

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN SALVATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
IN MINJUNG THEOLOGY**

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The intent of this study is to investigate the relationship between salvation and social justice in minjung theology. Minjung theology grew out of the social awareness in the 1970s that created a desire to fight oppression and misery in Korea. The term “minjung” refers to “the people,” those who are oppressed socially, economically, politically, and religiously.

The introductory chapter defines the problem, which is to critically evaluate minjung theology’s attempts to reconstruct the traditional Korean Christian notions of salvation. The chapter also delineates the objectives, method, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 traces the historical context of Korean society from which minjung theology emerged. The chapter particularly notes the religious traditions, the sociopolitical experiences, and Christian faith in the 1970s. Contemporary minjung theology is a reflection of the past minjung movements in Korean history.

Chapter 3 investigates the three foundations of minjung theology: the minjung’s perspective on life, the han of the minjung, and the hermeneutics of liberation praxis. These ideas have made minjung theology attractive in a world where the evils of oppression, exploitation, injustice, and alienation are widespread.

Chapter 4 critiques minjung theology’s hermeneutics and soteriology. The theology has its origins mainly in social circumstances rather than in the teachings of the Scriptures. In its particular hermeneutical approach, Scripture plays a secondary role. In reaction against too exclusive an emphasis on the otherworldly in traditional theology, minjung theologians radically reformulate the Christian doctrine of salvation from the perspective of the minjung. They equate salvation with the struggle for sociopolitical liberation of the minjung.

Minjung theology, however, fails to recognize that the source of social evils lies in the human heart and thus to grasp the “wholeness” of salvation. Salvation in the biblical witness is all-embracing and comprehensive—individual and social, eschatological and historical, spiritual and temporal. The exclusive, one-sided emphasis minjung theology places on this world is a clear departure from the biblical understanding of salvation. In fact, the theology falls into the same trap as traditional theology in its one-sided understanding of sin and salvation. Such unbalanced views of sin and salvation in both minjung and traditional theology need to be brought into line with the understanding of sin and salvation in Scripture.

The final chapter concludes by affirming the validity of minjung theology’s concern for the plight of the minjung and by reiterating Korean theology’s urgent need to develop a wholistic biblical soteriology capable of integrating personal salvation and Christian social responsibility into harmonious belief and praxis.