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The University of Wales

**Theological Contextualisation of the Concept of "God" in
Korea**

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1997

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Naming the Christian God in Korean Religious Culture

PhD Thesis, Sung-Wook Hong, 1997

Abstract

This thesis examines the theological contextualisation of the concept of 'God' in the contemporary Korean context. Although Protestantism has a history of more than 110 years in Korea, there are still many areas in which contextualisation is necessary. One of the most controversial and urgent issues is the Korean term for the Christian "God". This issue is very important because it is not merely naming the Christian God in Korean language, but an issue of the contextualisation of theology: an issue of the relation between Gospel and Culture, and an issue of Korean Christian identity.

Historically, this issue, along with that of ancestor worship, has been one of the most common difficulties in world mission history. Korea is no exception. It has been debated in Korean Protestant churches from the initial stage of mission to the present day.

Whenever a new version of the Korean Bible was published, a heated debate has emerged over the Korean term to be used for 'God'. This issue drew particularly great attention not only from the Korean Protestant churches, but also from Korean linguists and historians, just after *Kongdong Pönyök* (Protestant and Roman Catholic Joint Version) New Testament was published in 1971, followed by *P'yojun Saepönyök* (New Standard Version) in February 1993. Regarding this issue, Korean theologians have been divided into groups, which either prefer to use 'Hananim' or 'Hanunim'. Many debates have been taken place over this contentious issue since the 1960s. However, it still remains unsolved and controversial.

Several approaches are required to deal with this problem: theological, cultural and historical, because this research is dealing with a cultural issue in Korean history from a theological point of view. Therefore, theological aspects will be discussed in Part One, under the title of 'Theological Contextualisation', and Part Four, under the title of 'Theological Contextualisation of God in Korea'. Cultural aspects will be discussed in Part Two, under the title of 'High God in Korean Culture'. Historical aspects will be discussed in Part Three, under the title of 'God in Korean Protestantism'.

The terms 'Hananim' or 'Hanünim' for 'God' both have weak and strong points. The term 'Hananim' for the Christian God has strong claims from historical and theological perspectives, while the term 'Hanünim' has strong claims from the linguistic perspective. Using the term 'Hananim' for 'God' is the better choice as far as theological contextualisation is concerned. Alternatively, 'YÖHOWA Hanünim' or 'Chu Hanünim' should be examined carefully as a new term for 'God' in Korea.

The choice of Hananim is also confirmed by the principles of the theological contextualisation because it expresses a key element in forming Korean Christian identity; it applies the translatability of Christianity to the Korean context; and it

"demonstrates the nature of the Gospel in relation to cultures. i.e.' the universality of the Gospel expressed in all human cultures.