

Creative Dialogue on Ultimate Reality¹

Joohan Kim

Introduction

Religious pluralism is a remarkable cultural and religious phenomenon in our time and one of the important issues to be addressed by religious thinkers and writers of all traditions today. The challenge of religious pluralism has thus been extensively discussed. For me the problem of religious pluralism arises out of a very existential situation, not just theoretically or academically. In Korea three major traditional religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism have existed in a state of harmony for several centuries. Although Korea is culturally mono-ethnic, she is religiously a pluralistic country. Therefore, religious pluralism in Korea explains well the tensions and dynamics between Christianity and other existing religions. It also explains the spirituality of Korean people and their readiness for Christianity. In this regard, I would like to begin this paper with my existential experience that has led to my efforts at coming to terms with interreligious dialogue.

Since I began theological study, I confess that I could have not easily understood why we Korean Christians have to attach such a distinctive name(Yahweh) in front of God. This fact shows that although Yahweh God was one who Israel met in their concrete historical field that is, Yahweh God is a national God. I, consciously or unconsciously, presumed that the god of my ancestors is different from Yahweh God. Such a thinking always made me raise a doubt about Yahweh God. But it seems that my doubt came to a resolution when a Korean Old Testament scholar, Ee-Kon Kim, in an article, claimed that the name Yahweh is not just a specially fixed common noun or a proper noun such as table, chair, or apple, but it means the character of the living God who respond to salvation through creative action and the character of God of creation. Since then, I did not follow the teachings of some Korean theologians who hold that Yahweh God in the Old Testament is absolutely different from God of our ancestors. In this respect, I tentatively came to the conclusion that God can reveal himself/herself in various ways and have many appellations because of our different cultural and historical contexts, but God is only one, not many.

Interestingly enough, when Korean biblical scholars translated the Bible into the Korean vernacular language, they had to grapple with the problem of how to translate Greek term *theos* in Korean language. Eventually, *theos* was translated into *Hananim*(One God), but there is no term *Hananim* in Korean language. This translation is grammatically wrong. Because when in Korean grammar a number combines with a noun, the word should be transformed into a different character. In this case, *Hananim* should be *Hannim*. For Koreans *Hannim* traditionally meant "God of heaven." *Hannim* is the name of our ancestor's god. So many biblical theologians considered *Hannim* as a heretical nuance. In spite of the fact that the latter term is a far more appropriate concept to the consciousness of Koreans than the former, mainstream biblical scholars did not adapt the latter because of the danger of syncretism with our traditional religion. At any rate, this fact illustrates that religious pluralism in Korea is at stake.

I feel that God revealed his character more evidently, in depth to the Prophets of Israel, the Apostles, and his chosen people. I also perceive the breath, suffering, agony, and agape of God in the life and death, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. But simultaneously I believe that the same God was one who was together with our ancestor's history. I do not believe that a unique God, the God of creation entered into Korea with American missionaries

¹. This work was supported by Hanshin University Research Grant.

in 1884. These convictions of mine led me to be interested in issues surrounding the relationship between the Christian gospel and non-Christian culture.

I, in interreligious dialogue, think that the most troublesome issue concerns our different concepts of the Ultimate Reality. In this meaning, my argument in this paper starts from the fact that before entering into dialogue, we should examine the nature of Ultimate Reality. On the agreed understanding of the Ultimate Reality, we can make creative dialogue.

In order to carry out this task, I will deal with John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. Then I will explore the concept of *Hannim*, the expression of the Ultimate Reality experienced and perceived in the Korean traditional religious-cultural context. This paper proceeds as follows. The next section below deals with John Hick's thought in some detail. This section will argue the viability of Hick's proposal in the context of religious pluralism. The argument is based on the description of Hick's argument about from ego-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. The third section examines the concept of *Hannim* as an attempt to relate a Ultimate Reality of a non-Christian context to the Christian God. The section will also debate whether such revision of 'theo-logy' is possible in the cultural and spiritual setting of Korea. Here the work of Hick is supported and supplemented by suggesting that *Hannim* would be a different from my research for interreligious dialogue. That section states that each religion, and more specifically each religious community, must be faced on its own distinctive terms and within its immediate cultural environment. In the section, I will develop my own view about interreligious dialogue.

From Ego-Centeredness to Reality-Centeredness

As a main representative of theology of pluralism, John Hick begins his argument with the following basic question: How would the One we know as the heavenly Father of all humankind have restricted the possibility of salvation to those who happen to have been born in certain places in certain periods of history? This question is based on Hick's affirmation of the universal salvific will of God.² He criticizes all of those who are trying so hard to find room for their non-Christian brethren in the sphere of salvation, while still working within the presuppositions of the old dogma that holds Christ rather than God at the center.³ Therefore, Hick formulates his position in reaction to the Christo-centric approach dominant in contemporary Western theology today. From the Christo-centric perspective only Christians can be saved and "so we have to say that devout and godly non-Christians are really, in some metaphysical sense, Christians or Christians-to-be without knowing it."⁴ The intention, says Hick, is not double talk but the charitable extension of grace to religious persons who had formerly been regarded as beyond the pale. According to Hick, such a move can function as a psychological bridge between the no-longer-acceptable older view and a new open view that is emerging. But Hick insists, sooner or later, Christians shall have to get off this bridge to the other side.

In order to get off this bridge, Hick calls for a Copernican revolution in our theology of religions leading to a new map of the universe of faiths. It parallels Copernicus' model of the universe.

The Copernican revolution in astronomy.....involved a shift from dogma that the earth is the centre of the revolving universe to the realization that it is the Sun that is at the

² John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's press, 1973), 131. Hereafter *Universe of Faiths*.

³ John Hick, *God has Many Names* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

centre, with all the planets, including our own earth, moving around it. The Copernican revolution in theology involves an equally radical transformation in our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our own religion within it. It involves a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religious of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him.⁵

In short, Hick demands a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths. We then see the great world religions as different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances. On this basis, we can assume that God, as reflected in the different civilizations, manifests in differ, we may believe that everywhere the one God has been at work “pressing in upon the human spirit.”⁶

Hick’s proposal, a Copernican revolution in theology, helps overcome the Christian’s exclusivism to the non-Christian religions. But, insofar as he persists with belief in the universal salvific will of the God at the center of the universe of faiths, does he not still remain the Christianity-centered thought? In response to this criticism and in order to develop his argument, Hick proposes the one Spirit, the one Divine Reality or Absolute, behind all the religions as a common ground for interreligious dialogue. Can we really find out Ultimate Reality behind all religions in spite of differences of each religious worship, meditation, and experiences? How are we to refer to that Reality? Hick proposes to use the term “the Eternal One.”⁷

As a common ground to all the great religious traditions, contends Hick, divine reality, the Eternal One, is infinite and is in its fullness beyond the scope of human thoughts and language and experiences. On what basis does Hick insist that the Eternal One can be accommodated to all religions? In order to answer this question, Hick says that we have to note why we came to take faiths of different forms. “Religious faith is not an isolated aspect of our lives but is closely bound up with human culture and human history, which are in turn bound up with basic geographical, climatic, and economic circumstances.”⁸ In order to clarify this view, Hick traces the process of faith taking different forms through the actual religious history of humankind. In the earlier stages of religious history, humankind was aware of the Eternal One in the dimensions of its own image. In Primitive ages, humans lived in relation to an immense variety of tribal gods and spirits. They were sometimes aware of a High God, dwelling remotely in the skies, with an implicitly universal domain, though having little connection with the details of men’s daily lives. Hick holds, in the early twilight period, that men had, in virtue of the natural religious tendency of their nature, a dim and crude sense of the Eternal One.⁹

Through centuries and millennia the conditions of human life remained essentially the same, and generation after generation lived and died within this pre-revelation phase of natural religion. But with evolution of human’s life through long periods of time, the conditions gradually formed for the emergence of human individuality. Hick points out that such conditions made human’s awareness of the Eternal One immensely enlarge and develop.¹⁰ Subsequently, the different forms of human awareness of the Eternal One

⁵. *Universe of the Faiths*, 130-1.

⁶. *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷. *God has Many Names*, 42.

⁸. *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹. *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰. *Ibid.*, 45.

appeared on the religious life of human. As a result, we have what we know today as the great world faiths: the non-theistic religions of Buddhism and Confucianism and theistic religions of Christianity and Islam.

Hick presumes that there is some genuine awareness of the divine, but that the concrete form which it takes is provided by cultural factors. On this view these different human awarenesses of the Eternal One represent different culturally conditioned perception of the same infinite divine reality.¹¹ What Hick is claiming at this point was that though the form may be different, as human cultures and language, are different, the Ultimate Reality to which these diverse forms and paths refer must be the same.

In this regard, many have criticized Hick's argument for being too theistic. How can we accommodate Hick's theistic form to non-theistic religions? In response to these critics, Hick has elaborated the concept of the ultimate reality. Instead of using the term the Eternal One – because it is too theistically colored – he now prefers to speak of 'the Real.'¹² In a book, Hick deals more precisely with the concept of the Real.¹³

What do we mean by the Ultimate? Hick defines that the Ultimate is "putative reality which transcends everything other than itself but is not transcended by anything other than itself."¹⁴ The Ultimate is related to the universe as its ground or creator, and to us human beings, as conscious parts of the universe. Hick says that in regard to the Ultimate, what we describe is "not the Ultimate as it is in itself but as it is conceived in the variety of ways made possibly by our varied human mentalities and cultures."¹⁵ In other words, the Ultimate can be perceived and manifested in many different forms made by our different modes of religious experiences. This argument means that God of Christianity, *Allah* of Islam, and *Sunyata* of Mahayana Buddhism, etc, are just different forms of the Ultimate, thought and experienced by human beings in different culture and traditions. At this point, I think that it is valuable to note, the opinion of the Chinese philosopher, Chu Hsi. Chu Hsi advocated that "principle is one but its manifestations are many." Originally principle is one, but because of material forces it is manifested as many. In this way of speaking, material force determines principle. There is a unified principle first, but then according to the differences of material force, the things formed are different. The differences of things do not come from principle but from material force.¹⁶ I think that John Hick's and Chu Hsi's basic theories are the same in that they think various phenomena issue from one principle(the Ultimate reality).

How is it possible that there is such diversity in human response to one reality? Hick's explanation relies heavily on a Kantian-type distinction between the *noumenal* world, which exists independently, and outside human's perception of it, and the phenomenal world, which is that world as it appears to our human consciousness.¹⁷

We now have to distinguish between the Real *an sich* and the Real as variously experienced-and-thought by different human communities. On each of the great

¹¹. Ibid., 52.

¹². John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1989), 11.

¹³. John Hick, *Disputed Questions* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1993). Especially see chapter 10.

¹⁴. Ibid., 164.

¹⁵. Ibid., 165.

¹⁶. Wing-Tsit Chan, ed., *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1980), 66.

¹⁷. *In Interpretation of Religion*, 240f.

degrees of emphasis, between the Real(thought of as God, Brahman, the Dharmakays...) in itself and the Real as manifested within the intellectual and experiential purview of that tradition.¹⁸

By distinguishing 'reality' from 'appearance', or *noumenon* from *phenomenon*, Hick attempts to show that each religious tradition represents a different but valid way of worshipping or contemplating the same Ultimate Reality. We can only experience or conceive of the Real as we encounter it through the lenses of particular cultural, historical and linguistic structures which shape our humanity. Thus the one *noumenal* Reality is experienced, conceived, and thought about through many human phenomena.¹⁹

Phenomenal expressions of the Real may take the form of theistic personae like Yahweh and Alla and non-theistic *impersonae* like the *Tao*. None of these is a literally true description of the *noumenal* Real, which is in itself beyond such distinctions as personal or impersonal. We cannot apply to the Real *an sich* the characteristics encountered in its *personae* and *impersonae*.²⁰ The Real *an sich* cannot be the object of a religious cult. We cannot worship it or achieve union with it. We worship one or other of its *personae*, or we seek union with one or other of its *impersonae*.²¹ We are free to choose between the personal and non-personal manifestation of the Real. And insofar as a deity or the Absolute reflect an authentic phenomenal encounter with the Real, Hick requires that we should transform from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.

At this point, a question should be asked: if the various forms of the Real are just different manifestations of the same Real because of various tradition and cultural experiences, does not Hick fall into religious relativism or syncretism? Noticing the pitfalls of relativism, Hick says that "if we think for a moment of the entire range of religious phenomena, on one is going to maintain that they are all on the same level of value or validity."²²

He holds that evaluation of a religion should be based on the following question: "Is this complex of religious experience, belief, and behavior soteriologically effective? Does it make possible the transformation of human experience from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness?"²³ Hick argues that the great world religions are fundamentally alike in exhibiting a soteriological structure. That is to say, they are all concerned with salvation, liberation, enlightenment, fulfillment. In effect, this common soteriological structure can be typified as exhibiting a turning from "self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness."²⁴

Apparently, Hick recognizes to critics who have accused him of flabby relativism, Hick recognizes the need to grade religions and suggests that this can better be done soteriologically-ethically rather than theologically-doctrinally by examining how a particular belief or practice actually realizes what Hick takes to be the practical goal of all religions. A still more fundamental question should be raised to Hick: if the Real in itself is not and cannot be humanly experienced, why postulate such an unknown and unknowable '*Ding an sich*'? The

¹⁸. Ibid., 236.

¹⁹. *Disputed Questions*, 171.

²⁰. *An Interpretation of Religion*, 246.

²¹. *Disputed Questions*, 177-78.

²². "On Grading Religions," *Religious Studies* no 17(1981); 451, quoted from Paul knitter, *No Other Name*.(New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 148.

²³. *Disputed Questions*. 177-78.

²⁴. Ibid.,

answer, says Hick, is that the divine *noumenon* is a necessary postulate of the pluralistic religious life of humanity.²⁵

As we have examined so far, Hick's central concern was with the nature of the Ultimate Reality. He concluded that the great world faiths have each true and authentic values. Therefore, we may say that it is harmful and false to evaluate any religion alone as true or authentic and the other and the others as false or inauthentic. I think that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis helps explain the relationship between the Christian claims of Ultimacy and non-Christian religions. Also, Hick's argument teaches us that interreligious dialogue should be made on the basis of the understanding of authentic traditional culture in that he distinguishes the Real *an sich* from culture, tradition and experiences related to it. At this point, I principally agree with Hick's hypothesis. We Christians should differentiate the essence of Christianity in itself from the culture and tradition to which it belongs. It seems to me that Westerners tend to think that if Christianity combines with the Western culture, it is no problem, but if it combines with the non-Western culture, it would void Christian claims of Ultimacy or truth. What is our criterion for this judgment? I think that Hick's working hypothesis leads us carefully to notice all differences that the phenomenology of religion reveals, and through which the plurality of religious traditions can truly be given positive significance. Hick tries to establish his own dialogical standpoint on the understanding that there is a common ground about the Real underlying all religious traditions. On this basis, we can say that the Ultimacy of each religion is a different manifestation of the Real. I think that it may provide a framework for interreligious dialogue, and an explicit basis for the hope that each tradition may learn from and be changed by its encounter with the other.

But insofar as Hick still presupposes the Real *an sich* as a priori, I doubt if he can provide a valid concept of the Real for the post-modern age in which substantial metaphysics is collapsed. In other word, because Hick presupposes metaphysically "*Ding an sich*" or substance that has nothing to do with phenomena, his hypothesis is inadequate to apply to the religions which deny the existence of the Real. In this regard, I think that Hick has still the relic of the Western Christian concept of God. Nevertheless, it is evident that Hick's hypothesis provided fertile ground for basic dialogue. From the viewpoint of Reality-centeredness, the creative dialogue may be made. When we attempt to dialogue a religion, we should explore nature of the Reality. In this connection, I would like to discuss the concept of *Hannim*(God of heaven), expression of the Koreans' Ultimate Reality. In doing so, I will explore *Hannim* in relation to Christian God.

Ultimate Reality in Korean Culture

In introduction, I mentioned that in the Korean vernacular Bible Greek term *theos* was translated into "*Hananim*." *Hananim* is closely related to heaven. *Hananim* is god who resides in heaven above, and controls the world below. The term *Hananim* came from *Hannim* which means Lord of heaven. For Koreans *Hananim* means monistic one God, but in fact the origin of the term came from the traditional concept of the Korean nation's Ultimate Reality. In this sense, I think that in Korea the biblical concept of God is the most dynamically united to the expression of non-Christian Ultimate Reality. When Christianity was introduced in Korea in 1884, it seriously collided with the Korean traditional culture. For example, foreign missionaries considered ancestor worship of Koreans as a heresy. In that time, Christianity assumed a threatening attitude to Koreans' traditional ethics and morality. Nevertheless, the reason why Koreans were easily able to accept Christianity was due to the idea of *Hannim*. Spencer J. Palmer says that the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea is closely related to the

²⁵. *An Interpretation of Religion*, 249.

concept of *Hannim*.²⁶ According to him, Korean people viewed the Christian God as One that has little difference to their concept of *Hannim*.

From the ancient times to present, *Hannim* has played a great role in the Korean people's religious consciousness. Interestingly enough, in the Korean national anthem there is a phrase that the god of heaven will protect and guide our nation. Here the god of heaven does not indicate Christian God, but it means *Hannim* located in heaven. Sometimes Korean people think that *Hannim* is equal to heaven. Traditionally for Korean people heaven has been apprehended as an expression of the Ultimate reality. In some sense, heaven, in expression of a Ultimate Reality, is more profound and familiar to Korean Christian mind than the Christian God. Korean people feel a reality that heaven expresses an essential thing. Sometimes they used to think of heaven as a principle for the rightful ordering of human life on earth. Koreans' faith of *Hannim* revealed its evident meaning when it combined with the concept of heaven in Confucianism. At this point, I need to reveal the historical development of *Hannim* faith in Korean history. *Hannim* has dominated Korean people's religious consciousness for several thousands years. A Korean systematic theologian, Kyungjae Kim says that the faith of *Hannim* is based on the ancient Korean Shamanistic faith and nature worship.²⁷ According to him, the faith of *Hannim* came from the popular religious beliefs of the Korean people, which had been handed down from antiquity.

Like many religions of the world, the ancient Korean religion began with nature worship and their basic religious attitude was animistic and spiritualistic. And then gradually, their thinking tended towards monistic deity without eliminating nature gods. This monistic deity was expressed by the name *Hannim*. Therefore, the concept of *Hannim* should comprehensively be understood considering Korean people's traditional religious faiths. Curiously enough, most of Korean Christians think that when they call Christian God, God has spatial meaning. That is to say, they think that God dwells in heaven above. This fact shows how much the concept of *Hannim* influenced Korean Christians' understanding of God.

A Korean historian, Kyungtak Kim analyzes how the concept of *Hannim* has historically transformed in consciousness of Korean people. He examined the concept of *Hannim* in terms of 'Evolution's theology'. He insists, by analyzing the names of gods which appeared in each era of Korean history, the Korean history has developed from a polytheistic age to polytheistic monism and then to monism.²⁸ In the ancient time(earliest time to A.D.450), the concept of *Hannim* was directly associated with the worship of nature, especially the Sun. Among the natural objects, the Korean people regarded the Sun as sacred and they offered sacrifices to it. The Sun was deified, for it was responsible for the crops. At those time, the gods of nature were expressed in various ways by the Korean people, yet they primarily worshiped the god of the Sun who gives birth to the light and heat.²⁹ In Samkuk age(A.D. 450-890), along with introduction of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, the concept of *Hannim* had such various content that it came to have equivalent meaning to concept of *T'ien*(天) or *Sang Ti*(上帝).³⁰ In the medieval period(A.D.890 to A.D.1390), the concept of *Hannim* had been developed not only under the influence of these foreign religions but also with various philosophical ideas. So, the concept of *Hannim* had been thought as god who has

²⁶. S.J. Palmer, *Korea and Christianity* (Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, Holly Corps., 1967), 17.

²⁷. Kyungjae Kim, *Korean Theology of Culture* (Seoul: Institute of Korean Theological Study, 1983), 112.

²⁸. Kyungtak Kim, *The History of Korean Primitive Religion*(Seoul: Korean University Press, 1970), 115f.

²⁹. Ibid., 117.

³⁰. Ibid., 131.

the attributions of Lord, Fate, Providence, and Morality. At those time, the character of *Hannim* was primarily external, polytheistic monism, combination of heterogeneity, and naturalistic.³¹ During Yi dynasty(A.D.1390–A.D.1910), the concept of *Hannim* more elaborately absorbed the idea of *T'ien*(天), and in the meantime, *Hannim* closely bonded to *T'ien*(天). Kim says that by uniting *Hannim* to *T'ien*(天), Korean people recognized *Hannim* immanently. By influence of Confucianism, *Hannim* came to have internal, moralistic and characters of principle of all things³²

As has been explained above, the concept of *Hannim* in Korean history has been developed and transformed by adding new elements from various religious traditions and experiences. That is, when we Koreans call the name of *Hannim*, it contains various implications. *Hannim* came to mean philosophical oneness, First principle and at the same time personal Lord. To use Hick's expression, *Hannim* is experienced both in personal form and impersonal. It is infinitely transcendent and simultaneously immanent in the world and human being. It is a transcendent source of human and things and god who sustains all existing things and controls human destiny. Truly *Hannim* is the Lord of all things and human being. Although we do not find a theory of creation in the concept of *Hannim*, it is evident that *Hannim* is believed to be the Ultimate source of all existent things.³³ It is thus the common belief of the Korean people that all things, including humankind, came from *Hannim*.

At this point, it would be worthwhile to compare the concept of *Hannim* to the Christian God. Evidently the Korean Christians' God cannot be understood separating from the concept of *Hannim* as perceived by the Korean nation. A Korean theologian, Nosun Kwak pointed out several commonalities between the faith of *Hannim* and the concept of the biblical God.: 1)*Hannim* and Christian God are not plural but singular, 2)Both Gods can be manifested in the mode of anthropomorphism, 3)Korean people thought that God and *Hannim* have spatial meaning – God who abides in the heaven above, 4)They thought that both God and *Hannim* are the source of ethical behavior and object of reverence.³⁴ Kwak concludes that we Koreans can explain the concept of the Christian God very well by ontological analogy, and that in doing so, Christianity can deeply penetrate in the Korean folk faith and religious consciousness. In fact, as we can see, there is no big difference between Christian God and *Hannim* in their content or function. When we turn to Reality-centeredness, we Koreans can find many similarities between Christian God and *Hannim* of Korean nation. In this regard, I think that if we Koreans approach to Christian God through the prism of *Hannim*, we can contribute to establish a new 'theo-logy' that is adapted to the cultural soil of Korea. And also such an approach enables us to come to commonly agreed guidelines on the claim of Ultimacy between Christians and non-Christians.

Concluding Remarks

Nowadays, we have all become conscious, in varying degrees, that our Christian history is one of a number of variant streams of religious life, each with its own distinctive forms of experience, thought, and spirituality. Accordingly we have come to accept the need to re-understand our own faith, not as the one and only, but as one of several. This fact shows us

³¹. Ibid., 149.

³². Ibid., 161.

³³. Kyungjae Kim, *Korean Theology of Culture*, 116-17.

³⁴. Nosun Kwak, "Korean Church and the Title of Hannim," *The Journal of Christian Thought* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1972), 112.

why we should be concerned with the issue of religious pluralism. In this situation, Hick's work makes positive and valuable contributions for interreligious dialogue.

Concerning the nature of the Real, Hick proposes a thoughtful solution. By proposing the pluralistic hypothesis, he advocates that the great world religions embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human. He has also tried to make a true dialogue with non-Christian traditions or experiences by arguing that we should move from ego-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. Therefore, he prefers not to conduct the discussion on the basis of a comparative evaluation of the major religions. Specifically this means, for Hick, a rejection of any notion of Christianity, as absolute or superior to others. This means, for him, that the great world religions identified should not be viewed as essentially rivals. The basic reason is that all the religions can be perceived as communications from the same source. I think that Hick's working model offers a theological framework for a positive appraisal of non-Christian communities and their dogmatics, practices and beliefs.

On this basis, I have attempted to re-evaluate positively the essence of the Real perceived in the traditional religious-cultural settings of Korea. In this sense, *Hannim* is not a contradiction of the Christian God but would be a different manifestation of the same Real. I have noted that what God means to Christian is equivalent to what *Hannim* means to the Korean people. Here we find a basis for a creative dialogue of the understanding of the Ultimate. In future, Korean Christians will have to go beyond an extremely exclusive attitude to the Korean traditional religions, to seek positive factors in terms for better understanding of the Christian God in accordance with Korean people's mentality and religious consciousness.

Here I would like to suggest my own views about interreligious dialogue. First, As Hick advocates, the great world religions are distinct historical-cultural expressions of an essentially uniform experiential core. Therefore, in order to have authentic dialogue, each person must enter into the dialogue from the standpoint of each distinct tradition and culture to which we belong.

Second, Hick's pluralistic hypothesis suggests a number of guiding principles and strategies for engaging other religions. It teaches us that religions constitute different lenses through which the Ultimate is humanly perceived in different ways. Therefore, we must understand the interaction and coherence of a tradition and the patterns of cultural life to comprehend the religion.

Third, can we really establish truth-claim of the Ultimate without eliminating each religion's claim to absoluteness? Hick's proposal is certainly the basic principle which integrates all religions dynamically. It does not eliminate authentic reality in each religions but rather admit the various expressions of the Real.

Fourth, interreligious dialogue must be completed in the common task for liberation-praxis. This means that the primary task is not to discuss a rite or doctrine but to participate in authentic theological practice in a plural world, a practice that takes history seriously, that takes the semiotics of cultural forms seriously, that takes economic, social, and political relations of power seriously.

Fifth, in this regard, I would like to propose what I call strategic dialogue, which means that two or more religions share aspects of their faiths within specific aims related to a specific social context. This approach suggests that dialogue at local and regional levels, where something is clearly at stake in the social context, will be more promising than global dialogue seeking to transcend such context. As an example, in south-Korea, many different religious leaders including Christianity attempt to make a dialogue on the national task, unification between north-Korea and south. The fact to note is, I think, that interreligious dialogue has to go beyond dimension of simple dialogue and to develop toward participation and cooperation among religions.

Sixth, in post-modern age, religious freedom will go beyond the freedom of choosing just a faith and will be a creative faith interacting with the boundaries of each religion. In the twenty-first, we may witness an open-religion. Our faith will be formed and preserved not by only a tradition but by multi-traditions. Therefore, the traditional cultures in which religions are based will be brought to center stage. In future, the status of a religion will be decided depending upon whether the religion will operate as the power of unity or reconciliation or not in front of humankind's serious problems: ecological destruction, pollution of the environment, poverty, etc. Perhaps one of the most serious obstacles is the exclusive and arbitrary attitude of a truth-claim. In this sense, theology of pluralism would be the best way to solve such a problem. This means that Christians have to admit the possibility of God in other religions, and that we Christians can learn different forms of God's revelation in non-Christian religions.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is an attempt to make creative dialogue in Korean society where there are intermingles of various religions. In order to carry out this task, I will employ John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. I argue that before entering into interreligious dialogue, we should examine the nature of Ultimate Reality. On the agreed understanding of the Ultimate Reality, I am sure, we can make creative dialogue.

I will try to make point of contact of Christian God to the concept of *Hannim*, the expression of the Ultimate Reality experienced and perceived in the Korean traditional religious-cultural context. The paper demonstrates that whether such revision of 'theo-logy' is possible in the cultural and spiritual setting of Korea. Here the work of Hick is supported and supplemented by suggesting that *Hannim* would be a different manifestation of the Real.

Consequently, this paper states that each religion, and more specifically each religious community, must be faced on its own distinctive terms and within its immediate cultural environment.

Key Words

Ultimate Reality, Hannim, John Hick, Interreligious dialogue, Eternal One, Kant

*Kim, Joohan

He is assistant professor of historical theology at Hanshin University, Korea. He studied his doctoral study at school of Theology, Boston University. He is interested in examining of Christian history in terms of civilization. His research area includes the relationship between

the church and the state, dialogue between religion(theology) and science, and diakonia movement in church history. Email: jjooohan@hs.ac.kr