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THEOLOGIES OF LIFE

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Aim and Scope

Reformed World is an international journal that provides a forum for sharing and debating theological studies and prophetic witness that seek to engage and transform the realities of our time. The journal draws on, widens and deepens the treasures of Reformed sources, past and present. *Reformed World* purposefully and joyfully embodies a diversity of voices and contextual perspectives, inspired by ecclesial, academic and grassroots communities. In the understanding of *Reformed World*, theological studies are an intersectional and interdisciplinary conversation that includes biblical, historical, systematic, constructive, and practical studies, as well as reflections on visual art, music, poetry, and other expressions of the human mind and soul that aim at the transformation of the world.

In doing so, *Reformed World* is committed to the mission of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to be a global *koinonia*, covenanting for justice, and marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together. The journal also strives to receive impulses from and give impulses to the wider ecumenical movement, working together with all the partners God provides.

Reformed World is published by the WCRC. The WCRC is comprised of 100 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting, and Waldensian churches. The WCRC, working with its 230+ member churches, is active in supporting theology, justice, church unity, and mission in over 105 countries.

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Editorial

Dear readers of the Reformed World,

It is with joy that we resume the publication of the Reformed World. The WCRC has been experiencing staff shortages, which have forced us to postpone work on the journal.

We will resume the publication with volume 71, which will be backdated to 2025. Next to the issue on the Theology of Life, which pays tribute to the work of Kim Yong-Bock, we will also publish an issue on "Theologies of Mobility Addressing Global Migration". As from volume 72 (two issues on proceedings of the 2025 General Council in Chiang Mai), we will continue with the bi-annual schedule of publication

To ensure a robust publication process, we have restructured production, giving the Editorial Board a stronger role in planning and overseeing the publication of Reformed World issues. We welcome Henry Kuo (Convener), Margit Ernst Habib, Dario Barolin, Jenne Pieter, Rathnakara Sadananda, Victoria Turner, Lilian Siwila, Miriam Spies, Gerardo Oberman, Sukyi Pang, Robert Vosloo, Fraser Tauaivale, Carmen Lansdowne, and Ruben Rosario Rodriguez as members of the Editorial Board and express our appreciation in the process to resume the publication of the Reformed World.

Hanns Lessing, Executive Secretary for Communion and Theology

Henry Kuo, Convener of the Editorial Board

The Editorial Board has reviewed the Aim and Scope of the Reformed World and resolved the following text:

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deepens the treasures of Reformed sources, past and present. Reformed World purposefully and joyfully embodies a diversity of voices and contextual perspectives, inspired by ecclesial, academic and grassroots communities. In the understanding of the Reformed World, theological studies are an intersectional and interdisciplinary conversation that includes the biblical, historical, systematic, constructive, and practical, as well as reflections on visual art, music, poetry, and other expressions of the human mind and soul that aim at the transformation of the world.

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Introduction

By Hanns Lessing

This issue of the Reformed World is dedicated to the theological legacy of Kim Yong-Bock and to the continuing relevance of Minjung theology in a world marked by ecological crisis, economic injustice, war, trauma, and the fragmentation of communal life. In October 2022, the first Reformed Ecumenical Symposium in Rome brought together diverse voices from Reformed, ecumenical, feminist, and liberationist perspectives. The contributions to this conference revisited Kim Yong-Bock's theology not as a closed historical project but as a living and evolving theological grammar for discerning life amidst structures of death.

At the centre of these essays stands a common conviction: theology begins not from abstraction but from the lived experiences of peoples and communities struggling for life. Kim Yong-Bock's insistence that the Minjung are subjects of history rather than objects of analysis remains foundational throughout this collection. Yet the essays also demonstrate how his theology expanded beyond its original socio-political framework toward a broader theology of life capable of addressing the intertwined crises of global capitalism, ecological destruction, technological domination, militarism, and cultural exclusion.

Jin Kwan Kwon's contribution, "From Social Biography to Zoegraphy," traces the theological development of Kim Yong-Bock from classical Minjung theology toward his later articulation of "zoegraphy," an integral understanding of life that embraces human, ecological, biological, and cosmic dimensions. Kwon shows how Kim's theology evolved from the "social biography" of oppressed peoples toward a vision of the interconnected "webwork of life," while still retaining the liberative and justice-oriented impulses of Minjung theology. In doing so, the essay highlights Kim's attempt to move beyond anthropocentrism toward a

theology attentive to the suffering of the whole creation under global empire and ecological collapse.

Lee Hong-Jung's paper, "People as the Pivot of Missio Dei," situates Kim Yong-Bock's Minjung hermeneutics within the wider horizon of Korean religious and philosophical traditions. Drawing on Tonghak, Buddhism, Confucianism, Chungsan thought, and the March First Independence Movement, Lee presents a people-centred understanding of missio Dei in which the people become the locus of God's liberating action in history.
The essay demonstrates how Kim's theology envisioned a convergence of liberative spiritualities oriented toward justice, peace, and the "household of life" (*oikoumene*), thereby opening Minjung theology toward interreligious and global horizons.

In "Remembering the God of Life," Henry S. Kuo places Kim Yong-Bock in conversation with Johann Baptist Metz's theology of "dangerous memory." Against the backdrop of war, neoliberal capitalism, climate catastrophe, and post-pandemic instability, Kuo argues that the Minjung are custodians of memories of suffering that interrupt systems of privilege and technocratic power. Theology, therefore, becomes an act of remembering the cries of the oppressed and resisting the normalisation of injustice. Kuo further interprets the Accra Confession as a contemporary confessional expression of this prophetic remembrance.

Finally, Pauline Patricia's "Witnessing to a God of Life" extends Minjung theology into the terrain of embodiment, trauma, gender, disability, and mental health. Through autobiographical reflection and engagement with feminist and trauma theology, Patricia argues that vulnerable and wounded bodies are themselves sites of theological witness. Her essay challenges patriarchal, clerical, ableist, and ageist structures within church and society while proposing an embodied theology rooted in healing, vulnerability, and the sustaining presence of the Spirit amid suffering.

Taken together, these essays testify to the continuing vitality of Kim Yong-Bock's theological vision. They reveal Minjung theology not simply as a contextual Korean theology of democratisation, but as a broader theological project concerned with life against death, memory against erasure,

embodiment against abstraction, and communion against domination. In a world increasingly shaped by ecological devastation, technological control, widening inequality, and social fragmentation, this issue invites readers to reconsider what it means to witness to the God of life today.

From Social Biography to Zoegraphy: A Theological Journey of Dr. Kim Yong-Bock

By Jin Kwan Kwon

Dr. Kim Yong-Bock (1937-2022) was one of the major pioneers of *Minjung* theology (*Minjung* is a Korean term meaning ordinary people). Dr. Kim's journey of theology and ecumenical movement can be characterized as a journey from social biography to zoegraphy. As Dr. Kim was the youngest of the first-generation *Minjung* theologians, his passing ends the first *Minjung* theology; *Minjung* theology is now entering a new era of its history. His theological journey can be divided into two phases, to both of which he made significant contributions: *Minjung* theology and the theology of life. The latter is not disconnected from the first. The core ideas of *Minjung* theology are still operative in his theology of life.

As I started to write this article, I encountered a book written by Japanese sociologist Saito Kohei entitled 지속불가능 자본주의 (*Unsustainable Capitalism, Das Kapital in the Anthropocene*).[1] This work reminded me of a certain idea, not new but still very relevant to the major content of this article, that the capitalist drive of unlimited economic growth is the root cause of the destruction of the environment and the poverty of the weak sectors of the world.

The Social Biography of *Minjung*

The social biography of *Minjung* is a key idea of Dr. Kim. For him, *Minjung* are, most of all, subjects, not objects. *Minjung* are actors and speakers; they are agents who are participants in society and history. *Minjung* are the tellers of their stories. They create history as they participate in crucial moments and phases in history. For example, the *Donghak* peasant revolution against

[1] Saito Kohei, 지속불가능 자본주의 (*Unsustainable Capitalism: Das Kapital in the Anthropocene*), trans. Kim Young-Hyun (Tokyo: Shueisha, 2020).

the Korean feudal system and Japanese imperialism in the late nineteenth century was a typical historical event by the *Minjung*, who were poor peasants and ordinary people.

The March First Movement against the Japanese imperialist occupation of Korea in 1919 was *Minjung's* collective actions to restore the independence of Korea. *Minjung* and religious groups including Christianity, the Heavenly Way (*Donghak* religion), Buddhism, and Confucianism were involved in this *Minjung* movement to change history. Many casualties and imprisonments of *Minjung* and their leaders followed. In 1975, the name of *Minjung* theology appeared in Korea. In the 1970s, huge numbers of industrial workers were created by the industrialization of modern Korea, and their poor working and living conditions demanded a call for justice for the *Minjung*. Ahn Byung-Mu, another major *Minjung* theologian, once commented that underneath a nation's struggle for independence and democracy, a collective group to carry out incessant struggles were the deprived and underprivileged people, the *Minjung*, and they have played the role of Christ the liberator in Korean history.

Minjung are protagonists and heroes. They are not objects for social scientists to analyze and for the haves to exploit. The social biography of *Minjung* refers to the stories of *Minjung* told by *Minjung* in relation to others in context. The social biography of *Minjung* symbolizes the idea that *Minjung* are subjects, not objects in history and society.

Dr. Kim's understanding of *Minjung* as subjects who tell and write their own socio-biographies reveals his wish to view *Minjung* as active participants and agents. This understanding of *Minjung* leads to his idea of the subjecthood of *Minjung* in history and society. He demands us understand the *Minjung* as agents of activities and as changers of history, and discourages us from viewing them as objects to be analyzed, taught, and commanded. Dr. Kim believes that stories told by *Minjung* themselves show their subjecthood in the arena of history and society. For Dr. Kim, social sciences and other disciplines are not competent in showing them all, but only socio-biography is. He sometimes includes fictional stories and folk tales in his socio- biography.

Dr. Kim supposes that powers that treat *Minjung* as objects are technocracy, militarism, totalitarianism, military-industrial complex, transnational corporations, and Empire. To fight these enemies, *Minjung* must practice messianic politics by non-violent and self-emptying, suffering action. Technocracy is the most widespread power in modernity. It is a combination of technology, sciences, and bureaucracy. The power of technocracy is dominant over *Minjung* and all other creation. Now in this post-modern era, technocracy has come under the power of the global Empire. In the age of global markets and Empire, not only *Minjung* but all living beings are at the brink of total destruction. He starts to talk about life instead of *Minjung*, because the idea of *Minjung* cannot represent the whole creation suffering under the rule of the destructive global market and Empire. Regarding the global imperial power, he even says that the global geo-political power has shifted "from Bi-polar Geo-politics to Mono-polar Geopolitics: The Hegemony of the Global Empire."[2] But it is obvious that the globe has already entered into the Third World War, as we see the war in Ukraine. The globe is not monolithically controlled by a mono-polar global empire, the U.S. There are global powers competing and conflicting against one another.

However, the crisis of climate change and natural disaster has become a common issue that must be dealt with by all sectors of the world. This is the reason why liberation and *Minjung* theologies must create discourses and narratives that not only relate socio-economic structural problems to the problems of ecological crisis and life issues, but address concretely the problems poor people face in this capitalism. The current capitalist ways of production and consumption are the root cause of poverty, hunger, and climate change. Capitalism increases the production of CO2, the cause of global warmth, and the gap between the poor and the rich.

How can we balance between the structural problems of *Minjung*, the poor, and the ecological crisis of the world? The temperature increase has already reached the target degree, but reduction of the CO2 production is not yet in view. Because climate change affects agriculture and fisheries, poor sectors engaging in such traditional industries are in crisis, which makes the poor

[2] Kim Yong-Bock, "The Origin, History and Future of Minjung Theology—An Outline," 18. *Madang: International of Contextual Theology*, August, 2022.

poorer. High-tech, robotic industries and financial capitals in rich countries are not much affected by climate change, and they are the motors of unlimited and rapid economic growth. Liberal capitalism destroys the life of the poor and creation.

The climate catastrophe does not affect the poor and the rich equally. The poor in the global south are the most affected. Recent floods in Pakistan are an example. Wikipedia reports, "Since June 14, 2022, floods in Pakistan have killed 1,678 people. The floods were caused by heavier than usual monsoon rains and melting glaciers that followed a severe heat wave, all of which are linked to climate change. It is the world's deadliest flood since the 2017 South Asian floods and described as the worst in the country's history.… The government of Pakistan has estimated losses worth US$40 billion from the flooding."[3] One third of the country was underwater, and there was no dry land to pump the water out. In other parts of the world, many lands in oceanic countries are sinking as the sea level rises. Some nations can be wholly wiped out by water sooner or later. Wildfires in California and heat waves and droughts in Europe are a few effects of climate change in 2022. More catastrophes will follow in the days and years to come.

Zoegraphy and the study of life

Dr. Kim explained why he began to develop the idea of zoegraphy as follows:

> My development of zoegraphy comes from *Minjung* theology, but even more, it is a rejection of the Western individual concept of self, reductionist and controlling, dividing humans and nature. Native Americans understand humans and nature as one.[4]

Minjung theology as a political theology has been anthropocentric. It has dealt with the social and political problems of *Minjung* (people). In *Minjung* political theology during the movement for democratization in Korea, the socio-*bio*graphy of *Minjung* was a major point of reference for *Minjung*

[3] "2022 Pakistan Floods," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Pakistan_floods#cite_note-D_1545-5

[4] Kim Yong-Bock's unpublished manuscript, "APAY 35th Advanced Studies Programme, Kim Yong-Bock Lectures, November 9-9, 2017," 5.

theology. The term *bio* is more political and social than the term *zoe.* Kim Yong-Bock uses the term *zoe for* inhuman (and human) affairs, while *bio* is a term for human affairs. Kim Yong-Bock explains thus:

> We have used the social biography in reference to the story of the *Minjung* to express the social and community dimension of the subjecthood of the *Minjung*. The *zoe*graphy is used here in reference to an integral study of the whole life (living being), which involves biological and ecological as well as social and cultural dimensions of life.[5]

In the age of global Empire or global capitalism, the life of the whole creation including *Minjung* are under the threat of destruction. Climate change and the pandemic signal such destruction. *Minjung* theology has to change itself and become a theology of life. Life and ecology have become imperative categories for *Minjung* theology. Life and ecology are organically connected with the traditional themes of *Minjung* theology, e.g., liberation and justice. Without considering life as a major issue, *Minjung* theology cannot touch on the real issues of *Minjung*. Many statistics and research studies prove that poor *Minjung* are more vulnerable to ecological disasters. Then, we must account for what unique contributions *Minjung* theology can make to the issues of life.

Dr. Kim once wrote: "When the *Minjung* theological reflection was unfolding in the 1970s, the primary focus was the society of nation states. The *Minjung* was understood in terms of the structure of the nation state in its modern and capitalist development. The Cold War situation has affected its thinking very much. In the twenty-first century, however, the context is radically changed in global terms. This may be described and analyzed in terms of the globalization and the global empire."

Such a change has been made by the globalization of markets and the emergence of the global Empire. Under this globalized power life is threatened to death. Dr. Kim reiterates the situation by such terms as

[5] From Kim Yong-Bock's unpublished paper, "The Study of Life in Doing Theology: Overcoming the Forces of Death."

thanatography (story of death). To counter thanatography, Dr. Kim employs such ideas as zoegraphy and zoesophia. Zoesophia is the wisdom of life, which can be found in both East and West religions and thoughts. He emphasizes that the zoesophia is rich in the Eastern religions and thoughts such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. He suggests that the convergence of those religions and thoughts will bring forth a genuine *zoe*sophia.

According to zoesophia, all beings on earth, human or nonhuman, organic or inorganic, are in close relationship. All beings are not thing-objects, but body-subjects. Life is not only specific to the human and animal world, but it is the most essential factor constitutive of humans, animals, plants, rocks, and other things, organic and inorganic. They form the "webwork of life." Life lives in this web, communion of bodies-subjects, and their relationality. Life is lived in people in this wider web of life. For Dr. Kim, the universe is first of all a communion of subjects in the subject-subject relationship, not a collection of objects. Dr. Kim views the universe and life as unknown and as a mystery, and he envisions the Messianic feast of life as the final destination of all beings. It is *oikonomia convivencia*, the new heaven and new earth, the new garden of life, *oikonomia tou zoe*, which is life together, *sangsaeng*.

Zoegraphy can be defined, following Van den Hengel, as: "a mode of writing life…, which centers on the generative vitality of *zoe*, an inhuman, impersonal, and inorganic force which… is not specific to human lifeworlds, but cut across humans, animals, technologies, and things."[6] Again, Dr. Kim says that death also lives through all this connective relationality. It is the thanatography as opposed to the zoegraphy. For example, sea squirts consume plastics and are then eaten by fish, which are eaten by humans. Some scientists say that we might "be ingesting the mass of a credit card's worth of microplastic a year" by inhaling and eating.[7] The amount of plastics produced every year is skyrocketing on top of existing plastics landfills. It

[6] Louis van den Hengel, "Zoegraphy: Per/forming Posthuman Lives," *Biography* vol. 35, number 1, Winter 2012, DOI: 10.1353/bio.2012.0003

[7] XiaoZhi Lim, "Microplastics Are Everywhere—But Are They Harmful?" *Nature*, May 4, 2021, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01143-3

is a timebomb for the future generations, because studies find it toxic and harmful for living organisms.

Life or *zoe* (and death) is a key idea for the understanding of the bleak reality of human and non-human life. But when it comes to the issue of the recovery of the ecological integrity, *bio* becomes the key for action for it. Only human subjects can turn things around. Subjects can be divided into strong ones and weak ones. A strong subject is one who transcends her own limitations, while a weak subject is a subject that is in relation with other subjects affecting each other. When Dr. Kim talks about the universe as the communion of subjects, I believe that he speaks about weak subjects. Inter-relationality presupposes individual beings and individual subjects. Following Kim Yong-Bock we can see all beings in the world as subjects, and I would add that a certain segment of them are strong subjects who are capable of transcending themselves and turning things around. Not all humans can become strong subjects. Most humans are weak subjects, and they live the *normal* way of the present world. All other beings of the world, we call them nature as a whole, may also be seen as weak subjects. Weak subjects can be changed to revolutionary and strong subjects at a certain moment. Ordinary people—weak subjects—can be changed to revolutionary *Minjung* at an eventual moment. Natural beings can become strong subjects to turn everything around, like the recent pandemic and the climate change.

Life as the Subjects?

I quote Kim Yong-Bock in relation to the subjecthood of life:

> Whole life is a dynamic, intelligible web-work of the infinite reproductive and productive activities of living beings. As Lovelock has asserted, the earth as GAIA is a whole living being. This whole living being is a subject with unknown dimensions.
>
> The productive and reproductive dynamics of birth and rebirth are an elaborate, holistic network of mutual cooperation and common life. Here the subject of life is not individualistic or fragmentary but a convivial entity. The subjectivity of any living being should be understood in terms of the close, organic cooperation of its cells

> and genes at the micro-level; the symbiosis of living beings; and the interaction of organic and inorganic elements. Any living being is a subject in this complex matrix of "common life, cooperation and co-existence." Yet it is a mystery. It is a mystery that life is the subject, not the object, of its being.[8]

And,

> But we are looking for an answer for an integral and holistic understanding of life. We are rejecting any understanding of life that is reductionist, fragmentary and compartmentalized. Life is known through its story. The story of life is the best way to describe the way the life lives. The underlying assumption is that **the life is not object, but the subject**.
>
> This has two important understandings of life. The life is not to be fragmented and reduced as minutest parts; and its subjecthood is in **the whole of the living being**, not in the part of the living body. This means that the whole of the living being constitutes the subjecthood. The subjecthood of life does not abide in the particle of the living being. The subject abides in the whole being of life.[9]

Who are the subjects that play the role of agents to counteract the global capitalism that creates poverty, climate change, and other ecological crises? Dr. Kim announces that "life is the subject," and furthermore, "the subjecthood of life does not abide in the particularity of the living being. The subject abides in the whole being of life." Dr. Kim focuses on the whole life rather than individual life/lives. The single whole life matters. But I wonder if such whole life exists in reality. I can imagine, following Dr. Kim, that life is something that cuts across all the creation. *Zoe* is non- and pre-human vitality, *elan vital*, vital force, *ruach* in Hebrew, or *qi* in Korean. *Zoe* is the common vital element in the universe and all (in-)organisms. In contrast, *bio* refers to human life in the *polis*. Dr. Kim announces that *zoe* is a "force

[8] Kim Yonb-Bock's unpublished paper, "The study of life in doing theology: overcoming the forces of death"

[9] "Zoesophia: Integral Study of Life," Zoesophia 1101, https://zoesophia1101.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-story-of-life-zoegraphy.html.

of inhuman vitality that runs through humans, animals, and things, and connects them transversally."[10]

Dr. Kim declares the life force as the real subject to counter the power of global capitalism. He no longer says that humans are the subjects to counter it, because he believes that the life force is the genuine power to countervail the powers of death, global capitalism and Empire. For Kim Yong-Bock, life is the real representative of all organic and inorganic creation. Humans including the *Minjung* cannot be the authentic representative of the whole creation. The exploitation of nature has been so intense that nature has lost the resilience that enables it to return to its integrity. More hurricanes and typhoons, more drought and heat waves have become common.

But I think there is a tricky problem when we put the subjecthood on life. Subjecthood by definition goes only with human beings, the only species with the capacity to transcend themselves. Are only embodied humans the subjects in history and in the cosmos? Why is it the case? Although Dr. Kim Yong-Bock considers life a unitary subject, life by itself lacks something very essential: the body. Life exists in beings. It is common sense that life cannot be a subject without the body, and therefore we can say that the earth is the body of life. The Gaia theory is an attempt to make the earth a gigantic subject. Regarding life as an authentic subject and agent that would fight against global Empire and capitalism seems unrealistic. I think we need a more feasible idea of the subject. Dr. Kim shows his concern and hesitance about employing the idea of life as subject in the following observations.

> If life (*zoe*) is objectified, minimized, fragmented, and reduced to some fundamental elements, then life becomes non-intelligible (a phantasm). This is like presenting life as the body. Speaking of life instead of the body, a wholistic one, (however,) the individuality can be lost. Then the real base of life can be weakened. Life, as a word, can represent the unreal being. Like Being, the biography of the being? The reason for employing the language of life: to speak of the anti-life powers. That is the binarism of conflictual contradictions. Like Augustine's binarism of the *Civitas Dei vs. Civitas Terrena*."

[10] Ibid., 8.

Dr. Kim adopts the language of life in order to fight the language of death. He opposes the webwork of life to the network of death and destruction following Augustine's opposition between the City of God and the City of the Earth.

My question at this moment is: Can human beings become the subjects or co-subjects of life? Humans as co-subjects to fight against the culprit of destroying life: the global capitalism and global powers. These global powers kill the life of the environment by expediting the global competition for more economic, political, and military power. The ideology of unlimited economic growth is behind the global competition to dominate others. Such ideology has been created and practiced by the fear of losing in wars and competitions and of being dominated by others.

The Body and the Subject

Dr. Kim seems not to want to grant subjecthood to humans but to life itself. He seems to point to the ill effects of the role humans play in the destruction of the creation. Human civilization is regarded as a cancer that will lead the whole world to death. The body constitutes an essential part of the subjecthood. The embodied-ness of humans corrects the human civilization that drives unlimited growth in some significant ways. First, the bodily existence of human subjects awakens us that humans as bodies participate in the whole network of life, although the human subject has been inflicting havoc on the life of nature. Humans as bodies do not live on their own, and they cannot live without sound relationship with non-human beings in the world. Second, the body of the human subject points to its creatureliness and its finiteness and limits. The finiteness and limitations of the human body does not fail the subjecthood of the human. The finiteness and limitations of the human body tell the truth about the human. The embodied-ness of the human subject must be seen as a source of a real subjecthood. All creatures have bodies, and having a body is not a limit but a new possibility. The late *Minjung* theologian Suh Nam-Dong contrasted the language of the body as opposed to the language of the head, which was for him the discourse of the dominant classes.

Then, how can we understand the body in relation to subjectivity? The body is an organic substance that can assume subjecthood. Culture and technique are produced by the human ability to speak and use language. Thus, the body is, first of all, affected by human language (and discourse). The body is affected by another element, which is the spirit of the truth (God).

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). The sons of God are the subjects of history. In the New Testament, the human body-subject (the *soma*) is affected by two powers or two languages: the spirit and the letter (the law). The spirit of truth has the power to reveal real humanity (the truth of life), while the law represents the language and power of death and destruction. Apostle Paul says, "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God" (Galatians 2:19). "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31). "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6). "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

"Our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). The human body (*soma*) as a neutral matter could be bound either to the law or to the spirit, in other words, to two opposite types of language and power. Our thinking can also be under the power of the law and the spirit. Thus, the thinking of the people is always ambiguous.

Speech controls our thinking. Our thinking is constituted by speech. The material of speeches is language.[11] Speech is not simply a medium for learning, thinking, desiring, or communicating, but it is a source of them. Speech thinks, and we respond to the speech of others. Speech is composed of stories, narratives, and discourse. Language as a general category consists in all human achievements and constructions including tradition, culture, and diverse discourses. The product of language, human civilization is

[11] Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and philosopher, sees language as matter and material, which makes sense to me.

always ambiguous, as language (and discourse) itself is ambiguous. (See the story of the Babel Tower.)

If the body is overwritten and affected by the dominant language (discourse and narrative), then this body becomes a reactionary subject. If the body adopts the Spirit of truth, then the body will become sons of God, truthful subjects of transformation and revolution, who create new things, new Heaven and new Earth. We may also consider the status of the body as one totally dissociated from language.[12] The body is not simply the object of language and affected by the language, it becomes a source of a new language, which breaks up the dominant structure. This is why philosophy and theology in the post-pandemic age starts to look to the body as a focus and key for the new perspective. Such a totally separated body, an animal body, is an organism, an organic body, the biological matter.

In the time of the pandemic, we need to view the human body as an animal body and matter, which is no longer swayed by dominant language and discourse, which constructs the current dominant structure. We have to give full respect and independence to the matter and the organic body. Such a full respect for the matter and objects in the world is necessary for doing justice to the suffering organic bodies in the pandemic and to all objects and creations in the age of climate change. Giorgio Agamben, the Italian philosopher, argues that the separation of "bare life" from social life is "the most shocking element of the new cult established by medicine-as-religion."[13] For Agamben, social life matters. It is more essential than the bare life. That is why he demands for social life, even when social distancing and other related measures are necessary to save the lives of individual bodies. But, in the pandemic times, the bare life by itself matters. In order to save the bare life of the bodies, social life needs to be controlled. The law (social life, in this case) kills the life of the organic body, but the spirit gives life.(2 Cor. 3:6)

[12] Verhaeghe, P., "Subject and Body: Lacan's Struggle with the Real," in *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive,* https://paulverhaeghe.psychoanalysis.be/artikels/Subject%20and%20body.pdf, 9.

[13] Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now? The Pandemic as Politics*, trans. V. Dani (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 64.

For Dr. Kim, *zoe* is a mysterious entity, and it does not belong to individual bodies. It belongs to the whole of living beings. Thus, the conclusion of Dr. Kim's logic is the disappearance of the body in his theory of subject. An entity with no body, the *Qi*, the divine breath of life, has become the subject who fights against the powers of destroying life.

Further, Dr. Kim argues that the subjecthood lies in the whole of the living being.[14] This means that life is in living beings, but the subjecthood of life (*zoe*) is not in each individual being, but only in the whole of living beings. Individual living beings do not have subjecthood.

A big question to be answered is whether the whole life can have subjecthood in a practical sense. Another related question arises: Can individual living beings, for example, plants, animals, organic or inorganic matters, have subjecthood? Do only human beings have subjecthood? Who are the subjects that can change history and the world? The most important question is whether an unembodied being, a being without body, can be a subject.

I think that subjecthood and subjectivation in a true sense can only be applied to human subjects. *Minjung* theology upholds the idea that *Minjung*, the poor ordinary people, are the real subjects of history. In the era of ecological destruction and Anthropocene, the idea of zoegraphy and zoesophia, gives urgent message to the *Minjung*, and brings more responsibility to them for the life of the whole creation. I believe that subjecthood of a true sense must go with the *Minjung*, with different tasks and ethical responsibilities.

A Conclusion

I would call Dr. Kim Yong-Bock a visionary scholar. I think that we can detect logical pitfalls in his study of life. For example, his claim of the subjecthood of the whole life seems to me unreal and logically contradictory, as I indicated in the above. It seems that such an illogic occurs because he is a prophetic visionary as well as a scholar. By seeing him as a prophetic visionary, we

[14] "Zoesophia: Integral Study of Life," Zoesophia 1101

can understand why he enjoys such a freedom in constructing his own ideas about the study of life (zoesophia).

Dr. Kim employs such terms as zoegraphy and confluence. He believes that all sorts of stories, ideas and wisdoms from the East and West can be poured into zoegraphy and find confluence in zoesophia, which is to fight and overcome the thanatography (the biography of death) of all destructive powers including the global empire and technocracy.

Dr. Kim envisions a world where all creations are regarded and respected as subjects, not as objects for exploitation and use by human subjects and capital. He gave full subjecthood to the whole life, but not to each living being. Dr. Kim envisions a utopia or *sun*-topia (*sun* refers to an angelic and utopian landscape) where all living and non-living beings/things are respected as subjects and celebrate the feast of life, a cosmic feast.

Finally, I believe that Dr. Kim adopts an evolutionary view of the world, rather than a view of drastic and transformative change. He has left behind such ideas as messianic politics, revolutionary changes of the world and political theology, it seems to me, when he has gone over to zoesophia and zoegraphy from the political *Minjung* theology and socio-biography of minjung. I must, however, add that Dr. Kim did not leave *Minjung* theology totally. We can see this from the remark in his most recently written but unpublished manuscript, *A Preliminary Study on the Method of the Study of Life*.

"I claim that we cannot separate *Minjung* theology, theology of life, study of *Minjung* and study of life. The problem of life must include that of socio-economic oppression and injustice. The problem of *Minjung* must start from life or the living on a micro level toward life on a macro level and eventually the life of the cosmos. The problem of life and the problem of *Minjung* cannot be separated" (from the eighth chapter of the above manuscript).

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People as the Pivot of *Missio Dei*: A Religio-Social Horizon of Kim Yong-Bock's *Minjung* Hermeneutics

By Rev. Dr. Lee Hong-Jung

In my remarks on Professor Kwon Jin-Kwan's presentation, I further explore a religio-social horizon of Kim Yong-Bock's *minjung* hermeneutics as seen in the belated publication of his PhD dissertation, *Historical Transformation, People's Movement and Messianic Koinonia*, (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976). Due to the context of Kim Yong-Bock's work under the military regime of the South Korean government and his participation in the Korean Democracy Movement, its publication had been postponed until 2019. It was appropriate to be published on the centennial anniversary of the Independence Movement of 1919. It is a *minjung* hermeneutics on the March First Independence Movement, a religio-spiritual hermeneutics of history as well as a socio-political interpretation of the event. The *minjung* hermeneutics of the March First Independence Movement may continue to fuse with various religio-spiritual and socio-political horizons of the contemporary people's peace for life movements at a g-local [characterized by both global and local considerations] level. In this regard, Kim Yong-Bock's *minjung* hermeneutics calls for a convergence of various liberative and salvific spiritualities for a life-centric, historical transformation through people's movements, and it clarifies the catalytic and creative fermentation in the process of convergence among the Korean people's spiritualities in making peace for life.

From a Western hermeneutical perspective, humanity is open-ended to the world, and the world is open-ended to God, the Ground of Being. Thus, the people are open-ended to God. God is the ontological power of the world-experience, the ontological ground of the historicity and linguistics of existence, and the hermeneutical foundation for interreligious dialogue and praxis. In the theology of Korean people's religions such as *Tonghak*, literally meaning Eastern Learning, and of Korean people's movements such as the

March First Independence Movement, however, this is reversed: God and the world are open-ended to the people. The people are the pivot of *missio Dei*, that is, God's encounter with and God's salvific action in the world, and of inter-ideological and interreligious dialogue and praxis seeking the common ground for God-praxis.

The final result of fusion of horizons in *Tonghak*, a liberation/salvation-oriented, life-centric syncretism in a mutually critical correlation between the given social context of *Tonghak* and the great religious traditions of the East such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, was *Innaech'on*, literally meaning "the people are Heaven." For *Tonghak*, the resolution of *han*, meaning a historically accumulated resentment and deep sorrow, only becomes possible when Heaven (God) is united with the people. It is the norm of egalitarian justice: the people and Heaven are identical. Justice and equality as essential to the nature of God reveal one of the central notions of *Tonghak*, *minsimch'onsim*, meaning "People's mind and Heaven's mind are identical." Heaven's mind is in the collectively integrated mind of the people, and therefore the people's mind is the channel for the heavenly mandate, *ch'onmyong*. As a result, "all people should be treated as God is treated," that is, *sainnoch'on*; in other words, doing harm to others is to do harm to the Heavenly Lord.

The people are the pivotal locus in which *innaech'on* is realized, and where the apocalyptic transformation of the world, that is, *huch'on'gaebyok*, springs up. The logic of *innaech'on* therefore rightly implies that it is the people who are the direct medium through which *ch'onmyong*, the heavenly mandate, is revealed. The intermediaries between God and humans belong to the former age; in the present era the Spirit of Heaven directly descends to the people and becomes one with us. The people see or find God face to face. The messianic vision and praxis of *huch'on'gaebyok*, the apocalyptic transformation of the world, is realized in this concrete world by the people, with the people, realizing the true meaning of the *oikoumene* as the household of life, the whole inhabited earth.

In *Chungsan* tradition, a new religion in Korea deeply rooted in the *Tonghak* religion, a people-centric *missio Dei* is addressed by a key notion, *chohwajongbu*, meaning "governance realizing the harmony between the

way of heaven and the affairs of human beings." The subjects of the building of *chohwajongbu* are the *namjoon*, meaning a collective symbolic image of the *minjung*, the lower and nameless people. Therefore, strategy and method which will save all nations will come from the *namjoon*, and the pivotal locus of salvation—the salvation of the whole society, of the whole humankind, and of the whole universe—will be the locus of the *namjoon*, where the spirit world and the people are unified in concrete terms. *Huch'onsongyong*, meaning "the paradise of the latter heaven," would therefore be the time and space of the *han-puri*, meaning resolving *han*, of the *namjoson*. The *namjoson* will achieve the new life force through *haewon'gongsa*, meaning "the work of resolving *han*," and *ch'onjigongsa*, meaning "the work of the heaven and the earth."

The locus of the people is the locus where the principle of *sangguk*, meaning "being mutually destructive," is shifted to the principle of *sangsaeng*, meaning "being mutually constructive or living interdependently," through *haewon'gongsa* and *ch'onjigongsa*, that is, a total *han-puri*. This whole transformation, the core of *missio Dei*, is a *kairos* event which happens in the midst of the people. In this light, the subjectivity of *huch'on'gaebyok* shifts from God to the people, *mosajaein songsajaech'on*, meaning "the people propose, God disposes," to *mosajaech'on songsajaein*, meaning "God proposes, the people dispose." The people arouse God's compassion, the people know God's will through compassion, and the people realize God's will with God's compassion.

The common ground of the Korean Buddhist priest Wonhyo's ecumenism in the seventh century was the people. His Buddhist ecumenism, *T'ong Pulgyo*, meaning One Unified Buddhism, or *Ilsung Pulgyo*, meaning One Vehicle Buddhism, was concretized in the praxis of a life-centric *minjung* Buddhism. Wonhyo experienced a conversion from a 'church'-ecumenism to a people-centric ecumenism. He embodied a *boddhisattva* through working for the liberation/salvation of the *minjung* because the people themselves are *boddhisattva*. The people are the pivot which interconnects and integrates the sacred and the secular.

Since the seventeenth century the Korean scholars of *Sirhak*, a Realist School of Confucianism, converted themselves from orthodoxy to orthopraxis by

concerning to illuminate the situation of the people. This was a transition from Chu Hi's metaphysics down to the concrete reality of the people. With the painstaking scholarly inquiries and praxis in the midst of the people's reality, the *Sirhak* scholars developed a people's economy of life, a messianic *koinonia*, by advocating a form of proto-democracy, that is, *kyongse*, and the idea of administering the state to relieve the suffering of its people, that is, *chemin*; and they also investigated facts as a means of attaining truth, that is, *silsagusi*, and of improving the living conditions of the people, that is, *yiyonghusaeng*.

Missio Dei in the *oikoumene* forms an inseparably interconnected web of life, which takes as its pivotal knot the people with whom sovereignty rests. A web of life in *mission Dei* embedded in the interdependent web of the whole *oikoumene* is premised upon the participation of the people in a life-giving mission to the death-sentenced *oikoumene* beyond their particular traditions. A web of missions in *missio Dei* is not innocently and neutrally organic and dialogical, but conflictive and dialectical. It is often revealed as a confrontation between life-giving force and death-dealing power, even within the same particular tradition. The fragmented reality of the *oikoumene* bears an eschatological hope, not in a futuristic sense, but present, in *missio Dei*. This empathized and shared hope for transformation sees that the historical center is this present life, and is not limited to a particular tradition but open-ended to the people in the *oikoumene*. The household of life, the whole inhabited earth, is the present life-world actualizing itself through a people-centric, life-giving and transforming mission. The people fill the *oikoumene* with affirmative life, starting from this present life, through dialectical interlacing with the past and the future. For the people, the mutually interpenetrating living life of here and now is the beginning of religion, the center of faith-praxis, and the core of the web of life.

In the light of the above *minjung* hermeneutics, the March First Independence Movement was a great religio-cultural and socio-political reservoir of the Korean people's liberation/salvation-oriented traditions. If the *Tonghak* Peasant Revolution in 1894 was the flare of modern times in Korea, the March First Independence Movement may be regarded as a new milestone toward the modern scheme. The March First Independence Movement successfully fused, in a peacefully revolutionary way, the various

religio-social horizons in the context of Japanese forceful occupation, particularly influenced by the people- centric religio-social hermeneutics of the *Tonghak* Peasant Revolution. It includes, as Dr. Kim Yong-Bock has properly analyzed, the Confucian reformers, the Confucian Righteous Army, the *Tonghak* (later *Cheondo-gyo*, literally meaning Heavenly Road Religion), and the *Tonghak* Peasant Revolution, the Buddhist *minjung* movement, the Christian messianic movement (Protestant Christians), Korean national religious movements such as *Daejong-gyo* (literally meaning the Great God-like Man Religion), the Western liberal ideas of people's subjectivity and self-determination, the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, etc.

In 2019, the Korean people celebrated the centennial anniversary of the March First Independence Movement of 1919, and of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea during the Japanese forceful occupation. The March First Independence Movement proclaimed that national sovereignty rests with the people, and that accordingly the new nation-state should take the form of a democratic republic; it was a revolutionary paradigm shift, from the feudalistic Korean Empire to the people-centered Republic of Korea. The entire spiritual and political manifesto of the March First Movement has not yet been achieved, due to the unfortunate division of the Korean Peninsula at the end of the Japanese forceful occupation in 1945 by the Cold War superpowers surrounding the Peninsula. However, during the past one hundred years, the spirit of the March First Movement has evolved in timely response to the socio-political context, intermittently erupting like an active volcano through the people's liberation movements such as the April 19 Revolution in 1960, the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Movement in 1980, the June People's Democracy Movement in 1987, the Candlelight Revolution in 2016, etc. These impassioned, powerful movements of the Korean people, based on the spirit of the March First Independence Movement, will continue until the time when they peacefully bring about the healing, reconciliation and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, overcoming the division and Cold War, and constructing a North East Asian *oikoumene*, a North East Asian Common Household.

Remembering the God of Life: The Church on the Edge of Conflict

By Henry S. Kuo

The circumstances that led to the writing of this article are filled paradoxically with auspice and anxiety. It began as a presentation as part of the first Reformed Ecumenical Symposium, which was held at the Facoltà Valdese di Teologia in Rome, Italy, on October 27, 2022. The event itself was one of several surrounding the welcome and critical establishment of the Reformed Ecumenical Office in the city. My participation in the symposium also allowed me to meet the members of the Waldensian Church and appreciate the history of their Church embodying their motto, *lux lucet in tenebris.* And certainly, the symposium's topic—Kim Yong-Bock and his theology and philosophy of life—was an opportunity to introduce an important voice in Reformed theology to audiences in Europe.

However, these auspicious events met with dark clouds of anxiety and sadness. Europe is still confronting the reality of an unjust war being waged in Ukraine since early 2022 that has caused suffering and anxiety for millions of people. In March 2026, the United States and Israel have begun a war in Iran that only killed many innocent peoples, but also threatens to inject unnecessary economic uncertainty and chaos around the world. The ghost of the inflation that scourged global economies around the world in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was seemingly brought under control in the past year, seemed to have reappeared. The lightning-fast and oftentimes uncritical adoption of artificial intelligence is leading to job losses for jobs that were previously deemed safe. And climate change continues to ravage the earth in the form of increased extreme weather patterns.

One can suppose that this paradoxical dynamic in which auspice and anxiety conflict yet commingle is an ineluctable part of living in the world. The ethicist Ellen Ott Marshall forwards conflict as a foundational basis for

thinking through Christian ethics. For her, conflict does not automatically denote the presence of sin. Conflict, in fact, is a natural and necessary part of being human. Marshall's understanding of conflict relies on the Latin roots of the word that, together, means "striking together." Thus, she writes, "we live as part of an ecosystem that undergoes constant change as elements strike together. To be is to be in conflict."[1] A company that is confronted with deteriorating macroeconomic factors, for example, may need to decide between laying off workers to remain profitable or incurring losses to prevent workers' livelihoods from being adversely impacted. Conflicts are daily realities.

But, as Marshall noted, the conflicts that come from living in an interdependent and interconnected society can generate emotional and psychological stress, destroy relationships, or other maladies that create anxieties.[2] These anxieties are being reflected in ecumenical efforts. Indeed, when generalized across the world, one could argue that the church is not alone. Organizations and nations are experiencing the anxieties, maybe even the fatigue, of international cooperation. The optimism of the 1960s, that friendship and cooperation between nations could solve intractable problems, has given way to mutual suspicion between nations and various forms of nationalisms. Increasingly pressing problems such as climate change, crushing poverty, economic disaster, various forms of injustice between ethnicities and genders, and war remain intractable, like historical tumors that just would not go away.

Professor Jin Kwan Kwon and fellow scholars and colleagues have provided more penetrating genealogies of Kim's themes of zoesophia, zoegraphy, and his theology of life in this issue of the *Reformed World*, and I will simply recommend those articles for the reader's perusal instead of repeating them. What I will do is to ask a fundamental question that Kim raises in his work, one that underpins the criticality of the experiences of the *Minjung*—the "crucified peoples," in the words of Ignacio Ellacuría—in theological

[1] Ellen Ott Marshall, *Introduction to Christian Ethics: Conflict, Faith, and Human Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 2-3.

[2] Ibid., 1.

reflection.[3] Why are the *Minjung,* the crucified peoples, the "least of these" in our societies, the custodians of subjectivity? What I will elucidate, through the theology of the late Roman Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz, is how the reason they are custodians of subjectivity is rooted in them being bearers of the world's dangerous memories. As such, their voices become interruptions prompted by the Holy Spirit that breaks into the normality of the everyday, thereby teaching us the way to righteousness. This is how, for Kim Yong-Bock, theology is social biography or, in his later work, how theology is *zoe*-graphy. As such, those dangerous memories grant us wisdom and encourage us to practice wholeness in navigating an increasingly unstable, fear-driven, and anxiety-ridden world. As a case study, I will lift up the Accra Confession and illustrate its relevance as a voice from the *minjung* that calls the church towards a more wholesome, more catholic—if I can use that word—theology of life.

The Tragedy of Selective Memory in the World's Conflicts

The COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged the world has exposed and also amplified the injustices that have been percolating before it. To be sure, people around the world still continue to die or suffer from the virus, including many who continue to suffer the debilitating effects of what is called "long COVID." Updated vaccines or boosters are not universally available. In some communities, economic constraints foreclose people from the necessary healthcare and medication for managing the illness. Pope Francis, in a reflection on the thirty-first World Day of the Sick, remarks how "COVID-19 has strained the great networks of expertise and solidarity, and has exposed the structural limits of existing public welfare systems. Gratitude [for the courage of healthcare workers] needs to be matched by actively seeking, in every country, strategies and resources in order to guarantee each person's fundamental right to basic and decent healthcare."[4]

[3] Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology," in *Mysterium Liberationis* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 580.

[4] Pope Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the XXXI World Day of the Sick" (speech, Rome, Italy, Feb. 11, 2023). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/20230110-giornata-malato.html

Yet, the world has moved on, as if the pandemic were a matter of the past. Thus, the tragedy: COVID-19 was a pandemic in the public imagination only when the powerful, the privileged, those on the upper crust of the economy suffered. In the United States, economic growth mattered more than repairing the tears in the social body made even more apparent by the COVID-19 pandemic: tears made by racism, misogyny, environmental destruction, and other forms of hatred that have blown up across the country over the past several years. This social pattern is not unique to the United States. Across the world, governments are militarizing and engaging in warfare, catering to the desires of the powerful, wealthy, and influential while dismissing the needs of the poor, mothers and their children, in the name of economic growth. This happens because so many leaders and nations still run on the fundamentalist doctrine of how economic growth, by any means, ontologically translates to well-being. Such economic supersessionism was set in motion in the late twentieth century with the advent of libertarian philosophies and was best represented in Francis Fukuyama's popular 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, which boldly and unambiguously prophesied that Western democratic neoliberalism and the free markets have indubitably triumphed over command economies, and how they will solve much of the world's intractable problems. Hence, the "end of history."[5]

This was the political and social fundamentalism that dominated the globe at the turn of the millennium, the global epistemological *Weltanschauung* in which Kim Yong-Bock wrote. For Kim, such oversimplified narratives and over-realized economic eschatologies papered over the economic realities that many were facing. This concern was at the center of his reflections on the nature of messianic politics in one of his early essays, in which he was critical of the types of totalitarianisms that he identified in the politics of both North and South Korea. In the case of South Korea, he notes how "modern technocracy, in its Korean form, is being experienced as another form of national messianism."[6] In his 1992 book, Kim expands on what he

[5] See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[6] Kim Yong-Bock, "Messiah and Minjung: Discerning Messianic Politics over against Political Messianism," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History,* ed. Kim Yong-Bock (Singapore: Christian Conference of Asia, 1981), 192.

means by "technocracy," defining it as "that system of government in which the entire society, or its major dominant sector, is controlled by an elite who systematically apply science and technology in solving economic problems, creating political processes and ordering society."[7] Society is made less human and indeed less whole in a technocratic society because political, military, economic, and cultural powers utilize scientific and technological advancements in order to ensure that the elite more efficiently maintain their domination, to the detriment of any criticisms arising from the people, the *minjung* of society.[8]

It is a testament to his farsightedness and courage that even until his passing away to glory, he continued to preach and write about the resilience and longsuffering of the *minjung* while criticizing Empire and neoliberal economics. In what was certainly one of his last essays, which was published in a recent *Reformed World* issue, he defines neoliberalism with his usual verve and unflinching voice as "the primacy of private and corporate persons (the subject of liberal polity), giving them unlimited freedom."[9] Such primacy only leads to greater absolutism and despotism, which in turn will not hesitate to destroy the lives of communities surviving along society's peripheries, all in the name of profit maximization.

Kim's prophecy in 1992 would likely have sounded nonsensical in a world awaiting the "end of history," but thirty years later, how things have changed! Recently in an interview, Fukuyama had to walk back on his over-realized political eschatology, even as he tepidly tried to defend his book.[10] But that walk-back doesn't retract the harms that were already done to the poor and to the environment. Indeed, now, we stand at a precipice of history's regression. The Christo-Nazism that Karl Barth spoke against, the Apartheid

[7] Kim Yong-Bock, *Messiah and* Minjung: *Christ's Solidarity with the People for New Life* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia – Urban Rural Mission, 1992), 76.

[8] Ibid., 78-79.

[9] Kim Yong-Bock, "Global Study on New Models of Ministry (*Diakonoia*) for *SangSaeng* (相生=*Convivencia*-Ubuntu) and Grand Peace (太平) in the Twenty-First Century," *Reformed World* 69, no. 2 (2021): 62.

[10] Simon Brunner, Lucia Waldner, and Francis Fukuyama, "The Return to the Past," *Bulletin,* 1/2018, 56-57. https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us-news/en/articles/news-and-expertise/francis-fukuyama-and-the-return-to-the-past-201804.html

that the Confession of Belhar named and condemned as heresy, the Cold War that pitted superpowers against each other as they divided nations and oppressed the poor that liberation theologies have criticized and lamented over, all seem to be gaining ground across the world. It seems that being Christian nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-Black, anti-migrant, anti-poor, are no longer shameful attitudes, with many of those holding or promoting such anti-Christian views are Christians.

Which begs the question: What can we do as the church?

Remembering History's Dangerous Memories

In my theology, ethics, or church history courses, one of the lessons I hope to impart to my students is the wisdom of history, of approaching Christianity's ancestors fairly by reading them within their contexts and challenges. An ancestor of recent memory whose wisdom continues to demonstrate its pertinence and value today is the late Johann Baptist Metz. Metz is best known for his concept of dangerous memory and it is arguably one of the fundamental-theological building blocks of liberation theology. Given its criticality for our inquiry, it is worth briefly tracing the path that led to his formulation of the concept.

The starting point for Metz's theology is his reading of the signs of his times. Germany after World War II was experiencing two seemingly incompatible public sentiments. One was a sense of hopelessness brought on by national guilt for causing the war, a war that not only led to so much suffering and destruction throughout Europe but also included the Holocaust. But the Marshall Plan and the subsequent *Wiederaufbau* also jumpstarted the German economy, leading to a hopeful positivity that, as Susan Stern describes, "gave the Germans back some of their self-esteem… which released their energies and made them work all the harder to rebuild their country."[11] Metz, who was forcibly conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* near the end of the war, was troubled by both sentiments. For the latter, he was concerned that the *Wiederaufbau* had led to a convenient erasure of what

[11] Susan Stern, *The Marshall Plan, 1947-1997: A German View* (Frankfurt: Inter Nationes, 1997), 11.

he calls *memoria passionis*, or a "memory of suffering." As he assesses, the positivity in the wake of post-war reconstruction has meant that, "in contemporary life there is a kind of 'spell' or 'blind spot' that prevents or distorts insight into the primordial cognitive and practical role of suffering."[12]

In his context, this meant a lack of direct and concrete engagement with the dangerous memory of Auschwitz. The inspiration for the idea of dangerous memory was the philosopher Walter Benjamin, who wrote in his sixth thesis on the philosophy of history that to articulate history is not a mere accounting of events but to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[13] Dangerous memories are stories, comprising voices that cry out because they are voices of unheard, ignored, or forgotten suffering. Those are voices that, like Jesus's *eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani* on the cross, the rest of the world quickly glosses over and does not wish to hear because listening to those voices of danger threatens to interrupt habits, systems, and traditions that protect and enshrine power and privilege. Unfortunately for Christians, Metz reminds us, listening to danger is not an option, for danger is "clearly a fundamental category for understanding [Jesus's] life and message, and for defining Christian identity."[14] Without reading Jesus's story through the lens of danger, we risk defanging the gospel of God's salvation in Jesus Christ from its challenge to unjust "businesses as usual." Consequently, Christian faith devolves from being "salt and light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14) into what Metz calls "bourgeois Christianity." As he defines it,

> Our bourgeois Christianity is sickening from a sweet poison, the poison of a mere belief in faith and in the praxis of discipleship, a mere belief in love and repentance. All grace remains thereby in the realm of invisibility and intangibility. And we ourselves remain always unchanged; we go on defining ourselves by the trusted standards

[12] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder, 2007), 106.

[13] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 255.

[14] Johann Baptist Metz, "On the Way to a Post Idealist Theology," in *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, ed. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1998): 78.

> of our bourgeois identity. Grace in this case is not the grace given to us or promised us by God, but the "graciousness" we bestow upon ourselves, the grace without consolation typical of bourgeois religion—"cheap grace" as Bonhoeffer called it. A grace that does not penetrate or assail our lives, but just overarches our earthly-social life, totally separated from the senses, invisible and intangible, and precisely as such becoming the seal of our hopelessness and not the first fruits of our manifold consolation. Christianity as bourgeois religion does not console.[15]

As it pertains to church, theological reflection through the lens of danger means that faith and witness are not easily categorizable and do not fit neatly into theological systems; indeed, existing categories of thought and familiar theological definitions and traditions may need rethinking in light of those interruptive revelations. When interrupted by dangerous memories, the response is not abstract exposition or theoretical disquisition involving glittering generalities and vague references to justice, fairness, or other social virtues; these responses only serve to obfuscate truth and excuse sin. The right response is true repentance, resolute conversion, and concrete reformation. For Metz particularly, it is the failure of German theologians to directly and practically engage the dangerous memory of Auschwitz that forecloses hope for the future, a hope that is only possible because dangerous memories commit people of the present to engage in praxis and witness that hopefully prevents the evils of the past to have a place in the future.[16] How many of the social, political, and cultural maladies that plague our countries today can be traced to how our ancestors have not sufficiently and practically confronted society's dangerous memories?

The idea of dangerous memory is the starting point for Kim Yong-Bock's theology and underscores why he was suspicious of what Donna Haraway

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[15] Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Post Bourgeois World,* trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 55.

[16] Johann Baptist Metz, "Communicating a Dangerous Memory," in *Love's Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz,* ed. John K. Downey (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 139.

calls "technoscientific salvation stories."[17] Such rhetoric obfuscates the reality that the oppressed are trying to illumine: that advancement, peace, security, freedom, or any other political catch-phrases are often covers for suppression, be it through more extensive surveillance or through other efficient methods of social control. Hence, Kim emphasizes the importance of his method of doing theology as a "social biography." Such a method is built on dangerous memories, which include the "traditional histories of people in the global community, the historical and contemporary experiences of colonized peoples, and the history of modernization in the world."[18] These memories include retrieving wisdom and visions of conviviality and harmonious ways of living from traditions around the world and remembering movements of resistance against unjust powers and systems such as medieval feudalism, colonialism, and Empire. Listening to such stories and studying efforts to resist ways in which technocracies and oligarchies suppress the flourishing of life can, as he writes, "open creative space for all living beings to envision and enjoy a sustainable web of life, and to celebrate life as a *fiesta* of diverse forms and styles, enhancing the quality of life and opening pathways to new civilization and a new earth for all its beings."[19]

That is the basis for encouraging what he calls *Convivencia-Ubuntu* or *SangSaeng*. *Convivencia-Ubuntu* envisions new ways of being and co-living that includes the vibrant flourishing of all living beings, in contrast to the unsustainability and death-dealing ways of living that we have been habituated to over the past century. Such co-living, which constitutes a solidarity with *zoe* or life, is only possible if we listen and attend to the dangerous memories in our earthly existence. That is to say, without *memoria passionis,* the dangerous memory of suffering, what will result is a narcissistic "conviviality" in which only those in our orbits of concern will enjoy human flourishing. This was the tragedy that the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated starkly. Those who are usually not in our immediate consciences, who oftentimes exist in the form of abstract concepts and

[17] Donna Haraway, *Modest_Wtiness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™* (London: Routledge, 1997), 8.

[18] Kim Yong-Bock, "Global Study on New Models of Ministry," 70.

[19] Kim Yong-Bock, "Global Study on New Models of Ministry," 68.

categorizations, are the *minjung* who interrupt our lives to disrupt systems that have caused suffering to them and others. Remembering *memoria passionis* applies to non-human living beings as well! After all, animals, plants, and other life-giving structures on our planet such as the oceans and mountains are all silent victims to humanity's wanton destruction of fragile ecosystems through its technocratic advancements. Hence, *SangSaeng* aims to encourage a wisdom that supports sustainable life—*zoesophia*—by listening to the dangerous memories emanating from the victims of modern technocracy.

The Accra Confession

One can argue, however, that even the *minjung* could become an abstract category if we are not careful in attending to their experiences of suffering. Recall that for Metz, the response to dangerous memories is repentance, conversion, and reformation. Repentance, however, cannot happen if one does not recognize that one has participated in sin. And so, the final matter to reflect on is how Christians can be informed of their collusion with sin-laden powers, structures, or habits. Another way to put this is: how can Christians allow danger to interrupt and problematize the *status quo*, the "way that things have always been," and in doing so begin the journey towards righteousness and holiness?

In the Reformed tradition, one of the most powerful ways in which the church recognizes these dangerous memories are confessional statements. Confessions are not neutral documents. They are not merely texts for Presbyterian polity courses in divinity schools and seminaries or liturgical texts. It is too easy to do what Metz has cautioned against by forgetting how the words of confessions were often written in contexts of change, suffering, or even in contexts of power. Consider the Barmen Declaration, which was written in a time when few Christians would dare oppose Adolf Hitler publicly, or the Confession of Belhar, which was written by Dutch Reformed colored Christians against White supremacist Christians who ran the government and justice systems, and who had no moral reservations when it came to jailing justice leaders like Nelson Mandela. Many confessional statements were not written in the office of a seminary professor or in the cavernous halls of secular power, but were drafted in

atmospheres of anxiety and suffering. That is certainly one dangerous memory. The Westminster Confession of 1646, so beloved among many Reformed traditions throughout the English-speaking world, elicits a different dangerous memory. Drafted in a time when Puritans, led by Oliver Cromwell, were in power in England, among its articles is a statement that rejects papal headship of the church, but unnecessarily adds that he "is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalts himself in the Church against Christ…" (25.6) Such language of conviction, buttressed by temporal power, provided the means for conscience to be abused to dehumanize enemies such as the pope then, and many "others" in our midst today.

In our time, another danger is how confessional statements can be banalized in several ways. One way is to confess truths "from a distance," where one does not really need to commit tangibly and concretely to what one confesses. Another way is to abuse confessing as a unilateral way to shut down disagreeable socio-cultural perspectives or, worse, to foment ecclesial division. In such a confessional milieu, it is absolutely critical to remember such contexts of danger. To put it differently, remembering the confessions rightly re-members them into the conscience and life of the Christian community so that the community can be witnesses to the Jesus Christ who suffered, died, and rose again.

One of the most powerful confessions that has not yet received widespread acceptance is the Accra Confession. The Confession, which was written by delegates to the General Council of the WARC in 2004, was motivated by reflections about economic injustice and by a visit to the slave castles in Elmira where African captives who were forcibly evicted from their own homes and lands awaited to be packed onto ships to be sent to the United States. There, they were bought to do backbreaking, unpaid labor that would grow the American economy in the nineteenth century. That is a sad history that some school districts in the United States today are trying to forget; states are passing legislation that criminalizes the teaching of racism, fascism, or anti-Semitism as a structural evil, as opposed to a personal sin. More disappointingly and at times frighteningly, many individuals pushing that and other White supremacist ideologies are

Christians.[20] This sorrowful testament against truth and righteousness is a reminder to Christians worldwide that dangerous memories are fragile and require virtues such as courage, patience, faith, hope, and love to commit our communities to remember those narratives rightly and honestly. Without vigilance, dangerous memories can be sanitized, banalized, forgotten, or worse, militarized for advancing injustice and evil.

But back to Accra, the delegates rightly connected that dangerous memory to modern economies today, how communities in third world countries are oftentimes suffering from climate change, from health problems and pandemics, from the destruction of their ancestral lands and ecosystems, all in the name of maximizing the profits of big industries and corporations in the first world. If this sounds much like Kim Yong-Bock's critiques of his own political and economic context, it's because he was among the important and pivotal figures in the *processus confessionis* that led to the drafting of the Accra Confession.[21] His involvement gave the Confession a particularity that very few other confessional statements share, namely, its quotidian quality. In an article written for a popular audience, Kim notes briefly that the martyrdoms of saints such as Bonhoeffer, Chu Ki Ch'ol, and Óscar Arnulfo Romero represent impressive expressions of confessing and political resistance. However, "[these heritages] of political witness are regarded as something extraordinary, and therefore, they have had no general implications for the political life of the people."[22] Kim understood that confessing from a distance or from abstraction is not an option for faithful Christian discipleship. In Metzian fashion, true confession implicates us in the participation of sin, allowing us to confess our sins and, therefore, confess Jesus as Lord! Hence, it is critical for the Confession to speak to the mundane evils humanity participates in, be it intentionally or sometimes in ignorance.

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[20] Terry Gross, "From slavery to socialism, new legislation restricts what teachers can discuss," *NPR,* Feb. 3, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/02/03/1077878538/legislation-restricts-what-teachers-can-discuss

[21] Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 101.

[22] Kim Yong-Bock, "The Christian Churches' Response to the Principalities and Powers," *Religion Online*, March 3, 1998, https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-christian-churches-response-to-the-principalities-and-powers/

Space prevents me from exhaustively analyzing the Accra Confession and its reception. However, allow me to focus on one point of contention that has arisen, namely, about the nature of Empire that the Confession confesses against. As Martina Wasserloos-Strunk observes, different approaches of people from, generally speaking, the economically powerful countries and the poorer nations regarding how Empire has been understood from each of their perspectives has led to sometimes-heated conflicts at ecumenical convocations. People from the latter countries speak of their own concrete experiences of difficulty and suffering as a result of Empire while those from former countries respond with analyses, theories, and prescriptions without empathizing with the plight of the latter.[23] This is a dangerous insight, dangerous in the Metzian sense! This is a call for Christians from wealthy and powerful countries to change how we listen to other brothers and sisters in Christ—the *minjung* from around the world!

More urgent still, the experiences these brethren share are not ancient history. In Latin America, multinational companies from the United States have barely legally expropriated lands from indigenous farmers so that they can import tropical fruits cheaply to satisfy American consumers; such contexts were what gave rise to the Latin American liberation theologies such as those from Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino. Even now, Chinese diplomacy and economic investment strategies have been taken from the playbook of colonization. Pakistan, for example, used Chinese loans to build a multibillion-dollar seaport but much of the seaport's profits went to a Chinese state-owned enterprise, thereby removing a critical source of income that was necessary for the country to return to financial sustainability.[24] Similar stories have repeated themselves in other countries such as Tanzania.[25] These dangerous memories demonstrate how Empire is not a theoretical construct but a "coming together of economic, cultural,

[23] Martina Wasserloos-Strunk, "Empire – Provocation with a Perspective," in *Europe Covenanting for Justice: Break the Chains of Oppression and the Yoke of Injustice and Let the Oppressed Go Free* (Satz: Foedus Verlag, 2010), 76-77.

[24] Abel Kinyondo, "Is China Recolonizing Africa? Some Views from Tanzania," *World Affairs* 182, no. 2 (2019): 151-152.

[25] See footnote 24 for details on Tanzania. For the case of Sri Lanka, see Ashok K. Behuria, "How Sri Lanka Walked into a Debt Trap, and the Way Out," *Strategic Analysis* 42, no. 2 (2018): 168-178. https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2018.1439327.

political, and military power" that practically impinges on the lives of the people. (Accra, 11)

That such injustices of power also impinge on environmental issues is a fact that Pope Benedict XVI called attention to in a 2007 address, when he suggested that the reality of millions of people who lack basic necessities of life in a time where the world has the resources necessary to mitigate it, "reminds us of the urgent need to eliminate the structural causes of global economic dysfunction and to correct models of growth that seem incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment and for integral human development, both now and in the future."[26] Thus the Confession, in speaking to a very concrete matter, also attests to an ecumenical concern as well. Arguments mulling over whether Empire is a sin that's sufficiently concrete enough to address or whether the document is a confession as all are distractions given how the injustices, caused by sins of ignorance and hard-hearted refusals to change our unsustainable ways of living, have led those on the margins—the *minjung*—to cry out for justice. These cries for justice have not stopped; indeed, in the wake of the many uncertainties in the world today, they have only intensified.

Walking Together in the Midst of Conflict

These reflections, which seem to lean in the direction of anxiety in our uncertain times, lead me to swing in the direction of auspice. As I noted earlier in this article, the occasion for the reflection was the first Reformed Ecumenical Symposium and the establishment of the WCRC's Rome Office. One of the ecclesiological implications of Kim Yong-Bock's model of *Convivencia-Ubuntu* is how churches and Christians need to recognize that everyone is a part of the *zoe*-logical network that was created by the God of Life, headed by Jesus who taught us what it means to live, and the Holy Spirit who breathes life to us even in the valleys of the shadows of death.

[26] Pope Benedict XVI, "Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings" (speech, Rome, Italy, Jan. 8, 2007). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/ januar y/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070108_diplomatic-corps.html

In the United States, churches and seminaries are embarking on austerity initiatives or are closing, and COVID-19 is accelerating that trend. Oftentimes, the natural human response is to be anxious, fearful, or discouraged for many reasons. Perhaps it's fear that Christian influence is waning, or anxiety that the Christian monopoly on power and capital are loosening. In the face of this, churches and denominations respond by withdrawing to themselves, choosing self-preservation over ecumenical cooperation. The World Communion of Reformed Church's president, Rev. Najla Kassab, is surely on the dot in observing how churches are experiencing what she calls "ecumenical fatigue."[27]

But ecumenical fatigue that leads to retreat is a narrow and tragic miscalculation. As Pope Francis recognized in his encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "we must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another." (5.244) This insight comes from St. Augustine of Hippo, specifically from the *praefatio* of *De Civitate Dei.* We are on the same road on pilgrimage through the Worldly City, utilizing what is good in the world so that we can finally become, in Christ and through the Spirit, the City of God. Abandoning the pilgrimage in the name of self-preservation can only ensure ecclesial death. What we need in this pilgrimage for a more perfect witness to the God of Life is not individualistic self-preservation but mutual cooperation. Hence, it is most appropriate that Kim Yong-Bock's theology be placed in the context of the establishment of the Reformed Ecumenical Center in Rome. This ecumenical initiative is not insignificant, considering that historically, it was only within the past few decades—not centuries!— when Christians finally apologized to each other for the violence done in the name of confessional orthodoxy. Before then, it is instructive to remember how many people belonging to Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions were marginalized or even died because of confessional allegiances because each tradition otherized the others when they occupied the commanding heights of secular power.

The establishment of the Ecumenical Center reminds us of this dangerous memory. But it also reminds us that ecumenism is not just academic or

[27] Najla Kassab (Remarks, First Reformed Ecumenical Symposium, Rome, Italy, Oct. 27, 2022)

a matter of ministry. Convergence documents, ecumenical dialogues, and other forms of ecumenical activity, to be sure, are critical and those initiatives should be deepened, if not maintained. However, ecumenism is fundamentally about remembering a different future, and it is that remembrance that instills the churches today with hope. That Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians can be in the same room together in our time, have congenial and collegial conversations, and leave blessed by each other, is hope that Jesus's prayer of oneness for us will one day be a concrete reality. It is hope that people from all traditions can cooperate meaningfully and collegially to address the many injustices that contribute to make the world less hospitable to human and ecological flourishing. It is also hope that together the church catholic can be a witness to the world that an alternative way of being, a way that is not built on anxiety, selfishness, and fear, is possible. Together, in a time of unyielding conflicts, confronting our dangerous memories with courage and faith provides the hope that churches can live into the vision of mutual love, mercy, and justice that is embodied in the God of Life. Or, in summary, that the church catholic can become *lux lucet in tenebris.*

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Witnessing to a God of Life: Embracing Embodiment Theology

By Pauline Patricia

Where do we start our theology? With the help of *Introducing Body Theology* by Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, I may say that our theology starts from and with the body. Why body theology? Because the body has been exploited theologically. Women, children, homosexuals, people of color, and people with disabilities are oppressed by the patriarchal and the so-called "normalcy" structure. To reclaim the body as a theological site, I will use the method offered by Isherwood and Stuart. They mention that the body theology methods are process thought, liberation theology, and feminist theology.[1] Process thought helps undermine dualistic thinking by arguing that the body is the site of divine becoming.[2] Liberation theology helps to understand that sin is not a metaphysical reality but rather consists in the injustice that is perpetuated by people.[3] And feminist theology helps to see the body as a site of experience and therefore the body becomes the site of personal redemption and redemptive interdependence.[4] In other words, the body is just the body. Liberation theology begins with a liberated body.

This article is to honor the life of Kim Yong-Bok, the pioneer of liberation theology, or *Minjung* theology in the context of South Korea. According to Kim Yong-Bok, *Minjung* theology is a theology of the people, for the people, and by the people.[5] It means that *Minjung* theology starts from the body of the people. *Minjung* theology is a socio-political biography of Korean

[1] Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academia Press., 1998), 33.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid, 37.

[4] Ibid, 39.

[5] Kim Yong-Bok, "*Minjung* Theology" in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 552.

Christians about their own experiences in the struggle to free themselves and their entire society from suffering and injustice—but also an autobiography that reflects Kim Yong-Bok's bodily and personal experiences. Thus, we can say that theology is both biographical and autobiographical at the same time. Therefore, my reflection will be autobiographical and deeply rooted in my bodily experience: as an Asian woman, a young person, non-ordained, a person with a wound (trauma) that remains, as a person with a disability and mental health issues. And so, my bodily experience will be the structure of this paper[6]. The structure is not hierarchical, but more multidirectional. I believe that the experience of "witnessing to the God of life" is a bodily experience and that this bodily experience is, therefore, valid and perhaps challenges normative theology.

As an Asian Woman: Dismantling Patriarchy

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, women's bodies are theologically exploited under patriarchal theology and any other oppressive system. Women cannot claim their bodies because their bodies belong to social structures. Our body is a shared body broken down by crucifixion. This reminds us of a broken body, a body sacrificed for human salvation. The body of Jesus was born from the womb of a woman, the womb of Mary. The wounded body of Jesus became a sign of the body of every woman, a body sacrificed by the misogynist as well as a sign of the body that saves and heals. So, to dismantle patriarchy, I will embrace and use my body as a resource to do and think theology. My experience as a survivor of discrimination based on gender took me on a journey and struggle to name and give voice to women who are unnamed, silenced, marginalized, and invisible in theological discourse and practice. *Minjung* theology is rooted in "*han*," which is a deep inner feeling, an expression of pain, sorrow, anger, and even pity for unjust treatment; this writing is also a voice of pain, sorrow, anger, and hope at the same time.

Kwok Pui Lan in her book, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, notes that for some Asian women theologians, the emergence of a feminist awareness

[6] I borrowed this structure from Isabella Novsima, a promising Indonesian disability theologian.

is closely related to their personal histories and suffering in their own lives.[7] However, these personal experiences also represent a profound collective critical reflection on women living in the Asian context. The commonality in preventing patriarchy and any other oppressive system is an important keyword for Asian feminist theologians, without reducing the reality of their locality and the diversity of their histories, religions, cultures, and traditions. The real commonality experienced by Asian women, in my opinion, is the issue of objectification. Kim Yong-Bok's contribution to the theology of people is, of course, against this objectification of women. But it is undeniable that there was a blind spot where *Minjung* focused only on economic issues and cultural imperialism in the 1970s, as Joas Adiprasetya mentions in his article,

> Male *Minjung* theologians also have been accused by Korean feminists of overlooking key areas: they have failed to insert gender considerations into their social analysis and theological reflection, struggling only with the issues of economic injustice and cultural imperialism. For these male *Minjung* theologians, gender is their blind spot. Abuse and injustice are the experienced reality for Korean women, which makes them, in Hyun-Kyung Chung's words, "the *Minjung* within the *Minjung*" and "the *han* of the *han*."[8]

The theology of the people, for the people, and by the people was not considered to represent women as part of the *Minjung*. This objectification issue still exists today. And this is very ironic because we have not yet moved to the complete liberation of the crucified woman's body.

As a Young Person: Dismantling Ageism

In Indonesian culture, politeness based on age is highly respected. Young people must submit to their elders no matter the situation. This is also applied in the church. Young people naturally have to prioritize and give the most important place to church officials as a form of courtesy to those who

[7] Kwok Pui Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2000), 26.

[8] Joas Adiprasetya, "Towards an Asian Multitextual Theology," in the *Exchange Journal* (2014), 125.

are older and in higher positions. In my opinion, the system of servanthood in the church does not apply at all, because in reality, these ordained old people are very snobbish and narrow-minded. Opportunities to testify and share bodily experiences and theology in symposiums like these are not given much to young people in my particular context. We have always been stigmatized as inexperienced, unwise, clumsy, and incapable. On the contrary, young people always have the creative power to reconcile, restore, renew, and make changes in society and the church.

Non-Ordained: Dismantling Clericalism

Like ageism, clericalism is also maintained by the church and parishioners. It emerged from the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the church. In my context, even though there are many female pastors, church members prefer male pastors. Even though the pulpit is identical to the old male ordained clergy (abled-body and heterosexual) voice, not many female pastors are wanted by the congregation. I have been teaching homiletics for three years now. But it is ironic that a young ordinary female—homiletician—is not allowed to preach at Sunday services just because I am not clergy. Thus, the pulpit of the church became more and more exclusive, reserved for those who were ordained.

As a People with a Wound (Trauma) That Remains

How do we witness life in the midst of the complexities of poverty, natural disasters, pandemics, climate change, gender-based violence, racism, and neo-colonialism that leave us suffering individually and collectively? How do we witness God of life in the midst of suffering that remains? At the normative level, our theology and liturgy often encourage a person or community to rise immediately from the storms of life they are experiencing, but forgetting and leaving the past does not take place in one's own body and memory. When a person is in the midst of trauma, there is no longer a clear line between life and death. The two are not binary opposites that can be juxtaposed. Simply put, this understanding wants to show that life after trauma will never be the same as before. There is no difference between life and death.

Indonesian female theologian Septemmy Lakawa introduces contextual theology that demonstrates the multidirectional position in which theology and liturgy should respond to trauma. According to her, the three positions are witnessing, interreligious and aesthetic.[9] For Lakawa,

> Trauma ruptures a theology that defines Christian witnessing as a practice of claiming the truth. It challenges the primacy of word, of verbal communication, in the Christian witnessing practice. Trauma reveals a different language of witnessing—the unsayable, the language of silence, the language of the wound.[10]

The question that arises is how do we witness something invisible, something that remains unknown and inaccessible to verbal language? What language do we use to witness in the face of trauma?

With the help of Shelly Rambo's construction of remaining theology, we can find that the language of witnessing through a trauma lens is to use the Christian landscape of redemption by offering the middle—the site of Holy Saturday—the middle of the death and the resurrection.[11] Rambo shows that when trauma is used as a lens to see the enigma of suffering surrounding the narrative of death and resurrection, theological claims about death and life will appear as intertwined and jumbled relations. Rambo further said, "Between death and life, there is a testimony to Spirit, to a love that survives and remains not in victory but in weariness."[12]

The middle space theology offered by Shelly Rambo is a trauma-witnessing space that gives a complex meaning between life and death. The middle space is a space or site to discuss the complexity of trauma and the presence of God in the Spirit. This figurative space offers a new dimension of healing that does not focus on the passion to make things new and whole again. The

[9] Septemmy Lakawa, "Teaching Trauma and Theology Inspires Lives of Witnessing Discipleship: Theological Education as Missional Formation," *International Review of Mission*, World Council of Churches, vol 107, issue 2, 334.

[10] Ibid., 338.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 74.

broken narrative of words and bodies can only be mediated by the presence of the Spirit in the midst of our trauma, a spirit that gives a new dimension to remaining in love. The Spirit dwells in the space of love, that does not force a person to heal immediately from their trauma, but the Spirit that brings divine love even in our tears.

The Spirit, which also means breath or air (*Ruach*), breathes with us when it is difficult to articulate the unspeakable into existence. I quote Lakawa about the Aesthetic of Healing,

> The "poetic articulation of human experiences of rupture and terror" requires a different posture of witnessing, a posture that embodies the unspeakability of trauma and the promise of healing. Trauma—a wound to the mind—leaves its traces on the human body. Can trauma be healed? Can bearing witness to trauma reveal the promise of healing? Trauma studies provide a solid basis for the importance of bodily experience in trauma healing. An embodied narrative of trauma, as well as a narrative of healing, are fundamental to the healing process.[13]

Aesthetically imaginatively, the body can heal itself. Humans have the capacity and tendency to communicate all their feelings that are manifested in body expressions. Human beings were created to communicate the invisible idea to make the invisible visible. Humans can show something latent or hidden within themselves through expressions or bodily symptoms. A wounded body as well as a remembering body. A body that tells an untold story. A body that speaks in silence. In this case, Lakawa offers a posture of witnessing through a posture of dancing as a source of healing. The choreography starts from everyday bodily movements that function as a source and have a recreational dimension. It starts with the breath. Breath is a sign of life. It is also a sign of the Spirit that breathes, remains, and dances with us. "It is a theological posture of bearing witness in a way in which wounds and healing contain or make space for (Greek: *chorein*) each other paradoxically."[14] The dance itself is an aesthetic site for the body that

[13] Septemmy Lakawa, "Teaching Trauma and Theology," 343.
[14] Ibid., 346.

narrates the wounds and the body that heals. It is the beauty of art that embraces the unsayable, the wounded language, the silence, the darkness, and the absence of the word.

A People with Disability and Mental Health Issue: Becoming a Resilient Community in the Midst of Vulnerable World

As a person with anxiety disorder, I believe that word is never enough to reveal feeling and meaning. With the fast development of the world— industry, technology, media, even theology—humans are required to be all abled, positive, and perfect. However, when humans are dealing with the "storm" and suffering, the demands of perfection obscure the most essential human reality: vulnerability. Today, in the post-pandemic, recession, war, and climate change era, we are grappling with anxiety and disability to
cope with the pain of mind and body. But vulnerability is often rejected and unfamiliar in our theology.

William Placher in *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* notes, "Human beings seek power because they are afraid
of weakness, afraid of what might happen should they be vulnerable." Therefore, humans try to equip themselves so they can forget their vulnerability. Isabella Novsima, an Indonesian disability theologian, said that fear of vulnerability is the influence of normalism, which sees vulnerability as an unpleasant and harmful condition.[15]

The image of human vulnerability is very close to the Vulnerable God in
Jesus through the event of the Incarnation, when God enters and explores vulnerability. The Creator became the creation. The Gospels bear witness
to Jesus' vulnerability through the events leading up to his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus poured out his anxiety, fears, and sorrows before God in Gethsemane. Along with his disciples, Jesus groaned and mourned. Jesus said miserably, "My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death." Three times he shouted the same prayer and supplication, "My Father, if it is possible,
let this cup pass from me." A plea full of anguish and incapacity left Jesus'

[15] Isabella Novsima, "Beauty in Disabilities," *Indonesian Journal of Theology*, vol 3 no 1, July 2015, 55.

mouth. Indeed, the words that came out of his mouth when he preached the *Euangelion* (the good news that the kingdom of God is near) to many people were very powerful and mighty. But the events in the Gethsemane indicate something else. Jesus showed his anxiety, disability, vulnerability and his feeling of being uprooted from the love of God the Father who was about to forsake him (Matthew 26:42). He, who is life, thus embraces his vulnerability and waits for his body to break to restore the relationship between God and creation.

God's embrace of our vulnerability and our response to God's embrace is the essence of our resilience, our ability to adapt and thrive in times of crisis—a paradox of living faith. Becoming a resilient community is a pilgrimage to this paradox. Easter also becomes possible to live a resilient life because it points to the promise of the life that permeates our journeys that are disoriented (marked by the site of God's death, Good Friday), reorientation (marked by the threshold site, Holy Saturday), and a new orientation (marked by the site of life, Resurrection Sunday).[16]

A theology of life is a theology that embraces vulnerability. We can say that because the God of life is a God who embraces vulnerability. The embodied God in the middle of our suffering, struggle, and hope. And that resilience is a posture that breathes with awareness of our being. That we are here on this earth. Thus, resilience is what makes us keep going and move on with life. To continue to fight for those who are oppressed, marginalized, and objectified. The theology of life is not a theology that excludes women, young people, ordinary people, people with disabilities and mental disorders, or people with different sexual orientations. And also, the struggle is not only anthropocentric but with and for all of creation. This is a non-normative theology. This theology is not dreamy and abstract theology, but it is concrete and embodied.

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[16] Septemmy Lakawa, in the Jakarta Theological Seminary E-Newsletter, April 2021.

Called to communion, committed to justice

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