

Asian Perspectives in Theology of Pyun Sun-Hwan: Reexamination of Non-dualistic Theology of Religions

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Introduction

It was almost seventeen years ago when Professor Pyun Sun-Hwan, who had been the dean of Methodist Theological Seminary back then, passed away. Three years earlier, he was excommunicated by the denomination of Korean Methodist church. During this period of three years, he was very much alone like Jesus with no one that he could rely upon. Seeing his students being punished for having invited him as a preacher to their churches, he could not help giving up any hope for the church. He was brought to a religious trial without being allowed to have a legitimate theological discussion with the church authorities that would die for church growth as their goal, but like Kierkegaard, he did not make a compromise with church politics, and took a martyr's way for theology.¹ It was a tragedy caused by Korean church that was permeated with biblical literalism and dogmatism. Korean church thus rejected Pyun Sun-Hwan, but our neighbors from other religious traditions have up until now remembered him as a good Christian minister. Today's conference commemorating him here also indicates that his theological claims are still very important for our discussion. Although he is gone, he has left us as his students a burdensome theological task to carry on.

It was in the name of religious pluralism that Korean church accused the theologian Pyun Sun-Hwan; but there are many things to reconsider before we conclude that religious

¹ There is a published research on the current situation, To know about it, see the following article: Choi Dae-gwang, "Apologetics for Pyun Sun-Hwan", *Upright Master Pyun Sun-Hwan* (Faith & Intellect Press, 2010), p. 181-268.

pluralism was the final destination of his theology, because all the theories of religious pluralism he was familiar with were only a means to exposing the realities of rigid Korean church. Of course, there was a theory of religious pluralism he preferred to others, and that theory had certain limitations: theocentric pluralism was obviously so limited as we now see it from a recent theological perspective that emphasizes divine multiplicity.² However, it was a great contribution for him as an indigenous theologian who respected Buddhism to advocate a “theology of other religions” in the unique religious environment of Korea where the religions of the Axial Age were still very much alive together as they are now.³ Moreover, in the nineteen nineties, he paid attention to *minjung* religions and laid the foundations for liberation theology of religions, being aware of the poverty of Asia. He did all these alone in Korea.⁴ He also showed the element of post-nationalism as a key narrative of recent years in that he as an indigenous theologian emphasized Asian solidarity without falling into the category of “nation”.⁵ However, his liberation theology of religions including his theocentrism was different in many ways from that of the western Christianity. It was because he was willing to talk about the process and goal of liberation in terms of the Asian (Buddhist) logic-non-dualistic thinking (*advaya*) – while acknowledging Asian religiosity in the perspective of pluralism.⁶ For the purpose of explaining such a difference, I titled this article

² Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (Abingdon Press, 2011).

³ Pyun Sun-Hwan, “Other Religions and Theology”, *Theological Thoughts*, No. 47 (Winter, 1984). This article was published in the conference of theologians celebrating the centennial anniversary of Korean Christianity. It was later translated and included in *South-East Asian Journal of Theology*, vol. 3.2 (1985).

⁴ Pyun Sun-Hwan, “*Minjung* Buddhism and *Minjung* Theology Oriented toward *Minjung* Liberation-with a Focus on *Maitreya* Faith”, Association for the Study of Korean History of Thoughts, ed., *Korean History of Thoughts*, vol. 6 (September, 1994).

⁵ We need to pay attention to the fact that there are many articles that Pyun Sun-Hwan wrote not just as a Korean indigenous theologian but also with Asian self-consciousness. These articles were not recognized in his time in post-nationalist perspective, but they must be reevaluated today in that perspective. See Pyun Sun-Hwan, “Dewesternization and the Third World Theology – With a Focus on Sri Lankan Father Pieris”, *Theological Thoughts*, No. 46 (Fall, 1986); Pyun Sun-Hwan, “Dawn of Asian Christology”, *Theological Thoughts*, No. 48 (spring, 1985).

⁶ This argument was suggested in Shin Ik-sang’s voluminous Ph. D. dissertation that was written under my supervision. I will present my article here relying upon his argument. See Shin Ik-sang, *A Study of Theology of Pyun Sun-Hwan in the Perspectives of Existentialist Thought and Mahayana Buddhist Nondualist Thought*, Ph.

“Asian Perspectives in Theology of Pyun Sun-Hwan”

1. Non-dualistic thinking (*advaya*) as an Asian expression of dekerygmatising

As long as he set himself in the history of influence by three B's, that is, Barth, Bultmann, and Buri, Pyun Sun-Hwan did not have Asia in his mind until the first years of nineteen-eighties when he finished his studies abroad in Basel, Switzerland. The absence of Asia here means that he saw Asia not with Asian people's eyes but with western ones. Although he worked on the topic of “The Finality of Christ in the Perspective of Christian-Zen Encounter” for his doctoral dissertation, Buddhism for him was a degraded mysterious religion that is oblivious of history, still not being able to responsibly relate to the world. Thus, Pyun sun-Hwan's theology of indigenization could not help taking the feature of inclusivism that had just taken off exclusivism. However, as he shifted his focus on dekerygmatising that he had learned from Buri over onto Jaspers' philosophy of *Entkoerperizierung* (decorporization), Pyun Sun-Hwan's theological activities began to become much freer than before.⁷ Owing to the philosophy of *Entkoerperizierung* that went beyond the concept of dekerygmatising, he also began to gradually recognize Buddhism in its own terms. He realized that awakening to historicity of existence is the starting point of pluralism that allows him to be able to emphasize responsibility or “humanism of love” (humanization) universally, whether it is in the east or in the west.

It seems to be necessary here to mention the difference between Buri's and Jaspers'

D. dissertation at Methodist Theological University (Seoul, Korea, 2011).

⁷ Shin Ik-sang, *Ibid.*, p. 146-175. Professor Fritz Buri was supervisor for my dissertation as well as for Pyun Sun-Hwan's. He was a member of the school of consistent eschatology, who connected the theology dekerygmatisation. Buri opposed to Karl Barth's revelation-oriented theology while respecting Jaspers by even calling him “Teacher for the church”, but ultimately considered Jaspers as “a floating philosopher” who could not relate to any specific traditions, and sought to go beyond him. Pyun Sun-Hwan, who had been under the strong influence by Buri, gradually turned to Jaspers, and this move gave him the moment to be able to encounter Asian religions as they were on their own.

views on dekerygmatising. Being critical of theological thinking in the perspective of religions of the Axial Age (philosophical faith), Jaspers demanded people to discard even the symbol of Christ because of the danger that it can possibly fall into an object.⁸ For he thought that the divine revelation, or the way to transcendence would take place only within the existence of an individual human person, as *Entkoerperisierung* indicates. He considered even the act of seeing God in Jesus as a violation of the biblical religion that prohibits believers from making an image of God (Exodus 20:4). Jesus for him was no more than an embodiment of religious passion of the one who leaped toward transcendence in the middle of sufferings (boundary situation) like the sages of the Axial Age had done. Whereas dekerygmatising for Jaspers thus meant negating Christ kerygma itself, Buri as a theologian still put an emphasis on the symbol of Christ as objectification of what cannot be objectified. Just as in the case of Buddha in Buddhism, the symbol of Christ for Buri was like a historical home that should not be discarded in the tradition of Christianity. Therefore, he did not conceal his worries about the possibility that the meaning of Christian salvation could be lost without the symbol of Christ. That is why Buri as a leftist Bultmannian theologian considered the task of radicalizing dekerygmatisation as his own mission, but still adhering to the scheme of separation of subject and object in human thinking.

After he came back from his studies abroad, however, Pyun Sun-Hwan, who had learned about Jaspers from Buri, rather took such pro-Jaspersian position as he might have seemed to do so on purpose. This was a result of his understanding of the remnants of western dualism deep-rooted in Buri's theology as a limitation of the west. It was in this context that Pyun Sun-Hwan would afterwards join a group of Asian theologians, after having been awakened to the non-dualist thinking of Buddhism. The west (Christianity) to him was no longer a basis or touchstone of judgment on Asia (religions). He rather found a positive

⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith*, Shin Ok-hee, trans. (Ehwa Womans University Press, 1995), p. 104, 205.

orientation of *Bodhisattva* in Asian spirituality that had been set aside as a sort of mysticism being oblivious of history. In this new finding, mysticism and the spirituality of Bodhisattva are not the reality divided into two, and both Christianity and Buddhism have dual aspects of ascent (mystery) and descent (history), either one of which cannot be insisted on exclusively of the other. Therefore, he sought to understand a multi-religious society in terms of how one could become part of the other, rather than in the perspective of religious pluralism that emphasized differences among multiple religions.⁹ It was “to understand neighbor religions in a way of participating as a subject (communion) in religious experience of neighbor believers.”

Although the dekerygmatisation based upon existentialist thinking contained such an internal conflict, it was a foundation on which for Pyun Sun-Hwan to find his way to non-dualist thinking, albeit an unsatisfactory one. Of course, Buddhism provided him with its contents, but it was dekerygmatising that made it possible for him to accept Buddhism. In this process, Pyun sun-Hwan made a shift from the west over to the non-west in understanding even the subject of existence: whereas Buri dekerygmatised the “object” of Christ, Pyun Sun-Hwan set up in an Asian way the “subject” itself that he encountered, on the basis of Jaspers’ Philosophy of *Entkoerperisierung*. It was about at this time that Pyun Sun-Hwan went beyond the circle of his western teachers and then made concrete relationship with Asian theologians. According to his critical understanding, however, Asian theologians such as Aloysius Pieris still took Christ for the ultimate norm and leaned toward one side of either Great Wisdom (ascent, religiosity) or Great Compassion (descent, *minjung* nature).¹⁰ He felt very sorry for the situation in which, although they knew the structure of non-dualist thinking, they were not able to fully apply it to their own Asian theology. After this

⁹ Lee Jung-bae, “Theological Existence of Dr. Pyun sun-Hwan”, *Pyun sun-Hwan’s Theology of Religions*, Pyun Sun-Hwan Archives, ed., 1996, p. 43.

¹⁰ Pyun Sun-Hwan, “Dewesternization and the Third World Theology – with a Focus on Sri Lankan Father Pieris”, *Theological Thoughts*, No. 46 (Fall, 1986), p. 247-249; Shin Ik-sang, *Ibid.*, p. 204-205.

realization, Pyun Sun-Hwan began to learn all about the idea of emptiness from his respected friend, Lee Ki-young, who was a Buddhist scholar, in order to capture the essence of “non-dual existence” as an Asian expression of dekenygmazizing.¹¹ He realized from this learning experience that Buddhist idea of emptiness is the one in which the logic of identity and that of difference are one, and as such it has a dynamic essence of transcending the world (supra-mundane world) but transcending again the transcended world (supra-supra mundane world). As if he would redeem himself from his earlier errors, Pyun Sun-Hwan stressed that the mysteriousness of Buddhism (supra-mundane world) is only for renewing the world, but has nothing to do with nihilism escaping from the reality of the world. Non-dual existence that involves the movement toward oneself as non-self rather became a solid ground on which to criticize Christian dualism. For non-dual existence, oneself and others, individuals and the whole, or transcendence and immanence are one that cannot be divided into two. However, that one does not exist statically (totality) but is given as a task to be concretely realized in time (movement). Pyun Sun-Hwan here firmly believed that such a non-dualist perspective is rather the universal religiosity encompassing the east and the west,¹² because he found the non-dual existence also in the western mysticism such as Meister Eckhart’s based on self-denial rather than on denial of others.

As another expression of the same non-dual existence, Da-seok’s practice-oriented Christology emphasized that it is the way of vicarious redemption for us to embody the self-

¹¹ Lee Ki-young, who was a Buddhist scholar with a Catholic family background, was absorbed in Jaspers’ philosophy of “the encompassing”, just as Pyun Sun-Hwan was. For this reason, Pyun Sun-Hwan did a collaborative study on the theme of Buddhist-Christian dialogue with Lee Ki-young, so that he could undertake a more serious research on Korean Mahayana Buddhism other than Yanagi Soetsu’s Zen Buddhism. Pyun Sun-Hwan, “The Patterns of Acceptance of Christianity and Buddhism (Traditional Culture) in Korea after the Independence from Japanese Colonial Occupation”, A report of academic research presented to the Department of Education of the Republic of Korea, 1978. In this report, Pyun Sun-Hwan introduced Lee Ki-young’s Buddhist thought in great detail.

¹² See Pyun Sun-Hwan, “Dawn of Asian Christology”, *Theological Thoughts*, No. 48 (Sprign, 1985), p. 123; Pyun Sun-Hwan, “Lotus and Christ, Lemma and Logos, Cosmology and Eschatology” (an unpublished article), p. 150-60. This article is included *Collected Works of Pyun Sun-Hwan*, vol. 2, (Korean Theological Study Institute, 1997).

redemption of Jesus who made his own will become one with the will of heaven, going through hundred instances of death and thousand difficulties.¹³ After all, Pyun Sun-Hwan called such a non-dual existence (*advaya*) the universal religiosity in which Jesus' personality becomes my personality, and his death becomes my death. This non-dual existence for him was a clue to the question of how he could explore the way to Asian liberation theology of religions. Although he had learned from the west the theme of religious liberation, he reformulated it in Asian way of thinking that reaches self-affirmation though self-denial. For the purpose of grounding Asian liberation of religions, he also argued for merging together the two trends of theology of indigenization (religiosity) and *minjung* theology (history) in Korea. I will discuss this topic in the last part of this article, but in the next section. I will explore Asian perspective found in the theocentric theology that Pyun Sun-Hwan preferred to other positions.

2. The implications and limitations of the western theocentric pluralism in the light of non-dual existence

As is well known, Pyun Sun-Hwan's theological existence went through a series of stages: he began with exclusivism (Barth) but accepted inclusivism (Buri), and finally reached religious pluralism. Even when he engaged in sympathetic interchange with Asian theologians, he translated John Hick's and Paul Knitter's major publications into Korean.¹⁴ He did so, because he took the position of theocentric or salvation-centered pluralism arguing

¹³ I will talk more about theology of Da-seok in the final section. I will point out that theology of Pyun Sun-Hwan was able to encounter the theological thoughts of Da-seok school that emerged independently on the soil of Korea, although it was not intended to do so. This point of view is evidenced in several occasions in Shin Ik-sang's Ph. D. dissertation.

¹⁴ In spite of his busy schedule, Pyun Sun-Hwan translated the two scholars' published works: John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnated*; Paul Knitter, *No Other Names?* The latter was published with my foreword in Korea after the translator passed away.

that there is a common essence (identity), whether it is a priori or a posteriori, among many religious traditions, although he knew about the process theological thinking that emphasizes differences among religions on the ground of Christology. Because of the position he took, he was faced with the criticism that he was not pluralist at all, as Hick was often criticized for the same reason.¹⁵ Among the critics were Mark Heim who argued that religions are different ways to different ends on their own; and John B. Cobb who claimed that there exist multiple Ultimates that should not be reduced to each other.¹⁶ Recently, there has been a theological attempt to harmonize the undifferentiated absolute (identity) and plurality of Ultimates (difference) with the Christian notion of Trinity. However, Pyun Sun-Hwan was deeply concerned about the phenomenon that the western controversy on religious pluralism was being represented and repeated on the soil of Korea, thinking that emphasis on differences could make the self-identity of Christianity too easily turn into its superiority (absoluteness) to others, as long as exclusivism was representative of the reality of church (faith) as in Korea. Confronting the current situation in which the concept of plurality was a theological issue, he rather thought that it is “essentially theological and phenomenally plural” that, ultimately, there exists one truth, one salvation. Of course, his thought here presupposed that the ultimate salvation is never equal to that which each one of individual religions with their established doctrines believes in.¹⁷ This was a mandate that people should not focus only on “differences” which appear on the level of doctrines. He wished it to be valued in terms of mysticism rather

¹⁵ See Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Ibid.*, p. 46 ff., p. 242. Severe criticisms are poured to Hick here, as his religious pluralism was seen as “violent”.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243-255. Of course, criticism is extended toward Cobb as well, who, unlike Hick as a theologian of reality-centrism, argued for “multiple ultimates” on the level of structure of being. The critic argues that one can take the doctrine of the Trinity of God for the ground of “theology of multiplicity” without having to talk about multiple ultimates. The claim that the structure of the Trinity itself is Christian does not seem to be irrelevant in this discussion. There is also the claim that one should borrow diverse resources from other traditions outside of Christianity in order to talk about the real Trinity. This claim presupposes that there are still Trinitarian structures in multiple religions, too, but acknowledges that Hinduism accounts better than others for the ground of being, Christianity does better for contingency, and Buddhism does better for relationality. Therefore, it suggests that interconnecting these three elements will be a way of positive application of the doctrine of the Trinity for theology of multiplicity.

¹⁷ This was a part of what a Korean religious scholar said in support of Hick’s theory of religious pluralism.

than being negated, that individual religions are grounded in the Real. In the same context, Pyun Sun-Hwan also showed a keen interest in Jaspers' concept of *das Umgreifende* (the encompassing), identified mysticism with non-dual existence, as was mentioned earlier, and concerned himself with liberating practices, as he took seriously his theological relationship with Knitter. We know the criticism of monotheist metaphysics that divine identity as the One would arouse imperialism (colonialism),¹⁸ but Pyun Sun-Hwan rather attempted to solve in Asian way the problem of poverty (or the problem of "empire") that is a common issue for our age.¹⁹ In this sense, it is not right to consider Pyun Sun-Hwan as a scholar who followed Hick's logic of religious pluralism. Although we know that there were limitations of his time, his theological existence deserves our respect in his final refusal to be judged in terms of the logic of the west.

Pyun Sun-Hwan met on a deep level with Jaspers who worked out the concept of "*das Umgreifende*" (the encompassing) from that of "things-in-themselves" that Kant had assumed as the limit of our knowledge. As is well known, "the encompassing" is not an ontological concept of being worked out of the scheme of subject and object, but rather refers to the limit of being, because it has its dynamic nature of encompassing all beings in itself but transcending them. The concept of "the encompassing" as such is often compared to Plotinus' concept of "the One". However, it clearly differs from "the One" in that it does not contrast with "many" but rather encompasses and transcends them. Furthermore, it denies any kinds of total knowledge so that there is no room for being abused for the purpose of imperialism: being grounded on transcendence in the mode of "the encompassing", each one of the multiple beings has its determinate meaning on its own.²⁰ It is fair to say that it was because

¹⁸ Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (Abingdon Press, 2008), p. 9.

¹⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Yun Su-jong trans (Yi-hak Press, 2001), p. 261.

²⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung* (München: Piper, 1962), translated by Shin Ok-hee and Pyun Sun-Hwan into a Korean version, *Philosophical Faith confronting Revelation* (Waegwan: St. Benedict Press, 1989). See the translated version, p. 113-25.

of such pre-understanding of the concept of “the encompassing” that Pyun Sun-Hwan was also easily fascinated with Hick’s theocentric religious pluralism. He thus willingly proceeded to accept the Buddhist concept of emptiness in the perspective of “the encompassing”, that is, on the horizon of a radical move of breaking away from dualism. However, he thought that Jaspers’ theory of the encompassing still talks about the ascending movement (*Eros*) toward transcendence but lacks the descending movement (transcending the transcended mundane world) for humanization in the world.²¹ This judgment corresponds in its content to the fact that he directed his focus on dekerygmatising over to non-dual existence. In other words, whereas theocentric pluralism still focused on “massgebenden Menschen” (Great Men) such as Jesus and Buddha of individual religious traditions on the premise of differentiation between the divine and the human, Pyun Sun-Hwan emphasized non-dual existence as the universal religiosity and therefore placed great importance on realizing humanism of love and, furthermore, undifferentiated compassion as its concrete practice, that is, the liberating practice. This was a refusal of Christological concentration, a way of overcoming his teacher Buri from Basel, and a result of his attempt to critically accept and overcome Jaspers’ theory of “the encompassing”.

As I have discussed so far, Pyun Sun-Hwan was able to take the western theocentric theological trend as a theoretical model of non-dual theory of religious liberation via Jaspers’ philosophy. It was this theoretical context that he also tried to combine Asian religiosity and *minjung* nature with his keen interest in Knitter’s liberation theology of religions. In Pyun Sun-Hwan’s theological attempt as such, the non-dual existence that dekerygmatised the Christian subject became the foundation on which to reconstruct Asian liberation theology, a result of which was non-dual liberation theology of religions. This was indeed the theological

²¹ Pyun Sun-Hwan, “The Patterns of Acceptance of Christianity and Buddhism (Traditional Culture) in Korea after the Independence from Japanese Colonial Occupation”, A report of academic research presented to the Department of Education of the Republic of Korea, 1978, p. 92; Shin Ik-sang, *Ibid.*, p. 173.

task that Pyun Sun-Hwan would ultimately have to carry out in his later years. To say it again, non-dual existence clearly indicates the circularity of reaching self-affirmation through self-denial and the comprehensive horizon transcending the boundaries between persons and non-persons. That is why Pyun Sun-Hwan was able to pay attention to the difference between the western liberation theology with its focus on denial of others and personality, and the non-dual liberation theology of religions.

3. Non-dual existence and non-dual liberation theology of religions: Pyun Sun-Hwan's theology reconstructed in Asian way

In the nineteen nineties, just before he was drawn into the whirlpool of religious trial against his theology, Pyun Sun-Hwan embodied Mahayana Buddhist thinking in his theology and thus took its concept of non-dual existence as the ground for understanding human beings (religiosity) and as the place for doing Asian theology. Non-duality (*advaya*) here indicates the interdependent (dynamic) relationship of “mutual identity and mutual penetration” without having self-being or intrinsic nature (*svahana*). Therefore, it is awkward to connect the non-dual with existence involving an intrinsic self-being. Pyun Sun-Hwan rather interpreted human nature as the circularity of self-denial and self-affirmation in the light of Buddhist theory of harmonization saying, “many exist in one; one exists in many; and the one and the many are not different”. That is to say, all living things are not different from the true-suchness, or Buddha-nature, so that one should deny oneself and leap onto the absolute nothingness (“Forgetting both the man and the cow”), return to oneself without oneself (“Returning to the origin, back to the source”), and live again the life of being one with all

things (“Entering the market place with helping hands”).²² What is important here is the dynamism that is operating between selves (all living things) and *Tathāgatagarbha* (the Buddha-nature inherent in all beings).²³ It means that the true-suchness, or original human nature is not a simple state that can be reached through self-denial. What Pyun Sun-Hwan considered as Asian religiosity, that is, non-dual existence is rather the power of self-benefit for others-benefit that can fill up the gap between all living things and *Tathāgatagarbha*, and between oneself and others. In this sense, the western judgment with worry that all Asian wisdom would annihilate individuality and finally end up with totalitarianism seems to be inappropriate.

In the perspective of non-dual existence as such, Pyun Sun-Hwan attempted to deal with the problem of religiosity and that of *minjung* nature (poverty) together, tried to see Christology along with anthropology, and believed that he could connect Christianity with Asian religions in a singular sense of religious experience (practice). It was an attempt to lead the western religious pluralism not only into the liberation of theology but also into the liberating practice of theology, or liberation theology on the basis of non-dual existence. He thought that religious differences could be withheld for the purpose of liberating practice (orthopraxis). At this point, his primary focus was brought onto the work of building solidarity or bond between the western liberation theology of religions and Asian theology. In this period of time, Pyun Sun-Hwan thus began to deepen his own thought by connecting

²² “Forgetting both the man and the cow”, “Returning to the origin, back to the source”, and “Entering the market place with helping hands” cited here refer respectively to the eighth, and the tenth stages of the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures. They imply the process in which one breaks the scheme of subject and object, recreates oneself without oneself (or, centerless center), and thereby unfolds one’s undifferentiated compassion to all beings. Pyun Sun-Hwan, “The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures: The Way to True Self”, *Collected Works of Pyun Sun-Hwan*, vol. 2, p. 303.

²³ The dynamism mentioned here implies the continuity of salvation without the Savior, being achieved in the sense that one’s awakening to one’s true self awakens others to their true selves, and yet the others’ awakening does not differ from one’s own awakening. It is like one’s realization that as one goes some way, he becomes a way himself, so that he is the one that can let the others be saved. Pyun Sun-Hwan, *Ibid.*, p. 308. This perspective may be one of the possible Asian responses to the confession, “I am because we are”. or to the question, “Who am I without you?” Laurel C. Schneider, *Ibid.*, p. 53-73.

Paul Knitter with Aloysius Pieris, an Asian liberation theologian of religions. In fact, he was deeply moved by Pieris' thought that the Incarnation (*kenosis*) and the Cross overlap respectively with the Buddhist doctrine for liberating human interiority, and wit that for liberating human society. However, he did not readily agree with Pieris' Buddhist doctrine of salvation (Great Wisdom) that presupposes without difficulty the respective conformity between the doctrines of the two religions. He rather considered as a possibly more realistic way Knitter's theology of liberation (salvation) that reinterpreted as a possibly more realistic way Knitter's theology of liberation (salvation) that reinterpreted the uniqueness of Christ as a relational truth and argued for a social revolution on the structural level. But he thought that self-denial in one's non-dual existence must always precede one's denial of others, and that the horizon of liberation, too, must be expanded over to non-personal beings beyond personal ones. Therefore, Pyun Sun-Hwan's non-dual liberation theology of religions placed even greater importance on "mystical deepening of consciousness" (sanctification) for cosmic conversion, going beyond the dimension of consciousness-awakening that South-American liberation theology was talking about. What he called historicity (religiosity) was the practice of oneness between faith and act, arising in the lives of *minjung* and in the universe on the basis of self-denial, rather than existential historicity as the encounter between eternity and time. It is in this context that we should understand Pyun Sun-Hwan's "theology of other religions" that overturned the relationship between master and servant and thus took Asian religions as its text.

Such radicalization of self-denial constituted the framework for Pyun Sun-Hwan's non-dual liberation theology of religions, and lead to the self-criticism of Christianity that whatever forms of exclusive superiority that Christianity has claimed to have must be abolished. As we have seen in the above, Pyun Sun-Hwan dekerygmized both the subjective and the objective aspects of Christian faith, that is to say, decorporized Christian

faith. Of course, he did not intend to make the particularity of Christianity disappear. Even in the court of religious trial against his theology, he criticized the ecclesiasticists for confining Christ within the walls of Christianity, and pointed out their ignorance about the work of indigenous interpretation of Christ in their own culture. Nevertheless, Pyun Sun-Hwan believed that the particularity of confession of faith could be brought into solidarity with the universality of religious experience of God.²⁴ His argument was that one's experience of God must be unique on its own, whatever it would be named, but that uniqueness should not be a reason for denying the universal value that goes beyond the limits of space and time. He firmly believed that God is universally experienced anywhere in the feature of non-duality. For him, the experience of God involves the movement from the mundane world leading to the supra world and further to the supra-supra world, that is, both movements of ascent and descent, so that it is not different from the universality of love that leads to orthopraxis.²⁵ In Pyun Sun-Hwan's liberation theology of religions, the universality of experience of God and the universality of love are one that cannot be divided into two, that is, they are non-dual in one. Therefore, the universality of love functions as a link between *minjung* nature and religiosity. That is to say, universal love involving experience of God is the proper way to elucidate and solve the poverty of Asia. In terms of Buddhism, self-denial and denial of others arise interdependently on each other.

Here, we have to pay attention to the fact that Pyun Sun-Hwan's liberation theology of religions was still presupposing a common ground (universality) among different religions. However, it was not one-sided either with commonality or with differences, either side of which the western controversy on pluralism demanded people to choose. The non-dual liberation theology of religions rather proclaimed pluralism with no center (position).

²⁴ Pyun Sun-Hwan, "Christianity in Korean Culture", *Collected Works of Pyun Sun-Hwan*, vol. 3 (Korean Theological Study Institute, 1997), p. 48-49.

²⁵ Pyun Sun-Hwan, "Religious Dialogue between All Nations and Global Ethics", *Collected Works of Pyun Sun-Hwan*, vol. 7 (Korean Theological Study Institute, 1999), p. 251.

Because it refrained from affirmation and negation altogether and did not fall into either side of identity or difference, we can say, it opened up the dynamism of life, that is, the way of Asian religious pluralism in which both universality and multiplicity are acknowledged. It is fair to say in this sense that the non-dual liberation theology of religions was not only the logical radicalization of but also Asian interpretive response to the non-normative, theocentric religious pluralism that Pyun Sun-Hwan had once argued for. It came from what he learned from Lee Ki-young, a Buddhist scholar who regarded language as a means and thus had no intention to adhere to either side of being or non-being, one or many, essence or phenomena, all living things or Buddha, or samsara or nirvana. This was originally a result of influence by the theory of harmonization of Won-hyo, a great Korean Buddhist monk. In the same context, it was also very natural for Pyun Sun-Hwan to emphasize such non-dual religiosity as a response to Hans Küng's "*Weltethos*". He believed that there is no difference between the east and the west in one's search of meaning – "The heaven of the west is none other than the heaven of the east".²⁶ As the difference between the east and the west would lose its meanings in the practice of love on the stage of supra-supra world, it is right to say that Christianity just called this love "*kenosis*" in its own language: the incarnation of God culminated on the cross is God who became Emptiness, because God became the one who lost God's self-nature. In this sense, *kenosis* is to be understood in terms of the logic of "identity and difference". After all, Pyun Sun-Hwan's liberation theology of religions broke through not only dualism but also the simple logic of identity (pantheism) and sought to realize the world of "*Ha-na*" (One) by combining the universe and humanity, the east and the west, and religiosity and *minjung* nature.²⁷

²⁶ Pyun Sun-Hwan, "Tak-sa, Choi Byung-hun and Oriental Thoughts", *Collected works of Pyun Sun-Hwan*, vol. 3, p. 143 ff.

²⁷ In this respect, I think, Buddhist logic of identity and difference can come in contact with Christian notion of *kenosis* as the logic to overcome theism and pantheism.

4. Non-dual liberation theology of religions seen in the perspectives of Da-seok's idea of Returning to One" and of "Multiplicity"

Pyun Sun-Hwan's non-dual liberation theology of religions lied beyond the western controversy on (*a priori*) commonality and difference in the light of "center-less" center, after going through a series of the several stages that I have examined so far. However, he often sided with the theocentric religious pluralists are, for this reason, was faced with the ironic criticism that he was not a religious pluralist. In fact, the reason why Pyun Sun-Hwan related to Hick was not that he agreed with Hick's position on the issue of religious pluralism, but that he was concerned with "the world" calling for liberation. For Pyun Sun-Hwan who must be naturally tied to one God. It was also due to his Christian passion toward the world that he reconstructed the relationship of the world and God in the Buddhist theory of non0duality. As I have mentioned in the above, however, he pointed out that the relationship is not the one that the logic of identity, or pantheism prescribes, as long as the world is calling for its liberation. But he did not deny the ultimate state of unity where the world and God would become one through the process of hundred instances of death and thousand difficulties. This state was what theocentrism meant to him.

At this point, it seems to be meaningful to attempt to appreciate Pyun Sun-Hwan's liberation theology of religions by making it overlap with the idea of "Returning to One" that Da-seok, Yu Yeong-mo (1890-1981) suggested. Da-seok was a Korean religious philosopher who has been acclaimed worldwide in recent years as an original thinker for his native Korean religious thought. The concept of "Returning to One" is a call to return to the original *Ha-na* (One) as the ground that made all things in the universe exist, in essence indicating the

absolute world of “non-duality, or nothingness”.²⁸ On one hand, the concept of *Ha-na* (One) here is so unique that it cannot be understood with any western concept or category, but it is very similar to Pyun Sun-Hwan’s view of the world. On the other hand, the idea of “Returning to One” seems to differ very much from the western theological trend that has focused on the concept of “multiplicity”. In this trend, multiplicity does not mean a sort of undifferentiated plurality of separated individuals that pluralism implies, but rather presupposes a dynamic interrelationship among different religions, or polydoxy.²⁹ In this perspective, the idea of “Returning to One” together with Pyun Sun-Hwan’s theology of religions could be misunderstood as reduction to the One or as a sort of totalitarianism in which the meaning of individuals is lost. In the perspective of the idea of “Returning to One”, on the contrary, the emphasis on multiplicity could be considered as being locked up within the relative world of being and nothingness. In spite of the possibility of such misunderstandings from both sides, I think, it will be an interesting topic to evaluate Pyun Sun-Hwan’s non-dual liberation theology of religions in the perspective of theology of multiplicity that has denied the concept itself of the One (monotheism) in the age of multiple nations, multiple cultures, and also in the perspective of Korean indigenous theology of Returning to One that has drawn so much attention. I will conclude this article with short remarks on this topic in the following.

The idea of “Returning to One” and the theology of multiplicity share a common feature in that they both understand God as mystery or as the unknown in terms of negative theology”.³⁰ Just as theology of multiplicity attempts to overcome the monotheism rigidified by ideas, the idea of “Returning to One”, too, points out the ills of Asian religions including

²⁸ Da-seok Yu Yeong-mo, *Da-seok Lecture*, Association for Study of Da-seok, ed. (Hyeon-am Press, 1996), p. 255, 744.

²⁹ Theology of multiplicity clearly acknowledges the possibility that there can exist not just one theology but also multiple theologies within Christian theology. In this sense, we can talk about not only liberation theology but also “liberation of theology”. Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Ibid.*, p. 5 ff.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Confucianism that adheres to “being”. That was Da-seok’s intention when he explicitly called God or *Ha-na* as a whole “the immeasurable”. He argued that a religion, whatever it is, must teach, “*Ha-na* as a whole comes out before *Ha-na* of individuals comes out; all individuals come out of *Ha-na* and return to *Ha-na* as a whole”. However, *Ha-na* as such is not to be explained in terms of the logic of the One that the Christian west has developed. It is more like *Bin-tang*, or empty space, because it is “being without being”, that is to say, the one that cannot be possessed or captured. Da-seok found it to be a problem “to see only a flower within the boundary without seeing *Bin-tang*, or the empty space, that surrounds the flower”.³¹ For this reason, theology of “Returning to One” clearly differs from theology of multiplicity in the way of speaking of the incarnation of God as the immeasurable (the unknown): the former points out human *Mit-dung* or *Ba-tal* (the original human nature) to be the same as *Ha-na* as a whole (“heaven and earth are one in human beings”), whereas the latter understands the divine multiplicity or contingency in the world as the incarnational depth.³² The former suggests a sort of radical universalization of religious pluralism that there is no difference among human beings in their original nature, no matter who they are, let alone Jesus or Buddha; whereas the latter pays attention to dark realities of the world founded upon indeterminacy. Theology of multiplicity thus emphasizes the political role (post-colonialism) for theology to play in the unjust world. Theology of “Returning to One” rather expects the second Axial Age to come, in which divided religions will converge to *Ha-na* (One), and mentions the starting point of time (Later Heaven) in which that *Ha-na* will become the universal human *Mit-dung* or *Ba-tal* (the original human nature). It is like a principle of nature that, in the autumn season, the vital force is no longer in roots or main stems but rather in separated fruits.

³¹ Da-seok Yu Yeong-mo, *Ibid.*, p. 458, 559.

³² Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Ibid.*, p. 8.

I have presented in the above two contrasting themes: one is the concern for bringing religions together to One; the other is the affirmation of divine multiplicity within the world. They are too difficult themes to be compatible with each other. In spite of such a stark contrast, I think, there is an overlapping aspect between the two: as long as *Ha-na* as a whole is human *Ba-tal*, or the original nature, individuality will never be denied; but each individual's role rather will become important, just as Jesus is understood as an "unfinished draft" in the sense of his saying, "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these" (John 14:12).³³ However, there still remains a concern: the emphasis on multiplicity primarily involves the attention to the margin (or the periphery) of the world. In this respect, the theology of Returning to One can be criticized for having simplified the everydayness (the reality of the world) of human existence. It is not an easy task to find "*Keun Ha-na*" (the Great One) in oneself because it is to fight the three poisonous elements of greed, anger, and ignorance deeply rooted in human *alaya vijnana* (subtle consciousness). Without realizing the enemy (devil) within oneself, one cannot win the fight; one needs to fight one's internal battle in order for it to be applied to one's tumultuous everyday life. In this respect, Pyun Sun-Hwan's non-dual liberation theology of religions is on a different level from that of postcolonial theology, even though they both share a certain feature of the time. In order to open up the new heaven and the new earth, or the new world of civilization where individuals will be united with *Ha-na* who cannot be called differently but the one who is without being, or the Great Void, there must always be the events of self-denial and denial of others arising at the same time. In order to make these two events happen, there must be the existence of *Ha-na* understood in Asian terms. Theology of multiplicity does not differ from the theology of Returning to One in that it understands divine mystery (unknowing) not as otherworldly but as this worldly in its

³³ Da-seok Yu Yeong-mo, *Ibid.*, p. 805.

nature.³⁴ We can understand the mystery as coherence (novelty) that has arisen in the living interaction between the two.³⁵ Therefore, they call respectively *Ba-tal* (original nature) and relationality to be the Holy Spirit, but they differ from each other in their suggestions: the former emphasizes human *Ba-tal* as a sort of radical universalization of theocentric pluralism, whereas the latter emphasizes hybrid interdependence achieved through relationality, which is contrary to the logic of the One. In keeping this difference between the two in mind, we may express human *Ba-tal* as “collective intelligence” or multitude Christ for the expansion of “the ordinariness of the holy”.³⁶

I have so far compared in a simplified form of contrast the theology of Returning to One and theology of multiplicity that seem to contradict each other, in order to clarify the nature and status of Pyun Sun-Hwan’s non-dual liberation theology of religions. In this interpretive work, it was necessary to explain the self-contradiction of Pyun Sun-Hwan: he paid attention to the liberating role of theology to strengthen the *minjung* nature of Asia as the periphery of the world, but at the same time developed his ideas in terms of theocentric pluralism. I have thus attempted to find out the background in which Pyun Sun-Hwan talked about the importance of “belonging to each other” (inter-dependent belonging) by which one becomes a part of the other and vice versa rather than emphasizing the differences in Asian context, although he was called a pluralist who gave up pluralism and even criticized for being a Buddhist theologian who was not really a Buddhist. Of course, the limitation of Pyun Sun-Hwan’s non-dual liberation theology of religions came out of such a background, but there was a lot to be positively appreciated about his theological intention to belong to “the Great *Ha-na*”. Although, during his lifetime, he did not write much about Da-seok and his idea of Returning to One, Pyun Sun-Hwan acquainted himself with Da-seok’s spiritual world

³⁴ Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Ibid.*, p. 8-13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁶ Lee Jung-bae, *Bin-tang-han-de Mat-hyeo Nol-yi (Playing in Accordance with Emptiness): Reading the World with Da-seok* (Dong-yeon Press, 2011), p. 122-123.

through Kim Heung-ho, a disciple of Da-seok. Therefore, I think, it is not merely his students' later speculation to connect Pyun Sun-Hwan's firm belief in theocentrism with Da-seok's theology of Returning to One. For Pyun Sun-Hwan, God is "the Great *Ha-na*", reconstructed through the dialogue between Jaspers' theory of *Entkoerperizierung* and Mahayana Buddhism, and expressed ultimately as "non-duality, that is, nothingness". As a Cristian theologian, he simply called it God, but its concrete reality was all the same as that of "*Ha-na*" in the idea of Returning to One. He believed that what is important about the concept is none other than "self-denial", only through which the universality of love can be concretely realized. I think it was because of his firm belief in "*Ba-tal*", or humanity that he emphasized the religiosity and *minjung* nature of Asia. Therefore, it is fair to say that Pyun Sun-Hwan's non-dual liberation theology of religions was a result of belief in both the world of *Ha-na* a whole and the activity of human individuals.

Key words

Entkerygmatisierung, Non-dualistic thinking, Religious pluralism, Multiplicity, Asian liberation theology of Religion, Mahayana Buddhism, Existentialist Returning to One, Karl Jaspers, Fritz Buri. Da-seok

Abstract

This Study is work on the Pyun sun-hwan's Asian liberation Theology of Religion in the perspective from non-dual thoughts of Da-seok Yu Yong-mo, to overcome a problem of the Western God-centered religious Pluralism. Therefore this Article trying to discuss this subject following four steps. First of all this article aim to stress on Non-dualistic thinking as an Asian expression of dekerygmatisierung. Secondly we will try to point out the implication and limitation of the Western theocentric pluralism in the light of non-dual existence. And according to this logic we would like to discuss the Pyun sun-hwan's theology reconstructed in Asian way. Finally we will try again to prove Pyun's theology in the perspective of Da-seok's idea of 'Returning to one' and of Western 'Multiplicity'

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