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**Twelve Influential Early
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Twelve Influential Early Korean Preachers

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Mansu Kim, Chung-choon (1914-1981)

Jeunghoon Kim¹

*The difference between the strong and the weak does not lie in what they possess, but in their hearts and spirits. There are people who are strong though poor. Even enslaved workers can have more power than the capitalists who rule over them. Even among the people who are trampled upon because they have no power, there are many who are stronger than those in power. In such cases, we see that the weak become strong, and the strong become poor. Among those who lived their lives in pursuit of spiritual values, we often see people who lived as strong people even though they were weak.*²

Introduction

The Reverend Mansu³ Kim, Chung-choon (1914-1981) was a pastor, a writer, and a scholar equipped not only with academic knowledge, but also with passion for the pastoral ministry. As a well balanced pastor and a scholar, Mansu stressed the importance of the theology that is not just “conceptual or doctrine-oriented but practical and related to the details of human life.”⁴ During the military dictatorship in South Korea, Mansu took a great interest in social justice and the wellbeing of the oppressed. Mansu’s studies in the Old Testament provided the biblical evidence for the Minjung (people’s) theology. Mansu developed Korean contextual theology based upon Korean’s *Han*⁵, a theology of *Mokmin*⁶, and comparative study of Israel’s history and Korean history.

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² KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 33.

³ Mansu: Kim Chong-choon’s penname. Mansu means “late grain.” On a late autumn day, around the time of sunset, Kim was walking alone on the levee of a rice paddy, soothing his aching heart because his life seemed a failure after he had contracted tuberculosis. Then he found an ear of late grain—overripe and full of kernels—bending down. Kim felt that his situation was similar to that ear of grain abandoned in the empty rice paddy, and he gave himself the penname Mansu. KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 12.

⁴ KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 195.

⁵ Scholars acknowledge that *han* is central to the Korean character. Scholars have called it an all-encompassing sense of bitterness, a mixture of angst, endurance and a yearning for revenge that tests a person's soul, a condition



Historical Background

Korea was under Japanese colonial rule in the 1940s. After liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, the Korean War broke out in 1950. Mansu served several local churches during the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War. Mansu's heart went out to the people who were oppressed by Japanese rule and the corrupted authorities. Mansu was a true pastor who ministered to the oppressed and the marginalized until he coughed up blood due to overworking. Korea was under the military dictatorship in 1960s and 1970s when Mansu served Hanshin University and Yonsei University as a professor. "Mansu greatly contributed to the restoration of democracy and social justice from the viewpoint of liberation theology, and he contributed to providing a theological direction for the Church's mission in the midst of the suffering and pain of 1970s military dictatorship."⁷

Life

Mansu was born on November 6, 1914, in Dongnae County, South Gyungsang Province. Mansu's hometown was the remotest of remote villages on the mountain. Mansu traveled 50 li⁸ round trip everyday to attend elementary school. The door to middle school was not open to Mansu because his family couldn't afford to send him to school. Around that time, the Australian Mission Board in Busan decided to provide middle school education for Mansu. One year later, Mansu transferred to Soongsil Middle School and met Rev. Song Chang-Geun⁹. Under the personal guidance of Rev. Song, Mansu vowed to become a minister. Mansu studied theology in Tokyo at Aoyama Gakuin University and graduated in March of 1943. During the Korean War, Mansu studied at Toronto Emmanuel College in Canada with help from the Canadian Mission Board. He majored in the Old Testament. During two years of studying in Canada, Mansu felt how broad and deep his field was. Mansu entered the doctoral program at Edinburgh University in Scotland and earned a Ph.D. in 1961. Mansu served several churches as an associate pastor and a senior pastor. Mansu served the churches as best he could. Mansu built a thirty-meter

marked by deep sorrow and a sense of incompleteness that can have fatal consequences. But *han* has also been described as a sense of hope, an ability to silently endure hardship and suffering in a relatively small nation with a long history of being invaded by more powerful neighbors. Glionna, John M. "A Complex Feeling Tugs at Koreans." *Los Angeles Times*. <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jan/05/world/la-fg-south-korea-han-20110105>

⁶ *Mokmin*: in traditional Korean thought, the proper shepherding of the people expected of a leader in. Kim, Chung Choon. KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 218.

⁷ KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 22.

⁸ Li: a unit of distance equaling roughly 400 meters. Kim, Chung Choon. KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 40

⁹ Rev. Song Chang-Geun (1898-1951?), Presbyterian Church pastor. He studied at San Francisco Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Iliff Theological Seminary in Denver. Rev. Song was the first person who introduced liberal Christianity to Koreans. Rev. Song devoted his later life to Christian social work. His teaching and life greatly influenced Kim Chong-Choon's theology and ministry.

Chu, Jaeyong. "Manwoo Song Chang-geun: His Life and Theology." *The Veritas*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2010. Web. 14 Nov. 2012. http://www.veritas.kr/contents/article/sub_re.html?no=9133

church wall with his own hands. He placed roofing tiles for the church building that he served. Every morning, Mansu would light a kerosene lamp for early morning prayers then go house to house to awake his church members. After having pastoral experiences at several churches, Mansu served as a professor of theology at Yonsei University and Hanshin University. From the time when he started his academic career until he passed away in 1981, “Mansu exhibited great energy and passion in his work as an Old Testament professor, education administrator, chairman of allied organizations, editorial chair, writer, and pastor.”¹⁰

Theological Themes in Mansu’s Sermons

*Minjung Theology*¹¹

Mansu’s message was often focused on the oppressed people who suffered from social injustice and the big gap between rich and poor in Korean society. Mansu criticized the capitalists and authorities who ruled over the weak by redefining the true meaning of weakness and strength in his sermon “Though Weak, We are Strong.” Mansu maintains that making people strong doesn’t lie in material possessions but in pursuing spiritual values. Therefore the oppressed can be higher than the authorities and the poor can be more valuable than the rich.

*If a person must possess something to become strong, that person is always imperfect in his strength. If a natural man is deemed to be strong because he is given money, position, power, knowledge, or skill, he is not truly strong. Even enslaved workers can have more power than the capitalists who rule over them. Even among the people who are trampled upon because they have no power, there are many who are stronger than those in power.*¹²

Mansu studied Jeong Yag-Yong¹³’s *Mokminsimseo*¹⁴ in order to suggest the effective governing and the proper shepherding of the people as a leader. Mansu examined *Mokminsimseo* and discovered that Jeong Yag-Yong’s treatise *Mokminsimseo* was filled with the description of the oppressed. Employing *Mokminsimseo*, Mansu inspired his students to defend the oppressed and show interest in the benefit and wellbeing of the people.

When we examine the content of this book-a vast content that consists of 12

¹⁰ KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 16.

¹¹ As liberation theology emerged from the concern of Latin American theologians for the poor in their countries, Minjung (the oppressed) theology came out of the struggle of concerned Korean Christians for social and political justice in Korea. Park, Sung A. *Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology*. Berkeley: Biblicalstudies.org, n.d. Pdf. http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-4_001.pdf

¹² KIATS ed., *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 33.

¹³ Jeong Yag-Yong (1762-1836): one of the most well-known Korean Confucian scholars. *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 218

¹⁴ A treatise on just and effective governing written by Jeong Yag-Yong during the reign of King Sunjo in which he alludes to the abuse of provincial officials. *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 218



lectures and 72 articles--there is not a page that does not depict the conditions of the people who were deceived, exploited, trampled, beaten, poverty-stricken, and insulted. This book exposes...official clerks who did not care for the people, but were busy satisfying their personal gain and greed...In his Mokminsimseo, Dasan¹⁵ strongly defends the people, and shows interest in the benefit and wellbeing of the people, as well as in the defense of people's character and the protection of the dignity of that character.¹⁶

Mansu's Old Testament studies and his interpretations are also focused on the liberation of the oppressed. Mansu discovered that the dynastic history of the Old Testament was not written to narrate the legacy of the kings but it was written to instruct that caring for the people is the principle of one nation's success and prosperity.

In the books of Kings...they wanted to make it clear that if the ruler of a nation turns a blind eye to people's situations, his power will inevitably become corrupt, which in turn necessitates God's judgment.¹⁷

Mansu changed the way of studying the prophets in the Old Testament. Old Testament scholars had had a "tendency to focus on the historical situation, political situation and political leaders and their policies."¹⁸ However, Mansu viewed the prophets' messages from the viewpoint of the people. Mansu criticizes the lack of "sociological interest in the status and the role of the *minjung* even though the *minjung* was an important factor in constituting biblical history."¹⁹

Until now, studies on prophets have had a tendency to overly focus on what the prophets thought about the questions of God and history, and about cultic sacrifice and society. Old Testament scholars had little interest in how common people were oppressed and lived under iron rule and harsh treatment...When we see the prophets' messages from the viewpoint of the people, however, their meaning takes on new nuances.²⁰

¹⁵ Jeong Yag-Yong's penname. *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 218

¹⁶ *Kim, Chung-choon: Essential Writings* (Seoul: KIATS, 2009), 219-220.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

Not only the prophetic books in the Old Testament but also Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and other books in the Old Testament were the significant sources that Mansu employed in emphasizing the importance of *minjung*. Mansu's Christian theology was not just for the privileged groups who enjoyed power and wealth but "it was for the oppressed who were harshly treated, exploited, and deprived of human rights."²¹

Lamentation Theology

Mansu's lamentation theology originates from his own experience at the sanatorium. Mansu experienced the total despair and the pain of physical weakness due to his lung disease. During his life at the sanatorium expecting to live only three more months, Mansu overcame the despair by putting complete trust in God and meditating on the Book of Psalms. The true value of Mansu's lamentation theology lies in its triumph and restoration through the process of lamentation. Mansu's lamentation theology is well explained in his sermon "People Thirsty for God" based on Psalm 42. In his sermon, Mansu attests that human beings can achieve the ultimate comfort and happiness only from God. The only way that human beings experience God's presence in their lives is "seeking, waiting for, loving, and yearning for God" in the midst of suffering and despair.

This (Psalm 42) is a poem composed by a human whose existence is a fundamentally different from people who say they can lead a beautiful, great, and free life without God. This is a cry, a confession from the depth of a human soul, which says a human being cannot live without God even if he has all things...Why? Why did the poet earnestly miss God like this?...The person who wrote Psalm 42 lived under such conditions in which the faith of Israel was ridiculed...The poet of Psalm 42 ... wrote this song in the midst of this tragedy of being captured...Because of the mockery, "Where is your God?" the poet could not but thirst for God even more.

God, my rock, Why have you forgotten me?

*Why must I go about mourning because of the mocking of the enemies?
(Psalm 42:9)²²*

Mansu concentrates on discovering the true meaning of lamentation theology in the Book of Psalms. Mansu maintains that one doesn't have to just remain in despair but has to put more trust in God in the midst of suffering.

²¹ Ibid., 195

²² Ibid., 88



His sermon on Psalm 22 well explains why the Book of Psalms is not the “psalms of lamentation but the psalms of trust.”²³ Many commentators consider this poem (Psalm 22) as a psalm of suffering or lamentation... Psalm 22 is the most beautiful psalm of trust. The expression “*Eli, Eli, lama azabtani*” is words of lamentation, but its spirit is such that the psalmist trusts that God will deliver him from his trouble according to his will, knowing that all other hands of human salvation are cut off from the poet and that the poet can plead his case only to God... Therefore, in the psalm, the psalmist praises God, believing that the poet is already delivered by the heart of trust.²⁴

Mansu’s lamentation theology came from his own experience of physical disease. Also his pastoral ministry for the weak and the oppressed greatly helped the formation of Mansu’s lamentation theology. Mansu encouraged people to face reality squarely in the midst of suffering and confess their suffering to God honestly. The core value of Mansu’s lamentation theology lies in its true message. Many evangelical churches and revivalists stressed the materialistic blessings and miraculous signs as the key to liberation from difficulties at the time. However, Mansu emphasized the importance of experiencing God’s presence in times of failure by seeking and trusting Him. Mansu believed that trusting God and finding God’s presence in the midst of difficulties was the key to the true liberation from the hardships.

Korean Indigenous Theology

The theology of *Mokmin* needs to be used once again as an example of Mansu’s contribution to the development of Korean indigenous theology. In his preaching for the graduating students at Hanshin University, Mansu emphasized that Korean students of theology needed to develop Korean indigenous theology by “finding something (in Korean history) in agreement with the spirit of the Gospels and trying to realize that in historical reality”²⁵

*I think we need to do the work of theologizing the mokmin spirit of Mokminsimseo...the pastoral ministry that you are interested in and are willing to offer your body to must exhibit the spirit of mokmin...the theology of mokmin must become your spirit of pastoring...The road you and I must follow is the road of mokmin pastoring. Today, we should not be proud because we have changed into the ceremonial gown that resembles to Jeong Dasan’s attire. Rather, we should remember that unless Jeong Dasan’s mokmin spirit becomes our theology, we are like the subjects of an embarrassing fashion show.*²⁶

²³ Ibid., 98

²⁴ Ibid., 96-98

²⁵ Ibid., 222

²⁶ Ibid., 226-227

Mansu believed that Koreans are also chosen people before God as were the Israelites. “Mansu argues that God is the universal God. God can’t be limited to only one nation but God exists for all nations. Therefore Korean history also has to be included in the Salvation History.”²⁷ Mansu formed the theological foundation that Korean indigenous theology could firmly stand and develop by reaffirming the existence of the omnipotent God.

Conclusion

The Reverend Mansu Kim, Chong-choon’s theology has been considered an example of the theology that served as a bridge between the conservative Christians and the liberal Christians in Korea. Mansu’s theology encompassed both the conservative Christians and the liberal Christians by emphasizing both the importance of personal spirituality and the social spirituality that accomplishes personal piety and social change in his studies.²⁸ Mansu’s physical illness led him to recognize the sufferings of others. His recognition of God in the midst of his physical illness served as a foundation for his lamentation theology. Mansu learned piety through suffering and discovered that experiencing God’s presence in one’s life was the way to overcome difficulties. Social injustice and the big gap between the rich and the poor in Korean society during the military dictatorship led Mansu to take an interest in social justice and Minjung theology. For that reason, Mansu’s theological studies and his sermons were mainly focused on the biblical figures that were oppressed and marginalized. Mansu was a “late grain” that had seemed to be abandoned. However, Mansu was a good grain that had the full kernel in its head. Mansu came up in the barren land and finally produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times in the hope of turning the barren land into good soil.

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²⁷ Ahn, Byung-moo. *Mansu Kim, Chung-choon's Theology and His Philosophy*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. PDF. http://simone.or.kr/jbcgi/board/download.php?file_name=%B8%B8%BC%F6%20%B1%E8%C1%A4%C1%D8%0%C7%20%BD%C5%07%D0%B1%B3%00%B0%20%BB%E7%BB%F3.pdf&file_size=6293343&code=board1.

²⁸ Cha, Joon-hee. *Kim Chung-choon's Theological Understanding of the Book of Jeremiah*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. PDF. http://old.ot21.org/?module=file&act=procFileDownload&file_srl=451&sid=646ca702922646b86f15931fe4904f3e.

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