God and History in the Theologies of Liberation – Reading Suh Nam-Dong Contrapuntally

Volker Küster

God's presence and acting in history is one of the generative themes in liberation theologies. This interest can be explained by their location in the societal reform processes of the late 1960s. Grown out of resistance movements against oppressive economic structures and military dictatorships in Latin America, the Philippines and South Korea or the South African Apartheid regime, they are forms of contextual political theology, which rediscovered that God sides with the poor and oppressed. Under the catch phrase "option for the poor," coined by Latin American liberation theology, this insight has gained broad acceptance.

1. A Confluence of Two Traditions

Suh Nam-Dong, one of the founding fathers of *Minjung* theology, the South Korean brand of liberation theology, presupposes in his "pneumatological historical interpretation" a confluence of two *Minjung* traditions, the Christian and the Korean.

> Now, the task for Korean *Minjung* theology is [...] to participate in and interpret theologically the events which we consider to be God's intervention in history and the work of the Holy Spirit.[1]

[1] Suh Nam-Dong, Historical References for a Theology of *Minjung*, in: *Minjung Theology. People as the Subjects of History*, Maryknoll, NY 1983, 155-182, 177.

God's intervention in history is an *event* that happens at a certain place (kor. *Hjonjang*).[2] In the context of poverty and oppression God is present in the suffering (*Han*) of the people (*Minjung*).

> *Han* is an underlying feeling of Korean people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation and nothingness. On the other, it is a feeling with a tenacity of will for life which comes to weaker beings. The first aspect can sometimes be sublimated to great artistic expressions and the second aspect could erupt as the energy for a revolution or rebellion.[3]

The very conference volume with the basic texts of *Minjung* theology that I am quoting here has been published by the *Christian Conference of Asia* (CCA) in 1981 with the subtitle "People as the Subjects of History."[4] This is a subtle allusion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "world come of age."[5] In a similar vein, Gustavo Gutiérrez' classic "A Theology of Liberation" states

> "the social praxis of contemporary humankind has begun to reach maturity. It is the behavior of humankind ever more conscious of being an active subject of history, ever more articulate in the face of social injustice and of all repressive forces which stand in the way of its fulfillment."[6]

Practically, this refers to the "little people." A collection of articles by Gutiérrez therefore bears the programmatic title "The Power of the Poor in History."[7] The *Minjung* theologians Suh Nam-Dong and Kim Yong-Bock talk about the "social-biography" of the *Minjung* in this respect[8]:

> At present, the only way to understand the social biography of the *Minjung* is to approach it through dialogue and involvement with the *Minjung* and through the *Minjung*'s telling of their own story. [...] Social biography encompasses the

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[2] Suh Nam-Dong, Towards a Theology of *Han*, in: *Minjung Theology*, 55-69, 55-57.
[3] Op. cit., 58.
[4] *Minjung Theology. People as the Subjects of History*, Maryknoll, NY 1983 [Singapore, 1981]. Cf. Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion. Korean Minjung Theology Revisited*, Leiden and Boston 2010.
[5] Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft* (GW 8), München 1998, 477-482 [letter to Eberhard Bethge on 8.6.1944].
[6] Gustavo Gutiérrez, A *Theology of Liberation*, reprint of the revised version, London 1996 [1973; Spanish 1971], 30, cf. 42, and 138.
[7] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, Maryknoll, NY 1983.
[8] Kim Yong-Bock, Theology and the Social-Biography of the *Minjung*, in: *CTC Bulletin* Vol. 5 No. 3 – Vol. 6 No. 1 (Dec. 1984 – April 1985), 66-78, 70f.

Minjung's subjective experiences as well as objective conditions and structures and societal power relations.

In Western discourses on history from these years, one can find parallels in the differentiation between history and stories, oral history, the project to write a history from below or social history. With the discovery of "local agency," the reconstruction of the contribution of local people in historical processes dominated by the West, post-colonial criticism gave these discourses a new turn.

Theologically the separation between salvation history and world history is overcome as a consequence. Gutiérrez adds a Christological emphasis: "there is only one history – a 'Christo-finalized' history."[9] In the theology of mission after 1945, this conviction analogously found its expression in talking about "Missio Dei." This term was originally introduced by Karl Barth in a lecture in front of the Brandenburg Mission conference (1934). His attempt to give the missionary project a new theological foundation in the Trinitarian doctrine – it is God's mission – is at a closer look ambiguous. During the Conference on World Mission in Willingen 1952, the first ecumenical conference on German soil after the end of World War Two, the American delegation influenced by the *Social Gospel* talked about the "Mission of God." Some of its members saw God at work in the liberation movement of the times. A corresponding passage in the report of section I "The missionary obligation of the church" chaired by Paul Lehmann that "God exercises his judgment and grace in the revolutionary movements of our times,"[10] certainly contributed to its rejection by the plenary.

Only Karl Hartenstein, the director of the Basel Mission, who was advocating the reception of Barth in the theology of Mission, used the Latinism in his report on the conference. Yet as time went by, the term became associated with Willingen. Missiologist Georg Vicedom from Erlangen, unsuspicious of any kind of radicalism, chose *Missio Dei* as a title for his theology of mission. The Lutheran Vicedom again declared the church as the subject of God's mission, which stripped the term of its radicalism. In *Minjung* theology, on the other hand, another interpretation of the term, in the sense of a direct intervention of God in history, lived on.[11]

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[9] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 86.

[10] Quoted in: H. H. Rosin, *Missio Dei. An examination of the origin, contents and function of the term in Protestant missiological discussion*, Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Leiden 1972, 25.

[11] Cf. about Missio Dei: Volker Küster, *Theologie im Kontext. Zugleich ein Versuch über die Minjung Theologie*, Nettetal 1995, 35-37.

2. Deconstruction and Reconstruction – Generative Themes in the Theologies of Liberation

Already in 1976 representatives of contextual theologies from Africa, Asia and Latin America founded the *Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (EATWOT) in Dar Es Salam, Tanzania. With the question of commonalities, differences and cross-fertilization, the intercultural discourse that evolved from this Third World initiative found a heuristic framework, which would prove to be very fruitful. The Latin American theologians were under suspicion because of their relative closeness to North Atlantic academic theology and their prominence to just wanting to replace Western dominance. In addition, the Afro-Asian theologians criticized their single-minded orientation on socio-economic and political questions. The Latin Americans on their part queried that the Africans and Asians focused too much on the cultural-religious dimension, without analyzing the reasons for poverty and oppression in their countries. The role of the representatives of the Diasporas in the United States was also controversial. At the same time, North American Black theologian James Cone accused the Liberation Theologians of not paying any attention to the black minorities in Latin America in their theology. In the second generation, the women spoke up by negotiating their own position between Western feminist theology on the one hand and the theologies of their compatriots on the other.[12]

In spite of all local differences, liberation theologians became part of a "global theological flow." This constellation allows me to explicate how liberation theologies have rewoven the web of generative themes of God triune and Christology in regard to the liberating intervention of God in history which is so decisive for them. In this process they deconstructed traditional Western interpretations, in order to reconstruct a contextual theology from the dialectic of generative themes of text and context. In a perpetuating circle of deconstruction and reconstruction, they also review their own thinking in the light of new contextual challenges. This way of doing theology signified by fluidity and relationality allows, if nothing else, to tackle the ambiguities of Christian faith as well as those of the particular context. Post-colonial critic Edward Said, coming from literary theory and being a music lover, introduced the term "contrapuntal reading" for the kind of parallel reading

[12] Cf. about EATWOT: Volker Küster, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie*, Göttingen 2011, 154-186.

of texts from different contexts and times that follows below in order to highlight their commonalities and differences.

• *God Acts in History*[13]

The Exodus story became temporarily the central theological foundation for God's liberating acting in history, which establishes justice. Gutiérrez refers to "the Exodus, [as] a historical-salvific fact which structures the faith of Israel. And this fact is a political liberation."[14] This interpretation even reached Pop culture. Bob Marley's Song "Exodus" is still today the Hymn of liberation movements all over the third world.

A first aporia of the Exodus theme became visible in South Africa, where the Boers, the "Voortrekkers," as they also call themselves in historical memory of the "great trek," their flight from the Brits from the Kapland (1835-1841), stylize it as their Exodus experience. At the same time, Black theology claims the Exodus for their hoped-for liberation from the Apartheid regime. The Boers involuntarily already demonstrate what post-colonial critique later has denounced, namely that the Exodus story is simultaneously also an imperial text within the Bible: the land was not empty.[15]

The poor and oppressed invoke in their resistance first of all the experience of God's liberating intervention in history, which the Israelites in their interpretation made vicariously for all of human-kind.[16] For Israel, however, the Exodus became the foundational myth of its own history that served the Jewish people as hermeneutic key of its own experience of history ever since. Therefore, liberation theologies were temporarily under suspicion of Anti-Judaism – they denied the Jewish

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[13] Cf. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, Maryknoll, NY 1990, 2, 6, and 29; id., *Black Theology and Black Power*, New York 1969, 44 and 134; id., *God of the Oppressed*, new revised edition, Maryknoll, NY 1997, 57; Desmond Tutu, *"Gott segne Afrika." Texte und Predigten des Friedensnobelpreisträgers*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1984, 85 and 105f.; Allan A. Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence. A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*, Maryknoll, NY 1977, 2; Hyun Young-Hak, A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea, in: *Minjung Theology*, 47-54, 53f.; Suh, *Han*, 55; Suh, Historical References, 158 and 177.

[14] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 89; cf. 75, and 86.

[15] Cf. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, St. Louis, Missouri 2000, 17f. and 58-83.

[16] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 64.

people its genuine experience of history, was the allegation. The question whether the God of Israel and Jesus Christ is an imperial God touches on a sore spot in Jewish-Christian tradition, not the least in the actual Palestine conflict.[17]

• *God Speaks through the Prophets*

The message of the prophets was suited as another generative theme in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time this implies a differentiation in God's acting in history. Besides direct interventions of God, the Bible also knows indirect ones through "messengers," first and foremost Noah, Moses and the prophets. The different branches of Liberation theology repeatedly claim the prophetic function of theology and church.[18] They may not remain silent in the face of poverty and oppression. In the case of supporting liberation movements as it happened in Latin America or South Africa, however, also the question of true and false prophets came up. The Sandinistas after they seized power in Nicaragua (1979), or the Haitian priest and President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (*1953; several times between 1990 and 2004) are often quoted examples.

Feminist Theologian Rosemary Radford-Reuther refers to prophecy as a hermeneutic category. She reads the Bible intertextually using the prophetic-messianic tradition as a straightedge for patriarchal texts in the Bible. Against Mary Daly and other critics she tries to secure the Bible as a liberating text also for women.[19]

• *God Is Present in History through Jesus Christ*

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is again a direct intervention; this time God-self enters in historical circumstances.[20] This incarnation

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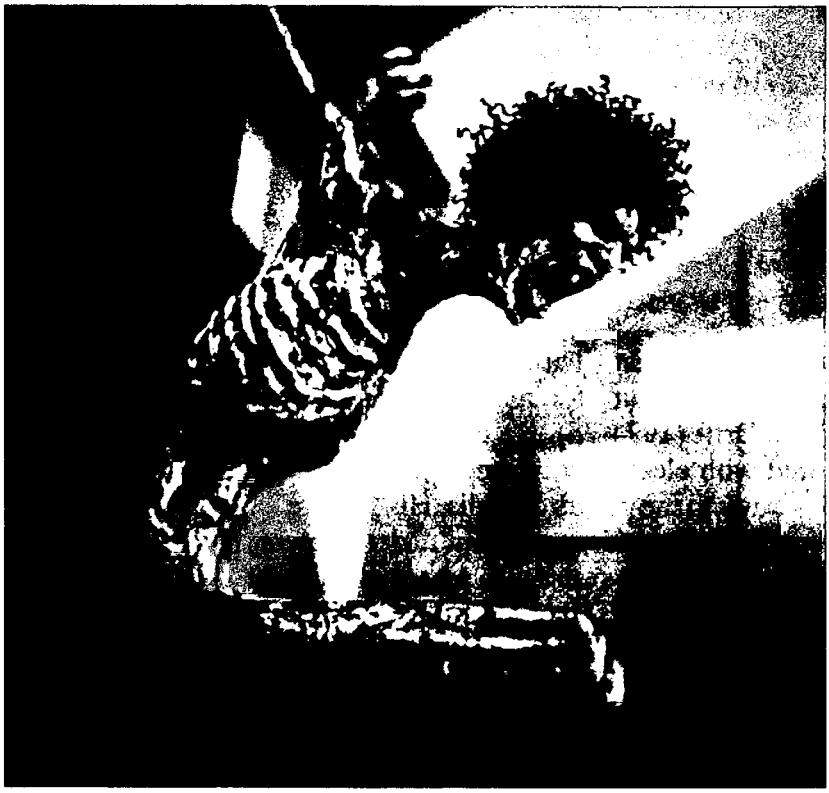
[17] Cf. Kairos Palestine "The Moment of Truth. A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of the Palestinian suffering" (2009); and the writings of Marc H. Ellis from the perspective of a Jewish Theology of Liberation; e.g. id., *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY 1987.

[18] Cf. Guttiérez, *Theology of Liberation*, 10, 69, and 70; Tutu, *Gott*, 86 and 110; Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 2 and 45; id., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xii and 2.

[19] Cf. Küster, *Einführung*, 69f.

[20] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 90 (new creation!), 92, 97, and 104; Boesak, *Innocense*, 13, 41; Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 45 and 48; Cone, *God*, 12, 71, and 90; Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 114; Kim Yong-Bock, Korean Christianity as a Messianic Movement of the People, in: *Minjung Theology*, 98 and 117.

does not spare God from suffering and death on the cross of the Roman Empire (*theologia crucis*), to which the temple aristocracy delivered him. Already during his lifetime Jesus Christ was present in the suffering of the "little people." In the form of the *Christus Praesens*, the poor and oppressed of the earth experience God's presence in the Spirit. This creates a dynamic tension between the "already" and "not yet."[21]



Brazilian artist Guido Rocha, a victim of the military dictatorship (1976-1983), portrays himself as suffering, stemming his body against the cross, while his cry of pain suffocates in his throat (Ill. 1). While in Latin America the influence of Spanish and Portuguese piety of passion is all pervasive, in Africa and Asia on the other hand the belief in a crucified God was for a long time hard to communicate because of their particular cultural-religious traditions. It is to the credit of Black theology in South Africa or South Korean *Minjung* theology to voice the theology of the cross in these contexts in a convincing way.

[21] Cf. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 40 and 126; Küster, *Einführung*, 275-282.

South African artist Charles B. S. Nkosi created a linocut cycle on the theme "Crucifixion" for his final exam at the arts and craft school Rorke's Drift (1974-76). He depicts inter alia a man who seems to be tortured with electricity in a deserted hall (Ill. 2). His hands are fixed with screws to the pillars or walls. His feet are nailed to a crooked pillar. The naked body undressed to an undergarment, partly looking as if x-rayed, is fixed by two straps to a bar bolted to the surrounding architecture at breast height. The head has fallen backward.

In a crucifixion scene from his woodcut cycle "Kwangju" South Korean artist Hong Song-Dam likewise uses his own experiences (Ill. 3). On

the loading platform of a lorry, which can be seen above the torso of the crucified in the lower third of the picture, three lifeless bodies are lying as if hurled down. At a closer look, they bear Jesus' marks of the cross on their hands and feet, while his extremities protrude beyond the image border. On the loading platform and under the lorry, puddles of blood have accumulated. In the background, one can see the mountain range in the vicinity of the city, where the victims of the Kwangju massacre have been hastily buried.

During the short political spring after the assassination of dictator Park Chung-Hee by the head of his secret service in 1979, the democratic forces temporarily gained power over the capital of the Southern Cholla province. Yet soon another military *coup d'état* shook the country and the new regime deployed troops in the interior against its own population. A transfer of the military units from the border to North Korea would not have been possible without the consent of the American supreme command. The soldiers were said to have been drugged. It came to rape and mutilations in public. The government admitted 200 casualties. Human rights organizations estimate at least ten times as much. Hong Song-Dam was an eye-witness of this massacre that still remains traumatic for the population of Kwangju.

The presence of God in the suffering of the people, as it is depicted in the images of Christ by the three artists introduced here, gave them hope against all hope. According to liberation theologies, this is decisive for the relevance of the Christian faith. *Minjung* theologian Hyun Young-Hak is quite outspoken about this:

> As Christians we have to start with the premise that God, as the Lord of History, has worked in and through our history and that God, as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, has a special concern for the underdogs, namely, the *Minjung*. Otherwise, the Christian God would have no place in our history, in the events of our time, or for that matter in the future.[22]

Rosemary Radford-Reuther has put the question of relevance differently from a feminist point of view: Can a male savior save women?[23] Her simultaneous attempt to save the Bible for women through a prophetic-messianic interpretation however makes this in the end sound

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[22] Hyun, A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea, in: *Minjung Theology*, 47-54, 53. Cf. a similar statement by James Cone, *God*, 75: "And if it can be shown that God as witnessed in the Scriptures is not the Liberator of the oppressed, then Black Theology would have either to drop the 'Christian' designation or to choose another starting point."

[23] Rosemary Radford-Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk. Toward a Feminist Theology*, London 1983.

like a rhetorical question. Yet placed in the context of official Catholic teaching, where the argument against admitting women to the priesthood is not least a biological one (Jesus was a man), it becomes obvious that Radford-Reuther exposes the absurdity of this position and the misogynic attitude of church and theology. Dorothee Sölle for her part fundamentally questioned the interpretation of the death of Jesus on the cross as salvific: What kind of father is this, who slaughters his son on the cross?[24]

Women theologians from the Third World were not afflicted by these questions of western feminists; for them, Jesus is a positive identification figure, who has a special relationship with the women in his surroundings that deviates from the patriarchal orientation of ancient societies.[25] The discovery of God's option for the poor and presence in the suffering of the people opens the possibility of a reinterpretation of Jesus' death on the cross beyond conceptions of sacrifice and atonement. Jesus Christ did not die *for* us but *with* us.

• *Jesus Christ Has Overcome Suffering and Death through Resurrection*[26]

South Korean artist Oh Hae-Chang (born 1941) depicts the resurrected Christ as a bearded Korean with long hair and a big smile (Ill. 4). The breast portrait with the hands loosely crossed in front of his belly emphasizes the marks of the cross, the lance wound in his side and the injuries caused by the crown of thorns on the forehead. Behind Jesus, who fills nearly two thirds of the picture, mighty dried-out thorny branches and a sign board with a crossed out smile are visible, an allusion to the military dictatorship, which is already considered overcome here. The blue and white paint on the post that carries the no-laughing sign is reminiscent of a boarder pole. Is this a hint to the still existing communist dictatorship in the other half of the divided country, which shall be overcome by the Easter laughter?

On the occasion of the International Conference of the National Council of Churches for Peace and Reunification in Inchon 1989, Minjung theologian David Suh (Suh Kwang-Sun David) has interpreted the hoped-for reunification of the two Koreas as a resurrection event.

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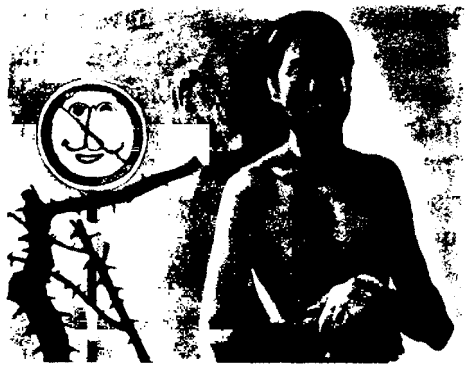
[24] Cf. Dorothee Sölle, *Leiden*, Stuttgart 1973, 39-44.
[25] Cf. Doris Strahm, *Vom Rand in die Mitte. Christologie aus der Sicht von Frauen in Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika*, Luzern 1997.
[26] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 30.



The cross of division under which the people suffer will be overcome in reunification. Suh combines this with the Korean spring (*Hanshik*) and autumn festivals (*Chusok*), which are closely intertwined with the traditional ancestor veneration. Many of the North Korean refugees in the South are longing on these days to be able to visit the tombs of their ancestors in the North.[27]

• *God Invites to Justification and Reconciliation in History through Jesus Christ*[28]

South African artist Azariah Mbatha has pleaded early on for reconciliation between black and white.[29] His linocut "Crucifixion" (Ill. 5) tells a whole story. In the left upper quarter, black and white seem to be separated by a wall; the bitter reality of apartheid. This is different from the scene on the right side, where people are standing mixed-chessboard-like under the cross. The Crucified himself has a black and a white half of face. A black tear runs over his white cheek. In the crucifixion event all divisions are overcome, yet at the same time it keeps the "dangerous memory" of the suffering alive. The two scenes are graphically integrated under a sort of doorway, which is supported in the middle by an ancestor pole on which black and white masks alternate. The lowest one again has a black and a white half of face, yet inverted in comparison to the crucified. Even the tear runs here in white over the black cheek. In African ancestor belief, inversion plays a central role; what is black in this world for example, will be white in the

[27] Cf. Küster, *A Protestant Theology*, 134f.
[28] Cf. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 45 and 143-152; Cone, *God*, 213.
[29] Cf. Theo Sundermeier, *Südafrikanische Passion. Linolschnitte von Azariah Mbatha*, Bielefeld and Wuppertal 1977.

hereafter. Therefore, the white colonizers have initially often been welcomed as the ancestors of the blacks. The lower half of the picture is dominated by a bearded white and a black face. The black guy still doubtfully seems to lend his ear to the white man. Where two or three are gathered in his name, the resurrected, here in the form of an ancestor mask of Jesus Christ, is among them. Against all polemics, Black theology pleaded from its very beginning for a process of reconciliation among the races.

• *The New Human Being Is in Christ*

Liberation theologies of the first hour are driven by an enormous anthropological optimism. Gutiérrez for instance states:

> It means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of humankind as a process of human emancipation in history. It is to see humanity in search of a qualitatively different society in which it will be free from all servitude, in which it will be the artisan of its own destiny. It is to seek the building up of *a new humanity*.[30]

This new humanity is the new human being in Christ. James Cone explicitly states:

> When St. Paul speaks of being 'a new creature' in Christ, the redeemed black man takes that literally. [...] The new black man refuses to assume the It-role

[30] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 56, cf. 21f., 24f., 81, 87, 90, 101, 109, 119, and 121 (anthropophany!).

> which whites expect, [...] Therefore the new black man refuses to speak of love without justice and power.[31]

This new human being was then recognized in Oscar Romero, Archbishop of Recife, who was killed while he was celebrating Mass because of his tireless support of the poor; or South African Student activist Steve Biko who was tortured to death. In South Korea, Chun Tae-Il plays a similar role: a textile worker, who immolated himself in 1971 in the Pyongwha Market in Seoul, to draw attention to the inhuman working conditions of young female textile workers. This event was a wakeup call for many South Korean intellectuals and is often seen as birth-hour of the *Minjung* movement.

The occasional accusation that all this is a deification of human beings can be countered with the long tradition of a Christian theology of martyrdom. All three aforementioned persons have in common that they are modern martyrs, who resisted poverty and oppression at the risk of their life. In their vicarious suffering, the new human being in Christ became visible.[32]

• *God Is in Community*

Latin American Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, in a similar way as Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltmann, focused on the social dimension of the trinity: "In the beginning is the communion of the Three, not the solitude of a One."[33] The basic theological idea is that the relations between the three persons of the trinity (action ad intra: *opere trinitatis ad intra*) and the relations of God triune with the world, God's intervention in history (action ad extra: *opere trinitatis ad extra*) have to be seen in analogy. The *Perichoresis*, the interpenetration of the godly persons, becomes the model for a human community in justice and harmony with the cosmos.

> Black theology has time and again emphasized the importance of the Black church as a place of encounter with God and the black community, which constitutes it: "After being told six days of the week that they were nothings by

[31] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 53, cf. 30 and 137; id, *God*, 31 and 112; Boesak, *Innocence*, 30.

[32] Tutu, *Gott*, 86; Suh, *Han*, 53-58; José Míguez Bonino, *Theologie im Kontext der Befreiung*, Göttingen 1977, 15.

[33] Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, Maryknoll, NY 2000, 1; cf. id., *Trinity and Society*, Maryknoll, NY 1988; Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146 and 150; Míguez Bonino, *Theologie im Kontext der Befreiung*, 76.

> the rulers of white society, on the Sabbath, the first day of the week, black people went to church in order to experience another definition of their humanity."[34]

Yet at the same time there is a just-as-often deplored estrangement between the two.

• *God's Spirit Works in History*[35]
With her rousing performance at the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra 1991, young Korean woman theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung suggested that God's Spirit is present in the spirits of the martyrs, known and unknown, Christian and non-Christian. The question of the distinction of the spirits was raised by the orthodox and evangelical side alike. The confrontation was channeled into a study process on the relationship between Gospel and Culture, which almost seems forgotten today.

The overview demonstrates that Liberation theologians of different contextual backgrounds are connected by a surprisingly coherent web of generative themes in terms of God-talk and Christology: critic regarding patriarchy and gender, but also anti-Judaism, or the colonial heritage of Christianity has been creatively incorporated and digested. These fruitful intercultural exchanges began to fall off in the early 1990s due to the contextual changes and a slow change of generations.

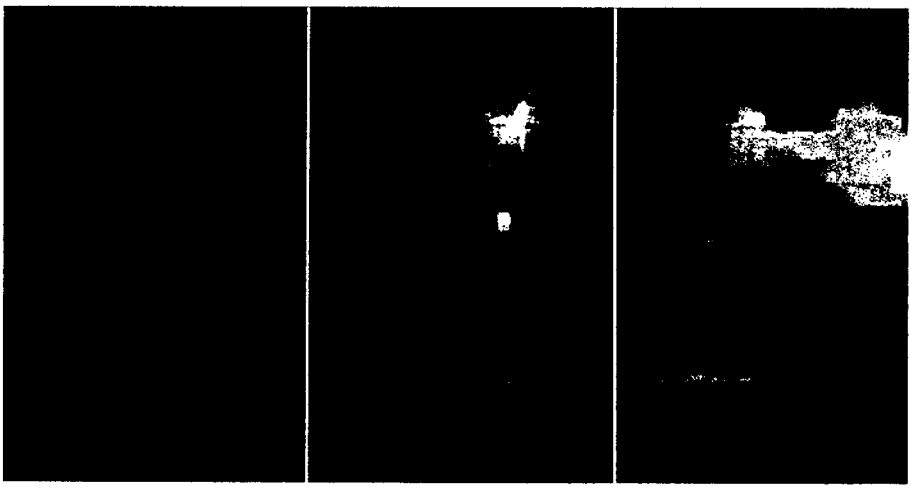
3. Secularization and Desecularization – Contextual Theologies in Transformation

The repeated societal transformations, which were symbolically condensed in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, demand from Liberation theologians the ability to transform their ways of thinking and adapt to the new situation; so far they were able to succeed in different degrees. After the end of most of the oppressive regimes, questions of trauma-healing in post-conflict situations and societal transformation processes are on top of the agenda. At the same time the gap between the rich and the poor is still widening in the complexity of global neo-liberal consumer capitalism, without adequate analytical tools at hand. Further, it is striking that classical theological generative themes like reconciliation, but also the Exodus, reappear in secularized form. They infiltrated

[34] Cone, *God*, 12.
[35] Suh, Historical References, 177.

the secular discourse, without losing necessarily their Christian overtones. In the churches, on the other hand, these generative themes were often neglected, unlike in the turbulent decennia before they fulfilled their societal mandate only hesitantly.

The digital print *(Three Persons) – Exodus* (Ill. 6) by South Korean artist Chung Sanggon that already formally adapts the Christian form of a triptych, depicts apparitional figures in a sort of transit space. The blurred Photo-realism in grey – reminiscent of Gerhard Richter – refers with its secularization of the Exodus theme to the fate of North Korean refugees, a concern that also occupies Korean theology, whether progressive in the tradition of *Minjung* theology, or conservative. Dealing with the North Korean regime or the division of the country is a reverberation of the cold war that still seems to function according to the old pattern.



In the aftermath of the peaceful regime change in South Africa, President Nelson Mandela installed a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC). This was the decision for a third way beyond a tribunal comparable to the one against the perpetrators of the Nazi regime in Nurnberg or a general amnesty. Whoever applied for amnesty, had to confess his or her deeds in front of the commission first. At the same time the TRC created a space where the victims finally could tell the stories about what had been done to them. The reconciliation theme was thereby secularized in a sense. The fact that Nelson Mandela made the black Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu Chair of the commission was politically criticized. Tutu regularly opened the sessions with a prayer and by

so doing created a theological sphere around the hearings; accordingly he reclaimed the reconciliation theme and desecularized it.[36]

The work of the TRC provoked a controversy between Alan Boesak and Desmond Tutu, both Black theologians of the first hour.[37] Boesak criticizes Tutu and the TRC strongly, when he talks about "an almost calculated form of emotional blackmail."

> If you did not forgive your torturer, you were made to feel as if there was something wrong with you. [...] There is a place for rightful anger. [...] So far only forgiveness by the victims has been truly realized. All the other elements without which reconciliation cannot be genuine – restitution, reparation, restoration, justice – are left to languish on the ash heap of the stories, told, listened to, not acted upon, and forgotten.[38]

Tutu argues to the contrary: "If the victim could forgive only when the culprit confessed, then the victim would be locked into the culprit's whim, locked into victimhood, whatever her own attitude or intention."[39] This point of view is supported by the testimonies of the victims. It makes therefore sense to speak about self-reconciliation or self-acceptance, as it is uttered in the slogan "Black is beautiful." Referring to Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalyst Franz Fanon, one of the fathers of postcolonial criticism argued that the victims have internalized the perspective of the oppressors.[40] This determination by others in one's self-perception has to be overcome through self-acceptance, reconciliation with oneself.[41]

Minjung artist Hong Song-Dam, who has already been introduced above, has dealt with his own experiences of torture in an artistic way to overcome his trauma. The first painting of the series "The Twenty Days in Water" shows the naked artist being tied to a chair, drowning in water upside down (Ill. 7). Fishes are swimming around him; next to the chair drifts a rice bowl on the water. Flowers seem to grow from the legs of the chair. The artist relates that he was born on an island, which

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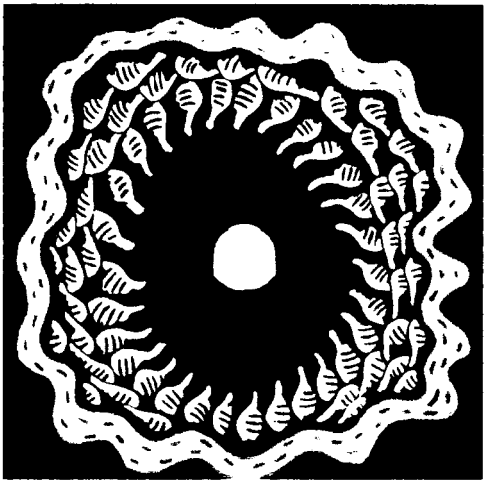
[36] Cf. Tutu, *Gott*, 34; Tutu, *No future*, 71.
[37] Cf. Allan A. Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience. African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics*, Stellenbosch 2005, 173, 175, 185, and 195ff; Tutu, *No future*, 58, 138, 184-189 and 220.
[38] Boesak, *Tenderness*, 195-198.
[39] Tutu, *No future*, 220.
[40] Cf. Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York 1967 [frz. 1952]; id., *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York 1963 [frz. 1961].
[41] This has also been observed by Boesak, *Innocense*, 92f. at an early stage. Cf. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 19f. For Latin Amerika cf. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York 1970 and his concept of "conscientization."

probably can be identified with the one in the background of the picture. When he ran to the beach in the mornings, he saw flowers looming up from the morning fog, which seemed to float on the water. These positive memories of life at and with the water are distorted through the experience of water torture. Hong tries to regain them through his painting. The cycle shows in its further course how the one who is tortured is slowly transformed into a fish. In the seventh and last picture (Ill. 8), this transformation is completed. Two fishes swim around a white rice bowl, a color which symbolizes reconciliation.



With the help of two small pencil portraits drawn by Hong, an investigative TV-program could at least locate one of his former torturers. He declared: 'obviously we have not tortured him enough, if he is still politically active.' Repentance and the wish for forgiveness seem to be a long time coming.[42]

Johann Baptist Metz talks in this connection about a "soteriological circle," "in which too quickly [...] the biblical quest for justice for the innocent sufferers is changed into the question of redemption of the perpetrators."[43] Often the latter receive faster redemption than justice which is done to the victims. The default of reparations for injustice suffered, and the accompanying economic loss, was a big disappointment not only in South Africa. It remains a pressing theme in societal reconciliation processes that has not been thought through theologically yet.

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[42] Cf. Volker Küster, *Gott/Terror. Ein Diptychon*, Frankfurt a.M. 2009.
[43] Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Freiburg etc. 2006, 10.

4. Contextual Theologies in Times of Globalization and Empire

While the neo-conservative myth of the end of Liberation theologies was successful, in the sense that they have been removed from the curricula of European theological faculties, the international discussion has never stopped. Considering the consequences of globalization and the lasting economic crisis or 9/11 and the new wars in the world risk society,[44] the time seems to be ripe for a "revisiting" of the classical texts as well as a review of the transformation processes which already have taken place – as it has been exemplified here through the understanding of God and history in the theologies of liberation. According to the theory of contextual theology, for which continuous change is programmatic – the hermeneutic circle between text and context is a perpetuating one – it cannot be the goal to canonize the classics. They rather undergo a *relecture* in the light of the contextual changes: what – besides the method itself – proves still to be helpful in the altered circumstances? What possibilities of transformation arise?

The contextual theologies emerged somewhere on the threshold of modernity and post-modernity respectively: second modernity. They incorporate the universal generative themes of class, race and gender and are compatible with discourses on democratization and human rights. At the same time, they interrupt the great narratives and collect the stories of the "little people," which they intertwine with the biblical stories. The cultural-religious *bricolage* of the diverse identity discourses, which surfaces in this process, adds to the new complexity. Yet simultaneously the manner in which the phenomena subsumed above under the catchword "world risk society" are analyzed, points to a return of the great narratives. This was already implied in the "clash of civilizations" proclaimed by Samuel Huntington, and has been developed exemplarily in the Empire theory of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri that in the meantime has outgrown into a trilogy.[45] When the authors introduce love as a central category, they sound like a secularized theology of liberation, which refers to the 'Love communism of early

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[44] Cf. Ulrich Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft. Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sicherheit*, Frankfurt a.M. 2007.

[45] Cf. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2000; id., *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2004; id., *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, MA 2009; further id., *Declaration*, New York 2012.

Christianity'. This stands in strange contrast to their otherwise rather negative attitude towards religion.

In their "theology of the multitude"[46] Kwok Pui-Lan and Joerg Rieger respond to these signs of the times with the appeal: "Occupy Religion!" The authors see the Occupy movement in the tradition of the civil rights movement (1) and other preceding emancipatory movements. "Throughout the history of the United States [...] religion has been deeply involved with progressive movements, such as the abolitionist movement, the suffragist movement, the civil rights movements, the peace movement, and the labor movement (25)." Yet "in the past three decades in the United States, faith-based politics has been dominated by the Religious Right (48)." Kwok and Rieger want to remind adherents of their own religion, Christianity, but also the other religions, not only about their inherent liberation traditions and their sense of justice, but to occupy them and force them to repent.[47] Even if Kwok and Rieger have a universal and interreligious claim, they first of all sketch a contextual Christian theology for North America. They don't shy away from the comparison with the *Kirchenkampf* of the confessing church against the German Christians, who were infected by the Nazi ideology (26). Any attempt "to organize religious communities like corporations (Ibid.)" as in the mega-churches with their pastors, who understand themselves as CEOs, leads to a new dance around the golden calf in the spirit of neoliberal capitalism.

In their analysis, Kwok and Rieger destabilize at first the self-confidence of the middle class with their statement, "there is no safe place in the middle (16)." The new class boarder runs today between the 99% and the 1% (20). What the 99 percent "have in common is that the economy is working less and less to our benefit and that our voices matter less and less in all areas of life (Ibid.)." As a consequence, the authors plead for a "deep solidarity." The divisions in "[class], race, ethnicity and gender have been used for the benefit of the system (69)" and have to be transformed into a "unity in diversity (27)," which finds its expression in a "direct and participatory democracy (37)." Referring to Arjun Apaduraj, Kwok and Rieger ascribe "public intellectuals and progressive academics" a role as organic intellectuals, who can put their knowledge and their networks in the service of the movement (34f.).

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[46] Cf. Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Occupy Religion. Theology of the Multitude*, Lanham etc. 2012 (page references in the text).

[47] For similar tendencies in Judaism, Islam and Buddhism cf. Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 50-52.

Theologically they explicitly refer to the legacy of liberation theologies (59), especially South Korean *Minjung* theology. New Testament scholar Ahn Byung-Mu has declared the *Ochlos* in the gospel of Mark, an amorphous group of members of the lower echelon of society in changing composition, which has Jesus' direct attention, as a group of reference for the *Minjung*, the poor and oppressed. Such a Christology "from below (95)," as it is frequently called, does not leave behind the godliness for the humanness.[48] The Jesus movement, as well as the contemporary Occupy movement, is based on inter-human relationships (63f.). The human beings are subjects of their own history and not "another service project (78)." Consequently, as a further generative theme, Trinity in its communal interpretation is taken up (66). In line with the orientation towards relevance of the theologies of liberation, Kwok and Rieger write: "If our response to where God is at work is 'Nowhere in particular,' then let us stop bothering with the God question right here and now (87)." Otherwise, this applies: "We invite all those who believe in the subversive and transforming power of the God incarnate into the conversation of 'occupy religion' (9)."

Piece by piece, the argumentation patterns of Liberation theologies reconstructed in the course of this article recur in Kwok and Rieger's manifesto. Even the interreligious dimension (71) was already intertwined with Liberation theology in the 1980s by Sri Lankan Jesuit priest Aloysius Pieris and Paul Knitter in the West.[49] Not only the method, but also many of the theological generative themes are still of relevance even under the alternate contextual circumstances. Some have been modified and diversified, as in the reception of the Exodus story or the *Ochlos*. In the first case, the liberation experience of some has been debunked as new injustice for others. In the case of the *Ochlos*, a group of people that had been seen as relatively homogenous was recognized in its diversity.

"Deep solidarity" aims at producing social cohesion, where before boundaries between groups have been erected. This is again already a

[48] Cf. Volker Küster, *Jesus und das Volk im Markusevangelium. Ein Beitrag zum interkulturellen Gespräch in der Exegese*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1996.
[49] Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY 1988; Paul Knitter, Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions, in: id. and John Hick (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralist Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, NY 1987, 178-200.

step further than "multiple belonging" and deterritorialization postulated in connection with the global re-orientation.[50] While this still implied multiple belonging as well inside the multi-cultural immigration societies as between home country and Diaspora, Kwok and Rieger think in temporary network structures, which continuously constitute themselves anew due to comparable experiences of marginalization and exploitation. This temporary dimension is compatible with the category of event especially emphasized by *Minjung* theology. The subjects, who are hybrid in their cultural identity, constitute history continuously new in particular liberation events, in which in Christian terms the presence of God can be experienced. Adherents of other religions may discover in such events their own mythological surplus. While deep solidarity could be a shared experience, the different interpretations of history are a subject matter for interreligious dialogue.

[50] Cf. Küster, *Einführung*, 92.