

JESUS THE CHRIST WITH AN ASIAN FACE

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IMAGINE THAT the first disciples of Jesus had turned to the East rather than to the Greco-Roman world to carry out the Lord's "great commission" (Matthew 28:18-20); that East Syrian Christianity, which came to China in the seventh century, had gained wide acceptance; or that the missionary enterprise of such luminaries as Matteo Ricci in China, Roberto de Nobili in India, and Alexandre de Rhodes in Vietnam had transformed the cultures of these lands. Imagine this historical improbability and ask how Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15) would have been answered. Would the Church have continued to confess Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:17), and would it have proclaimed him, in the words of the Council of Chalcedon, as the only-begotten Son of God in one *hypostasis* or *prosōpon* in two *physeis*, human and divine? To phrase the question in the words of Raimundo Panikkar, "Does one need to be spiritually a Semite or intellectually a Westerner in order to be a Christian?"¹

In the past the Asian churches were content with rehashing the creedal formulas and the theological systems devised by the West. In Christology, for instance, not only the dogmatic teaching but also the ontological categories of Chalcedon were accepted as universally normative. In Asian seminaries, courses on Christology consisted mainly in finding appropriate translations for such expressions as "incarnation," "hypostatic union," "nature," "person," "*homocousios*," "atonement," and the like. Furthermore, since Christian mission in Asia was intimately bound with Western imperialism, the imported portrait of Jesus was what has been called the "colonial Christ," that is, Jesus as the white, male, all-powerful lord conquering souls and empires for God and implanting his own Church.

Since the 19th century, however, a distinctly Asian theology began to emerge as Asian theologians attempted to articulate their Christian faith in the context and in terms of their own cultures and sociopolitical conditions. In this article I present some recent efforts of Asian Christians to answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?"²

¹ Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness," in John Hick and Paul Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987) 89.

² Jesus is reported to have asked two distinct questions: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" and "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:14-16). Interestingly, in Asia

First, I describe the context and the corresponding method which inform Asian theology in general and Christology in particular. Then I expound four salient Asian Christologies that hold promise of theological and spiritual fruitfulness for the Asian people. Finally, I conclude with critical reflections on the appropriateness of these Christologies to the Christian tradition and their adequacy for the Asian context.

CONTEXT AND METHOD

The Asian continent is composed of several subcontinents with at least seven major linguistic zones, far more than in any other continent.³ Given such a cultural and linguistic diversity, "Asian theology" defies exact description and neat categorization.⁴ Nevertheless, there exist throughout Asia, despite genuine differences, a common religious-cultural heritage and a similar sociopolitical context. Since all theologies are necessarily context-dependent and local,⁵ inasmuch as the context determines both the method and the agenda of all theologies, it would be helpful to outline briefly the cultural-religious and sociopo-

the first persons to reflect on who Jesus is from the perspective of Asia's religious traditions were not Christians but Indian Hindus such as Ram Mohun Roy (Jesus as Supreme Guide to happiness), Keshub Chunder Sen (Jesus as true *Yogi*), Swami Vivekananda (Jesus as *Jivanmukta*, i.e. one who has achieved liberation while alive), Rabindranath Tagore (Jesus as the Son of Man seeking the "poor" of the earth), and Mahatma Gandhi (Jesus as the Supreme *Satyagrahi*, i.e. lover and fighter for truth). They are the "people" of Jesus' first question. In this article I will prescind from these attempts by non-Christians to find the meaning of Jesus Christ for them. For excellent studies of these "Christologies," see M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM, 1969); and Stanley J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1974).

³ The seven linguistic zones are: the Semitic, the Ural-Altai, the Indo-Iranian, the Dravidian, the Sino-Tibetan, the Malayo-Polynesian, and the Japanese. As the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris has pointed out, language represents a way of experiencing reality and religion is its expression. Language is a *theologia inchoativa*. Given the fact that there is linguistic heterogeneity in Asia and that Asian theologians are not able to communicate with one another except in a language not their own (indeed, they have to use the languages of their colonizers!), Asian theology is deprived of one of the most fruitful elements of its methodology (Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988] 70-71).

⁴ For introductions to Asian theology, see Barbara and Leon Howell, *Southeast Asians Speak Out: Hope and Despair in Many Lands* (New York: Friendship, 1975); Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976); Douglas J. Elwood, ed., *What Asian Christians are Thinking: A Theological Source Book* (Quezon City, Philippines: Newday, 1976), and *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); Dayanandan T. Francis and F. J. Bal-sudaram, ed., *Asian Expressions of Christian Commitment* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1992); and R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994).

⁵ For the contextual character of all theologies, see Peter C. Phan, "Cultural Diversity: A Blessing or a Curse for Theology and Spirituality?" *Louvain Studies* 19 (1994) 195-211; and Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985).

litical contexts of Asia and to indicate the challenges they present to Asian theology.⁶

Poverty and Oppression

Aloysius Pieris has repeatedly argued that an authentically Asian theology must take into account two characteristics of the Asian context:

Any discussion about Asian theology has to move between two poles: the *Third Worldliness* of our continent and its peculiarly *Asian* character. More realistically and precisely, the common denominator linking Asia with the Third World is its overwhelming poverty. The specific character defining Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted religiousness. These two inseparable realities constitute in their interpenetration what might be designated as the *Asian context*, the matrix of any theology truly Asian.⁷

The third worldliness or the dehumanizing poverty crushing immense masses of Asia is imposed or forced poverty, the product of oppression and injustice, as distinct from voluntary poverty, which is freely assumed as a way of life in solidarity with the poor in their struggle for liberation. Except Japan, which has a first-world economy, other Asian countries suffer from massive poverty, with destitution for the many and opulence for the few, brought about by colonialism, neocolonialism (with the small elite inheriting the power and wealth of the colonials), economic exploitation by multinational corporations, institutionalized violence, and military dictatorship.

Violence, both political and economic, was perpetrated not only by Westerners to Asians in their wars of conquest (e.g. the French in Indochina, the Spaniards in the Philippines, and the British in India) but also by Asians to their fellow Asians (e.g. the Japanese to the Koreans, the Chinese to the Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese to the Chams and the Cambodians). And within each country, acts of violence and oppression are committed by one class against another class (e.g. the caste system in India), by the racially dominant group against the tribes and ethnic minorities (e.g. the Burakumin in Japan, the mountain tribes in Vietnam, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka), and by members of one religion against those of another (e.g. Hindus and Sikhs, Buddhists and Catholics).

Among the victims of oppression women form a special group. Asian feminist theologians have highlighted the multiple forms of injustice and violence against Asian women. Examples of violence against women include forms of the dowry system, bride burning, forced sterilization and gender determination in China and India, sex tourism in

⁶ For a discussion of these contexts and their challenges to theology, see Peter C. Phan, "Experience and Theology: An Asian Liberation Perspective," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 77 (1993) 101–11.

⁷ Pieris, *An Asian Theology* 69.

Thailand and the Philippines, discrimination on the basis of religious fundamentalism in Malaysia, the male-oriented emperor system in Japan, and the Confucian family legal system in most Asian countries.

Cosmic and Metacosmic Religiousness

Besides massive poverty Asia is also characterized by pervasive religiousness. Asia is the birthplace of all the major religions of the world: not only Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism (southern Asia), Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism (eastern Asia), but also Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (western Asia). These religious institutions with their sacred texts, rituals, ethical teachings, and mysticism are what Pieris calls the "metacosmic order" embodying the "cosmic religion," that is, the basic subconscious attitude that the *homo religiosus* adopts toward the mysteries of life.⁸

Among the non-Christian religions, Buddhism represents the greatest challenge to Christian theology in Asia because, as Pieris points out, it is the one soteriology that is truly pan-Asian in cultural integration, numerical strength, geographical extension, and political maturity, and not limited to any one language or national group.

Communism and Socialism

In addition to these two characteristics of the Asian context, a third should be mentioned: the presence of communist regimes. While communism in Eastern Europe has collapsed, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall, it still survives and will do so for a foreseeable future in China, Vietnam, and North Korea (the only other communist country being Cuba, but neither its size nor its economic and military power pose a threat to the West). While China and Vietnam have embarked upon a limited path of economic liberalization, both politically and ideologically, all three of these countries officially maintain a staunchly communist and areligious stance and brook no opposition.

These communist countries, to which about half of the Asian population belongs, pose a challenge to Christian theology. Will theology be able to explore the religious and spiritual meaning of the unbelief and atheism that accompany the political realization of the Marxist dream? Or will it continue the mindless demonization of communism and ignore this loudest of questions God is posing to contemporary Christianity?

In sum, the Asian context presents both severe challenges and enormous opportunities. What can Christianity and Christian theology do with and say to teeming millions of Asians, most of whom are crushed by abject poverty and live in dehumanizing squalor, and yet are imbued with pervasive religiousness? What can Christian theologians who are not poor say to billions of Asian poor who are not theologians?

⁸ Ibid. 71-72.

How can Christianity help these people become "subjects" of their future and destiny and facilitate their struggle for liberation from the aftermath of colonization, political oppression, economic exploitation, communist regime, patriarchal domination, and racial discrimination?⁹

Resources and Method

In an "Asian theology" whose form and method are molded by and related to the historical context of Asia, as distinct from a "theology in Asia" whose structure and style are not shaped by such a context,¹⁰ the Asian reality as described above, and not Bible and/or tradition, is the starting point. Of course, theology, Asian and otherwise, is an intellectual activity, a critical reflection on Christian living. But it is, as Gutiérrez has put it, a second act following upon the first act which is Christian praxis; it "rises only at sundown."¹¹

This praxis of love and justice is carried out in a particular context; and theology, in reflecting on the Christian praxis, must first of all be informed by this praxis and familiar with this context in all its dimensions. There are, then, in terms of theological method, two essential steps that must be performed as constitutive parts of an Asian theology: first, personal commitment to and active solidarity with the teeming masses of poor and oppressed Asians in their struggle for justice and liberation, and second, social analysis.¹²

Concomitant with praxis and social analysis, which are required by Asian poverty, there is a third part of the theological method which is demanded by the overwhelming presence of non-Christian soteriologies in the Asian reality, namely, what Pieris calls "introspection." Neither Marxism nor early Latin American liberation theology were able to appreciate the religious dimension that Asian cultures attrib-

⁹ For a succinct presentation of the sociopolitical and religiocultural challenges of Asia to theology, see K. C. Abraham, ed., *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 3-27.

¹⁰ For the distinction between "Asian theology" and "theology in Asia," see James A. Veitch, "Is an Asian Theology Possible?" in Emerito P. Nacpil and Douglas J. Elwood, ed., *The Human and the Holy: Asian Perspectives in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980) 216.

¹¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, revised edition with a new introduction (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 9.

¹² There is a parallel, therefore, between the method of Asian theology and that of Latin American liberation theology. Clodovis Boff describes the method of liberation theology as composed of three mediations: socio-analytic mediation, hermeneutical mediation, and practical mediation. These three mediations are preceded by praxis in favor of justice and liberation (Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987]). Among Asian theologians, M. M. Thomas uses social analysis consistently throughout his works; see Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution* (London: SCM, 1964); *Salvation and Humanization* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1971); and *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1978).

ute to voluntary poverty; therefore they failed to understand its revolutionary impact on Asian society. Hence, Pieris argues, "a 'liberation-theopraxis' in Asia that uses only the Marxist tools of *social analysis* will remain un-Asian and ineffective until it integrates the psychological tools of *introspection* which our sages have discovered."¹³

This introspective process will necessitate interreligious dialogue. This dialogue is carried out not only at the level of intellectual discourse and study but also in worship and liturgy, in living together and relating to the society at different levels, and in participating in the people's struggle for life.¹⁴ It is important to note that struggle against poverty and dialogue with Asian religiousness are not two independent activities. Rather they are two sides of the same coin and must be joined together to achieve their goals. Struggle for justice and freedom without the religious dimension would be no more than social and political activism; more pragmatically, it is destined to dismal failure since it is impossible to transform social structures in Asia without enlisting the collaboration of religions.

On the other hand, interreligious dialogue without the sting of sociopolitical involvement would run the risk of being an elitist and harmless form of "inculturation" in which, as Pieris has pointed out, non-Christian religious traditions are vandalized and baptized into instruments of apologetics and proselytization.¹⁵ A genuinely Asian theology must be rooted simultaneously in the religiousness of the poor and the poverty of the religious.

An Asian theology must of course dig deep into the humus of Asian cultures in order to find the resources for its development. The first resource has to be the billions of Asian people themselves with their stories of joy and suffering, hope and despair, love and hatred, freedom and subjugation, stories not recorded in history books written by victors but kept alive in the "dangerous memory" (Johann Baptist Metz) of the "underside of history" (Gustavo Gutiérrez). In recent years, the theme of "people" has assumed a special significance in the discussion of Asian theology. As we shall see below, Korean theologians have

¹³ Pieris, *An Asian Theology* 80.

¹⁴ Pieris speaks of a *communicatio in sacris* with these religions. The Vatican has spoken of four forms of interreligious dialogue: "dialogue of life," "dialogue of action," "dialogue of religious experience," and "dialogue of theological exchange"; see the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* jointly issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (June 20, 1991), in James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, ed., *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 1: Basic Statements 1974-1991* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 187. For a discussion of the method of interreligious dialogue as theological exchange, see Peter C. Phan, "The Claim of Uniqueness and Universality in Interreligious Dialogue," *Indian Theological Studies* 31 (1994) 44-66. Obviously, because there is religious homogeneity in Latin America, this element of interreligious dialogue is absent from Latin American liberation theology; in its place there is an attempt to enter into conversation with *religiosidad popular*.

¹⁵ See *An Asian Theology* 80.

developed a distinct theology called "*minjung* theology" as a faith reflection of, by, and for the people in their struggle against oppression.¹⁶

The second resource is a subset of the first, namely, the stories of Asian women. Given the pervasive patriarchal character of Asian societies, the stories of oppression and poverty of Asian women occupy a special place in theological reflection. Indeed, an increasing number of Asian feminist theologians have begun to construct a theology from the perspective of their "Asianness" and "womanness."

The third resource is the sacred texts and practices of Asian religions that have nourished the life of Asian people for thousands of years before the coming of Christianity into their lands and since then. These religious classics, together with their innumerable commentaries, and these religious rituals serve as an inexhaustible fountain of wisdom for Christian theology. Connected with these religious texts and rituals is what is known as philosophy, since in Asia religion and philosophy are inextricably conjoined. Philosophy is a way of life and religion is a worldview, each is both *darsana* (view of life) and *pratipada* (way of life).

The fourth source is Asian monastic traditions with their rituals, ascetic practices, and social commitment. The last point, namely, social commitment, needs emphasizing. Pieris has argued, as will be shown below, that the most appropriate form of inculturation of Christianity in Asia is not the Latin model of incarnation in a non-Christian culture, nor the Greek model of assimilation of a non-Christian philosophy, nor the North European model of accommodation to a non-Christian religiousness. What is required of Asian Christians is the monastic model of participation in a non-Christian spirituality.¹⁷

The fifth resource is Asian cultures in general, which are embodied in stories, myths, folklore, symbols, poetry, songs, visual art, and dance. The use of these cultural artifacts promises to add a very distinctive voice to Christian theology coming from the deepest yearnings of the people of Asia.

Asian Christologies

In response to the religiocultural and sociopolitical context of their continent, and drawing on the resources of their cultures which we have been describing, a number of Asian theologians have recently attempted to formulate their own Christologies. They present these Christologies as alternatives to the Chalcedonian Christology that has

¹⁶ For reflections on "theology by the people," see S. Amirtham and John S. Pobee, ed., *Theology by the People* (Geneva: WCC, 1986); F. Castillo, *Theologie aus der Praxis des Volkes* (Munich: Kaiser, 1978); and Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976).

¹⁷ On the inculturation of Christianity in Asia on the basis of monasticism, see *An Asian Theology* 51–58. On Buddhist monasticism, see Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 61–72, 89–96.

dominated Western theology since the fifth century and has been imposed upon Asian churches since missionary days.¹⁸ The core of this article will now describe four such Asian Christologies—those of Aloysius Pieris, Jung Young Lee, Choan-Seng Song, and Chung Hyun Kyung. Each of these Christologies is similar to the others inasmuch as they are all liberation Christologies. Each can be distinguished from the others, however, by the ways in which their proponents attend to the Asian context and make use of Asian resources.¹⁹ These ways, though not mutually exclusive, provide distinctive features to four different portraits of Jesus.

ALOYSIUS PIERIS'S PORTRAIT OF JESUS

Aloysius Pieris has tirelessly argued that an Asian theology must confront the two poles of Asian reality together: poverty and religiousness.²⁰ These two elements must be coupled in both interreligious dialogue and inculturation.

Religiousness and Poverty

In Pieris's view, Christian churches and by extension Christian theology have remained in Asia and have not yet become of Asia, because they failed to join together non-Christian religiousness and material

¹⁸ For general, though by no means comprehensive introductions to Asian Christologies, see Anton Wessels, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 126–57; Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 55–88; Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit of Justice* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1995) 195–233; Stanley J. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991); Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Cultural Revolution: An Asian Perspective* (Bombay: Bombay Industrial League for Development, 1983); Benigno P. Beltran, *The Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ* (Manila: Divine Word, 1987); Tissa Balasuriya, "Christ and the World Religions: An Asian Perspective," in Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, ed., *Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989) 337–45. There is an excellent anthology of essays on Christology by Asian theologians, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993).

¹⁹ In this article I will not discuss the older attempts, especially by Indian theologians, to present Jesus in terms of Hindu theology, e.g. Jesus as *Prajapati* (Lord of Creatures), as *Cit* (consciousness), as *Avatara* (incarnation), as *Isvara* (the cosmic Christ), as *Guru* (teacher), as *Adi Purasha* (the first person), as *Shakti* (power), as eternal *Om* (logos), as *Bodhisattva* (the buddha who postpones enlightenment in order to suffer with human beings).

²⁰ The Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris (b. 1934) is the first Catholic to have earned a doctorate in Buddhism at the University of Sri Lanka. Founder and director of the Tulane Research Center in Kelaniya, he has published extensively on liberation theology. His essays have been collected in *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (see n. 3); *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (see n. 17); and *Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996). For an account of his theological development, see his "Two Encounters in My Theological Journey," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology* 141–46.

poverty or, to use his metaphor, because they have refused the double baptism of the "Jordan of Asian religion" and the "Calvary of Asian poverty."²¹

I have already pointed out that for Pieris "inculturation" of Christianity in Asia should not be undertaken, on the models of Latin and Greek Christianity, by taking up non-Christian culture and philosophy respectively, simply because in Asia it is impossible to separate non-Christian religions from their cultures and philosophies. Furthermore, the North European model, which appropriated the "cosmic" religiousness of clannish societies of the early Middle Ages into Christianity would be too late for Asia, because in most Asian countries the cosmic religiousness has already been appropriated by the non-Christian "metacosmic" religions. The only effective way in which the Christian churches in Asia can become of Asia, Pieris suggests, is to assume the spirituality of non-Christian religions symbolized by the figure of the poor monk.²² Inculturation is, therefore, not a process to be undertaken apart from the struggle for liberation. Indeed, for Pieris, inculturation and liberation, rightly understood, are but two names for the same process.

Jesus as the Poor Monk

It is in this context of unified Asian religious poverty and poor religiousness that Pieris outlines his liberationist Christology of Jesus as the poor monk. To begin with, he criticizes the two models of Christology which have existed in Asia and which he terms "Christ *against* religions" and "Christ *of* religions."²³

The "Christ *against* religions" model contains three varieties. First, the "colonial Christ" of early-17th-century Western missionaries. This Christ conquers non-Christian religions regarded as responsible for the moral poverty of the pagans, and he does so by means of Western civilization. This colonial Christology, however, ignores the potential of religion to relieve material poverty. Second, the "neocolonial Christ" of the late 1960s. This Christology recognizes the link between religion and material poverty and attempts to conquer non-Christian religions regarded as responsible for material poverty. The means to do so is the Western model of development. This neocolonial Christology, however, fails to perceive the link between religion and structural poverty. Third, the "crypto-colonialist Christ" of the late 1970s. This Christology recognizes the link between religion and structural poverty and attempts to conquer non-Christian religions regarded as responsible for structural poverty. The means it uses is political liberation. This

²¹ *An Asian Theology* 45–50.

²² Pieris himself has not used this expression to describe Jesus; it is my own shorthand description for his Christology.

²³ For a helpful diagram of these two Christologies, see *An Asian Theology* 89.

crypto-colonialist Christology, however, fails to see the link between religion and liberation.²⁴

The "Christ of religions" model also contains three types. First, the "gnostic Christ" of 19th-century Indian theologians. This Christ is seen to be present in all religions as the final consummation of all human search for redemption. Unfortunately, this gnostic Christology, which anticipates the fulfillment theology of religions of the 1930 Lambeth Conference and Vatican II, ignores the potential of religion to relieve material poverty. Second, the "ashramic Christ" of late-1960s monks and mystics who voluntarily embraced material poverty. This Christ functions as a protest against forced poverty. This ashramic Christology, however, fails to see the link between religion and structural poverty. Third, the "universal Christ" of the late-1970s theologians committed to inculturation who appropriate the language and symbols of non-Christian religions. This universal Christology, however, ignores the link between religion and liberation.

Needless to say, Pieris finds all these six Christologies unsatisfactory on the ground that they all divorce Asian religiousness from Asian poverty. In his view, it is precisely this fatal separation between these two realities of the Asian context that accounts for the failure of Jesus, who was no less an Asian than Gautama the Buddha and Muhammad the Prophet, to win large-scale acceptance in Asia. Indeed, Asia has surrendered only less than three percent of its population to Christianity! The only way for Christ to return to Asia and strike deep roots there is to don the habit of a poor monk who unites in himself the religiousness of non-Christian religions and the poverty of the Asian masses. In other words, only the Jesus who has been baptized in the Jordan of religiousness and on the cross of poverty can acquire an authentically Asian face. Pieris puts it succinctly: "The door once closed to Jesus in Asia is the only door that can take him in today, namely, the soteriological nucleus or the liberative core of various religions that have given shape and stability to our cultures."²⁵

Pieris understands the religiousness that Jesus adopted at the Jordan to be informed by prophetic asceticism, as opposed to what he terms the Zealots' narrow ideology, the Essenes' sectarian puritanism, the Pharisees' spirituality of self-righteousness, and the Sadducees' leisure-class spirituality. This prophetic asceticism is essentially a liberative religiousness.

Jesus' immersion into the religiousness of the poor was followed and completed by his baptism of the cross of poverty on Calvary. To understand the nature of this poverty, Pieris reminds us that in the Bible

²⁴ For Pieris, the negative understanding of the role of religion for liberation is derived from three non-Asian sources: Latin American liberationists' early rejection of religion as contributing to alienation; an unrevised Marxian analysis of religion; and Western (e.g. Barthian) understanding of religion as human work antithetical to faith.

²⁵ *An Asian Theology* 59.

as well as in the Asian context, the opposite of poverty is not wealth but acquisitiveness and greed (which the Buddha identifies as the cause of all sufferings in his second "Noble Truth": *tanha, upadana, lobha*). In Pieris's view, Jesus' poverty did not consist merely in being materially poor; more important than that was his struggle against *Mammon*, the god opposed to his *Abba*. It is Jesus' struggle against mammon that led to his being crucified on Calvary.

The cultural and sociopolitical figure in Asia today that reproduces Jesus in his immersion into religious poverty and poor religiousness is, Pieris contends, the monk. Speaking specifically of Buddhist monasticism, Pieris shows that it is both the seed from which Buddhism springs and the flower in which it blooms. Buddhist spirituality has an essentially monastic thrust.²⁶ The monk embodies in himself both religiousness and poverty.²⁷ He is quintessentially one who has renounced mammon for religious reasons (struggle to be poor through voluntary poverty) so that he may help the poor socioeconomically (struggle for the poor by radically transforming oppressive social structures operated by mammon). With the former the monk achieves interior liberation from acquisitiveness, with the latter he brings about social emancipation from structural poverty imposed upon the masses.

Buddhist monks, of course, do not live alone but in community (*sangha*), one of three jewels in which Buddhists take refuge (the *triratana*). A quasi-sacramental pointer to the metacosmic goal (*nirvana*) and to a corresponding state of perfection which is the *raison d'être* of any monastic community, the *sangha* is a visible community of religious poverty and poor religiousness, of a few who assume voluntary poverty to remove the forced poverty of the many. Such a community is therefore not purely spiritual but political as well. Indeed, by practicing what Pieris calls "religious socialism,"²⁸ Buddhist monastic communities, especially those in rural areas, have preserved the seeds of liberation that religion and poverty have combined to produce. Furthermore, by adopting a republican form of government inspired by tribal socialism rather than by monarchical structure, these communities are presented as the ideal society in which there is no room for caste differentiation and in which the ruler is subservient to the will of the people.²⁹

The Christology of the poor monk combines what Pieris considers to be the two basic goals of all religions: wisdom and love. As poverty and religiousness constitute the two fundamental poles of Pieris's Asian

²⁶ "The monastic life is an inherent feature of Buddhist soteriology and almost a constitutive dimension of Buddhist spirituality" (*Love Meets Wisdom* 63).

²⁷ Note that here the masculine form is used intentionally since the order of nuns (*bhikkuni-sangha*), originally founded by the Buddha himself, became extinct since the Middle Ages. Pieris explicitly acknowledges the all-male character of Buddhist monasticism as well as of all other Buddhist institutions.

²⁸ *An Asian Theology* 43.

²⁹ *Love Meets Wisdom* 73-79.

liberation Christology, so wisdom and love are the two cornerstones of his liberation theology of interreligious dialogue, which he calls *gnōsis* and *agapē* respectively. Although the former is conventionally associated with Asian religions, especially Buddhism, and the latter with Western religions, especially Christianity, *gnōsis* (salvific knowledge) and *agapē* (redemptive love) are two poles of a tension present in all religions, irrespective of geography. Each by itself is incomplete, and therefore they complement and correct one another. An Asian Christology of Jesus as the poor monk must employ both the "agapeic gnosis" of Christians and the "gnostic agape" of Buddhists.³⁰

How can the Christology of the poor monk be formulated? True to his liberation method, Pieris maintains that it cannot be constructed in the abstract, apart from praxis. It is born only after the Christian churches in Asia have received the double baptism of the Jordan and the cross. More concretely, an Asian Christology will emerge only after Asian Christians, by plunging into the waters of religiousness and poverty, succeed in fusing "politics with asceticism, involvement with introspection, class analysis and self-analysis, the Marxist *laborare* with the monastic *orare*, a militant repudiation of Mammon with a mystic relationship with Abba their Father."³¹ For Pieris, Christology follows an "ecclesiological revolution"³² of participation in the twofold reality of Asian religiousness and poverty, of *gnōsis* and *agapē*. From this participation Christology arises as an explicitation of the many hidden theologies issuing out of the soteriological promises of Asian religions.

This side of Christology must be complemented, Pieris suggests, by the stories which non-Christian sages tell of Jesus, that is, not intellectuals and theologians but "those *religious* seekers who have opted to be *poor* in their search for the saving truth and who, during their pilgrimage, encounter Jesus within their own soteriological perspectives."³³

JUNG YOUNG LEE'S PORTRAIT OF JESUS

Whereas Pieris makes extensive use of the Asian social context of poverty and of Asian religious traditions, in particular Buddhism, in elaborating his Christology, Jung Young Lee³⁴ first delves into Taoist

³⁰ Ibid. 114–19.

³¹ *An Asian Theology* 64.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jung Young Lee, born in Korea in 1935, now a naturalized American, is a United Methodist minister and professor of systematic theology at Drew University. He has authored and edited some 20 books, among which the most significant for our theme are: *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into the Concept of Divine Passibility* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); *The Theology of Change: A Christian Concept of God from an Eastern Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979); and *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

philosophy, especially as contained in the *I Ching*, and later into his experiences as an immigrant in the U.S., in order to formulate his answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Jesus-Christ as the Perfect Realization of Change

Drawing on the metaphysics of the *I Ching* (Book of Changes) crystallized in the concept of the *yin-yang* relationship, which constitute the two primordial components of change,³⁵ Lee argues for what he terms the "theology of change." It includes both the "theology of the absolute" based on Greek metaphysics and the "theology of process" based on Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. The Greek theology of the absolute emphasizes immovable being, whereas the Whiteheadian theology of process privileges becoming.

The theology of change based on the *I Ching* includes both being and becoming as the ultimate character of reality. According to Lee, reality is not known in an "either-or" but in a "both-and." Consequently, the theology that claims to know Ultimate Reality must be characterized not by exclusiveness but by inclusiveness:

"Both-and" philosophy is based on the idea of change, which produces both *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* is rest, *yang* is movement; *yin* is being, *yang* is becoming. *Yin* is responsiveness, *yang* is creativity. If creativity is the character of the ultimate in process theology, responsiveness is the character of the ultimate in substantial or absolute theology. If *yang* is the leitmotif of process theology, *yin* is the leitmotif of absolute theology. Theology of change, however, comprises both *yin* and *yang*, both creativity and responsiveness, both being and becoming, because change is the source of both. Change is, then, the matrix of all that was, is, and shall be. It is the ground of all being and becoming. Thus theology of change, which characterizes the ultimate as being *and* becoming, is that inclusive theology to which we must turn. Process theology represents the turning away from western absolute theology toward the eastern theology of change.³⁶

In this theology of change, Lee suggests that God must be understood neither as "being itself" nor as "becoming itself" but as "is-ness itself." Being and becoming are mutually exclusive categories, whereas is-ness includes both. Another way of saying that God is "is-ness itself" is to affirm that God is "change itself" since change is the source of both being and becoming. Paradoxically, then, change, which changes all things, is itself changeless: "The character of changelessness is a part

³⁵ For Lee's exposition of the *I Ching*, see his *The Principle of Changes: Understanding the I Ching* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1971) and *The I Ching and Modern Man: Essays on Metaphysical Implications of Change* (Secaucus, N.J.: University Books, 1975). For a brief summary of the *I Ching* metaphysics of the *yin-yang*, see *The Theology of Change* 1-10.

³⁶ *The Theology of Change* 20.

of the changing reality of God: Changelessness is possible because of change. God is changeless because he is primarily change itself. Changelessness means, then, the changeless pattern of change, or consistent structural change. The changelessness of God does not negate his essential nature as change but affirms the unceasingness of his changing.³⁷

In this context of the theology of change Lee develops his Christology. Given the priority of creation over salvation, of God the creator over Christ the savior, Lee argues that the early Church's teaching on the coequality of Christ with God the creator is mistaken:

God as the creator is the source of creativity and the source of all that is and will be, while Christ is only what is manifested of God. To identify the creator with the revealer, the Christ, is to deny the inexhaustible nature of the divine creativity. God as creator is more than what is manifested, and his mystery is not and will not be exhausted. He is more than the One revealed in Christ. . . . In other words, Christ is subordinate to the creator, and his work as savior and redeemer is one part of the work of God as creator. . . . Everything that Jesus Christ has done or has been must be understood as an element of divine creativity.³⁸

Having asserted this principle of christological subordination to divine creativity, Lee goes on to examine the traditional titles of Jesus. The first is Christ as Word. Lee takes this title to mean that Christ is the "foundation" of the creative process, the "dynamic force that changes and produces new life and new possibilities."³⁹ Connected with the description of Christ as Word is that of Christ as wisdom of God. Wisdom, like Word, signifies the creative activity of God.

The title of Christ as the Light implies for Lee that Christ also includes darkness, just as life includes death, and good includes evil: "Christ as light cannot be excluded from the darkness, because light cannot exist without darkness nor darkness without light. To exclude Christ from the darkness is in fact to exclude him from light also. Because Christ subjected himself to the condition of existence, the darkness must also be in his light. Conversely, Christ as light enters

³⁷ Ibid. 43.

³⁸ Ibid. 88. Lee seems to have misunderstood the classical teaching on the coequality of Christ with God the Father. This coequality is based on the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son (*homoousios*) and does not entail identity of functions. Indeed, as Karl Rahner has convincingly argued, the principle that all ad extra actions of the Trinity must be attributed equally to the three divine persons by way of efficient causality does not mean that their acts of external self-communication (e.g. the Incarnation of the Logos and the bestowal of the Spirit in grace) can and should be understood by way of the same causality. On the contrary, they should be understood by way of (quasi) formal causality which implies their distinct modes of subsisting and acting. To express this in Lee's terms, the redemptive act of the Son is not to be "equated" with the creative act of the Father.

³⁹ Ibid. 89.

into our darkness."⁴⁰ This view of the correlation between light and darkness is consistent with the *I Ching's* understanding of the relationship between *yang* and *yin*. Christ as light or *yang* is not entirely exclusive of darkness or *yin*, and the world as darkness or *yin* is not entirely exclusive of Christ as light or *yang*.

Christ as the Savior is understood in relation to the notion of sin. For Lee, sin consists in the desire to be rather than to become, that is, unwillingness to change. By resisting change, we fall into "existential estrangement," that is, we suffer what the Buddha calls *dukkha*. To be saved or to accept Christ as the Savior, then, means that we must accept change. Again, in terms of *yang* and *yin*, Christ as the Savior is *yang* who initiates and acts, and we who accept his power of change are *yin* by responding to and following him. But by responding, we become active or *yang*, and Christ becomes part of creation or *yin*.

Christ is also called the center of the creative process or the cosmic Christ. For Lee, this title means that Christ is a divine reality. Besides being divine, Christ is also human. He is both divine and human because he is the primordial origin of the creative process. As such an origin, Christ is "the perfect incarnation of the infinite in the finite world; he is human and divine in the fullest sense. He is fully divine because he is fully human. He is a perfect man because he is a perfect God. . . . In him the power of the change is manifested perfectly. He is in perfect harmony with the process of change."⁴¹ In this way he is the perfect mediator between God as creator and humanity as creature.

Finally, in his death and Resurrection, Lee points out, Jesus becomes the perfect realization of change which includes decay and renewal of life. His crucifixion is the perfect symbol of decay, and his Resurrection is the perfect symbol of renewal of life: "Thus Jesus as the perfect symbol of the change unites both decay and growth or death and resurrection in the process of constant change and transformation."⁴²

Jesus-Christ as the Marginal Person Par Excellence

In a later work, while still maintaining a Taoist philosophical framework, Jung Young Lee shifts to a more narrative mode of theological reflection and draws upon his experiences as an immigrant and the

⁴⁰ Ibid. 92. Lee understands good and evil not as ontic realities but as existential manifestations of the Ultimate Reality which is the process of change. In this way, they are not opposed to one another but mutually correlative and interdependent. In this context, the following statement would lose some of its strangeness: "If we believe that God's absoluteness lies in his inclusion of all aspects of the world, and if we admit the existence of evil, then we must grant that God includes the existence of evil. God must be both good and evil. If he were not, we would be forced to posit that evil exists independently of God and in conflict with him" (ibid. 57).

⁴¹ Ibid. 98.

⁴² Ibid. 100.

history of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants in the U.S.⁴³ He defines his and their experiences as being on the margin as opposed to being at the center. By their different race and culture, Asian immigrants can never be totally assimilated into American society, even though they may successfully compete with the central people and accommodate to their lifestyles and values. They will always remain on the margin.

By "marginality" Lee means not only being "in-between," that is, the experience of the people-on-the-margin as described by the central people. This "in-between" experience has been diagnosed by people at the center as productive of an inferiority complex in the marginalized people with its symptoms of ambivalence, excessive self-consciousness, restlessness, irritability, moodiness, lack of self-confidence, pessimism, and the like.

This classical understanding of marginality is one-sided because framed by the central group; it focuses only on its negative effects. In Lee's view, it needs to be complemented by the self-understanding of the marginalized people themselves. Lee suggests that from the perspective of the marginalized people, marginality includes also being "in-both." As Asian-Americans, Asian immigrants are both Asian and American. To stress in-bothness means first of all affirming one's racial and cultural origins; for Asians, this means affirming their "yellowness," like the dandelion. Being on the margin, however, prevents this affirmation of ethnicity from being exclusive, since the margin is where worlds merge. Thus to stress in-bothness also means affirming Americanness: "Being in-both Asians and Americans, the affirmation of Asian-ness is also the affirmation of American-ness."⁴⁴

Definitions of marginality as being "in-between" and as being "in-both" are not mutually exclusive; both have something true to say about the experience of being an immigrant: "To be in-both is as authentic as to be in-between."⁴⁵ Hence, both definitions need to be brought together in a holistic understanding of marginality. Lee suggests that the category of "in-beyond" would include both "in-between" and "in-both." To be in-between and in-both the Asian and American worlds, one must be in-beyond them. To be in-beyond is to be a hyphenated person: "The hyphenated minority or the minority of 'and' is *extrinsically* in-between because of societal pressure, but *intrinsically* in-both. . . . The condition of in-between and in-both must be harmo-

⁴³ Lee describes his immigrant experiences as well as those of other Asian immigrants in a beautiful parable of the dandelion, a yellow flower in a green lawn. The dandelion is rooted up every year by the owner of the lawn because its yellow flower is out of place in a green lawn. It tries to survive by not blossoming, hoping to blend in with the green grass. But without its yellow flower the dandelion loses its reason for living and so decides to blossom again. An Asian-American, a yellow man, has a dream in which he becomes a dandelion (*Marginality* 10-13).

⁴⁴ *Marginality* 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 58.

nized for one to become *a new marginal person who overcomes marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person.*⁴⁶

What is the impact of marginality upon theology? Lee suggests that as long as third-world theologians continue to validate their work by the criteria of Euro-American theology, which has long dominated racial and ethnic minorities, they will not be able to produce an authentic theology from their own perspective. In epistemological terms, marginal theology rejects the Western exclusivist either-or thinking and adopts the Eastern inclusivist epistemology of neither/nor and both/and. Neither/nor expresses the in-between situation of marginality, whereas both/and its in-both. Marginal theology thinks in simultaneous double negations (neither/nor) and double affirmations (both/and): "Being in-between and in-both worlds, total negation (in-between) and total affirmation (in-both) always coexist in new marginal people. Because these ideas coexist, they are not only the most inclusive but also the most relational form of thinking."⁴⁷

In this new context of in-beyond marginality of both in-between and in-both with its corresponding epistemology of neither/nor and both/and Lee develops his Christology. He points out that Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" has been consistently wrongly answered in the history of Christianity because Jesus was understood from the perspective of centrality. Traditionally, he was always regarded as the "center of centrality." On the contrary, Lee argues that Jesus is "a new marginal person *par excellence*."⁴⁸ To indicate this fact, Lee will place a hyphen between Jesus and Christ: "I use a hyphenated 'Jesus-Christ' because Jesus is the Christ, while the Christ is also Jesus. In other words, Jesus as the Christ is not enough. He is also the Christ as Jesus. Just as 'Asian-American' means an Asian and an American. Whenever I say Jesus, I mean Jesus-Christ; whenever I say Christ, I mean Christ-Jesus. They are inseparable, two facets of one existence."⁴⁹

To show that Jesus was "at the margin of marginality," Lee rereads the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and Resurrection from the perspective of marginality.⁵⁰ For him, the birth of Jesus from an unwed mother in a manger is the beginning of his marginalization. John's account of the incarnation of the Logos (1:1-18), in which the Logos is said to be the agent of creation and to be rejected by his own people, indicates divine marginalization. Description of Christ's incarnation as kenosis to become a slave is also an indication of divine marginalization. Indeed, "the incarnation can also be compared to divine immigra-

⁴⁶ Ibid. 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 70.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 71.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 78.

⁵⁰ Lee does not attempt to reconstruct the historical Jesus but simply assumes that the stories about Jesus reported in the Gospels are historical and reinterprets them from the perspective of marginality; however, he finds instructive the title of an important current book on the Jesus of history by John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

tion, in which God emigrated from a heavenly place to this world. As an immigrant in the new world, Christ, like the Asian-American, experienced rejection, harassment, and humiliation."⁵¹

Jesus' entire life is also a story of marginality. His childhood is exposed to a double marginalization: political, by Roman authority; and cultural and ethnic, by living in the foreign land of Egypt. Furthermore, his hometown of Nazareth was despised (John 1:46). In his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus became a new marginal person par excellence, "a person who lives in-beyond by integrating and harmonizing both the total negation (neither/nor) and the total affirmation (both/and) of two different worlds into himself through death and resurrection."⁵² In Jesus' threefold temptation, the devil, in Lee's view, is the personification of the self-centering power in the forms of wealth, glory, and dominance.⁵³ By rejecting these three central forces Jesus became a person on the margin. Jesus' public ministry can be regarded as a life of marginality: "He was a homeless man with a group of homeless people around him. He associated with marginal people, although he never closed the door to central-group people. He taught, acted, suffered, and died as a marginal man. He rose from the dead to help us live in-beyond."⁵⁴

For Lee, Jesus' marginality reaches its utmost expression in his death on the cross which is marked by suffering with humiliation and loneliness by rejection. Suffering is a pain expressed in attachment, and loneliness is a suffering expressed in detachment. On the cross Jesus was rejected even by his Father (Mark 15:34). Jesus' death symbolizes tragedy, failure, disappointment, and darkness (total negation), whereas his Resurrection symbolizes hope, joy, and life renewal (total affirmation). Again, by combining both death and Resurrection, both total negation and total affirmation, Jesus is the new marginal person: "With resurrection, Christ transcended all marginality. He broke the bonds of every cultural, racial, religious, sexual, economic, social, or regional bias that marginalized him and eventually led him to the cross. With resurrection Jesus-Christ is a new humanity, a new marginal person, who lives in-beyond by affirming both worlds."⁵⁵

In sum, in Jesus-Christ and Christ-Jesus, Lee argues that we have both the "margin of marginality" (his ministry and death) and the "creative core" (his Resurrection and new life). Like *yin* and *yang*, they are inseparable. In fact, they are identical with one another. By assuming the margin of marginality Jesus becomes the new creative core. By taking up the neither/nor, Jesus also takes up the both/and. But the new core is not another center of centrality; in fact it marginalizes the old centers of centrality and turns the margins into the new creative core. But the new core will not become another center of cen-

⁵¹ *Marginality*, 83.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 95.

⁵² *Ibid.* 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 86.

trality, for it remains the margin of marginality. In this way the new creative core can reconcile the center with the margin. Jesus as the new creative core is the perfect new marginal person, "because in him every marginal determinant is nullified, and every one can overcome his or her marginality. In the creative core of Christ-Jesus, racism is overcome, sexism is no longer in practice, the poor become self-sufficient, the weak find strength."⁵⁶

CHOAN-SENG SONG'S PORTRAIT OF JESUS

Whereas Pieris and Lee find their theological resources in Asian religions, philosophies, and autobiography, Choan-Seng Song⁵⁷ derives much of his inspiration from the *stories*, real and mythological, of the people oppressed by both church authorities and sociopolitical powers. His theology and particularly his Christology are essentially narrative.

Christian Theology: Stories of Asian Peoples

For several years now Song has been persistently advocating an Asian theology. Among the immense resources of Asia, Song privileges the stories of poor and oppressed people and their folktales, old and new. He believes that the most important skill for Asian theologians is the ability to listen theologically to the whispers, voices, groaning, and shouts from the depths of Asian humanity. This ability is the "third-eye," that is, a power of perception and insight (*satori*) that enables theologians to grasp the meaning beneath the surface of things and phenomena.

Since the stories of the Asian people are those of poor, suffering, and powerless people, an authentic Asian theology, in Song's view, is necessarily a liberation theology. Or, as he puts it, theology is "the hermeneutics of love between God and human being active in the human community."⁵⁸ This means that theology must begin not with abstract and universal doctrines but with the particular sociopolitical and cul-

⁵⁶ Ibid. 98.

⁵⁷ Choan-Seng Song (b. 1929), a prolific writer, is a Taiwanese Presbyterian and professor of theology and Asian cultures at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, Calif., and regional professor of theology at the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology in Singapore and Hong Kong. His publications include: *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979; rev. ed. 1990); *The Compassionate God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982); *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984); *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986). Pertinent to our theme is his recent trilogy titled *The Cross in the Lotus World*, subtitled: *Jesus, the Crucified People* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); *Jesus and the Reign of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); and *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). On Song's theology, see Peter C. Phan, "Experience and Theology," 114-18.

⁵⁸ *Third-Eye Theology* 108.

tural situations of the people in which God's "pain-love" is manifested and actively working for their liberation. Theology must deal with concrete issues that affect life in its totality; the totality of life is the raw material of theology. A theology that is culturally and historically neutral is not only a homeless theology but also an impossible theology. Every theology is necessarily a political theology because what is historical is political.⁵⁹

Jesus as the Crucified People

It is on the basis of the liberation theology concealed in the people's stories, folklore, mythologies, art, dance, and music that Song develops his christological trilogy. Underlying his Christology is the attempt to discover how the event of the Word-becoming-flesh (with the emphasis on flesh) is being continued today in the life of Asian peoples. To achieve this goal, Song suggests that the christological hermeneutic has to be "people hermeneutic": "People are now clues to who the real Jesus is—people who are poor, outcast, and socially and politically oppressed."⁶⁰ God is the story of Jesus, and Jesus is the story of the people.

With this "people hermeneutic" Song discovers that central to Jesus' teaching and experience is his rejection of the God of retribution, the God defended by Job's friends, and his affirmation of God as Abba, the God of merciful love. Song finds it significant that on the cross Jesus did not address God as Abba but as God in his desperate cry "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" He rejects the usual theological explanation that on the cross Jesus was rejected by God because he was covered with the world's sin and curse, since this explanation presupposes that God is a God of vengeance. For Song, the fact that Jesus addressed his Father as "God" on the cross indicates that he rejected the God of vengeance and opted for the God of love and compassion: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Furthermore, Song rejects the view of Jürgen Moltmann and others that the scandal of the cross consists in some inner-trinitarian act whereby God the Father abandons God the Son:

The cross is the suffering of Jesus of Nazareth and it is the suffering of humanity. The cross means human beings rejecting human beings. It is human beings abandoning human beings. . . . The cross is the plot of an organized religion blinded by its own power and orthodoxy and unable to tolerate those deeply and sincerely religious persons eager to restore faith in the God of love and mercy. And the cross discloses the complicity of sociopolitical powers ready to defend their self-interest at any cost, even at the expense of the law, even at

⁵⁹ Song has proposed ten theses on the nature and method of an Asian liberation-story theology (*Tell Us Our Names* 3–24). For his liberation theology, see *ibid.* 163–205, and *The Tears of Lady Meng: A Parable of People's Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC, 1981).

⁶⁰ *Jesus, the Crucified People* 12.

the cost of the lives of those God-inspired persons faithful to the truth and devoted to love for others. . . . The cross, in short, is human violence and not divine violence.⁶¹

Though the death of Jesus was no accident, it was premeditated and predetermined not by God but by the twin evils of oppressive religious and political authorities to whom Jesus was a threat.

In the light of his death, then, who is Jesus? To Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" Song argues that the correct answer is neither that Jesus is the "Davidic Messiah" nor that he is the "fulfillment of God's promise to Israel." Not the former, because the Davidic kingdom is primarily a political system built upon a religious ideology of theocracy, a history marred by corruption and oppression; and not the latter, because Jesus did not consider himself to be the fulfillment of God's promise, first in terms of the possession of a land and then in relation to God's salvation granted to Israel and the Christian Church.

The true identity of Jesus, Song suggests, can be gauged by his behavior during the three temptations. In refusing to turn stones into bread, Jesus rejected the temptation to be a magician-messiah, deceiving the masses with illusion and false promises and offering a theology without pain or tears. In refusing to throw himself down from the parapet of the Temple, Jesus rejected the temptation to be a miracle-messiah who would bring about sociopolitical change entirely through his own feats, without people and without God. In refusing to fall down and do Satan homage, Jesus rejected the temptation to be a king-messiah who must do homage to political powers.⁶²

Lastly, Jesus' identity is revealed in the Last Supper. For Song, the supper was a symbol of Jesus' inclusiveness. It was attended not only by the Twelve but also by all his friends and followers, including women. That is why Song calls it the "People Supper." The perfect image for it is not the rectangular table represented in many Last Supper paintings and in all Western churches, but the Chinese round table—a symbol of hospitality, communion, and empowering. "A round table is a family table at which members of the family, young and old, women and men, can seat themselves. That circle around the table begins with any person—the eldest person or the youngest person. And that circle can end with any person—mother, sister, father, or brother."⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid. 98–99. Here Song describes well the death of Jesus as the result of a historical conflict between him and his opponents precipitated by their different understanding of God (God of love and compassion vs. God of retribution). Elsewhere, he explicates the other aspect of Jesus' death, i.e. as God's identification with the suffering people; here Jesus appears as the "love-pain" of God (*Third-Eye Theology* 83–88).

⁶² For Song's extended commentary on Jesus' temptations, see *Jesus, the Crucified People* 165–87.

⁶³ Ibid. 203.

Who is Jesus, finally? Perhaps the question is badly phrased. The question is not who Jesus is, but where he can be found today. In other words, the question is not about the identity of Jesus but about his identification. Whom did Jesus identify himself with? With this question in mind, one can readily understand Song's at first disconcerting statement:

Jesus, in short, is the crucified people! Jesus means the crucified people. To know Jesus is to know crucified people. . . . By people I mean those women, men, and children whose company Jesus enjoyed, with whom Jesus liked to eat and drink, to whom, Jesus declared, God's reign belongs. By people I mean those men, women, and children, in Jesus' day, today, and in the days to come, economically exploited, politically oppressed, culturally and religiously alienated, sexually, racially, or class-wise discriminated against.⁶⁴

Jesus in the Power of the Spirit

Having established Jesus' identification with the people, Song goes on to reflect on Jesus' message and his action in the world today. To know who Jesus is for us today, one cannot begin with a historical reconstruction of a "biography" of Jesus nor with metaphysical reflections on his divine and human natures; rather one must adopt "an approach that moves from the message of Jesus to his life and ministry, or, if you like, to his person and work."⁶⁵ Now, the central message of Jesus' preaching is the reign of God. The reign of God is the vision which inspired Jesus to say what he said and to do what he did: "This vision of God's reign is the *hermeneutical* principle of the life and ministry of Jesus. It is the *ethical* standard of his lifeview and worldview. It is the *theological* foundation of his relation to God and to his fellow human beings. And it is the *eschatological* vantage-point from which he relates the present time and the end-time."⁶⁶

Using the images of a great banquet (Luke 14:16-24) and the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:22-24), Song depicts the reign of God as the realm of truth and abundant life open to all people, especially the outcasts and the poor.⁶⁷ This reign of God, he reminds us, is not simply a future reality, but also a present dynamic at work inside history through men, women, and children, that power of redemption that mends, heals, and re-creates the entire creation for the day of a new heaven and a new earth. Lastly, the goal of the reign of God is the transfiguration of life understood as liberation and symbolized by the resurrection: "The resurrection is essentially the proclama-

⁶⁴ Ibid. 215-16. For Pieris too, the christological question that "epitomizes the Asian quest is not 'Who is he?' or 'What is he?' but 'Where is he?'" (*An Asian Theology* 128).

⁶⁵ *Jesus and the Reign of God* xi.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 3-75.

tion that the reign of God is here, that it is in the midst of us in the world. The resurrection life is life in the reign of God. To live that life is to live life in all fullness in spite of the fact that it has to be lived in hardship, pain, and suffering."⁶⁸

The last issue Song deals with in his trilogy is how to proclaim Jesus as God's living truth and grace, that is, Jesus in the power of the Spirit, to our world of diverse cultures, religions, and sociopolitical systems. First of all, Song reminds us that truth is related to power; in the case of Jesus, the Spirit of truth is the power of love, justice, and freedom. Second, truth is always relational; it is related to what God's reign is and what it stands for. Furthermore, truth is contextual, historical, and transcultural. Consequently truth is open: "open to the poor and the disinherited . . . , to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews . . . , to those outside the Christian church as well as those inside it."⁶⁹

Because Jesus is open truth, he can cross the boundaries of all cultures which include art, custom, morals, and beliefs.⁷⁰ Similarly, he can also cross into the world of diverse religions, just as he could recognize the power of God working in those exorcists who were not of his fold (Mark 9:38-41). In this context, Song reexamines the famous, apparently exclusivistic "no other name" text (Acts 4:12) and shows that it was directed to the Temple authorities and therefore cannot be made to address non-Christian religions.⁷¹

Song's Christology is a narrative Christology deeply rooted in the New Testament. With consummate skill and rousing eloquence, he weaves the biblical stories with the stories of suffering people to paint a portrait of Jesus as the prophet of the reign of God identified with the crucified people of all times and places.

CHUNG HYUN KYUNG'S PORTRAIT OF JESUS

The use of the stories of suffering people in constructing an Asian Christology brings us to Asian women's Christology. Recently, Asian women have begun to theologize from their own experience as Asian women, and although their number is still small, Asian women's theology has acquired a distinct and important voice.⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid. 287.

⁶⁹ *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* 64.

⁷⁰ For Song's explanations of the grammar, syntax, and semantics of culture, see *ibid.* 142-60.

⁷¹ Ibid. 241-44.

⁷² For a history of the development of theology by Asian women, see Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 1-21. For the social context of Asian women's theology, see *ibid.* 22-35. See also Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, ed., *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Hong Kong: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1989).

Asian Women's Theology as God-Praxis

Among Asian women theologians, Chung Hyun Kyung⁷³ has attempted a comprehensive presentation of Asian women's theology. For her, Asian women's theology is a "cry, plea, and invocation" to God in search of justice and healing. It originates in "God-praxis" and is identical with it, not something that follows it. It is an embodied and critical reflection on Asian women's experiences and aimed at bringing about a community of harmony, peace, and love.⁷⁴ Such a theology, in Chung's view, is inductive, that is, it does not begin with the Bible or Christian doctrines but with the stories of women: "The text of God's revelation was, is, will be written in our bodies and our peoples' everyday struggle for survival and liberation."⁷⁵ In our words, the first step is "socio-biography," that is, listening with care to women's stories in order to discern the people's suffering and yearning for freedom.

In addition to women's stories, Asian women's theology should draw its resources from popular religiosity among women (e.g. Korean shamanism, folk Chinese Buddhism which venerates Kwan In, and Filipino worship of Ina). The second step is critical social analysis which includes political, economic, and religiocultural analysis. The third step is theological reflection in which the Bible and Christian tradition function as the context for understanding women's experiences.

Christ as the Minjung within the Minjung

On the basis of this methodology, Chung begins her exposition of Asian women's Christology with a critical review of traditional christological titles: Christ as Suffering Servant, as Lord, and as Emmanuel. With regard to the first, Asian women acknowledge that the image of Jesus as the Suffering Servant enables them to see meaning in their own suffering and to accept suffering and service as part of their option for liberation. But Chung points out, the Church's traditional associations of obedience and subservience with this image reinforce the oppression of women by their fathers, husbands, and brothers. Similarly, it is acknowledged that the image of Christ as Lord frees Asian women from the false authority of the world over them to claim the true authority which springs from their own experiences. Yet the image of Christ as Lord has also been used to perpetuate Asian women's oppressed status in church and society; the lordship of Christ was transformed into a patriarchal lordship.

Lastly, the image of Jesus as Emmanuel (God-with-us) is cherished

⁷³ Chung Hyun Kyung is a Korean who earned her doctorate from Union Theological Seminary in New York City; her major work so far is *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 99-101.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 111.

by Asian women because it shows that God shares their poor and oppressed condition and is with them in their struggle to reclaim their full humanity. On the other hand, the Church's emphasis on the maleness of Jesus rather than on his humanity excludes women from full participation in the Church.⁷⁶

Besides these traditional images of Jesus, Asian women theologians have begun to carve their own portraits of Jesus on the basis of their experiences as Asian women. Not surprisingly, given their poverty and oppression by colonialism, neocolonialism, military dictatorship, and overarching patriarchy, the most common image of Jesus among Asian women theologians is that of liberator, revolutionary, and political martyr. These images of Jesus strengthen Asian women in their own struggle for freedom, even to the shedding of their blood for their people.

Naturally, too, Jesus is imaged as mother, woman, and shaman. In the image of Christ as mother, Asian women see Jesus as a compassionate one who feels the suffering of humanity deeply, weeps and suffers with them. Jesus as the female figure is seen as the woman Messiah who liberates the oppressed. As shaman, Jesus is accepted by Korean women as a priestess who helps them release the *han*, that is, the resentment, indignation, the sense of helplessness and total abandonment which have accumulated over years and even centuries of oppression suffered by the *minjung*, or "people."

The Korean word *minjung* (literally "the popular mass") is left untranslated. By it are meant "the oppressed, exploited, dominated, discriminated against, alienated and suppressed politically, economically, socially, culturally, and intellectually, like women, ethnic groups, the poor, workers and farmers, including intellectuals themselves."⁷⁷ In *minjung* theology, Christ is identified with the "people" themselves. Furthermore, among the *minjung*, women suffer oppression not only as members of the *minjung* in general but specifically as women, and therefore can be categorized as "the *minjung* within the *minjung*." Accordingly, Christ is said to be "the *minjung* within the *minjung*."

Finally, because Asian women are often forced to bear an overwhelming share of back-breaking labor, not only in the home but also in factories, Christ is also depicted as a worker enduring the despair and humiliation of unskilled laborers. And because they often suffer hunger as the result of poverty, they also image Christ as the grain of wheat or rice in their meager bowls of gruel.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 53–61.

⁷⁷ Chung Hyun Kyung, "Han-pu-ri: Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," in *We Dare to Dream* 138–39. For a discussion of *Minjung* theology, see Jung Young Lee, ed., *An Emerging Theology in World Perspective: Commentary on Korean Minjung Theology* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1988); David Kwang-sun Suh, *The Korean Minjung in Christ* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1991); and Peter C. Phan, "Experience and Theology," 118–20.

Chung neatly sums up Asian women's Christologies: "There are *traditional* images of Jesus, which are being interpreted in fresh, creative ways by Asian women, largely based on their experiences of survival in the midst of oppression and on their efforts to liberate themselves. We have also observed new images of Jesus that offer a direct challenge to traditional Christologies. These new images of Jesus are also based on Asian women's experiences of survival and liberation."⁷⁸

ADEQUACY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF THESE PORTRAITS

The four Christologies we have discussed are but samples of the many portraits that Asian theologians have recently drawn of Jesus. Because they are all Christian theologies, two broad set of criteria can be applied to assess their validity, namely, adequacy and appropriateness. By the former is meant the power to speak the Christian word in the contemporary idiom in order to understand and transform the condition of the addressee. By the latter is meant the relative coherence of this message with the life and teaching of Jesus as mediated through the Bible and Christian tradition.

The Transformative Power of Asian Christology

As Pieris and Song repeatedly point out, both the Christian churches and their theologies are *in Asia* but not *of Asia*. There has been a reluctance to break the pot in which Western Christianity has grown and to let the Christian tree strike its roots deep in the Asian humus to become a native plant instead of growing like a stunted bonsai. Even the early attempts to "inculturate" Christianity by missionaries such as Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili, and Alexandre de Rhodes, as well as by Asian theologians, laudable as those attempts have been, amount to no more than trimming rather than transplanting the Christian tree.

In Search of an Adequate Christology

In order that transplanting may result in a healthy tree with green foliage and beautiful blooms, an accurate knowledge of local soil and climate is necessary. To obtain this knowledge, Asian theologians have adopted Latin American liberation theology's use of social analysis. Asian women's feminist theology in particular has focused on the destructive effects that colonialism, neocolonialism, military dictatorship, and patriarchy have wrought on the *minjung*, and especially on women, the *minjung* within the *minjung*. However, as Pieris has properly warned, social analysis without what he terms "introspection" would make theology un-Asian. His insistence on the coupling of poor religiousness and religious poverty is one of the most important and challenging (even discomforting) insights for an adequate Asian Christology. In this way he offers a positive contribution to the debate

⁷⁸ *Struggle* 73.

among third-world theologians concerning the relative role of liberation (which Latin American theologians favor) and inculturation (which many African and Asian theologians privilege) in the formulation of a third-world theology.

Words alone, of course, despite their performative power, cannot transform sociopolitical conditions. To do so, a transformative Christology must be preceded and accompanied by christological praxis. All four Christologies examined above insist on the necessity of such a praxis. Pieris speaks of "theopraxis," and more specifically, the monastic practice of voluntary poverty; Chung Huyn Kyung speaks of "God-praxis" as theology itself. Insistence on praxis as part of the theological method, along with social and psychological analysis, assures the adequacy of an Asian Christology for Asia.

Furthermore, to be adequate to the Asian situation, Christology must use the resources of the Asian people. Here the works of Jung Young Lee and Choan-Seng Song stand out as particularly promising. Lee's consistent use of the Taoist philosophy of the *I Ching* to reinterpret Christian theology in terms of the "theology of change" is an important corrective to recent Asian theologians' tendency to restrict themselves to stories and symbols. It is also an effective example of how an Asian Christology (Jesus as the "perfect realization of change") can and should be "metaphysical" without using the categories of Greek philosophy.

However, metaphysical Christology runs the risk of being detached from real life, especially the life of the *minjung*. Even Lee has shifted to a narrative mode of theologizing. His analysis of marginality as both "in-between" and "in-both" (i.e. "in-beyond") and his depiction of Christ as the "new marginal person par excellence" provide useful insights not only into the condition of Asian immigrants in the First World but also into the situation of the *minjung*, who are essentially the people on the margin in the Third World. Moreover, this Christology of marginality allows Lee to highlight an important aspect of Jesus' ministry which is left undeveloped by the other three theologians, namely, his ministry of reconciliation. As the new creative core, Jesus reconciles the central people with the people on the margins.

The master of Asian story theology is no doubt Choan-Seng Song. The summary of his Christology given above, which is unavoidably drained of the life-giving blood that his stories supply, cannot capture the power of his theological imagination and rhetoric. Real stories as well as folklore, religious mythologies, and symbols make Asian Christology concrete and suffuse it with a transforming power that no metaphysical categories, however intricately chiselled, can provide. People laugh and weep and are transformed by stories, not by concepts. Nevertheless, an adequate Asian Christology must employ both metaphysics and stories, since metaphysical Christology without stories is empty, and story Christology without metaphysics is blind.

Among the four christological proposals, Pieris's is no doubt the most

intriguing. For him, an Asian Christology is "the Christic apocalypse of the non-Christian experiences of liberation."⁷⁹ Such a Christology will be the fruit of genuine interreligious dialogue which fuses together wisdom and love. Pieris's proposal is intriguing not only because it has not been written and therefore its contours and substance remain yet unknown, but also because the common efforts between the Christian non-theologian poor and the poor non-Christian theologians are bound to produce a Christology quite different from the standard Christology of the West.

But how adequate will this Christology of the poor monk be to the Asian situation? Pieris is well aware that monasticism, even in Asia, can be and has been an instrument of oppressive powers, and monastic communities can be and have been oases of wealth and privileges. Hence his loud and frequent insistence on *poor* religiousness. Moreover, Asian monasticism has been an exclusive preserve for males, at least since the abolition of the *bhikkuni-sangha* in the Middle Ages. Finally, it has been vitiated by an antisex and antimarriage stance with a concomitant depreciation of the lay state. Given these historical associations of monasticism with centers of power and wealth, patriarchy, and Manichean spirituality, the portrait of Christ as the poor monk needs the complement and corrective of Asian women's Christology of the *minjung* within the *minjung*.⁸⁰

Further Issues in Asian Christology

There are, in my judgment, three further issues that these four Christologies must develop more explicitly in order to be more adequate to the Asian situation. First, as already mentioned, one feature of the Asian context is the presence of communist ideology. An Asian Christology must seek to understand the paradoxical domination of an atheistic ideology in intensely religious countries such as China, Vietnam, and North Korea. It must also find an answer to the challenge of atheism itself, perhaps by reflecting on the desperate cry of Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

The second issue relates to ecology. Capitalism has recently made rapid inroads into communist countries such as Vietnam and China. The market economy is being embraced as the panacea for all ills. Besides the exploitation of cheap labor by multinational corporations and the attendant injustices against the poor, there is also the threat of ecological destruction by technocracy and the development ideology. An adequate Asian Christology must unfold the role of Christ in the cosmos that makes use of the deep Asian sense of harmony with nature. A cosmic Christ should not serve the leisure class's occasional retreat into the wilderness to regain mental and physical health after

⁷⁹ *An Asian Theology* 86.

⁸⁰ Pieris is aware of this need and has turned his attention to feminist issues; see his *Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996).

the stresses of high-power careers. Rather it should serve the interests of the poor, who most often are the victims of environmental degradation and the pollution of water and air.⁸¹

The third issue concerns one of the most common and sacred elements of Asian spirituality, at least in countries heavily influenced by Confucianism: family relationships and above all the veneration of ancestors. For most Asians, to exist is to be woven into a web of familial relationships, not only with the living but with the dead as well. For instance, to enter into marriage involves not only a new relationship to one individual, but also a new set of relationships with the spouse's extended family, including the dead. An essential part of the marriage ceremony includes the introduction of the bride and bridegroom to each other's families and their ritual veneration of their ancestors. Missionaries such as Matteo Ricci, in an effort to make these rituals acceptable to Christianity, presented them only as "civil," not "religious," rituals, thereby divesting them of their real meaning and power. As is well known, in the controversy of the so-called Chinese Rites, the Vatican, after bouts of condemnation of these rites as superstition, finally accepted them as legitimate civil celebrations. To restore their genuine meaning, an Asian Christology must develop the image of Jesus as the "Elder Brother" of the family, caring for his siblings and responsible for the cult of the ancestors (the firstborn among the living), and after his death and Resurrection as an ancestor mediating the life of God to the community (the firstborn among the dead).⁸²

In sum, because the four Christologies we have studied focus mainly on Jesus' identification with the *minjung* rather than on his identity, their adequacy to the Asian context is largely assured. The question is whether they are also fully appropriate to the Christian faith.

Dynamic Fidelity to the Christian Tradition

It will be helpful to approach the question of whether these four Asian Christologies are consistent with the Christian faith by exam-

⁸¹ On third-world ecological theology, see Samuel Ryan, "Theological Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology* 221-35; Eleazar S. Fernandez, "People's Cry, Creation's Cry," *Tugon: An Ecumenical Journal of Discussion and Opinion* 12 (1992) 276-94; Jong Sun Noh, "The Effects on Korea of Un-ecological Theology," in Sally McFague et al., ed., *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 125-36.

⁸² Obviously, there are close parallels between the Asian veneration of the dead and the African sense of kinship with the ancestors. For a presentation of an African Christology on the basis of this kinship, see Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* 101-06. See also Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1984); and Robert Schreiter, ed., *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991). For an attempt to construct a Christology within the context of the Vietnamese cult of ancestors, see Peter C. Phan, "The Christ of Asia: An Essay on Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor," forthcoming in *Studia Missionalia*.

ining how they incorporate the biblical witness to Jesus and how they make use of the historical christological traditions.

Asian Christology and the Jesus of the Gospel

Of the four authors, Choan-Seng Song is the one who makes the most extended and explicit use of biblical texts, which is to be expected since his approach is story-based. Indeed, the second and third volumes of his trilogy are essentially theological commentaries on biblical texts. Like most liberation theologians, Song privileges Jesus' denunciatory and proclamatory roles, that is, his criticism of the oppressive nature of the religious and political hierarchies of his times and his announcement of the imminent coming of God's reign of love and compassion. Song's narrative Christology makes careful use of historical criticism to answer some of the key questions about who Jesus was (e.g., whether he was a Davidic Messiah, and whether he was the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel) and to determine the cause of Jesus' death on the cross (e.g., whether it was predestinated by God or brought about by human violence). But his almost exclusive concern with the identification of Jesus with the "crucified people" leads him to neglect, in my view, other New Testament passages (mostly Johannine and Pauline) which indicate an "ontological" relationship between Jesus and his Father and the Spirit.

The same criticism applies, perhaps more strongly, to Chung Huyn Kyung, who seems to have joined with Kwok Pui Lan in rejecting the existence of biblical inspiration, a closed canon, and a biblical theological norm.⁸³ Furthermore, Chung explicitly calls for the adoption of non-Christian sources (e.g. Korean shamanism) to formulate a Christology, without worrying too much whether they are in accord with biblical "orthodoxy."⁸⁴

Jung Young Lee pays much attention to New Testament Christology to undergird his portrait of Christ as the perfect realization of change

⁸³ Kwok Pui Lan maintains that the Bible is just one form of human construction among many that speak about God and does not obtain pride of place among the sources of Christian theology; that a closed canon excludes other voices; and that the critical principle norming biblical interpretation (e.g. prophetic criticism) is not found in the Bible itself but in the community of men and women who read the Bible and appropriate it for their liberation (Kwok Pui Lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991] 299-315).

⁸⁴ "My fourth and last hope for the future direction of Asian women's theology is that it move away from the doctrinal purity of Christian theology and risk the survival-liberation centered syncretism. . . . We Asian women theologians must move away from our imposed fear of losing Christian identity, in the opinion of the mainline theological circles, and instead risk that we might be transformed by the religious wisdom of our own people. We may find that to the extent that we are willing to lose our old identity, we will be transformed into truly Asian Christians" (*Struggle* 113).

(Christ as Word, Light, and Savior) and as the new marginal person par excellence (his reinterpretation of the life of Jesus from his birth to his Resurrection). His use of *I Ching* metaphysics allows him to take seriously biblical texts that affirm both Jesus' humanity and his divinity. On the other hand, his reliance on *yin* and *yang* metaphysics leads him to invest biblical texts with meanings that are doubtfully there, e.g. that Jesus as Light includes also darkness.

Pieris's essays on Christology, programmatic as they are, do not intend to present a complete portrait of the New Testament Jesus, but so far his liberationist exegesis of certain texts is nothing short of brilliant, e.g. his interpretation of the death of Jesus as a baptism in religious poverty (against Mammon). On the other hand, Pieris's concentration on Jesus' double baptism has so far left the Resurrection of Jesus virtually unexplored in his Christology.

As a whole, then, Asian theologians practice a liberationist hermeneutic of the New Testament. Such exegesis does not pretend to be "objective" in the sense of neutral, or "comprehensive" in the sense of inclusive of all sides of every issue. Rather it sets out to read Scripture from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed, and in Christology it tends to emphasize Jesus' prophetic message about the reign of God (e.g. Choan-Seng Song) and his mighty deeds in favor of the poor. Such a Christology is liable to the charge of partiality and advocacy by those whom Lee calls the "central" scholars. Asian theologians, however, would point out that every interpretation is undergirded by an ideology. The issue is whether one's ideology conforms with God's universal love for all and preferential option for people on the margin. For Asian theologians, the two areas in which God has manifested God's self to the Asian people are their religions and their poverty. An Asian biblical hermeneutic must therefore take these two "biases" into account.⁸⁵

There is one area, however, in which Asian theologians can derive much profit from contemporary Euro-American biblical research on early Judaism. In their stress on Jesus' denunciations of the religious traditions of his times, Pieris and Song present a negative portrayal of early Judaism, the former by contrasting Jesus' prophetic spirituality with the "narrow ideology" of the Zealots, the "sectarian puritanism" of the Essenes, the "self-righteousness" of the Pharisees, and the "leisure-class mentality" of the Sadducees; and the latter by contrasting Jesus' "God of compassion" with his opponents' "God of retribution."

Besides being inaccurate generalizations, these statements may reproduce in Asian theology the anti-Semitism that has been the bane of Western theology. A careful and judicious use of contemporary scholarship on early Judaism, especially on the Pharisees, will correct the age-old Christian bias against Jews and Judaism.

⁸⁵For reflections on third-world hermeneutics, especially on the need for reading the Bible from the standpoint of the underprivileged, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin* 434-39.

Asian Christology and Western Christological Tradition

The four Asian theologians we have studied are as a whole quite critical of the Western theological tradition in general and of Western Christology in particular. Chung Hyun Kyung points out how traditional christological titles such as Suffering Servant, Lord, and Emmanuel have contributed to the subjugation of Asian women. Pieris offers a trenchant critique of the six early Asian Christologies for their failure to unite religiousness and poverty. Song harbors a deep distrust of the metaphysical cast of Chalcedonian Christology for its separation of Jesus from the "crucified people" and offers a severe criticism of the patristic and Anselmian doctrine of redemption. Lee rejects Western Christologies based on Greek metaphysics and process philosophy.

These four theologians do not, however, reject Western theology and Christology *in toto*. Besides the hermeneutics of suspicion, they also employ the hermeneutics of retrieval. Chung Hyun Kyung recognizes that the Suffering Servant, Lord, and Emmanuel Christologies have also contributed to the liberation of Asian women. Pieris calls for a union of the Western stress on *agapē* with the Eastern emphasis on *gnōsis*. Lee acknowledges the usefulness of framing Christology in metaphysical terms, a characteristic of Western Christology, though naturally enough, he prefers Taoist metaphysics. Even Song, who is the most negative toward the Western christological traditions, makes use of recent narrative Christologies and Euro-American biblical scholarship to develop his own story-based Christology.

In general, it must be said, however, that a cavalier dismissal of patristic and medieval Christologies would impoverish Asian Christology by neglecting their genuine insights, and that ignorance of them would severely limit the possibilities of dialogue between Western and Eastern theologies, which is more necessary now than ever before. Not least, a thorough knowledge of them may spare Asian Christology the mistakes and deficiencies for which Asian theologians have criticized Western Christologies!

Christologies are nothing but attempts to answer Jesus' famous question "Who do you say that I am?" Asian theologians have taken up the challenge to answer that question in terms both understandable to their people and faithful to the New Testament witness to Jesus. Their responses join the ever-growing list of Christologies by third-world theologians who paint different portraits of Jesus: the liberator, the elder brother, the ancestor, the chief, the "witch doctor," the *christa*, the black Messiah, the guru, and so forth. Whether these portraits will be received as authentic representations of Jesus or discarded as counterfeits only time will be able to tell.⁸⁶

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