was a cheap grace. He regretted that he did not practice love and ignored others. He repented of ignoring social evil and social participation and kept silent about the pain of troubled people and the pain of nature. Lastly, he confessed having narrow faith and accepting that there is nothing wrong if his church alone is saved.<sup>253</sup> Dong Won Lee, the representative leader of the Korean Baptist church, confessed that he ignored the pro-democracy movement, did not care enough for alienated church members, and did not preach prophetic sermons to the established members of the church.<sup>254</sup>

Their confessions are examples of Korean conservative churches and Korean evangelicals who have ignored the practice of love and the freedom of the oppressed and the alienated. It is ironic that these two conservative church leaders indirectly acknowledged some aspects of Minjung theology. Even though they see the need for practical faith for the freedom of Minjung, their conservative faith ignored this. Presently in Korea, the young generation and intellectuals are making broad accusations against Christianity. They criticize Christianity as the most exclusive religion and as a religion for the established or the rich.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Cho-Yong Gi Moksa “Jega Jalmothaetseupmida” Chamhoi  
<http://www.chtoday.co.kr/view.htm?code=cg&id=162879> (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>254</sup> Lee-Dong Won Moksaui ‘Dasutgaji Chamheoiwa Gamsa, Dugaji Gidae,’  
<http://www.christiantoday.co.kr/view.htm?id=243493> (accessed January 10, 2012)

<sup>255</sup> Dae Gwang Choi points out that Korean churches cannot positively respond to the following current issues: (1) the young generations leave the church because of growing-ism (a spirit that the growth of the church is the church’s first priority) and the conservative political tendency of the churches, (2) many Christians feel more comfortable in the “spirituality” of religious experiences, meetings, and books than in the religious institution, and (3) dialogue and cooperation between religions are increasing to solve various

Yet, these same assaults against Christianity existed when Pyun was developing his theology. Even though Pyun did not develop his own inventive theology, he evidently still struggled with these two problems. His theological concerns, interreligious dialogue and desire for freedom for the alienated, are also the theological assignments that churches and theology should solve today. Therefore, Pyun brought an important conversation to the Korean church and Korean theology. Even though Pyun was excommunicated, the issues with which he struggled, “is Christianity an exclusive religion?” and “is Christianity a religion for the established?” are the same problems with which the Christian church and theology should struggle.

#### Critics against Dialogue Theology as a Minjung-Liberation Theology

Pyun pursued the balanced unification of Korean religious indigenous theology and social, political Minjung theology. He also wanted to balance “Jesus from below” and “Jesus from above.” However, his theology was more inclined to Minjung theology than religious experience. For example, like Nam Dong Seo and Eun Go, Pyun proposed Maitreya Buddha and Jesus as the contact point for dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. Pyun stood with Seo, who found the models for freedom of Minjung in Maitreya of Minjung Buddhism and Jesus of Minjung theology. This theory, in which Maitreya Buddha is a millennial Messiah in Minjung Buddhism, and Jesus is a millennial Messiah in Minjung theology, proposes that the established Buddhism and Christianity are for the established, not for the alienated.

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issues such as ecological and political issues. (Dae Gwang Choi, Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Wehan Byunjung, 184.)

Therefore, Pyun's dialogue theology as a liberation theology of religions is actually closer to Minjung-liberation theology than interreligious theology.<sup>256</sup> This is evident since his liberation theology of religions was inclined toward Minjung theology and "Jesus from below." Dialogue between Korean Buddhists and Christians, which Pyun pursued and other Minjung theologians are pursuing, has been leaning toward a liberation centered and praxis centered dialogue and a dialogue for the struggle of human rights and democratization.<sup>257</sup>

Therefore, Pyun's theology has the same problem as Minjung theology. According to Pyun, by subjective interpretation of the Bible, both the form and content of the Gospel can be changed.<sup>258</sup> Minjung theologians' hermeneutical perspective is completely different from that of traditional theologians because they regard the Bible as the source of the Minjung-liberation movement, in which Minjung is the subject.<sup>259</sup> Pyun's dialogue theology, as religious pluralism, gave up the essence of the Gospel in order to have dialogue between other religions. His dialogue theology, as a Minjung-liberation theology, also ignores the Gospel's spiritual and faithful salvation for the purpose of having dialogue between Minjung religions. Pyun said that the essence of the

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<sup>256</sup> Even though Knitter, who largely influenced Pyun, insists that the theology of religion and theology of liberation need to have dialogue, in a pragmatic aspect of religion, his primary purpose of the dialogue also concerns bringing about socio-political transformation. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 179-181.)

<sup>257</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 245.

<sup>258</sup> Ik Sang Shin, *Pyun-Sun Whaneui Sinhak*; *Siljoneui Jagi Eehae Yujungeuros*, 158.

<sup>259</sup> For example, as Jong Gil Kim, in the stance of Minjung theology, interprets Gal. 2:16, which is an important verse about the justification of Christianity, he also interprets "πιστις χριστου" as "faith of Christ." By understanding it as a subjective genitive, not an objective genitive (faith in Christ), justification can be achieved by Christ's faith, not our own faith. According to Kim, Christ's faith is the model for our faith, and our faith is just a part of and response to Christ's faith. (Jong Gil Kim, *Chingeuirongwa Grisdoeui Mideum, Dasi, Minjung Sinhakeeda*. (Seoul: Dongyun, 2010), 208, 219.)

Gospel should not change, but that the Gospel should be reinterpreted and translated to convey historical reality.<sup>260</sup> However, Pyun's theology changed the essence of the Gospel for the sake of a new interpretation of the Gospel.

There are two meanings of Jesus' death on the cross. On the one hand, it is the death of Christ, the Son of God. The meaning of the cross is not the amount of pain or the type of death, but the one who died on the cross. The main reason that Jesus' cross and the robbers' cross at Golgotha were evidently different is that Jesus is the Christ. In Mt.16:13-21, Jesus asked Peter who He is, and Peter answered that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God. After this conversation, Jesus began teaching his disciples about his cross and resurrection. The death of Christ, the Son of the living God, indicates that either Jesus' cross or the shedding of Jesus' blood has the supernatural authority or ability to save human beings (Heb.9:14, 1 Jn. 1:7). Therefore, the cross of Jesus is the power of God for those who are being saved (1 Cor.1:18). On the other hand, the cross of Jesus is the model that Christians must follow. When Peter tried to prevent Him from dying on the cross, Jesus rebuked him and asked him to follow the path of the cross (Mt.16:24).

Pyun denied that the cross of Jesus has supernatural power and is the power of God for salvation because he understood Jesus' cross as a cross of a human being, and interpreted Jesus' cross as a model for following Jesus' life or a source for the Minjung-liberation movement.<sup>261</sup> Pyun made the mistake of abjuring the most important meaning

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<sup>260</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, "Du Yuhyungui Musinronja," 87

<sup>261</sup> Jin Gwan Gwon, a Minjung theologian, insists that the doctrine of Jesus' atonement makes us ignore structural evil and close our eyes to the real world. Citing the words of Ignacio Elacuria, liberation theologian from South America, "this pattern of thought (the doctrine of atonement) is mostly incorrect and carries a large risk, namely, it should be acknowledged that this concept makes us ignore or close our eyes

and role of Jesus' cross in his theological attempt to remedy the faults of the Korean church with Minjung theology. Since Pyun excessively emphasized the meaning of the cross as a model, the meaning of the cross as the supernatural power of salvation becomes very weak. In the cross of Jesus, God's wisdom simultaneously accomplishes both His love for sinners and His justice toward sinners. God's power and wisdom on the cross are not only the true foundation of salvation, but also the true foundation of the moral life of human beings. To Pyun, however, the ability of the cross itself or the blood itself to save human beings would be a kind of magic, mysticism, or myth.

Like other Minjung theologians, for Pyun the concept of Christ or Messiah cannot be confined to Jesus. Even though he confessed Jesus as Christ, to Pyun, the "Christ" is a symbol that calls human beings to a true self or responsible self.<sup>262</sup> However, if one's belief is not rooted in the historical fact of Jesus, it cannot be the basis of true faith. Even though Pyun believed in Jesus as Christ, the "Christ" could not be God. He objected to the deification and absolutization of Jesus. Despite this, Jesus claimed the truth that God and He are one and claiming this caused Him to die (Jn. 5:18; 10:30-31). Even though Pyun believed that Jesus Christ died on the cross, he emphasized the historical and political meaning of the cross more than the kerygma and efficiency of the cross. However, the cross of Jesus Christ is the model that Christians must follow, and further, is the power of God saving His people (1Cor. 1:18).

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to our responsibility, corresponding to the structure of sin which made Jesus die." (Jin Gwan Gwon, *Yesu, Minjungeui Sangjing Minjung, Yesueui Sangjing*. (Seoul: Dongyun, 2009), 196.

<sup>262</sup> Gregory A. Boyd states, "Jesus is not a symbol of anything unless he's rooted in history... The theological truth is based on historical truth. That's the way the New Testament talks." (Strobel Lee, *The Case for Christ*, (Grand Rapid MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1998), 124-125.)

Pyun consented to Pieris' belief that soteriology clarifies the mystery of salvation and the mystery of liberation which occur in the Asian Minjung-liberation movement.<sup>263</sup> Further, he pursued the freedom and millenarianism of Minjung through Maitreya of Minjung Buddhism and Jesus of Minjung theology. However, this kind of soteriology cannot explain the salvation of the robber on the cross who believed in Jesus. For him, there is no good deed except confession to Jesus Christ and no earthly paradise, but instead paradise after death (Lk. 23:39-43).

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<sup>263</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Other Religions and Theology*, 48.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### A Liberation Theology of Religions

Pyun Sun Hwan's theology is dialogue theology as a liberation theology of religions. He searched for an open way to have dialogue, a dialogue where Christians and non-Christians together become the subject and object.<sup>264</sup> He thought that the division of religious theology and political theology could be solved in the religious nature of Minjung.<sup>265</sup> Pyun searched for the basis of his "liberation theology of religions" in the teachings of Wesley. According to Pyun, Wesley's concept of prevenient grace implies a possibility of salvation for non-Christians. Wesley's thought on the rebirth relates to a dynamic religious experience for interreligious dialogue, and his thoughts on sanctification give a basis for Minjung theology and liberation theology while struggling to restore humanity.

It is difficult to simply and clearly define Pyun's liberation theology of religions. According to Ik Sang Shin, Pyun filled many of his works with the words of others, a method known as indirect conveyance. Because of this, and combining the contradictory thoughts of the West and the East, Pyun's works seem like a miscellaneous store. Shin

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<sup>264</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Tajonggyoeui Sinhak, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib. Vol. 1 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1999), 185.

<sup>265</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung, 134.

stipulates Pyun's theology as a "journey" that was never confined to any one theology.<sup>266</sup>

Shin sums up the pluralistic journey of Pyun as follows:

His pluralistic walk started from a metaphysical, cosmic Christology (Panikkar), introduced a theology for the world (Wilfred Cantwell Smith), and grabbed the polarity of a theocentric pluralistic theology (John Hick) and a practice-centered, soterio-centered theology (Pieris). His theology progressed toward a liberation theology of religions (Knitter), attempting to combine indigenous theology and Minjung theology.<sup>267</sup>

According to Shin, however, even though Pyun learned "liberation theology of religions" from Knitter, he made an independent "liberation theology of religions", by adding the Wesleyan tradition, rediscovering Minjung Buddhism, and merging existential theology with the concept of "Not Two". He used this concept to combine Minjung theology and religious theology (indigenous theology).<sup>268</sup>

Pyun tried to find a balance between interreligious dialogue and dialogue in the field and actual practice. He said as follows: "Asian spirituality does not dualistically discriminate between secular and sacred, *Nirvana* (emptiness) and *Samsara* (form). It is the spring of eternal life, gushing up from the abyss of experiencing God (religious experience) and history (field experience)."<sup>269</sup> However, strictly speaking, Pyun's theology leaned a little more towards liberation theology than religious theology. Even though he learned the liberation theology of religions from Knitter, it originated from Pieris' "Asian liberation theology of religions". Pieris' theology insists on Christology,

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 98.160-161.

<sup>269</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Minjunghaebangeul Jihyanghaneun Minjungbulkyowa Minjungsinhak*, 383.

practically tested and formed, making the priority orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy.<sup>270</sup>

Pyun himself said that nationalization (indigenous theology) is the starting point toward contextualization (Minjung theology), and contextualization is the destination of nationalization.<sup>271</sup>

### Truth, Faith, and Love

One verse from the Bible that Pyun Sun Hwan loved, and is inscribed into his gravestone, is “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:32, NIV). For Pyun, this means the “non-restriction of human responsibility” learned from Buri. According to him, as truth is not separated from liberation, responsibility is not separated from non-restriction. He proposed that Christian existence cannot be limited by time and space; that the Christian lives here and now with human responsibility, which cannot be restricted.<sup>272</sup> For Pyun, truth cannot be expressed by human language, especially Western language.<sup>273</sup> Absolutized truth expressed by human language is an exclusive type of self-fulfillment that conquers or absolves different belief systems.<sup>274</sup> He stated as follows: “In the age of dialogue, truth is not absolute, fixed, monologue and exclusive. Truth is relative, dynamic, dialogue, and relational.”<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Ik Sang Shin, *Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung*, 141.

<sup>271</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*, 112.

<sup>272</sup> Sung Yong Park, *Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Baksa Sarmgwa Geueui Yiyagi*, 31.

<sup>273</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Hangukjuk Sinhakeui Mosaek*, 214.

<sup>274</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*, 18.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

It is true that human language has limits when it comes to expressing all of truth and reality, but this does not mean that human language cannot express truth. If human language cannot express truth, human beings cannot know the truth or God's will, since God's words are truth (Jn. 17:17).<sup>276</sup> As Pyun said, truth is not fixed or monologues, but it is also not relative. If truth is relative, truth (except the proposition that truth is relative) no longer exists, and there would be no need to pursue truth through dialogue. Truth giving liberation (Jn. 8:32) is not the responsibility of human beings and ethics, as Pyun claims. As one sees in the beginning and end of the verse, freedom is given by dwelling in Jesus' words (31), and Jesus himself gives freedom (36). Therefore, Jesus Christ is the truth (Jn. 5:33; 14:6), His words are truth (Jn. 8:45-46), and truth came through Him (Jn. 1:17). Without truth, there is no liberation or salvation. Based on the concept of Wesley's prevenient grace, Pyun insisted on universal salvation, but if there is no truth, there would not be grace. This concept is seen in Jn. 1:14, 17 which say that grace and truth work together in and through Jesus Christ.<sup>277</sup>

Pyun understood faith and love not as cause and effect, but as both being on the same level.<sup>278</sup> Based on 1 Jn. 4:7-8 and Mk. 2:1-12,<sup>279</sup> it is not true that faith is first and

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<sup>276</sup> While Netland argues against the thought that the knowledge of God is non-propositional, he insists that one cannot respond appropriately to God without some knowledge of God. He supports CF. Nash's words, "Personal encounter cannot take place in a cognitive vacuum." (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 126, 138-141.) Panikkar also states that any act of negating a relation with the world already constitutes a relation with the world. (Raimondo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, 64.)

<sup>277</sup> Samartha states that God's love is more important than the question of truth. (Stanley Samartha, Reply, in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Gerald H Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 54-55.) Netland criticizes Samartha's statement because, if there is no truth of certain basic propositions about God's love, His love has no connection with anyone. He concludes that the most important criterion to evaluate various religions is the question of truth. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 166.)

<sup>278</sup> Pyunsunhwan Archive Ed., *Pyunsunhwan Sinhak Saero Bogi*, 59.

love follows as the result of faith.<sup>280</sup> That is, the Bible rates love first among faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13). However, from a functional point of view, faith works through love (Gal 5:6).<sup>281</sup> Faith and love are the cause and effect, without the problem of level or rating.<sup>282</sup> According to Pyun, because God is love (1 Jn. 4:8. 16), God meets human beings in love.<sup>283</sup> However, God is love, but love is not God. The essence of God's love is that even though humanity did not love God, He sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for humanity's sins (1 Jn. 4:10). God's love is both the Gospel and truth. If the essence of God's love is set aside, loving God or others is not true love. Even if there were some people outside of God's salvation, God's love should not be criticized as an exclusive and false love. Similarly, the method of God's love should not be ignored as an exclusive and foolish method.<sup>284</sup> Even if God wants to save all human beings, no one has the right to impose an obligation on God to save all human beings without exception, and propose to God any other way other than Jesus and His cross. These attempts are humanism or

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<sup>279</sup> “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 Jn. 4:7-8), Mk 2:1-12 is about the friends of a paralytic lowering him down to Jesus through a hole in the roof.

<sup>280</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Oneului Sungyowa Grisdoinuui Jayu*, 208.

<sup>281</sup> From a spiritual standpoint, human beings were dead in their transgressions and sins. The purpose of God's salvation is that those who were made alive through grace in Christ Jesus can now do good works (Eph. 2:1-10). From a behavioral standpoint, God's love and justice manifested in the cross of Jesus Christ is the original driving force to obey Him (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:10, 2 Cor 5:13-17).

<sup>282</sup> Dunn emphasizes that even in Israel's law, God initiated both His election of Israel and His saving righteousness. According to him, in the instance of the preamble to the Ten Commandments, God's saving action is prior to His demand for obedience. (James D.G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*, 127.) According to Plantinga, while faith is initially and fundamentally practical, faith itself is still a matter of belief rather than action. (Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 249.)

<sup>283</sup> Sung Yong Park, *Ila Pyun-Sun Hwan Baksa Sarmgwa Geueui Yiyagi*, 39.

<sup>284</sup> Even though it could be reasonable that Hick criticizes the following thoughts: “outside, no salvation” and “outside Christianity, no salvation”, he goes too far when he says that God cannot restrict the possibility of salvation for all people because He is love. (Cf. John Hick, *God Has Many Names*. 17, 27.)

human-centered, but not God-centered.<sup>285</sup> If these attempts cause human beings to know and believe that God's love (the Gospel or truth) is wrong, the purpose of Pyun's dialogue becomes corrupted. Pursuing love, freedom, and peace without truth or God's love is no longer Christianity.

### Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ

Pyun said that salvation does not belong to a particular religion or religious leaders, but is a holy thing, only trusted to God.<sup>286</sup> Il Jun Park positively evaluates this as a product of thorough fideism because Pyun made all ideas about "absoluteness" relative and imputed absoluteness only to God.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, Pyun's liberation theology of religions is a theocentric, soteriocentric theology.<sup>288</sup> If this is so, there is no difference between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, which all impute absoluteness only to God. The uniqueness of Christianity is in the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and is also God Himself (Mt.16:16, Jn. 10:30). Jesus is the way to God (Jn.14:6, Jn. 5:23). The identity of Christianity is that absoluteness is imputed to Jesus Christ, as well as to an absolute God. Christians worship Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2: 5-11), and Jesus built His church on the foundation of this confession (Mt. 16:18).<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. The cross of Jesus is God's wisdom and power. (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Even though God selected some and rejected others, human beings cannot question what God has done (Rom. 9:13-23).

<sup>286</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*, 49.

<sup>287</sup> Il Jun Park, *Juhangwa Taljueui Momjiteuroseo Jonggyohaebangsinhak*, 307.

<sup>288</sup> Ik Sang Shin, *Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung*, 135.

<sup>289</sup> According to Knitter, Küng has told him personally and has said publicly that even though moving in the direction of a non-absolutist christology might make logical sense, he could not make this move because it would alienate him from his faith community and would diminish the depth and firmness of Christians' personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Knitter proposes liberation theology as an *ecclesial*

Like Panikkar, Pyun accepted the belief that Jesus is Christ, but not that Christ is Jesus.<sup>290</sup> According to him, mystery as ultimate Reality cannot be seen in Jesus only, but existentially in Jesus.<sup>291</sup> In the end, he denied the identity and uniqueness of Christianity for the sake of interreligious dialogue. However, the abandonment of identity is not purpose of interreligious dialogue. Dialogue between religions can start not by abandoning the identity of each religion, but by acknowledging the uniqueness of each religion. When someone does not acknowledge their own identity, they cannot acknowledge others'. Even though Pyun denied the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ, it is the starting point for dialogue.

### The Bible, Interpretation, and Contextualization

Pyun's basic problems are caused by his understanding of the Bible. Even though the Bible is the word of God and is not bound by circumstance or persecution (2 Tim. 2:9; 3:16), Pyun thought that the word of God is not restricted to the Bible, and the Bible should be reinterpreted by human beings and circumstance. He said as follows: "The

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*mediation* received by the faithful to solve this problem. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 194-195) Knitter and Küng indirectly acknowledge that the essence of the Christian church or Christianity is worshiping Jesus as Lord and committing to Him. According to pluralistic liberation theologians, like Knitter and Pyun, the Christian church or Christianity has been built on a fundamentally false belief. For Knitter and Pyun, Christianity based on absolutist christology is false and their liberation theology of religions is true. If everyone follows their theology, as Küng worries, Christianity or the Christian church would be diminished or banished (this would never occur Cf. Mt. 16:18). Knitter and Pyun have to admit that their theologies could cause harm to the Christian Church or Christianity. Plantinga also points out that it is possible for knowledge of the facts of religious pluralism to deprive Christians of their beliefs or reduce their degree of warranted belief. (Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 456-457.)

<sup>290</sup> Ik Sang Shin, *Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung*, 112.

<sup>291</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Hanguk Gaesingyoeui Tohakwha: Gwagu, Hyunjae, Mirae, Hangukjuk Sinhakeui Mosaek*. PyunSunHwanJeonjib, Vol. 3 (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyeonguso, 1997), 98.

living word of God is never bound or restricted to the letters of the Bible or dogma.”<sup>292</sup>

However, even though the word of God is not restricted to the Bible, as Pyun said, the Bible is a part of the word of God, and, ultimately, is the word of God. Because Pyun did not believe the Bible as the word of God, for him, as in other Christian cults, the Bible does not have absolute authority, and is one of the many scriptures of world religions. According to him, the Bible is a product of contextualization from biblical times.<sup>293</sup> The Johannine and Pauline epistles particularly played a role in deifying Jesus as the Christ. Therefore, he could not accept the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ.

Further, subjective interpretation of the Bible is very important for Pyun. According to Il Jun Park, for Pyun, the issue of religion and liberation or nationalization and contextualization is involved in subjective interpretation. The truth that the subject can know and contain is the truth of circumstance.<sup>294</sup> According to Pyun, indigenous theology is an attempt to existentially and subjectively interpret truth.<sup>295</sup> Pyun said, “Logos is connected with the word ‘speak (λέγειν).’ While the subject speaking in logos is the absolute God; in rhema (ῥῆμα), the subject is the human being (atman), i.e., true self (maha-atman).”<sup>296</sup> Even though Buri questioned the kerygma as the object, Pyun said that the subject facing kerygma is the issue. By insisting on subjective interpretation, Pyun said that the content of the Gospel, as well as the form of the Gospel, can be

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<sup>292</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*, 302.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>294</sup> Il Jun Park, *Juhanggwa Taljueui Momjiteuroseo Jonggyohaebangsinhak*, 290.

<sup>295</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*, 92.

<sup>296</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Yunkkotgwa Sibjaga, Rhemawa Logos*, 147.

changed.<sup>297</sup> However, from the time of the first Adam to the time of the second Adam Jesus Christ, the temptations of Satan have always been involved in challenging the authority of God's words by adding, subtracting, mutating, or misinterpreting God's words. (Cf. Gen. 31-5; Mat. 4:1-10).<sup>298</sup> Therefore, Peter exhorts that all should support knowledge with self-control (2 Pet. 1:6).

From this point of view, religious experience becomes more important than the Bible.<sup>299</sup> Pyun said as follows: "Let's meet in 'religious experience,' beyond dialogue based on scripture. Let's pray, meditate, and do zazen (Zen meditation). Unless we do this, it is not true dialogue."<sup>300</sup> He supported the thought of Wilfred C. Smith, "[W]e should aim for one world by meeting together based on experiencing a transcendent Being, having dialogue without division."<sup>301</sup> Paul admonishes not to go beyond what is

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<sup>297</sup> Ik Sang Shin, Pyun Sun Whaneui Sinhak Yujung, 160.

<sup>298</sup> Knitter, who knows the importance of interpretation for a liberation theology of religions, highly evaluates the "hermeneutics of suspicion" of liberation theologians against traditional Christian theology. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 181-183.)

<sup>299</sup> Hick thought that religious experience is a common ground for world religions to develop a global theology. (John Hick, *God Has Many Names*. 23.)

<sup>300</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, Seugwangsun oi 4 myung, "Simpojiium: Hanguksinhak," *Sinhaksasang*. Tonggwun 52 ho, (Seoul: Hanguksinhakyunguso, Winter 1984), 827.

<sup>301</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Hangukjuk Sinhakeui Mosaek*, 50.

Against Smith's thought, Netland insists that both personal truth and propositional truth can be applied to religion, but that propositional truth is more basic. He supports Donal Wiebe's words that Smith confuses the question of truth with that of the believer's response to the truth. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 127, 131.)

written (1 Cor. 4:6).<sup>302</sup> However, for Pyun, the Bible cannot be the standard for religious experiences anymore and is an obstacle for interreligious dialogue.

According to Pyun, who emphasized the subjective interpretation of the Bible, other religions should become the subject of theology. He stated, “Other religions are not the tools or objects of theology, as Western theology practices, but are the purpose of the subjects of theology. Therefore, ‘theology of other religions,’ not ‘other religions and theology,’ should be the new subject.”<sup>303</sup> Theology, for the sake of other religions or from the stance of other religions, should be developed by contextualization. However, as other religions become the subject of theology, it is not Christian theology anymore, but religious philosophy. Ultimately, in Christian theology, even though the Christian church is a hermeneutical community (subjective stance), it is always seen as the object before God and God’s word. In Christian theology, God and the Bible can be both subject and object.

For Pyun, Asian Minjung is the subject for interpreting the Bible, as Pieris and Pyung Mu Ahn thought. According to Ahn, the scripture should be interpreted from the viewpoint of Minjung.<sup>304</sup> Pyun tried to find the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection from the perspective of the Minjung’s field of life. According to Pyun, the resurrection of Jesus is the restoration of a relationship broken with God and others and the new establishment of

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<sup>302</sup> Pluralist Samartha insisted that, like the Hindu and Buddhist, the authority of the scriptures and knowledge of God does not depend on the *writtenness* of the text, but on *hearing* and *seeing* the word (Sabda). (Stanley J. Samartha, *The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture*, 78. Emphasis in original.)

<sup>303</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Jongkyogan Daehwawa Asia Sinhak*, 181.

<sup>304</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Asia Grisdoronui Yumyung*, 125-126.

a relationship with the self.<sup>305</sup> Minjung theologians' hermeneutical perspective is very different from that of traditional theologians because they regard the Bible as the source of the Minjung-liberation movement.<sup>306</sup> Even though the Bible cannot be interpreted 100 % objectively, every effort should be made to interpret it from an objective point of view. If the Bible is interpreted subjectively by a person or a group, it is inevitable that it will become a tool used only for profit or other purposes. Therefore, interpretation should be a process of hearing God's will with the help of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ (Jn. 15:26; 16:13, Heb. 1:2). The ultimate subject in interpreting the Bible is God himself, who is speaking to human beings, the object.

Even though Pyun insisted that Western clothes on the Gospel should be taken off, and replaced with Eastern or Korean clothes, he could not clearly distinguish the clothes (culture) from the body (the Gospel). As a result, he hurt the body. When he put Korean clothes on the Gospel, he adjusted the body to the clothes rather than the clothes to the body, making the body insignificant. Strictly speaking, he removed the Western clothes and part of the body. As a result, the body becomes a lifeless body without an identity. Il Jun Park expresses his concern with Pyun's insistence that Korean spirituality is hidden in a mine at the bottom of the Korean heart and should be the subject used to nationalize the Gospel. Park states as follows: "For Pyun, it seems that absoluteness (God), which cannot be expressed by human language, was replaced by 'something Korean.'"<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Insaengeun Salmanhanga*, (Seoul: Handeulchulpansa, 2002), 123-124.

<sup>306</sup> Knitter states that a basis of liberation theology of religions is the hermeneutical privilege of the poor. According to Cormie, in liberation theology, the experience of the oppressed is a foundation for hermeneutical privilege, and identification with the oppressed is the first act in understanding the Bible and the world today. (Paul Knitter, *Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions*, 185.)

<sup>307</sup> Il Jun Park, *Juhanggwa Taljueui Momjiteuroseo Jonggyohaebangsinhak*, 299.

According to Park, even though Pyun pursued the theology of other religions, aimed for interreligious dialogue, and constructed indigenous theology, he cannot be free from the limitation of continually emphasizing that self-identification (Korean spirituality) is absolutized.<sup>308</sup>

### Gospel, Salvation, and Dialogue

The Gospel, for human beings, is the way to salvation through Jesus Christ. Even though Pyun confessed, “I believe that (human beings) can be saved only by Jesus Christ” and put his signature on *a letter of explanation* in 1981,<sup>309</sup> he later could not accept this kind of Gospel because, according to him, Jesus was deified by the early church and exclusivized by Western theology. For Pyun, Jesus Christ is one of many ways to salvation. According to him, every way to salvation has a common “truth” as the restoration of true humanity. On his last theological journey, he was especially interested in the liberation (salvation) of the Minjung. Therefore, all religions, atheists, and humanists can have dialogue about these goals. For Pyun, dialogue is the best way to salvation. Pyun declared that “dialogue is the last hope of humankind.”<sup>310</sup>

However, all of the apostles, including John, proclaimed the Gospel as follows: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV). Salvation involves eternal life in heaven and abundant life in this world (Jn. 10:10, 28). Despite referring to Jesus as Lord and

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>309</sup> Dae Gwang Choi, *Pyun-Sun Hwaneul Wehan Byunjung*, 208.

<sup>310</sup> Sun Hwan Pyun, *Manguk Jonggyo Daehoewa Jigu Yunri*, 170.

doing ministry in Jesus' name, among them, there would still be some who would not be saved (Mt. 7:21). Although people can be saved by confessing with their mouth, God only knows whether they believe with their heart (Rom. 10:10). While the individual can be convinced that they are God's child by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16), others can know whether they believe in Jesus Christ by their fruits (Mt. 3:8; 7:16). These fruits are love working through faith (Gal. 5:6) and the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

If there is truth and falsity, truth is exclusive. As relativists insist that truth is relative, and a Buddhist believes that truth is skeptical, the concept of "Not Two,"<sup>311</sup> they also have their propositions that they deem as true or false. Even though Pyun denied the three classic laws<sup>312</sup> as exclusive logic, the distinction of truth and falsity undoubtedly exists.<sup>313</sup> If it is wrong that one religion has an exclusive dogma, it is similar to the insistence that when an individual has self-identity or a couple exclusively loves each

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<sup>311</sup> See Dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity in Chapter Two.

<sup>312</sup> The three classic laws of thought attributed to Aristotle are the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle.

<sup>313</sup> Even though Pyun thought that he overcame Western exclusive logic by the "Not Two" concept, during his entire theological development, he was under the influence of Western theology and used Western logic. For example, his way of pursuing balance between indigenous theology and Minjung theology is dialectic, and his insistence that Christian exclusivism is false is not from the Eastern "Not Two" concept, but from the Western logic, the three classic laws. Netland argues against an insistence that in religion one is not limited by the principle of non-contradiction. The attempt to refute this principle is relying on the principle of non-contradiction itself. According to him, the principle of non-contradiction is irrefutable because it is a necessary condition for any coherent, meaningful, or intelligible position. Therefore, it is not simply a Western presupposition, but universally applies to all humans. Even an insistence that in religion there is a higher level of truth beyond rational, logical principles is not separated from the principle of non-contradiction, which is even considered a lower level of truth. This distinction itself still relies on this principle. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 146. 149.) While Norman L. Geisler admits that Aristotle was the first to systematically discuss the law of non-contradiction, he emphasizes the fact that Aristotle did not invent it. He insists that this law, as a basic law of human thinking, reflects the very consistency of the mind of God. (Norman L. Geisler, *Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy, Inerrancy*, Ed. Norman L. Geisler. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 309-310.)

other, it is wrong. Dialogue with others starts with realizing our own exclusive self-identity. The next step is acknowledgment of the others' exclusive identity. After that, the search for contact points or common grounds can begin. Knitter insists that if partners of dialogue claim that they possess the final, definitive, irreformable truth, dialogue is not possible. Further, they should be ready to reform, change, and even abandon, certain beliefs in their own religion.<sup>314</sup> However, in interreligious dialogue, changing or abandoning their beliefs would be nearly impossible. This is more likely to occur in an informal exchange between individuals. Dialogue does not mean that the beliefs of others should be excluded or removed. Dialogue can include both common ground and different beliefs.<sup>315</sup>

Pyun regarded evangelism or Christianization as a crusader mentality of Western Christianity and objected to it. However, if someone prohibits a Christian from evangelizing, it restricts their desire to show others the goodness of God, for He called them out of the darkness into His wonderful light (1 Pet. 2:9).<sup>316</sup> If someone believes that they have an exclusive truth, they cannot help sharing the good news with others. Whether formal or informal, dialogue should acknowledge others' desires to share their truth. Christians should always be prepared to answer (defend), in gentleness and respect

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<sup>314</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitude toward the World Religions*, 211.

<sup>315</sup> Panikkar points out that a plural system would be a contradiction in term (pluralism) because it does not allow for a universal system. (Raimundo Panikkar, *The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges*, 110.) Cobb also states that to truly accept pluralism is to abandon the quest for what is common. (John B. Cobb, *The Meaning of Pluralism for Christian Self-Understanding*, in *Religious Pluralism*, Leroy S Rouner, ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 172.

<sup>316</sup> According to Netland, even though evangelism is not only a legitimate option, but also an inescapable imperative (1 Cor. 9:16), it is simply the communication of the good news about Jesus Christ. The goal of evangelism is to convert unbelievers. However, it can and does occur even when conversion does not. He emphasizes that the mission of the church is broader than simply evangelism. (Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices; Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*, 282-293.)

(meekness and fear), anyone who questions the reason for Christian hope (1 Pet. 3:15). Dialogue has no clear purpose when the content of faith is removed and the beliefs of a person cannot be shared. If the purpose of dialogue is cooperation on political, ecological, and ethical issues, a person's exclusive truth should not be criticized or removed in dialogue.<sup>317</sup> Like Pyun's thought, dialogue is positively necessary. However, dialogue itself should not be the ultimate goal. If having exclusive faith along with the will and attempt to share a message is criticized under the pretense of dialogue, this criticism is an exclusive attitude and is not true dialogue.

### Summary of Conclusion

For Pyun, truth cannot be expressed by human language. However, Jesus says, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (Jn. 8:32 NKJV)." Contrary to Pyun's claims, truth giving liberation is not the responsibility of human beings and ethics. Jesus Christ is the truth (Jn. 5:33; 14:6), His words are truth (Jn. 8:45-46), and truth came through Him (Jn. 1:17). For Pyun, other religions should become the subject of theology; furthermore, Asian Minjung should be the subject for interpreting the Bible. However, if the Bible is interpreted subjectively by a person or a group, it is inevitable that it will become a tool used only for profit or other purposes. Therefore, interpretation should be a process of hearing God's will with the help of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ (Jn. 15:26; 16:13, Heb. 1:2).

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<sup>317</sup> The thirty three national representatives of Korea signed the Declaration of Independence and the Notice of Independence that triggered the 3.1 Movement against Japanese imperialism in 1919. They consisted of the leaders of the following religions: Cheondo-gyo (15), Christianity (16), and Buddhism (2). This movement is a good example of cooperation and dialogue among religions beyond their own religious traditions.

Pyun said that salvation is only trusting in God and that every way to salvation has a common “truth” as the restoration of true humanity. However, the uniqueness of Christianity is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and is also God Himself (Mt.16:16, Jn. 10:30). Jesus is the way to God (Jn.14:6, Jn. 5:23). Christians worship Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2: 5-11), and Jesus built His church on the foundation of this confession (Mt. 16:18). All of the apostles, including John, proclaimed the Gospel as follows: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV). Salvation involves eternal life in heaven and abundant life in this world (Jn. 10:10, 28).

Even though Pyun denied the three classic laws of thought as exclusive logic, the distinction of truth and falsity undoubtedly exists. If there is truth and falsity, truth is exclusive. Even if a relativist insists that truth is relative and a Buddhist believes that truth is skeptical, they also have their propositions that they each deem as true or false. Pyun regarded evangelism or Christianization as exclusivism with a crusader mentality. However, if someone prohibits a Christian from evangelizing, it restricts their desire to show others the goodness of God (1 Pet. 2:9).

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