4. JESUS-CHRIST

The Margin of Marginality

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. (Heb 13:12-13)

"Who do you think that I am?" is a question that Jesus still asks us today. Peter's reply was affirmative. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In Matthew's account, Jesus was satisfied with his answer, but, although Peter did not realize it, Jesus knew that Peter's answer did not truly come from himself. "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Matt 16:15-17). Peter, like other human beings, was interested in the center. He misunderstood Jesus, because he perceived Jesus from his own perspective of centrality. From Peter's point of view, the son of the living God must be at the center of centrality; the king of kings and ruler of rulers. Peter, no doubt, wanted to share the power and domain of Christ over the twelve tribes of Israel. He misunderstood Jesus' goals because they did not come from his own centralist position.

Right after Peter answered Jesus' question, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (16:21). Hearing this Peter began to rebuke him and said, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you" (16:22). Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for..."
you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Matt 16:23). From what has been recorded in Matthew, we can easily see that Peter did not understand Jesus because Peter thought of him from a human perspective. Humans naturally seek the center, the position of power.

Nevertheless, in the history of Christianity the same mistakes have been made again and again. Jesus was understood from the perspective of centrality. He was regarded as the center of centrality, and his followers wanted to be a part of the central authority to rule and dominate the world. In the name of Jesus, papal authority enjoyed power over European nations for many centuries, and the exclusiveness of Christ was affirmed by the early councils, confining Christ within doctrinal guidelines. Christians became increasingly interested in the power and majesty of Christ and forgot that it was his weakness that made him powerful, and his humility that raised him to be the Lord of lords. They were more interested in his lordship than his servanthood, and more interested in his resurrection than his death. Jesus became the subject of metaphysical speculation by scholars of central groups and the center of glorification by privileged church officials. Still, we want Jesus to be at the center that we seek, but the center we seek is not the real center. It is an egostic one that seeks power and dominance. That is why Jesus said to Peter, “Satan, your thought comes from man.”

Today Jesus still asks: “Who do you think that I am?” I answer you are Jesus-Christ, the Son of the living God. I use a hyphenated “Jesus-Christ” because Jesus is the Christ, while the Christ is also Jesus. In other words, Jesus as the Christ is not enough. He is also the Christ as Jesus. Just as “Asian-American” means an Asian and an American. Whenever I say Jesus, I mean Jesus-Christ; whenever I say Christ, I mean Christ-Jesus. They are inseparable, two facets of one existence. Also I understand the “Son of the living God” phrase differently from Peter. To be the Son of the living God does not mean to be at the center of centrality. It means to be at the margin of marginality, the servant of all servants. I will provide sufficient evidence of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection to support the notion that Jesus was, and is, the margin of marginality rather than the center of centrality.

Incarnation as Divine Marginalization

Jesus was born as a marginal person. Conceived by an unwed woman, born far from his hometown, sheltered in a manger, visited by Eastern wise men rather than by the elite of his nation, and flight into Egypt: these are all inklings of what would be his life-long marginality.

One of the most common mistakes made by central group people is to study the idea of incarnation in the Gospel of John and Philippians without considering the Gospel accounts’ background of Jesus’ birth.

When these passages are examined without the stories of Jesus’ birth, they are easily misunderstood metaphorically. In light of the historical background of Jesus’ birth, however, we can understand Jesus from a new perspective.

The determinants of Jesus’ marginality, class, economic, political, social, and ethnic orientations, made him the marginal person par excellence, so the stories of incarnation ought to be interpreted from the perspective of marginality. In the prologue of John, we see that Jesus-Christ was not only a marginal person in his country but also in the cosmos: he was rejected by his people and by the world created through him. ‘He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him’ (John 1:10-11). Jesus-Christ became a marginal person by emptying himself to become a servant of people (Phil 2:5-11). Thus the stories of Jesus’ birth and incarnation are stories of divine marginalization. During the incarnation, God was marginalized in Jesus-Christ.

Let us further discuss why Jesus was born to be a marginal person. He was conceived by Mary when she was unwed. Even though the story describes Jesus’ conception to a virgin as a divine act that emancipated Mary from mortal and social sanctions, Mary was deeply troubled by her situation. According to the account in Luke, Mary’s conception before a formal wedding was divine and glorified by the angel. Nevertheless, Mary was terrified. She told the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34). It is important to note the moral and ethical perceptions of Jewish society at that time. According to its mores, it was a disgrace to be an unmarried, pregnant woman and to be a child born to such a woman. According to Matthew, Joseph was a righteous person, “and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, [so] planned to dismiss her quietly” (Matt 1:19). Thus, while the birth of Jesus to Mary was divinely justified, it was nevertheless socially condemned. Jesus, as well as his parents, was marginalized from the time of his conception.

Another “marginal” episode took place in Bethlehem in Judea. According to Luke, Mary went with Joseph from Nazareth in Galilee to
the city of David, for Joseph was a descendant of David (Luke 2:1-5). While they were in a Bethlehem stable, Mary gave birth to her son, Jesus, and wrapped him in cloth and laid him in a manger (2:6, 7). We do not know how accurate this story is. What is intriguing, however, is the symbolic significance of the manger. Laying the tender baby, just thrust from the warm protection of the womb, into the roughly carved wooden manger has amazing symbolic meaning to marginality.

Because I grew up on a farm and raised a cow, I know how unsanitary the inside of a stall is. If the centralist group accepts the story at face value, it will likely be romanticized because they, as centralist people, are removed from marginal experience, and often want to romanticize Jesus’ divine birth rather than consider the less glamorous reality. The placement of Jesus in the manger perfectly symbolizes his marginality.

Centralist people of the city of David rejected Jesus from birth. No one offered a single room to his family. John narrated it this way: “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11). The essence of the Christmas story is, then, Jesus’ divine marginalization: God marginalized his Son to save the world.

Now let me examine the story of the incarnation (or the story of Jesus’ divine birth in the world) in the Fourth Gospel. The prologue of John (1:1-18) describes the process of divine marginalization. As I have already indicated, instead of metaphysical speculations of a logos doctrine or a critical analysis of the story as centralists have done, I am re-examining the story of the incarnation in light of the story of Jesus’ birth (or the Christmas story), and understand it from a marginal perspective.

John’s prologue discusses the incarnation from a divine perspective. It relates Jesus’ birth from God’s perspective (above), while the Synoptic Gospels tell of Jesus’ birth from human perspective (below). The prologue complements the Christmas story. It deals with the other side of the Christmas story.

In the prologue, divine marginalization is initiated in creation. The prologue begins with the assumption of the coequality and coexistence of Christ, the Word, with God (John 1:1-2), and continues with a description of the creation of the world through Christ (1:3-4). If creation, here, is regarded as an act of divine immanence extended through a creative presence of Christ, creation then is a process by which Christ marginalizes himself from the divine center. By fully participating in the creative process as the agent of creation, Christ affirms the world as his own, despite that his people ignore and reject him. “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (1:10-11). The process of divine marginalization begins with creation and is actualized through Christ’s rejection by his creation. Christ becomes a marginal person in the cosmos. John’s prologue tells the story of divine marginalization on a cosmic scale.

Another well-known story of incarnation is found in Philippians. The text is a song by which Paul illustrates Christ’s humility. It has been the topic of much metaphysical speculation by Christian and Buddhist scholars. It is no coincidence that the Christian idea of kenosis (self-emptying) has attracted the attention of Buddhists with their notion of sunyata. I do not agree that the intent of the song describes emptiness as divine nature. Rather, the song attempts to show emptiness as a process in which the divine nature becomes human, and takes on the form of the servant. In this respect, God becomes empty, rather than God is empty in essence or in originality. Emptiness is not an original nature but rather a consequent nature of God. It is consequential to God, because it means giving up divine nature to become a servant. Emptiness, in Philippians, therefore describes the process of God’s transition from the nature of God to the nature of a servant:

. . . who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8).

In other words, the self-emptying process signifies the transition from divinity to humanity. It serves as a means of divine incarnation in the world. God became human through emptying the divine nature.

What is interesting here is that Christ became an ordinary human being, and further, took on what is considered the lowest kind of occupation—a servant. The incarnation, the transition from divine nature to human nature, was divine marginalization. However, when divinity takes on human form and lowly human occupation, it becomes the margin of marginality. Christ became the margin of marginality by giving up everything he had.
Becoming a servant often means to become nothing, to become a non-human being. Unless you have been a servant, you may not understand what servanthood means. Early African-Americans and Asian-Americans undoubtedly know what servitude means. Let me tell you a story about servitude from my life. I was fortunate enough to serve an old master for a few months. I was the extension of his hands and legs, and did exactly what my master told me to do. No matter how much I disagreed with him or how unhappy I was with my work, I could never reject or deny his demands. I was practically his possession. I had no rights of my own. I lived in fear and uncertainty. My master demanded absolute obedience of me. To be a servant means to have no personal worth, no innate value.

As a servant, Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Servants do not belong to the dominant group. They are outsiders, alienated from the world in which they live. To take on the nature of servitude after having had the nature of God, therefore, means to become the precise margin of marginality.

According to this passage in Philippians, the emptying process seems to be an essential point of the incarnation. Christ became as nothing. Thus, as servant, Christ was alienated from and placed in-between two worlds without belonging to either. He entered a neither/nor category. This kind of total negation was necessary for Jesus-Christ to make a total affirmation of himself in both worlds:

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11)

Only because he took the lowest position was he raised to the highest position. Likewise, because he was nothing through the emptying process, he was the one who could live in-beyond all things in heaven, on earth, and in the world below. This scriptural passage, therefore, is a magnificent song that captures the process of divine marginalization.

What is important to know, however, is that the act of self-emptying takes place simultaneously with the act of self-fulfillment, that is, the humiliation of Christ simultaneously accompanies his exaltation. In the same manner, Christ is still the servant of the world at the margin of marginality, and Lord of all lords. He is this because he was the servant of all servants. Although they are inseparable, Christ’s marginality precedes his lordship. The emphasis is placed on marginality or servant-hood rather than on centrality or lordship. If Christ is present in the world, the self-emptying process continues. It is a mistake to stress the lordship of Christ alone, and neglect his servanthood, as if it were only a historical phase of who he is.

As we have seen, a holistic understanding of the incarnation is not possible unless it is seen from the narrative of Jesus’ birth as related in Scripture. Moreover, John’s prologue symbolically retells the Christmas story on a cosmic scale and provides a description of Christ’s cosmic marginalization. The process of divine marginalization occurs from above, while in the Christmas story divine marginalization occurs from below. Thus, they complement each other. In Philippians the total negation (in-between) and total affirmation (in-beyond) of two or multiple worlds were possible through the self-emptying process. Thus Jesus-Christ is identified as a new marginal person who lives in-beyond by totally affirming the worlds that negate him.

The incarnation can also be compared to divine immigration, in which God emigrated from a heavenly place to this world. As an immigrant in the new world, Christ, like the Asian-American, experienced rejection, harassment, and humiliation. Many Asians, prominent in their countries, gave up everything to come to America. Where they once held professional-level positions in their native land, here, they started as janitors, launderers, cooks, and other marginal workers. The similarity ends there. God’s divine emigration was intended to save the world, while human emigration is to save the immigrant; also God moves from eternity to temporality, while the human being merely moves from place to place. It is crucial to understand that the analogy between humanity and divinity is limited.

The Life of Jesus as a Paradigm of New Marginality

The life of Jesus was a life of marginality, according to the Gospel accounts. The infant Jesus was marginalized again when Herod, frightened by predictions of the infant’s influence, sought to kill him and ordered the slaughter of all children two or fewer years old (Matt 2:16).

Jesus and his parents escaped to Egypt, where they remained until Herod died (2:13-15). Jesus’ childhood exposed him to double mar-
ginalization: political from Roman authority, and cultural and ethnic by living in a foreign land.

Although we know almost nothing about his life in Nazareth, it must have been humble. If, as is probable, Joseph died at an early age, Jesus undoubtedly, as an elder son, took over his carpentry trade and likely experienced early the toils and conflicts of adult life.12 Humbleness is even expressed by the town in which he grew up—Nazareth. Natha-
nael, when asked by Philip to come to see Jesus, sneeringly dismissed Jesus, saying, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). I used to live in North Dakota. When I took a trip, people looked at my car license plate and said, “Oh, North Dakota!” and sneered at me. They wanted to humiliate and marginalize me, but I was used to it. Nazareth must have been Israel’s equivalent of a North Dakota town. It is, therefore, likely that Jesus’ life as a Nazarene marginalized him in the eyes of the larger community.

Baptism had a profound implication for Jesus’ ministry. It began his ministry and ended it—for the cross symbolized his dedication of his ministry. In other words, Jesus dedicated his life through his baptism in the river Jordan. Repentance also had a profound implication for Jesus’ baptism. Repentance was the primary act which led John the Baptist to baptize people (Matt 3:1-12).13 From my reading of the Scripture, it is clear that John the Baptist was not simply interested in short-term repentance for personal sins but in repentance to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of God (5:2). He was concerned about the transformation of people’s outlooks. Repentance involved the radical change of the social, political, economic, religious, and racial orientations which marginalized people. Repentance, therefore, dealt with justice, peace, compassion, and harmony among all people. Because he, too, was committed to this kind of repentance, Jesus wanted to be baptized.

This radical transformation involved a total detachment (or emptying process) from past situations that marginalized him. By immersing himself in the Jordan, Jesus was symbolically placed in-between the worlds, belonging neither to heaven nor earth. He no longer belonged to heaven because he left there, and he did not belong to the world because through baptism he renounced his ways. Baptism was, then, a clear expression of Jesus’ experience in the neither/nor—in the total negation—symbolized in death. However, baptism did not end with his immersion in water but ended with his rise from the water, symbolizing his total affirmation. Jesus’ affirmation was confirmed by the vision and voice of the Spirit (Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-12; Luke 3:21-22). It is important to remember that Jesus was not adopted as the Son of God by baptism but confirmed to that by the Spirit of God at his baptism.14 In other words, the self-affirmation of Jesus as the Christ upon his rise from the water was confirmed by the Spirit. Jesus was Christ at his incarnation but was denied by the world. At baptism, he reaffirmed his true nature and the Spirit confirmed his reaffirmation. By his total affirmation to be in both worlds, he became a person of both/and—Jesus and Christ, simultaneously. His affirmation and heavenly confirmation did not remove his marginal status as long as the whole world was not ready to accept him as the Son of God. In this respect, Jesus became a new marginal person par excellence through baptism, a person who lives in-beyond by integrating and harmonizing both the total negation (neither/nor) and the total affirmation (both/and) of two different worlds into himself through death and resurrection.

If I look at the temptation of Christ in the wilderness from a perspective of marginality, I see a new insight on Jesus-Christ’s marginality. I am not interested in reinterpreting traditional beliefs of the central group. Rather, I hope to show an alternative interpretation of Jesus’ temptation. From the marginal perspective, the devil is a personification of the self-centering force which acts as the center of centrality.15 People seek the center because of this force, which manifests itself in three different forms: wealth, glory, and dominance.16 The first temptation deals with wealth symbolized by bread (Matt 4:2-4). Bread can mean very little in our time, but it does symbolize a basic element for human survival. The lack of bread represents an economic element which marginalizes the poor and hungry. Jesus overcame the temptation of wealth by transcending his physical needs. Another force that marginalizes people is the desire for glorification. When Jesus was placed on the pinnacle of the temple, where he would be seen by the crowds in Jerusalem, he was asked to throw himself from it (4:5-7) to prove his faith in God.17 This temptation to receive glorification from others naturally arose from his power to perform miracles that impressed ordinary people. It is identical with a pride and self-glorification that condescends to others who have a different ethnic and cultural background. Jesus overcame the temptation for glorification from others by defending his divine integrity. Finally, the third force that marginalizes people is the desire for dominance. The power to rule all the kingdoms of the world (4:8) is an ambitious goal that has tempted human beings throughout history. Power is manifested in the political systems of dominant groups and is a direct means of margin-
alizing the weak and powerless, Jesus overcame that temptation by serving and worshipping God alone (4:10).

The significance of the temptations proved Jesus’ commitment and reaffirmation at his baptism to a new marginality. He did not yield to temptations that could have given him centrality in the kingdoms of the world. By resisting temptations, he became a new marginal person, aligned with marginal people.

Jesus’ public ministry may best be characterized as a life of marginality. He was a homeless man with a group of homeless people around him. He associated with marginal people, although he never closed the door to central group people. He taught, acted, suffered, and died as a marginal man. He rose from the dead to help us live in-beyond.

The people Jesus called to be his disciples were marginal people. None came from the religious political establishment: they were not elders, high priests, or Judaic-law teachers. Most were fishermen, except for a tax collector and a clerk, Judas, who betrayed Jesus. His other associations were primarily with the poor, weak, outcast, foreigner, and prostitutes.

His ministry was divided into two categories: healing ministry and teaching/preaching ministry. It is a centralist tendency to stress Jesus’ prodigious healing power. Such thinking may arise from today’s highly professionalized medicine. The often impersonal relationship between patients and doctors and the highly technological aspects of medicine can give us the impression that Jesus’ healing was attributed to him alone. We must remember, however, that the healed were more than patients or mere objects to be healed. Jesus remarked frequently to his patients that it was their faith that healed them: “. . . your faith has made you well” (Mark 5:34, 10:52). Faith has a dimension of personal relationship between the healer and the healed. No doubt, therefore, Jesus’ patients were or became closely related to him, and some of them must have continued their association with him even after their healing. In this respect, those who had been healed by Jesus’ ministry also became his followers. Thus the people with whom Jesus associated: the sick (Mark 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41), the blind (Matt 9:27-31, 20:29-34), the mute (Matt 9:32-34), the deaf (Mark 7:31-37), the crippled (Matt 15:29-31; Luke 13:10-17), women (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 8:1-3, 10:38-42), the paralyzed (Matt 9:1, 14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 5:17-26, 6:6-11; Mark 2:1-12), the possessed (Matt 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39) prostitutes (John 8:1-11), Gentiles (John 4:1-42; Mark 7:24-30), and the crowds of poor and weak who followed him (Mark 3:7-12; Matt 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10) were marginalized from the larger society because of what they lacked. Jesus was a friend to these, but he did not associate exclusively with marginalized people. He was available to anyone willing to approach him, such as the Roman officer (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), a local synagogue official (Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56), the rich young man (Matt 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30), a lawyer (Luke 10:25-28), Pharisees (John 3:1-21; Luke 7:36-50), and a council member (Matt 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42). His presence to all was to help each fill up an individual need for wholeness. He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, gave hearing to the dumb and speech to the deaf, straightened the bones of the crippled, helped the paralyzed to walk, drove demons from the possessed, empathized with prostitutes, offered fellowship to women and Gentiles, fed the poor, strengthened the weak, and taught all persons to follow the way of love. As healer and reconciler, he pioneered the new marginality.

Jesus was a homeless man. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt 8:20). It is easy for us to forget the homeless aspect of his life, because his healing and preaching are emphasized. But it’s likely his personal life was not much different from that of the beggar or the homeless in New York City or San Francisco. I often go to the University of California at Berkeley campus, where I see a talented, homeless man who performs an extraordinary act. People come to see him and often applaud his performances. Some of them drop a dollar bill or a few coins into his collection box before walking away. After his performance, he is once again homeless, wandering here and there, seeking a place to rest. He wears the same clothing for months and has not bathed for a long time. That is what life is like for the homeless of the world. Was Jesus’ life much different from, or even worse than, this homeless man’s? The crowds came to see Jesus’ prodigious performances, then went away. They were more interested in the miracles and signs than they were in Jesus.18

Thus, behind the miracle stories and wonderful teachings was the lonely figure of a homeless man, rejected in his hometown (Matt 14:53-58; Mark 6:1-6) and misunderstood by his disciples, who were more interested in moving toward centrality than in staying at the margin.

The homeless are also the poorest of the poor. All they own is what they can carry. They live each day at the mercy of those who donate something. Jesus was one of the poorest and lowliest. That was why he
said, “...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt 25:40). This seems to imply that the true presence of Christ is found among the poor.

A Korean-American grocer who operates a fruit stand in New York City told me that he gets up at four o’clock every morning and goes to the market. He said, “If I live today, I hope to live another day. The place I work is like a war zone. I used to carry a gun, but I don’t carry it anymore, since I became a Christian. Christ is stronger than the gun, stronger than the bullet, and stronger than the police. He is always with me and protects me.” As he spoke, I looked at him; the expressionless face of this poor and helpless man reminded me of the face of Jesus. Was he the Christ present in this man? Was he the Christ who is reflected in the poor, the humble, and the helpless? A long time ago, East Indian Rabindranath Tagore wrote a beautiful poem that seems to depict Jesus:

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowest, and lost. When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, lowest, and lost. Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowest, and the lost. My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowest, and the lost.19

The homeless person is also a beggar. Being a homeless man, Jesus was a beggar, and his followers were beggars also. When he sent them out on a mission, two-by-two, he said, “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road” (Luke 10:4). Being beggars, Jesus and his disciples no doubt carried beggar’s bags when they were on the road. Being a homeless man, Jesus went around “as a beggar among beggars, as an outcast among the outcast.”20 He was, however, more than a beggar, because he became the servant among servants to save the world. In this respect, tracing my roots in Asian culture, I can compare him with Kuan-yen, Bodhisattva, who often appears as a beggar or a poor old woman to assist others in need.21 Being a servant and a beggar, Jesus did not have to serve an earthly master. He was free but suffered and was despised like the servant whom Isaiah described:

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him of no account. ... But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruise we are healed. ... He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Is 53:3-7)

Because Jesus was a servant, he suffered for the transgressions of the world; because he was a beggar, he was despised and rejected by others. As servant, he was in the world at the margin of marginality; as beggar, he was free from the world’s dominance that marginalized him. Jesus was in the world but not of it.22 He negated the world as a beggar but affirmed it as a servant. Thus he lived in-between and was in-between and in both simultaneously.

The teaching of Jesus also reflects his life. I will discuss the Sermon on the Mount, what I consider the essence of his teaching (Luke 6:12-49; Matt 5:3—7:27). I will examine it from the perspective of marginality.

In Luke’s beatitudes, we notice that Jesus was speaking to marginal people; it was they who came to hear his sermon. Jesus said, blessed are the poor (Luke 6:20),23 the hungry (6:21), those who weep now (6:21), and those who are hated, excluded, and cast out (6:22-23). It was they who were economically, politically, and socially marginalized. They are blessed because they will receive what they presently lack; they will receive the kingdom of God, food, joy, and reward in heaven. On the contrary, Jesus warned those who were rich, full, laughing, and accepted (6:24-26). They were dominant-group people. Their fate will be reversed. They will be poor, hungry, woesful, and will mourn. Jesus, as the new marginal person, thinks inclusively and complementarily. Centrality and marginality are defined in relationship to each other; they are inseparable and complementary. The loss of one is the gain of the other. Jesus, therefore, said, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matt 20:16). “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (16:25). Negation presupposes affirmation, and affirmation presupposes negation.

Because Jesus was the marginal person par excellence, he thought marginally, in terms of neither/nor and both/and. It is this inclusive and complementary thinking that causes marginal people to yield positively rather than react against opposites. By yielding they will eventually overcome their marginality, and the centralist perspective will give way to marginality. The law of love is based on this principle of reversal.24
Let us examine Jesus' ideas on love which follow the beatitudes. Love is the supreme principle of life. The whole of Jesus' teachings and life can be summed up in love. Jesus said, "But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27). "But I say to you" contrasts against what central-group people taught. In other words, Jesus' love represented a marginal perspective. Central-group people, including Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and other Jewish rulers, taught their people to love those who loved them, to hate the enemy and to do good to those who were good. Their way of life was based on justice and the law, so justice and the law became the instruments of the dominant groups to control and to exclude the weak, the poor and the powerless rather than to restore order and equality to all. But Jesus' life was based on love and grace. Love and grace are all inclusive. Such a life approach is key to understanding Jesus. While justice and the law force people to live in-between, love invites them to live in both. Also love does not exclude the law, but includes and fulfills it. Jesus said he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). Life in-between is included in life in both. As love encompassed his being, it colored his judgments. His denunciation of Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, and other central-group people must be understood within the law of love, which is the norm of new marginality.

The Loneliness of Jesus-Christ

After his baptism everything Jesus did led to death and resurrection. They were inseparable. One automatically implied the other; death and resurrection mutually complement and complete Jesus' life. This idea was expressed in the last supper, a sacred event, because it was the final meal together for this marginal group. The meal became a rite of death and life (or new life); it became sacred because it exemplified the most dangerous margin: the margin of marginality that connects both death and life.

The entirety of Jesus' ministry led toward this rite. It was not an accident that Judas Iscariot was included in his discipleship. The seed of death was planted with the start of Jesus' ministry, grew in its conflicts with central groups, and bloomed at the supper. The plot for arrest became obvious with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. This move intensified the polarities of centrality and marginality (Mark 11:1-11). It is not appropriate to call Jesus' entry into Jerusalem triumphant. Rather it was a humble entry of marginality. The colt which Jesus was riding symbolized marginality, while the horse which the Roman rulers rode symbolized centrality and triumph. The entry was the symbolic penetration of marginality into the center of centrality. This created alarm, and the center had to act to eliminate the alien element—marginality. Returning to the supper rite, we know it commemorated the Jewish Passover. Its very simplicity emphasized marginality. It used the bread and wine, the common symbols of food and drink for marginal people. According to Mark, whose Gospel identified with marginality, no sayings related to "forgiveness of sins" or "remembrance of me" were said by Jesus. Nevertheless, forgiveness of sins has become more important than participation in the rite.

During a communion service at a Korean-American church, where I pastored for several years, a Korean-American lady came forward to a rail but could not take the bread because her hand was shaking violently. I decided to put the host in her mouth after dipping it in the grape juice. After the service I asked her why her hand was shaking violently. She said, "It was so holy that the sinner like me could not take it." I said to her, "It is not as holy as you think, and you are not as sinful as you think you are." Why do we often make the rite so holy and perceive ourselves as so sinful? Isn't it a way to elevate those who administer the rite? Hasn't it been a way for priests to put themselves at the center rather than at the margin? Clearly the rite is a simple act of eating bread and drinking wine with Jesus (Mark 14:22:26). Instead of making it too holy and too sacred, we must try to find in it the profound symbolic meaning of life and death. Because the bread and wine represent the blood and body of Jesus who died on the cross, they are symbols of death as well. Therefore, they have dual meanings: the meaning of life and meaning of death simultaneously. In other words, the bread and wine are symbols of death and resurrection. To live is to die, and to die is to re-live. The inseparable connection between negation and affirmation or between neither/nor and both/and is the new symbolic significance of this ritual. That is why I call it the rite of death and life. Everyone who eats and drinks will live and die, but everyone who participates in this symbolic act with Christ will die like Jesus died, and will again regain life like Jesus did. That is why the last supper is different from other suppers.

Dying like Jesus died expresses the epitome of negative marginality. There are two experiences which need consideration as related to
Jesus' death: his suffering with humiliation and his loneliness by rejection. Suffering and loneliness are mutually inclusive. Moreover, suffering, humiliation, loneliness, and rejection are elements of marginality.

Loneliness is basic to Jesus' life because he was rejected by his world. Loneliness marginalizes people. Because rejection and loneliness exist in a cause and effect relationship for Jesus, loneliness deepens as death approaches, and he is released from rejection when he dies. When loneliness and rejection reach to their maximums, marginality has expanded to that also. So Jesus-Christ is the margin of marginality at death and because of his death.

Jesus epitomized rejection. It was that which killed him on the cross. As Isaiah said, "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces[,] he was despised, and we held him of no account" (Isa 53:3). This rejection is a mark of marginality. An Asian-American is also rejected and despised by central-city people in North America. The following description of an Asian-American woman by her white husband depicts the similar predicament of Jesus in 2 Isaiah:

I hate my wife for her flat yellow face and her fat cucumber legs, but mostly for her lack of elegance and lack of intelligence compared to Judith Gluck . . .

She's like a stupid water buffalo from the old country, slowly plodding between muddy furrows, and that's all she knows of love beneath my courses and sometimes blows . . .

So I hate my gentle wife for her flat yellow face and her soft cucumber legs bearing the burden of the love she has borne for centuries, centuries before anglicans and dymans, playmates and rock before me or Judith Gluck. 27

The rejection of Jesus intensified as his ministry climaxed. The more people followed Jesus, the more rejection he faced. The more he was rejected, the more he suffered loneliness. Especially, the betrayal by Judas caused him unbearable pain and isolation. Following Judas, Jesus was rejected by his other disciples in the garden and as he approached the cross: "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered' " (Mark 14:27). Even Peter could not keep his promise, and denied Jesus three times. With frequent and heightening rejection, his pain escalated and death came closer. "I am deeply grieved, even unto death" (Mark 14:34). It became a time of prayer. Often, prayer becomes genuine in loneliness. God is present in loneliness, which alone touches the depth of human existence. In loneliness, Jesus was freed from the power that sought the center of the world and remained at the margin of marginality where God was present.

With arrest, Jesus stood isolated, alone before the council. He was accused of blasphemy and judged "deserving of death" (Mark 14:64). They spat on him, blindfolded him, slapped him. Pilate avoided his responsibility and asked the crowd to decide Jesus' fate. They shouted, "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:14). He was now rejected by his marginal followers. The soldiers ridiculed, robbed, and crowned him. They beat, spat on, and bowed before him, just before his trek to the cross (Mark 15:16-20). This extreme humiliation reminds me of lesser ones endured by an early Chinese immigrant whose queue was cut off as a form of public mockery; Mary Paik Lee, a Korean-American woman, who was laughed at, spat upon, and kicked by white, young men; 28 and a Japanese-American who was led like a sacrificial lamb to a relocation center during World War II. People can experience such humiliation only when they are at the margin of marginality.

Jesus' final rejection was from his Father. Sick with despair, he cried, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?," which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). He could endure no more; his loneliness was cosmic. He hung in-between belonging to neither heaven nor earth. He was completely negated. Only divinity could endure such, and Jesus-Christ was unique and distinctive in that. At that moment he reached and tolerated the nadir of everything. 29 Such inhumane depth cannot be comprehended in the human experience; its depth is divine. By being present in the bottomless abyss, Jesus-Christ is divine and human at the same time. Yet, paradoxically, the total negation is always complemented by the total affirmation; likewise, total detachment is possible because of the total attachment. In the depth of depth, therefore, both a negation and an affirmation are two different expressions of one, just as death and resurrection are inseparable.

Loneliness and suffering are intensely relational, but different. Loneliness is a suffering expressed in detachment, while suffering is a pain expressed in attachment. That is why they coexist. When Jesus experienced cosmic loneliness, he also experienced cosmic suffering. Just as his
loneliness was so great that it resonated through the earth, so his suffering was so intense that the cosmos felt it. Luke described it this way:

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)

Let us look to the garden again to consider Jesus as sufferer. As the final hour there approached, Jesus prayed, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14:36). From his ministry’s beginning, he knew he had to bear the cross. Yet, when he confronted it, it was too much for him. He was a human being, like all of us, and wanted to avoid pain and suffering. He never, however, responded to suffering with violence. That was his greatness, and evidence of true marginality. His suffering was an act of love. That is why he endured the crucifixion without resistance. Although suffering seems to be a negative experience, it always contains a positive element of creativity because of its embracing love. If there was no love to embrace the world, suffering would be a destructive force. Jesus’ suffering was redemptive because it was love that healed and embraced that which caused suffering. For love to embrace and affirm all, it suffers. Love without suffering is unrealistic and has no redemptive value. Love is redemptive because of suffering. That is why we cannot talk about God’s love without the cross. It is the cross where love becomes truly redemptive. This is perhaps why Jesus said, “If anyone wants to be my follower, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24).

Only when we participate in his suffering with our suffering does our pain become redemptive. A faith without suffering is empty and romantic and without redemptive value. Such is the faith of some central-group people who want to minimize suffering in life. For them the cross is a decoration, love is romance, and faith is to hide a lack of belief. But for marginalized people, suffering is the way of life; the cross is harnessed as an unremovable sign of struggle, and faith is a praxis itself. Crucifixion was not a way of death for central people. Romans, Sanhedrin members, and dominant-group members did not die on a cross. Crucifixion was for marginal people—criminals and outcasts. The cross was for those who were in-between. It is, then, the symbol of marginality. On the cross rejection, loneliness, humiliation, and suffering are met. Marginal people bear the cross; central-group people put the cross on marginal peoples’ shoulders. When both groups join on the cross, reconciliation takes place and new marginality is possible.

Death symbolizes tragedy, failure, disappointment, and darkness: utter negation. It is the denial of human all, a definitive “No.” It is the assertion of a neither/nor. It is the abyss of abysses that separates this from that world. Everything stops in death: cosmic loneliness, immeasurable suffering, unbearable humiliation, and divine rejection. Yet, paradoxically, all things come from it. Death is the end of the old but the beginning of the new.

Paul attempts to explain the relationship between the dead and resurrection in terms of a physical body and a spiritual body. He said, “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44). He explains this complementary relationship through the analogy of a seed: “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies’” (15:35-36). Death and life, and negation and affirmation, are interconnected. It is the margin of marginality again where all is negated and affirmed. In it the neither/nor is the beginning of the both/and. That is why death is necessary for resurrection, and resurrection is possible because of death. On the cross death and resurrection join.

Resurrection symbolizes hope, joy, and life renewal. It represents the dawning of the day; in it we can glimpse divinity. It is ultimate affirmation; the fulfillment of all life’s hopes; a definitive “Yes” to humanity. It is the assertion of both/and. Everything begins anew because Christ’s resurrection had cosmic dimensions. He became limitless, beyond space and time. Still his cosmic presence permeates the universal. The risen Christ is a universal spirit present in each individual.

With resurrection, Christ transcended all marginality. He broke the bonds of every cultural, racial, religious, sexual, economic, social, or regional bias that marginalized him and eventually led him to the cross. With resurrection Jesus-Christ is a new humanity, a new marginal person, who lives in beyond by affirming both worlds. Resurrection is based on faith. It cannot be proved. As Paul wrote, “... and if Christ has not been raised, your proclamation has been in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). The ultimate test for the validity of resurrection is faith. In the same manner, the affirmation of new marginality comes from the conviction that a genuine pluralistic society is dawning.
The cross symbolizes death and resurrection. It was once filled and now is empty. The cross means that death presupposes resurrection, and resurrection is possible because of death. Marginal people relate to Jesus’ humiliation, loneliness, suffering, and death, and are reminded of each time they see a representation of the cross in a crucifix. This powerful memory gives marginal people comfort and determination to continue their struggle in life. On the other hand, the empty cross represents triumph, joy, and hope. It reminds marginal people that they can have a space—an empty space—to live authentically without domination from the central group. In this empty space, they can paint with their favorite colors, plant their favorite flowers, eat their favorite foods, play their favorite games, and invite others to celebrate their joy in freedom and peace. The cross, thus, gives us memory and hope. The memory inspires us, and the hope encourages us to walk with Jesus-Christ, the pioneer of new marginality.

The Creative Core: The Margin of Marginality

The resurrection of Christ-Jesus marks the beginning of a new age. It offers us a glimpse of the reign of God, where all people live in harmony and peace as children of God. The emergence of this new vision was clearly evident when Christ-Jesus appeared to his disciples in his resurrection. The same Christ-Jesus appeared in a different form—a new and powerful person who drew people to himself. He, a new center of a creative core, emerged among marginalized people. The scattered disciples were drawn together at the news that their leader was resurrected from the dead (Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-49). This time Christ-Jesus appeared to them as the Lord: “So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’” (John 20:25). Thomas also confessed and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28). The lordship of Christ-Jesus became the creative core of marginalized people.

Christ-Jesus’ power centered with the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). The new core was the Spirit. People from every nation found a common core and understanding without a common language. Peter witnessed this powerful center in the name of Christ-Jesus (2:14-42), and a new life was formed around him (2:43-47). Eventually, a new community of believers was born and its head was Christ-Jesus himself (1 Cor 12:2-26).

This creative core is where the Son, Spirit, and Father are present. In this core the Son meets Father and Spirit, just as Father meets Son and Spirit. This creative core is often expressed in the Scripture by a single proposition “in...” “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:11). The Spirit is also sent in his name (14:26). God is also known to us in Christ-Jesus’ name (16:25). In this “in” or core, all become one. In Jesus’ prayer he said, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (17:21). This core is the unifying force of the divine trinity as well as the world. To be in this core is to be with God. It is the holy of holies, the sacred core, where God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod 3:14). This core is as undefinable and incomprehensible as God is, although we are in it.

This creative core is, then, different from the center that people seek. The center they seek is the center of centrality, a false center. It does not exist. We seek the center because we think it is the source of existence, the locus of dominance, and the place of security. My experience during the Korean War is helpful to illustrate the human struggle to find the center of existence. When more than 100 refugees were attacked by enemy artillery, every one of us wanted to be at the center of the group. We felt subconsciously that the center was the best and safest place to be. No one wanted to be on the periphery. When we found ourselves pushed out to it, we started to move back into the center. When we thought that we were secure in the center, we were pushed out again to the margin. This struggle was relentless. No one secured the center because it changed constantly. Everything seems to revolve around a center that does not exist. The center we seek is the center of our creation. It is not real. Like the center of a wheel is hollow, so the one we create is incomprehensible and unreachable. The creative core, which is the new center, seeks the people, while the false center is sought by them. That is why the creative core or the new center cannot be found by people who seek it. Jesus illustrated, “Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it” (Luke 17:33). Therefore, God is not central to those who seek the center, but God is center to those who seek marginality, because the real center is the creative core, the margin of marginality.

So it is with Christ-Jesus. The creative core is connected with his resurrection and new life, while the margin of marginality is connected with his ministry and death. So the creative core and the margin of marginality are one. Both are in-between, negated, empty. The creative core is the place of neither/nor thinking, and the nexus of all margins.
The creative core is in both, and the place of both/and thinking, as explained in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4:

As we see in Diagram 4, the creative core or the new center marginalizes the center of centrality and brings the marginals toward the creative core. Previous centers become margins, and margins cores (the new centers). The new, transforming core will never replace the center of centrality, for it is also the margin of marginality. It is a dynamic, creative, transforming core, because it does not dominate but harmonizes margins with coexistence. In this dynamic process everyone moves toward the margin of marginality, the real center; there marginality is overcome by marginality. When the former marginality is overcome by the new marginality, a creative core is formed again. In this way countless cores of new marginality are formed because Christ-Jesus, each core, is present.

The creative core invites reconciliation. As Paul said, God was in Christ Jesus to reconcile the world to self (2 Cor 5:19). A new marginal person is a reconciler of two different or, even, antagonistic worlds. Being between these two margins, an individual reconciles each and lives in beyond the two. He or she is at the creative core. Wherever there is an event of reconciliation, there is a new marginality. Wherever there is a new marginality, there is a creative core where Christ-Jesus is present. Until the whole world is reconciled, the process continues, and Christ-Jesus will remain the margin of marginality.

What makes Christ-Jesus different from the centers of other new marginalities? He is the new marginal person par excellence, because in him every marginal determinant is nullified, and every one can overcome his or her marginality. In the creative core of Christ-Jesus, racism is overcome, sexism is no longer in practice, the poor become self-sufficient, the weak find strength. All people live in harmony and peace. The creative core of Christ-Jesus includes all things. It is the authentic center where God reigns over the world. To recognize this creative core means we put our center in God, who is none other than the margin of marginality. When we are there at the margin of marginality, we glimpse the divine presence and become the agent of reconciliation.

Pioneering New Marginality

Christ-Jesus was the marginal man par excellence. He was a man of sorrow and grief and love. He lived and died in love. He taught people to love. Those who lived solely by law and order did not know him; often his disciples did not understand him. This human lack led to Jesus' rejection and ridicule. Human misunderstanding and prejudice led to his crucifixion. On the cross he became free and the new marginal person at resurrection. Jesus was transformed from servant to Lord at his resurrection. Christ-Jesus is the pioneer of new marginality and the exemplar of all marginal people. In him is the creative core where God is present, and we are joined in that core by the virtue of our marginality. It is at this core where God seeks us all, and draws us to the new marginality. At this core God reigns with genuine pluralism. Although we will never be free from marginality on earth, a pluralistic world is my vision of God's reign that I seek as a marginalized person in the United States. My prayer in the name of Christ-Jesus is: 'May your kingdom come on earth.'
Footnotes

Chapter 4 Jesus-Christ: The Margin of Marginality

1. "Jesus as the Christ" is commonly used to understand the relationship between Jesus and the Christ. This term has a tendency to stress the Christ over Jesus. He is not only Jesus as the Christ but also the Christ as Jesus. To stress the "Christly" function of Jesus over the "Jesusly" function of the Christ can be attributed to the centralist tendency to elevate power and majesty over weakness and lowliness. As the new marginal person, Jesus-Christ is the hyphenated one, who reconciles both the powerful and the weak or the central and the marginal.

2. When I refer to the historical background of Jesus' birth, I do not mean the critical study of the historical Jesus or formal or textual criticism performed by scholars of centrality. I am neither a biblical scholar nor a historian. My interest is to present a marginal perspective based on my re-reading of the Scripture. Thus, I have taken the Scripture, particularly the Gospels, seriously as a sole source of knowing Jesus and his life.

3. The illegitimacy of Jesus as a viable thesis has been suggested by recent scholars. However, according to John Meier, the charge of illegitimacy is not new. In Contra Celsum, Origen reported that Celsus had heard that Jesus' mother, Mary, was driven out by the carpenter husband because she had committed adultery with a Roman soldier. Meier believes that such a story was already circulating among certain Hellenistic Jews around the second century. See John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 222-29.

4. Matthew dated the time of Jesus' birth during the time of Herod the Great, who reigned from 40 to 4 B.C. Luke, on the other hand, dated it with the taking of the census organized by Quirinius after Archelaus' deposition in A.D. 7. It is certainly difficult to provide historical accuracy of Jesus' birth date or place. Various attempts to reconstruct the historicity of Jesus have failed. That is
why I do not take the story of Jesus’ nativity as a fact but as a meaningful statement, for I have faith in him. Bethlehem as the place of Jesus’ birth is also problematic. From the centrist perspective, Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem is important because of a symbolic connection with Davidic messiahship. Thus, “Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem is to be taken not as a historical fact but as a theological affirmation (e.g. Jesus is the true Son of David, the prophesied royal Messiah) put into the form of an apparently historical narrative.” See John Meier, A Marginal Jew, 216.


7. My argument is that the real comparison between the Buddhist concept of sunyata and the Christian concept of kenosis is easily misunderstood unless we have to clarify the distinctive emphasis in each tradition. As far as I know, in Buddhism, especially in Mahayana tradition in East Asia, emptiness is the essence of the Buddha nature. In other words, emptiness can be regarded as the original nature of Buddha. However, from my reading of Philippians 2, emptiness is not the original nature of God. It is the consequent nature of God. That means the Son of God was not originally self-emptying but emptied himself, so that his emptiness was fulfilled through exaltation. His self-emptying process was temporary, according to my reading of Philippians 2. Masao Abe, for example, reads it quite differently. According to him, the very original nature of the Son of God “is essentially and fundamentally self-emptying or self-negating . . . The Son of God becomes flesh simply because the Son of God is originally self-emptying.” See Masao Abe’s “Kerotic God and Dynamic Sunyata,” in The

8. Quoted from RBST.
10. Quoted from RBST.

11. Again, it is not my intention to provide historical evidence of this passage. It might be added by the editor to justify Jesus-Christ as the Messiah who fulfilled the promise in the Old Testament. What I hope to do in this book is to re-read and re-understand the Gospels of Jesus Christ as witnessed and written in the New Testament.

12. In Mark 6:3, Jesus is known as a carpenter: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” We often get the image of a poor Jesus because he was a carpenter. However, this image should be revised. According to Meier, there were three classes in the socio-economic structure of Galilea at the time of Jesus: a small group of the very wealthy, a middle-class composed of craftsmen and farmers, and slaves. “On this rough scale, Jesus the woodworker in Nazareth would have ranked somewhere at the lower end of this vague middle, perhaps equivalent to a blue collar worker in lower-middle class America . . . His was not the grinding, degrading poverty of the day laborer or the rural slave.”
MARGINALITY

Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 282. However, what made him different from others was that he renounced his economic security and became poor.
13. Traditionally, repentance is closely related to the remission of sin, and baptism has been used since the time of the early church for the remission of original sin. However, it was probable that the baptism of Jesus was meant to signify the need for repentance by the whole nation. See Sherman E. Johnson, “The Gospel according to St. Matthew,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951), 268.
14. In all synoptic Gospels it is said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; Matt 3:17). It is difficult to justify adoptionist theory from this passage. It is very clear to me that God reaffirms or confirms Jesus’ sonship at baptism.
15. The devil is often known as the prince or the ruler of this world (John 12:31). It was probable that evil was then figured in the ruler of the Roman Empire or other powerful nations. See S. MacLean Gilmore, “The Gospel according to St. Luke,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 85. In this respect, the devil is regarded as the center of centrality.
16. Desmond Stewart thinks that the temptation deals with power. “The three temptations were linked by power: the power to solve man’s economic problems; the power to impress by prodigies or magic; above all, the power to rule men.” See his *The Foreigner: A Search for the First-Century Jesus* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), 65. The power to impress by prodigies or magic is to show off, that is, to glorify oneself in front of other people.
17. George A. Buttrick thinks that the pinnacle is a tower (used by Roman guards) on which a man could be seen by crowds in Jerusalem. Jesus could imagine the crowds watching: “Surely he is not going to jump! Look, he has jumped! He is safe! Is this the Messiah?” See his “The Gospel according to St. Matthew,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951), 271-72. If this kind of imagination became true, he would be certainly glorified by the crowds. Jesus was not impressed by this kind of temptation.
18. The following passages seem to imply that the crowds were more interested in miracles and prodigies from Jesus than in his teachings: “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matt 12:39). “Why does this generation ask for a sign?” (Mark 8:12). “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (John 4:48).
20. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “He does not enter in the royal clothes of a ‘form of God.’ . . . He goes incognito as a beggar among beggars, as an outcast among the outcasts, despairing among the despairing, dying among the dying. He also goes as sinner among the sinners, yet in that he is pessumin pessimus, as sinner among the sinners. And here the central problem of christology lies.” See his *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 111.
21. In early Korea, the emissary of the king, Amengusa, was sent out as a beggar to investigate the conduct of officials in various provinces. In Hindu tradition, the beggar Suvarisin was regarded as an enlightened one; the sage, who was respected as a divine being. In Asian tradition the beggar was, therefore, given a special status.
22. My aunt used to manage a huge hotel in Korea. She wanted to help a young beggar whose life was wasted on the streets. She invited this young beggar in, and gave him the room and a job in the hotel, but he ran away saying “I want freedom as a beggar more than a job that binds me.”
23. Matthew adds “in spirit” after “poor” and “righteousness” to “hunger now.” Scholars question whether Matthew and Luke had different sources or whether Matthew added these words to the Q source. See Sherman E. Johnson, “The Gospel according to St. Matthew,” 280.
24. For Asian-Americans, this principle of reciprocity and reversal is deeply rooted in Asian tradition. Especially, classical Taoism is based on this principle. Because of inevitable reversal, Taoism stresses the weak, lowly, humble, and marginalized. The best symbol of the Tao or the way is described as: water flowing lower and penetrating into the depth of existence.
25. I am afraid that this is also happening in America. When the so-called marginal group of Asian-Americans succeeds in business and other areas of life, penetrating into the very structure of centrality, we see alarm expressed in anti-Asian racism. The rise of anti-Asian racism is directly connected with the idea of “model minority,” which allows the penetration of Asians into the life of centrality. One newspaper article said, “Japan-bashing politicians and stereotypes that paint Asian-Americans as a ‘model minority’ have fueled widespread and growing discrimination and racial violence in the United States, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported Friday after a two-year investigation.” See “Anti-Asian Bias Called Rising Threat” in *San Jose Mercury News*, Saturday, February 29, 1992, 1D.
26. Rituals become complex as the church moves toward the center. The closer to the center, the more complex the ritual. For example, established churches striving to be at the center, such as the Roman Catholic church, Episcopal Church, or Methodist Church, make their rituals very complex, while non-established churches or churches at the margin seem to keep it simple.
29. Although he was not physically dead at the moment he tried to God, his death and cry coincided. He reached non-being, where there is complete detachment—death. Thus, Mark wrote, “Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last” (Mark 15:37).
30. This new center may help us understand the idea of the Trinity in terms of relationship rather than substance. I said it in terms of divine empathy.
The late Dr. Jung Young Lee taught Asian philosophy and systematic theology at Drew University before his death in 1996. He wrote and edited nearly twenty books and fifty articles.