

Dong-Hak's Theism and Its Cosmopolitan Spirituality:

A Search for an Alternative Global Ethic

Introduction

This paper examines the moral implications of the theism and spirituality of Dong-Hak, a religious and social movement that has deeply influenced the modern history of Korea. In this paper, I will discuss Dong-Hak's possible contribution to the issue of global ethics. How can we address various problems, which have been caused by the market globalization and its neo-liberal ideology, and foster the hope of overcoming the current global crises with an appropriate ethic? With this question in mind, this work presupposes that a religious standpoint is related to the mode and scope of ethical acts, observes that many religious and non-religious answers fail to respond to the global predicaments, and proposes that the ideas of Dong-Hak offer alternative religious suggestions for addressing global moral problems.

The panentheism and cosmopolitan spirituality of Dong-Hak has the potential to overcome previous failures. In western historical traditions, Christian supernaturalistic theism lacked a conscious grasp of the organic interrelationship between human beings, the world, and God. Not surprisingly, modern atheism also lacks an understanding of this interrelationship. Consequently, these gaps resulted in the theological support of the idea of anthropocentric arbitrariness as the cause of various moral problems today. Eastern religious immanentism, rather than lacking a sense of the connections between humans, God, and the world, confused the interrelationship and became inert with regard to socio-historical problems. However, Dong-Hak's theism illuminates the organic link and provides a proper theistic perspective as well as applicable moral discipleship, both of which can be meaningful sources for building up a global ethic.

A *global* ethic should be constructed in light of *both* the necessity of responsibility and the need of ultimate openness. The generalization of a single opinion cannot produce a *global* ethic because the religio-cultural plurality of diverse traditions does not allow it. A global ethic is formulated through open discussions in which various traditions conjoin. Dong-Hak can and should join this meaningful stream.

This paper is composed of two parts. The first half introduces the historical background of the creative movement and examines Dong-Hak's panentheism and spirituality in order to present

its cosmopolitan theistic morality. The second half discusses the need for global ethics, explores some issues involving global ethics, and finally, suggests ways of addressing those issues with ideas of the Dong-Hak movement.

The Historical Background of Dong-Hak

Dong-Hak is one of the prominent socio-religious movements in the modern history of Korea. The creative movement “Dong-Hak” arose in response to national crises in the second half of the nineteenth century. In those times, the corruption of bureaucrats reached a peak such that people’s lives were hardly sustainable. Consequently, major revolts by oppressed and underprivileged peasants numbered over sixty during the century. Furthermore, a number of natural disasters took their toll on the country. Invasions of foreign imperialism became increasingly visible. The feudal society was driving itself into its final collapse. In this desperate social context, traditional religions of the society—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—gave people few practical answers. The brief history of Christianity in Korea was too short to inspire solid hope in the despondent people, and the increasing number of western invasions worsened Christianity’s image, leaving it to continue as a small persecuted religion. No religious ideal lured Korean spirituality. Dong-Hak commenced in the midst of this distressed situation.

Dong-Hak (東學), literally meaning “Eastern Learning,” or “Eastern Study,” appeared in a syncretic form. The title itself seems to contain a direct criticism of *western* streams of thought. Indeed, the founder, Su-un Choi (1824-1864), criticizes Christian religious life. Yet this criticism is not the central concern of the title;¹ rather, the term suggests a creative sublation of the traditional eastern religions.

Su-un’s socio-religious experiences and his awakened teachings were the foundation of the rising of Dong-Hak movement. Su-un lamented the social tragedy of his time and observed the irresponsibility of prevailing religions. He did not trust Christianity and Confucianism which he saw as destroying nature. He saw no hope in Buddhism and Taoism which lost an ethical

¹ Dong Hee Choi and Kyung Won Lee, *A New Writing of Dong-Hak: Thought and Canon* (Seoul: Jip-Moon-Dang, 2003), 227-31. In “*Po-Duk-Moon*” (布德文), Su-un condemns Christianity (Catholicism) for playing the hypocrite: while it preaches no desire for riches and rank on behalf of God, it appropriates the world for building churches (pp. 191-98). However, in “*Non-Hak-Moon*” (論學文), he says that western teaching about God is similar to his, and he limits his criticism of Christianity to its inconsistencies in religious life.

responsibility to history.² These various critical perspectives are reflected in the name of Dong-Hak.

Many scholars have raised the question of how Su-un, an ordinary person, could have had such an impact during his time. They posit that his personal character was deeply aligned with the social character of his time. That is, his aim was to achieve both personal and social deliverance.³ Su-un's personal misery corresponded with the social climate of despair and urged him to seek a way to save the society. The way he found became a meaningful answer to the social predicaments. During a seventeen-year period of wandering and seeking for truth, he had numerous mysterious religious experiences and at last founded Dong-Hak in 1861.⁴ Su-un propagated Dong-Hak for about three years, and his teachings rapidly spread out over the marginalized people in the southern areas of Korea. In this short period, the growing Dong-Hak movement began to disturb the established socio-religious structure, which caused Su-un's early martyrdom in 1864. Ironically, he was indicted for distributing "Suh-Hak" (西學), meaning "Western Learning." This was a forged ruse, which was perhaps the best pretext for getting rid of him because "Suh-Hak," implying Christianity, was still an officially persecuted religion at the time. Finally, he was executed. Nevertheless, the enormous influence of his teachings would continue to permeate ever more broadly.

Corresponding to the passion of the days, Dong-Hak could prevail. Miserable people as well as religious seekers entered the stream. The bigger the organism grew, the stronger the enthusiasm to transform the society became. At last, in 1894, the religious tide turned to a socio-political movement.⁵ Local leaders of Dong-Hak led the ardent peasants against the old dynasty, which appeased foreign imperial powers to prolong its survival. Consequently, the struggle was

² Sang Yil Kim, *The Structure of Donghak Existence* [in Korean] (Seoul: Ji-Sik-San-Up-Sa, 2000), 366.

³ It is interesting to know the meaning of Su-un's name. The name, "Su-un," is an honorific name, literally meaning, "water and cloud." His original first name is "Je-woo (濟愚)," meaning "deliverance of people," like that of Joshua and Jesus. The names have socio-historical and ecological implications.

⁴ Su-un's awakening was not only religious but also ethical. He burnt the slave ownership documents of his two female slaves and adopted the one and took the other as his daughter-in-law. This also shows Su-un's exalted social consciousness of emancipation and gender equality, which created a disturbance of the social establishments in his time.

⁵ This political struggle was different from previously spontaneous peasant revolts of the century in that it was led by local Dong-Hak leaders who took subscribed to religious disciplines. Therefore, the political uprising did not involve the plundering, killing, and raping often associated with uprisings actually, it had quite strict guidelines in its political actions.

paralleled with anti-colonial resistance. On the one hand, the shift from a religious movement to a political movement was not strange because religion and politics themselves are indivisible in nature. On the other hand, the shift was drawn from the very characteristics of Dong-Hak philosophy, according to which religious concern and ethical concern penetrate each other in an integral life. Still, “the Dong-Hak peasant war” resulted in failure in a few years because the irritated dynasty acquired foreign military aids.⁶ A new persecution began; frustrated people dispersed. Colonial darkness began to set in as well. Despite the political anathematization of Dong-Hak, its influence incessantly continued. Religiously, the great impact of Dong-Hak generated many offshoots in Korean native religions thereafter. The main line of Dong-Hak is inherited by “Ch’ondogyo” (天道教), meaning “Religion of the Heavenly Way.” Later progressive socio-political movements have often appealed to the spirit of Dong-Hak.

Dong-Hak’s Theism and Theological Epistemology

After Su-un’s death in 1864, the Great Teacher, Hae-wol, gathered the founder’s writings and canonized them under the title of *Dong-Gyung-Dae-Jun* in 1880. The canon is composed of twenty-one teachings, which are based on Su-un’s theistic ideas. To comprehend Dong-Hak’s theism essentially depends on the interpretation of the concept. “*Si-Chun-Ju*.” *Si-Chun-Ju* literally means “bearing (侍, *Si*) Heavenly (天, *Chun*) Lord (主, *Ju*).”⁷ Stressing the importance of connotations in the letter “*Si*,” Su-un explicates them in *Non-Hak-Moon* with the following three phrases: “*nae-yu-shin-lyung*,” “*wae-yu-ghi-hwa*,” and “*gak-ji-bool-yi*.” The hermeneutical analysis of Su-un’s religious experiences of “*Si-Chun-Ju*” becomes the process of interpreting the phrases.⁸

⁶ Scholars estimate the population of the time to have been about eighteen million. Three million participated in the political movement, and four-hundred-thousands were killed.

⁷ The Divine Being—Heavenly Lord (天主, *Chun-Ju*) is a different name of the Being, *Han-Wool-Nym*. According to Korean religious philosophers, the “theistic” faith of *Han-Wool-Nym* has taken a dominant role in the Korean religious history for over fifteen-hundred years. Historically, the faith expanded its “horizon” in new meetings with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. However, the faith never lost its dominance in this fusion of horizons. If the western “God” had not adopted the concept and term of *Han-Wool-Nym* from the introduction of Christianity into Korea, this God would never have shaken the religiosity of Korean people.

⁸ I am deeply indebted to Kyung Jae Kim who is a specialist in the study of Dong-Hak as well as a leading religious thinker in Korea. The following interpretation of Dong-Hak’s theism is little more than a translation of his articles: “Su-un’s *Si-Chun-Ju* Experience and Dong-Hak’s Theism” and “A Comparative Study of Raimon Panikkar’s

The religious experience of “bearing” is first the experience of God as “*nae-yu-shin-lyung*” (內有神靈), meaning “internal existence of the divine spirit.” The experience could be explained with some further questions: How do we understand the meaning of the expression of “internal existence” (*nae-yu*, 內有)? What/who is “the divine spirit” (*shin-lyung*, 神靈)? What is the reciprocal relation between the experiencing human subject and the divine reality? Here, the “internal existence” presupposes a concept of body. We should notice the importance of the meaning of “body” in the Dong-Hak’s ideas. Kyung Jae Kim says, “Dong-Hak’s theistic experience is essentially an experience ‘in body,’ ‘by body,’ and ‘with body.’”⁹ Dong-Hak’s concept of body does not mean a physiological totality (*sarks*) that is merely a physical place where a divine experience takes place. In contrast to the body of the Cartesian mind-body dualism, Dong-Hak’s body is a symbol of the integral vitality of the body (*soma*).¹⁰ That is, this idea does not mean that the body has an ontological priority and then becomes experiencing *nae-yu-shin-lyung*. Rather, the existence of body itself is a creative phenomenon of *nae-yu-shin-lyung*. The experience of the “internal existence” (of the divine spirit) is a holistic function of the body. According to Dong-Hak’s anthropology, in other words, “man is not created by a supernatural (personal) God who is objectively outside or beyond man, but rather man is caused by an immanent God, which is . . . the totality in relation to man.”¹¹

What/who is “the divine spirit” (*shin-lyung*, 神靈) experienced? In Dong-Hak’s terminology, the divine reality (God) is *Ji-ghi* (至氣), literally meaning “ultimate energy.”¹² God is the Totality or the Originality. God as *Ji-ghi* is not merely the universal stuff but the ultimate reality that embraces both matter and spirit as the living unity of the universe, the ultimate from which all things come into being. *Shin-lyung* is a different aspect of the ultimate reality, *Ji-ghi*, which

Cosmotheandric Experience and Choi Je Woo’s ‘*Si-Chun-Ju*’ Experience,” which can be found at <http://soombat.org/article/article.html>.

⁹ The Korean term *Mom*, which is translated as *body* here, does not refer to a dead body. *Mom* is an organic place where life plays with its vitality for novelty.

¹⁰ Yong Choon Kim, *The Ch’ondogyo Concept of Man* (Seoul: Pan Korea Book Corporation, 1978), 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18-22. “*Ghi*” (氣) might be best translated as “energy,” although it has various additional meanings, namely, spirit, essence, and breath.

responds to the whole-heartedness of human spirit. In other words, *Shin-lyung* is not an objectified reality in religious experiences but the integral reality that makes the inter-relationship between the human body and *Ji-ghi*. Generally, the experiences of the holy are a minor aspect in most eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. However, Dong-Hak's concept of *nae-yu-shin-lyung* contains a strong indication of such religious experience. Therefore, in Dong-Hak's teaching, a religious human being is forced to prepare a place for the *shin-lyung*. The process is also the experience of a new being who makes a transition from an ego-centric self to a *shin-lyung*-centered self. The experience of this transition becomes the essential motif through which Dong-Hak advances to a socio-practical ethics. The ethics proclaims the dignity and equality of humanity and critically protests unjust social structures. In short, the experience of the "internal existence of the divine spirit" is to bear the ultimate divine reality in human bodies.

The second religious aspect of "bearing" is the experience of God as "*wae-yu-ghi-hwa*" (外有氣化), meaning "external existence of the divine energy's alteration."¹³ In *wae-yu-ghi-hwa*, *ghi-hwa*—the divine energy's alteration—the divine energy *Ghi* (氣) emerges into, makes creative relationships with, and remains within, the universe. The concrete phenomena of *ghi-hwa* include diverse meanings: organic togetherness, interdependence, inter-penetrating creativity, and the evolving process of human life and nature. From the perspective of *wae-yu-ghi-hwa*, a religious person bears God through a faithful life, a life lived to accommodate, participate in, and respond to, God's creative movements. In comparison, while the first experience, *nae-yu-shin-lyung*, is the experience of God as an immanent-spiritual being who works *in* the human body to fashion the human life as a bodily spirit, the second experience, *wae-yu-ghi-hwa*, is the experience of God as a spatio-temporal being who creatively operates through the universe and makes human life a cosmic body. In other words, the first experience awakens humans to realize their deepest spirituality, while the second experience enlightens humans, allowing them to see that their broadest and highest cosmic reality is connected with the whole universe.

Su-un finally explains the religious experience of "bearing God" with the phrase— "*gak-ji-bool-yi*" (各知不移), meaning "each person knows (it) cannot be moved." The difficulty of the

¹³ The translation of the term *hwa* (化) into an English word is highly difficult because it has various connotations. Basically it means creativity, capacity to generate, and naturally being so.

phrase is to interpret the “it” that cannot be moved.¹⁴ According to Kyung Jae Kim, a critical point here is to see the dynamic characteristic of Dong-Hak’s theism and ontology. Dong-Hak’s conception is non-dualistic; its teaching is very close to the idea of Advaita Vedanta.¹⁵ That is, the concept of “*gak-ji-bool-yi*” is different from the Buddhist idea that human nature and the Buddha nature are one and the same. It also differs from a Christian conception that divine transcendence is totally out of reach for human beings. The idea of *gak-ji-bool-yi* contains the dynamic understanding: God appears in and through the human body to enable divine creativity, and so God is the ontological foundation that is never excepted from, separable from, or absent in, the process of the movements of all of life. It is noteworthy that Su-un’s conception of God is not the unchanging, completed, ultimate Being. Rather, his God participates in the shaping process. The God has di-polarity: while God is *within* the creative advance of all lives, this God never loses eternity and infinity. Such a dipolar understanding is based on a distinctive epistemology.

Dong-Hak’s epistemology, “*bool-yeon-ghi-yeon-non*” (不然其然論),¹⁶ undergirds its dynamic panentheistic meaning. As we see above, a typical characteristic of Dong-Hak’s theistic understanding in the concept of “*Si-Chun-Ju*” (Bearing God) is a “panentheistic” idea in that God is not a transcendent Other, but the Being who is fully immanent within all lives, creatively works through all lives, and yet never loses God’s own primordially transcendent nature. In short, Dong-Hak’s theism is neither a pantheistic immanentism nor a supernaturalistic transcendentalism. Such a dynamic understanding is possible because of its epistemology—*bool-yeon-ghi-yeon-non*.

Dong-Hak’s epistemology is united with two different logics: “*Bool-yeon*” (不然) is a negative logic that stresses unconceivability, trans-logicality, or inscrutability, which is beyond the ken of reason. “*Ghi-yeon*” (其然) is a positive logic through which reason can evince probabilities.

¹⁴ Many Scholars confess that they encounter difficulty interpreting the phrase, “it cannot be moved.” They often ask, what is “it” that cannot be moved? Is it the ineffability of one’s religious experiences into accounts? Is it the inseparability of the two divine existent modes, *nae-yu-shin-lyung* and *wae-yu-ghi-hwa*? Or, is it our inescapability from the ubiquitous God?

¹⁵ Arvind Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedanta* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1-14. The concept of Brahman has two aspects, *nirguna* and *saguna*. *Nirguna* Brahman is the Absolute, which is the undifferentiated transcendent being, whereas *saguna* Brahman is God with attributes which are relative in relation to the world, but the two aspects are not dualistic.

¹⁶ Dong Hee Choi and Kyung Won Lee, *A New Writing of Dong-Hak: Thought and Canon*, 287-300. *Bool-yeon-ghi-yeon-non* (不然其然論) is one of the essential writings in the Dong-Hak’s canon *Dong-Gyung-Dae-Jun*.

In his writings, Su-un asks important religious questions regarding such as the initiation of the universe, the birth of human beings, the origin of emotions and will in animals and plants, and the alpha and omega of history and time. Then, he points out two different aspects: “observable” orders of existent beings and “incomprehensibility” of the origin of being and becoming process. However, he maintains that the seemingly opposite could be paradoxically harmonious. According to him, *bool-yeon* and *ghi-yeon* must not be seen as contradictory to each other; rather, they are complementary. His *bool-yeon-ghi-yeon-non* is the logic of the harmony of opposites or of paradoxical conformity. That is, there is no absolute dichotomy in-between God and the world, infinity and finitude, affirmation and negation, creation and evolution, subject and object, the sacred and the profane, divinity and humanity, religion and politics, and so on. The opposites are complementary.

Dong-Hak’s *bool-yeon-ghi-yeon-non* is an epistemology that presupposes realities as becoming or in process rather than as static beings. In his canon, Su-un asks how we can possibly understand the matter of the origin of the universe. The origin must become infinitely regressive in that an origin needs its origin. For Su-un, the traditional Christian resolution refers to *ghi-yeon* that presupposes the Absolute, which creates and yet is not created. That seems to be the simplest answer to the question of the origin. However, there remains *bool-yoon*, incomprehensibility, in the issue of infinity. To resolve this issue, Su-un suggests that creation be understood *with* evolution. That is, creation is not an essential event in the primordial time but an evolutionary process in which God participates. According to this idea, neither is God separated from the becoming processes. Rather, God as *Ji-ghi*, meaning Ultimate Energy, makes possible the creative advance of all of life. God deeply immerses in the “flux” and yet does not exhaust the “permanent” characteristic, which is the fundamental ground and power for all beings.

Dong-Hak’s Cosmopolitan Spirituality¹⁷

Dong-Hak’s cosmopolitan spirituality depends on its distinctive understanding of body. Its philosophy contains a balanced perspective that overcomes both the transcendentalism of Semitic

¹⁷ Generally, the term “cosmopolitanism” indicates an ethical claim that “constitute[s] the basis of international legal obligations.” Refer to Darrel Moellendorf’s *Cosmopolitan Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2002), 5. Acknowledging this basic agreement, in this essay, I expand the use of it from the sense of international politics to that of its philosophical undercurrent. That is, cosmopolitanism is supported by the philosophical idea of realities’ inherent interrelationship to others as well as by the ethical idea of egalitarianism.

religions and the immanentism of eastern religions. The basis of this unified perspective lies in the concept of body. Dong-Hak stresses the “organic interdependence” of body, which is far from reductionist and mechanistic ideas. The realization of the importance of the organic body makes possible the creative theistic understanding of “*Si-Chun-Ju*” (bearing God). Sometimes, religious teachings advise followers either to abandon fellow human beings for the sake of God, or to kill them in the name of God. Such extreme teachings arise from the lack of the conscious understanding of the interdependence between human beings and God. This falseness never occurs in Dong-Hak because of its concept of body. Moreover, the concept of the interdependence of body develops to the awareness of the suffering of other lives and so affirms human dignity, social ethics, and ecological justice, as well as reverence for cosmological mystery.

Dong-Hak’s cosmopolitan spirituality is revealed in the concept of *In-Nae-Chun*. The humanitarian creed, *In-Nae-Chun* (人乃天), literally meaning “Man is Heaven,” is the hermeneutical result of a later development of the concept *Si-Chun-Ju* (bearing God).¹⁸ Although it literally means “Man is Heaven,” we can read it as “Man is God” because Heaven generally refers to God in Korean religious thought. However, this seemingly blasphemous idea does not affirm a blind identification of humanity with God in the substantialist way. It also does not mean a mere unity of minds that could be separated from their bodies. Rather, it indicates an inseparable, but not confused, relationship between the human being and God.

To grasp the full meaning of the idea of Ui-am, we need to trace the meaning of the concept explained by the Teacher Hae-wol. Developing Su-un’s “*Si-Chun-Ju*” (bearing God) concept, Hae-wol introduced the idea of “Three Respects”: respect for God, respect for Nature, and respect for Humanity. In this thought, we can see a definite expansion from the God-human relation to the God-Nature-human relationship. Hae-wol developed the concept of *Si-Chun-Ju* and expanded it to the cosmological dimension. The result of this development, inherited in Ui-am’s *In-Nae-Chun*, is clearly revealed in Dong-Hak’s cosmopolitan spirituality.

The concept of *In-Nae-Chun* implies a trinitarian spirituality: egalitarian humanism, ecological cosmopolitanism, and religious faith in God. These three support one another. That is,

¹⁸ The creed *In-Nae-Chun* was established by the Third Teacher, Ui-am (1862-1922). Ui-am took the legacies of the prior Teachers, Su-un (1824-1864) and Hae-wol (1827-1898). Historically, Hae-wol received the mantle of the founder, led Dong-Hak for thirty-five years, and finally died on the gallows. Religio-political persecution was terminated in the time of Ui-am. Ui-am reformed Dong-Hak and renamed it as Ch’ondogyo in 1905.

the egalitarian humanism never deteriorated into anthropocentrism because of ecological cosmopolitanism. We have observed such deterioration in the past in western traditions, whether they are theistic or atheistic. Although religious faith in God assures human egalitarianism, it often fails to expand its justice to nature. The contemporary ecological crisis is the evidence. The modern atheistic tradition also celebrates humanitarianism. However, its sense of ecological cosmopolitanism is scarce. In Dong-Hak spirituality, humanitarian justice does not exclude ecological justice since its philosophical understanding suggests the organic inter-relationship between human beings and the world. This comprehensive spirituality is possible because of its panentheistic perspective, which is a major difference from some eastern religious thought. In fact, the concept of Dong-Hak supposes that theism buttresses ethics. The trinitarian spirituality is of great value and applicability to global ethics.

Dong-Hak's spirituality is supported not only by its philosophical teachings but also by its quest for religious discipline. Dong-Hak regards human beings as respectful beings;¹⁹ however, the respectful state is not warranted in itself. "*Su-sim-jung-ghi*" (修心正氣), meaning "keeping mind and having right energy," is essentially encouraged. Su-un stresses religious discipline at various points in his writings. The idea of "bearing God" is not merely a philosophical explanation but implies a spiritual training: "*Sung* (誠 sincerity), *Kyung* (敬 respect), and *Shin* (信faith)."²⁰ Su-un borrows the Confucian virtues (sincerity and respect) and completes them by adding his own religious experience—faith. For Su-un, the virtues of sincerity and respect derive from Confucianism; however, they do not refer to goodness achieved by ethical self-realization. Rather, they are based on "faith in God." Like the trinitarian spirituality, the three virtues are interdependent, and yet faith plays a dominant role.²¹

In short, starting from Su-un's creative religious experience, Dong-Hak expanded to provide a solid theological background to promote a cosmopolitan spirituality. Uniting previous

¹⁹ In "*Non-Hak-Moon*" (論學文), Su-un says that everything generates from the interaction of *yin-yang*, and the human is the most spiritual being. He says that humanity deserves both respect and responsibility.

²⁰ Dong Hee Choi and Kyung Won Lee, *A New Writing of Dong-Hak: Thought and Canon*, in "*Jwa-Jam*" (座簾), 305

²¹ Yong Choon Kim, *The Ch'ondogyo Concept of Man*, 72. Later, Hae-wol develops the idea and proclaims the "Ten Things Not To Do To God." 1. Do not deceive God (Heaven). 2. Do not be proud before God. 3. Do not hurt God. 4. Do not contradict God. 5. Do not let God die early. 6. Do not profane God. 7. Do not let God be hungry. 8. Do not destroy God. 9. Do not dislike God. 10. Do not let God yield.

discussions, I would here like to summarize the valuable accomplishments of Dong-Hak's panentheism and its cosmopolitan spirituality.

First, Dong-Haks' panentheism overcomes both transcendental dualism and pantheistic monism. God is not the absolute Other that transcends human beings and the world. There is no absolute division between God and worldly beings. On the other hand, God is not equal to the world either. Dong-Hak's panentheism maintains a holistic view that avoids complete dichotomies of nature/super-nature, mind/body, sacredness/profanity, and creator/creature.

Second, Dong-Hak's philosophy has a trinitarian structure: God—human being—the world. The human body is a cosmic body that is interconnected with God and the cosmos. Therefore, human ethical and spiritual responsibility to the socio-political and ecological problems is encouraged.

Third, Dong-Hak's trinitarian spirituality—egalitarian humanism, ecological cosmopolitanism, and religious faith in God—undergirds a religio-ethical "ought" to humanity and nature as well as to God. This "ought" can be nourished by spiritual disciplines.

In summary, Dong-Hak presents both a respectable theistic idea very viable in the current theological debates and a balanced spirituality useful in the formation of an ethic to overcome the contemporary ecological crisis. Its theism and spirituality are essentially joined so that it succeeds in offering the potential to build a good *theistic* morality.

Economic Globalization and the Need of a Global Ethic

Globalization is a "structural revolution," which is "unavoidable and unpredictable."²² It is caused by the economic and technological development of modern Europe and North America. While economy, politics, and information move globally, globalization involves structural change toward a new economic and political distribution of power throughout the world.²³ One problem with this is the stratification it fosters: the rich become richer, the poor poorer. Therefore, "the

²² Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 160.

²³ Historically, globalization seemed to appear as a struggle between East and West in which the latter invaded the former while the former had been drained of its economic resources and power. However, in the current situation, the international relationship becomes much more complex. The economic restructuring in the global dimension is occurring not by the West only but by the East-West axis. The capital is flowing out of the West and toward East Asian and the Middle East with various economic and political variants. In this sense, globalization cannot be simply equated with the western exploitation of eastern resources. Nonetheless, the general process of globalization has been following its basic rule, an extreme polarization of wealth with which this paper is concerned.

escalating unipolarity of the global order”—globalization—has its moral implications: it undermines “the ethical equilibrium of our nature at all levels.”²⁴ In fact, the emerging global order engenders a profit-oriented worldview, and it legitimizes the greed of the rich at the expense of human welfare. The most disconcerting aspect of globalization is the erroneous conviction that “under the justification of unconditional competition, human society can be directed and improved by the rule of the free market alone.”²⁵ However, the factual realities are quite contrary: disobedience to “market theodicy” is regarded as a deadly sin. Furthermore, this new global market sovereignty actually creates unequally economic distribution, biased political enforcement, and the devastation of the environment. From this broken place we must listen to “the wake-up call!”

The need for a global ethic arises from consciously seeing the planet-wide crisis caused by market globalization. Developing a global ethic is a process of globalization. However, there are some legitimate fears of this form of globalization. Historically, a “global” process has often turned out to be a ploy of western society to impose the values of western culture on the rest of the world. Therefore, a crucial point is the issue of “credibility.” If a document for a global ethic would be prepared and promoted by organizations controlled by a club of rich countries, it could jeopardize the ethical credibility for those who suffer and lose out. Hence, it is imperative to follow Paul Knitter’s suggestion that any talk of “global” reality privilege the experiences of those who suffer.²⁶ This entails not only that dialogues should be about those who suffer, but that the oppressed should be given a privileged place at the table to speak for themselves. In that sense, the process of a global ethic is a process of globalization *from below*, a process against dominating corporate powers.

Although actual works stimulated by a global ethic involve a long-term process, we can find undercurrents for the work already prepared. In Ewert Cousins’ words, “the Second Axial Period” comes! This new period can be characterized as the shift from the “Age of Monologue” to the newly dawning “Age of Dialogue.”²⁷ In fact, there are global movements networking diverse communities in their struggle against the consequences of economic globalization. These movements form the undercurrents of a global ethic. In particular, they are open to contributions

²⁴ Swami Agnivesh, “Religious Conscience and the Global Economy: An Eastern Perspective on Sociospiritual Activism,” in *Subverting Greed*, ed. Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 40.

²⁵ Zhou Qin, “A Confucian View of the Global Economy,” in *Subverting Greed*, 85.

²⁶ Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 87-96.

²⁷ Leonard Swidler, ed., *For All Life* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999), 13 and 16.

from religions of the world that have maintained their “long-term memory, yielding a much richer understanding of the spiritual dimension of life and culture, and vision of life.”²⁸ Various world religions, having kept a strong sense of reverence for life, could provide a vision for change. Rooted amidst the “thick” cultural backdrop to which religious spiritualities belong, surely different religions that interact with each other could collaborate in order to obtain new moral meanings and values for each other beyond their original contexts.

However, the project for a global ethic must be a risky business since it takes a kind of a universalist perspective. Morality is a culturally integrated “thick” reality; and it becomes “thin” only on special occasions and for specific purposes. As Michael Walzer says, every moral term has both minimal (thin, universalist) and maximal (thick, relativist) meanings, and these two are “an internal feature of every morality.”²⁹ Therefore, to pursue a “global” ethic is always precarious because there is no “neutral moral language.” Still, the project is not a case of foundationalism such that different groups of people are “all committed to the same set of ultimate values.”³⁰ According to M. Walzer, we much find “overlapping [moral] expectations” about “the behavior not only of our fellows but of strangers too.”³¹ These overlapping expectations are a “thin and universalist morality inside every thick and particular morality.”³² In fact, a global ethic is an art that strives to achieve balance between the necessity of responsibility and the need of ultimate openness. In the “between,” it strives to locate an ethical “ought” that refers to life-oriented values.

A bold challenge to a global ethic comes from ethical relativists. According to them, “moral rightness for a culture or society is determined by that society’s accepted moral standards.”³³ This basic understanding must be accepted as a valuable teaching of cultural criticisms. However, what becomes problematic is the “position” of ethical relativism. Charles Jones, in *Global Justice*, criticizes the position of ethical relativism in three ways. First, although ethical relativism appeals

²⁸ Martin Robra, “Affirming the Role of Global Movements for Global Ethics,” *Ecumenical Review* 52.4 (Oct. 2000), 477.

²⁹ Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, xi, and 17.

³³ Charles Jones, *Global Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 174.

to the “actual variation of moral beliefs across communities,” we do not have to move “from cross-community disagreements to ethical relativism.”³⁴ Diverse moral opinions do not necessarily entail disagreement about moral values at any deep level. The presence of cultural and moral diversity itself does not oppose a “cosmopolitan morality.” Second, Jones asks whether cosmopolitanism is justified by “imposing justice.” He suggests that, “one can be a moral universalist without believing that there is a ‘single moral code’ with specific rules that every human society must follow.”³⁵ Third, ethical relativism has self-stultifying implications in itself. Relativism leaves us with “an impoverished conception of moral progress.” That is, relativism would make it “*impossible* to judge the justice of arrangements.”³⁶ To be sure, a cosmopolitan endeavor for a global ethic is a journey that requires the willingness to risk commitments; however, it is imperative and ennobling work!

A Discussion on Global Ethics

Let us examine a beautiful example of working on a global ethic, one which is promoted by Hans Küng. According to Küng, a global ethic is nothing but the necessary “minimal basic consensus relating to binding values, irrevocable standards and fundamental moral attitudes.”³⁷ For Küng, a global ethic is the ethical minimum that provides a basis for a rational dialogue of different socio-religious communities. The necessity of a global ethic derives from the fundamental crisis: a crisis in global economy, ecology, and politics. This leads to a judgment that there will be “no new world order without a new world ethic.”³⁸ There is no total ethical consensus among the variety of communities, he believes, and yet they all concern “human beings.” Küng respects human beings as “the goal and criterion” from the beginning of his ethical concern.³⁹ His project for a global ethic, therefore, is to find “the golden rule of humanity” that could be generally comprehensible among different religious groups, and that could penetrate to a deeper ethical level. The basic idea appears

³⁴ Ibid., 174-75.

³⁵ Ibid., 175.

³⁶ Ibid., 176.

³⁷ Swidler, *For All Life*, 42.

³⁸ Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 92.

³⁹ Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 31.

in “Towards a Global Ethic” under the title of “four irrevocable directives.”⁴⁰ Herein lies the importance of the initiative taken by representatives of the world religions to develop and propose a global ethic.

The declaration of “a Global Ethic” nurtured the hope that moral values held in common by people of faith can become an instrument for a more peaceful and just world. The fact that the declaration was presented to the “Parliament of the World’s Religions” is related to Küng’s understanding of the role of religions: religions can effect a change “in the inner orientation” the “hearts” of people and move them to a “conversion” from a false path to a new orientation for life.⁴¹ According to him, religion certainly cannot do everything, but it can disclose a certain “more” in human life:

- Religion can communicate a specific depth-dimension, an all-embracing horizon of meaning, even in the face of suffering, injustice, guilt and meaninglessness.
- Religion can guarantee supreme values, unconditional norms, the deepest motivations and the highest ideals.
- Religion can create a sense of feeling at home, a sense of trust, faith, certainty, strength for the self, security and hope.
- Religion can give grounds for protest and resistance against unjust conditions.⁴²

Far from merely being a source of “the clash of civilizations,” religions can offer hope to the global community. Küng’s global ethic project is of crucial importance in that it provides religion with the “space” that would otherwise be occupied by the utilitarian values aggressively promoted by corporate globalization and its guiding neo-liberal ideology. However, the declaration does not yet fully overcome the limitation of “anthropocentric” philosophical and theological traditions. Here, P. Knitter’s suggestion sounds worthy.

Knitter takes the same stance as Küng in his quest for global responsibility to “the pain of the world.” Interestingly, Knitter warns and criticizes pluralist positions in the title of “Pluralists

⁴⁰ Swidler, *For All Life*, 44-50. “The Declaration of a Global Ethic” was proclaimed on Sep. 4, 1993. The four irrevocable directives are: 1. Toward a Culture of Non-violence and Respect for Life. 2. Toward a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order. 3. Toward a Culture of Tolerance and a Life in Truthfulness. 4. Toward a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women.

⁴¹ Swidler, *For All Life*, 43.

⁴² Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 54.

Become Imperialists”: 1) “they too quickly presuppose the common ground that establishes unity among religions, and 2) they too easily draw up common guidelines for a dialogue among the religions.”⁴³ He evaluates Küng’s position that only *humanum*—respect for human dignity and basic values—could provide the raw materials of a global ethics. He suggests an addition of *cosmicum*—the ecological dignity and value—to *humanum*. For when we focus only on the human, we would easily slip into the “anthropocentrism that has condoned the misuse and the murder of nonhuman life and life-support systems.”⁴⁴ A global ethics, for Knitter, must be rooted in a concern for the human *and* the ecological. Furthermore, in order to be able to promote the greater life of *humanum* and *cosmicum*, he advises that we will have to wake up to the *divinum* that animates or transcends the human and the cosmic. Using Raimon Panikkar’s terminology, reality itself is “*theanthropocosmic*—a unity in distinction between the divine, the human, and the cosmic.”⁴⁵

The crucial unity embodied in Panikkar’s vision and language is valuable and essential. Philosophical and theological perspectives could regulate the ‘mode’ and ‘range’ of ethical considerations, and a unified idea of the God-human-cosmos experience of realities could foster a comprehensive morality. Panikkar’s concept of “*cosmotheandric* experience” can be represented as an “emerging religious consciousness,” which inclusively grasps the nature of reality. The notion can also become a firm ground for a religious perspective by providing ethical suggestions for the contemporary global crisis. According to the idea:

- The World is not a habitat or an external part of the whole or even of myself. . . . My relationship with the World is ultimately no different from my relationship with myself: the World and I differ, but are not two separate realities.
- God is not the absolute Other. . . . God is the ultimate and unique “I,” . . . we are God’s “thous,” and our relation is personal, trinitarian and non-dualistic. . . . God is not only the God of Man, but also the God of the World.
- Man here is ultimately more than an individual. Man is a person, a knot in the net of relationship not limited to the spiritual “thous,” but reaching out to the very antipodes of the real.⁴⁶

⁴³ Knitter, *One Earth Many Religion*, 43–45. Knitter’s soterio-centric pluralism is often criticized because of his request to a global justice as a “pre-condition” for inter-religious dialogues. However, in this book, Knitter presents the error of the universalist attempt.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 72–75.

This “cosmotheandric intuition” stresses “a mystical strain” between God, humans, and the world. In this sense, the human being as “the product of a cosmic Womb” must be responsible to the fundamental global crisis, as it was caused by the human being. Panikkar’s ideas show the potentiality of a persuasive theistic morality on the issue of a global ethic.

The theistic morality, though still requiring open discussions with non-theistic ethical positions, could become a meaningful response to the modern moral theory in crisis. Of course, the theistic morality is not a mere return to a traditional “premodern religious perspective,” which modern autonomous reason successfully criticizes. Rather, it must overcome “the major weakness of late modern ethics, its inability to point to a basis for moral motivation.”⁴⁷ In fact, late modern ethics fails to give “motivation to adopt a moral way of life,” and the failure is caused by its separation “from religious beliefs, especially any type of theism.”⁴⁸ Through the separation, the late modern ethics lose the sensitivity of the “unbreakable inner connection between ought and is.”⁴⁹ In that sense, I agree with David Ray Griffin who proposes not merely a “return to theism,” but a “return forward” to theistic ethics.⁵⁰ Theistic ethics could be an alternative global ethic to the modern autonomous ethics, which stresses the precedence to individual freedom and autonomy and consequently engenders “atrophy of the sense of community.”⁵¹ Theistic ethics emphasize a “religious conscience” that has “awareness with a duty to respond.”⁵² There is a crucial need to activate the religious conscience at the global level because the advent of globalization has already upset the balance between greed and need.⁵³ The legitimization of greed and indifference by market globalization has not only moral but also spiritual implications. In the contemporary global crisis, therefore, far more needed is a *spiritual morality*, which a theistic ethic can provide.

In sum, a global ethic must evoke the necessity of global responsibility toward the widespread crisis caused by market globalization. In other words, a global ethic must create a sense

⁴⁷ David R. Griffin, “Whiteheadian Theism and the Crisis in Modern Moral Theory” in *Whitehead’s Philosophy: Discussing It and Applying It* (unpublished, 2003), 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Agnivesh, *Subverting Greed*, 44.

⁵² Ibid., 46.

⁵³ Ibid., 40.

of cosmic community. Due to the “thick” characteristic of morality, it needs ultimate openness to different opinions. Here is the reason why a global ethic becomes a risky business. A global ethic is a process of globalization, and yet it must not “impose” any universalized morality in the name of global justice. Rather, “the principle of self-determination” should be respected in the process of ethical globalization “from below.” The principle, however, is not equated with an affirmation of the priority of autonomy and freedom, which modern autonomous morality stresses. Instead, to implement a global ethic is to propose an ethical “ought,” referring to life-oriented values, which is the basis of “motivation” for a moral life. Here, religions can contribute their all-embracing hopes to the global community. In particular, religious morality can provide a global ethic with a spiritual dimension that is crucial for overcoming indulgent consumerism endorsed by market ideologies. A global ethic must extend its scope from human communities to the cosmic community. For this purpose, what is needed is an integral perspective from which to see the interconnectedness of the God-human being-cosmos. A panentheistic idea could offer both theoretical ground for seeing the “unbreakable inner connection between ought and is” and moral spirituality for overcoming greed and indifference.

Linking Dong-Hak’s Ideas with Global Ethics

Now, we arrive at the final point at which I connect Dong-Hak’s theism and spirituality with the issue of a global ethic. I would like to point out three aspects of Dong-Hak that could contribute to a global ethic.

First, Dong-Hak’s distinctive emphasis on the religious experiences of “Bearing God” and related panentheistic ideas grasp “the organic interrelationship” among the human being, the cosmos and God. Theologically, this emphasis overcomes errors in dualistic transcendentalism and monistic immanentism. Dong-Hak’s panentheism represents a balanced perspective that avoids the absolute division between God, humanity and the cosmos without a confusion of their interrelationship. Transcendental dualism eliminates the interconnectedness and often causes anthropocentric arbitrariness, whereas monistic immanentism confuses the interrelationship such that it lacks responsibility to socio-political problems. Both fail to become a philosophical and theological basis for a global ethic, especially for a “theistic ethic.” Dong-Hak’s “Bearing God” concept and its theistic implication overcome both failures and become a possible theoretical ground for a theistic global ethic.

Second, Dong-Hak's "Man is Heaven" ideas and its trinitarian spirituality provide crucial elements of theistic morality. Knitter's suggestion that a global ethic contain *humanum*, *cosmicum* and *divinum*, perfectly corresponds to Dong-Hak's trinitarian spirituality, which is listed as egalitarian humanism, ecological cosmopolitanism, and faith in God. As we have seen above, this theistic ethic not only overcomes anthropocentric morality but also provides a global ethic *with a spiritual dimension*. Dong-Hak's spirituality underlines an ethical *imperative* because of its theistic elements, which is its merit in contrast to "late modern atheistic ethics."

Finally, Dong-Hak's request for spiritual disciplines—"keeping mind and having right energy" and "sincerity, respect, and faith"—*enrich* the awareness of "duty" to respond. Both egoism and altruism are the moral realities of the human being. An ethic is "the art of loving" in order to overcome the manipulation of narcissism, which results in the swaying between egoism and altruism without a sense of community. Moral philosophy must provide a moral foundation and to build "a more expansive structure."⁵⁴ Indeed, the expansion of moral structure is crucial in the contemporary situation in which the legitimization of greed and indifference is accelerated. Dong-Hak's spiritual disciplines are significant for enabling and enhancing the expansion of the moral structure.

Conclusion

In this paper, I presented a distinctive Korean religious and political movement, Dong-Hak, to examine its potential contribution to a global ethic. I focused on its panentheism and trinitarian spirituality and discussed whether those ideas could provide a theoretical basis for the possibility of a theistic global ethic. Stressing the interrelationship of God-human being-the world, Dong-Hak presents an idea of cosmic community and a cosmopolitan morality. In particular, its theistic conception is integrated with ethical arguments so that it shows that a "theistic" global ethic with the potential to respond to the contemporary global predicament. In addition, its theistic spirituality could promote the ethical "imperative." Surely, Dong-Hak could contribute its theism and spirituality to a global ethic!

⁵⁴ Walzer, *Thick and Thin*, 6.

Bibliography

- Choi, Dong Hee. and Kyung Won Lee. *A New Writing of Dong-Hak: Thought and Canon* [in Korean]. Seoul: Jip-Moon-Dang, 2003.
- Griffin, David Ray. "Global Imperialism or Global Democracy: The Present Alternatives." Unpublished, 2003.
- _____. "Whiteheadian Theism and the Crisis in modern Moral Theory," in *Whitehead's Philosophy: Discussing It and Applying It*. Unpublished, 2003.
- Jones, Charles. *Global Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Kim, Kyung Jae. "Su-un's *Si-Chun-Ju* Experience and Dong-Hak's Theism" [in Korean], (Aug. 1998), <http://soombat.org/article/article.html>.
- _____. "A Comparative Study of Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Experience and Choi Je-Woo's *Si-Chun-Ju* Experience," [in Korean], (Oct. 1998), <http://soombat.org/article/article.html>.
- Kim, Sang Il. *The Structure of Donghak Existence* [in Korean]. Seoul: Ji-Sik-San-Up-Sa, 2000.
- Kim, Yong Choon. *The Ch'ondogyo Concept of Man*. Seoul: Pan Korea Book Corporation, 1978.
- Knitter, Paul F. *One Earth Many Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995.
- Knitter, Paul F. and Chandra Muzaffar, eds. *Subverting Greed*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Küng, Hans. *Global Responsibility*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.
- _____. *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Maguire, Daniel C. *Sacred Energies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- McMurtry, John. *Unequal Freedoms*. Toronto: Kumarian Press, 1998.
- Moellendorf, Darrel. *Cosmopolitan Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2002.
- Panikkar, Raimon. *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Robra, Martin. "Affirming the Role of Global Movements for Global Ethics." *Ecumenical Review* 52.4 (Oct. 2000): 471-478.
- Sharma, Arvind. *The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedānta*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.
- Swidler, Leonard, ed. *For All Life*. Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999.
- Walzer, Michael. *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.