

# The Holy Spirit and Minjung from the Perspective of Process Thought

Jin-Kwan Kwon

Professor of Theology department at Sungkonghoe University

## Introduction

The life of the minjung of Korea and other Asian countries is a life of suffering. It has a character of deficiency. It is deficient in the material for living, deficient in social status, and deficient in health. Minjung suffer from poverty, despair, mental and physical illness, and even spiritual depletion. They cling to the material and the monetary because they need them direly for survival. But because they do not possess material goods or money, there is a greater possibility that they can lead a spiritual life, overcoming attachment to the material and the monetary. In our global post-modern capitalist world, a person is valued by how much she possesses. Ours is an age of materialism and de-spiritualization. Such an age started with capitalism, and has accelerated along side a philosophy of dualism that sharply divides between the spiritual and the material. Whitehead pronounced that the effect of this sharp division has “poisoned all subsequent philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> The philosophy of dualism, of which Descartes is a major leader, deprives the universe of spirit, and reduces Nature to the state of pure matter. The result is the destruction and death of nature. As Whitehead deplored, nature has become “a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly.”<sup>2</sup>

The de-spiritualization process of our age is taking place in many directions. Life is ever more in danger and the riches of our life are being depleted and dried up. We must restore the sphere of the Spirit in our life. We have inherited spiritual traditions, including Spirit-languages, from the past. I would like to explore the meanings of some selected Spirit-languages that have arisen in Christianity and in Eastern religions so that we can attain a more encompassing understanding of the Spirit, especially in its relation to our concerns for the suffering and liberation of people. Process philosophy, especially that of Alfred N. Whitehead, provides important insights and a useful frame of reference for understanding the Spirit. Therefore, process thought will direct and guide our discussions of Spirit-languages.

I would like to start with the question: What is minjung theology? Minjung (민중, 民衆) is the name used to identify people suffering from a lack of social status and material wealth, who suffer from

---

<sup>1</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Nature and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 54.

poor physical and mental health. They are poor, lacking in education, and are very often physically and mentally ill. But minjung theology believes that minjung are subjects, that they have subjectivity, and that they are the subjects of history. Each of them has, as Whitehead would say, prehending subjectivity. They can select elements from history and society for their own good and liberation. Minjung theology is theology undertaken by a theologian within the bosom of minjung. Minjung theology witnesses to the hope and spirituality of minjung. In so doing, a minjung theologian wants to stand on the side of minjung, put their shoes on her feet, trying to see and think from their perspective negating her own; she aims at their liberation and freedom in history. A minjung theologian employs empathy and sympathy for minjung, sides with them, and puts herself in solidarity with the suffering minjung.

Minjung cannot be described in substantialist terms, as though they have an unchanging nature and are comprised of unchanging qualities. Minjung are changing, and are entities always in process. Thus, minjung cannot be determined by definitions and concepts. The Korean minjung have emerged in history in different social forms. During the premodern period (many centuries up till the end of 19th century) minjung were feudal subjects (baegsung, 百姓) under feudal kingdoms. The minjung were the objects of rule and protection under the king and his officials. During the period of Japanese imperialism waged upon Korea (1876-1945) minjung were the nation who struggled for national integrity and liberation. But, in the 1920's, 30's and 40's and beyond, minjung were more consciously socio-economic as members of the "under-classes." During these decades, socialism and nationalism were the most influential ideologies for minjung. After liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945 minjung proceeded to attain the consciousness of "citizens," as subjects of the nation-state who demanded democracy, human rights, justice, and participation. Class-consciousness continues to play an important role in minjung thought and their activities. Meanwhile, with the beginning of the 21st century, citizens' movements for participatory democracy, economic justice, ecological justice, and anti-corruption have emerged with speed and strength in Korean society; as a result, civil society has expanded its space within the larger Korean society. Minjung in the age of globalization continue to be deprived of social status and are insecure in their lives. Their lives are full of suffering and insecurity under the global market system and the competitions it brings about. Socio-economic class remains the most important category for minjung. Minjung remain passive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Korea mainly due to their underprivileged social class status. However, class-consciousness is not enough to comprehend and deal with the problems minjung find themselves in today. They must have both class and citizen consciousnesses in order to become active participants, critiques and constructors in society. Minjung attain ever-new consciousness as they encounter new historical situations, and assume for themselves new historical tasks.

### **Some Whiteheadian Ideas Relevant to Minjung Theology**

Many of Whitehead's ideas and concepts can be accepted and utilized by minjung theology. I would like

to suggest only three: the relational nature of all entities, the conception of God as a suffering and mutable God, and the consequent nature of God as Spirit. Other important ideas relevant to minjung theology are the incompleteness of the temporal world that requires process and becoming, and the idea of life, which is crucial in Whitehead's philosophy. We may well find many other ideas to be employed for the enrichment of minjung theology.

### **The Relational Nature of All Entities**

The relational concept of Whitehead can be applied, first of all, to the relation between the theologian and minjung. Minjung should not be considered as objects of research. Theologians should not think of themselves as thinking mind, treating minjung as passive objects to be analyzed and explained. Our relationship with Minjung is actual and dynamic; we as theologians are to be one with minjung in a reciprocal way. A subject-object dichotomy is not applicable here. We see minjung; we also see ourselves who see minjung. Then a series of questions arise. What is my attitude when I see minjung? Is it non-relational and indifferent, *or* relational, sympathetic, and even empathic? In Whiteheadian philosophy of organism, the latter is the answer. Minjung theologians and minjung are in an internal relation.

Every entity prehends, that is, feels. Whitehead maintains that feeling is the primary experience; more so than consciousness, thought, and sense perception, which traditional philosophy has held to be essential elements in experience.<sup>3</sup> Feeling, according to Whitehead, refers to "the basic generic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question." The feeling of the object by the subject allows the subject to integrate the object in such a way that the object contributes to the internal constitution of the subject.<sup>4</sup> This creates an internal relation between the subject and the object. Minjung theologians are in such a relation to the minjung, being changed by them through their interactions and relationships.

The relation is not limited to minjung and theologians. Whitehead states that all creatures are in a web of relation. Being is relational, and becomes and changes due to the creative and luring forces of God. By the stimulation of this luring from God and its persuasive power actual entitiesprehend and select elements in the web of relations and incorporate them into their identity and unity.

### **Whitehead's Conception of God: a Suffering and Mutable God**

The God who feels is a fellow-sufferer. God is full of sympathy with all suffering creatures. Suffering arises when life-destroying forces, such as monopoly powers, obstruct life processes. Whitehead rejects

---

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

the Greek conceptions of God as immutable and simple. For Whitehead, God is not all-powerful; God loves and suffers with creatures. According to the doctrine of simplicity, God cannot have any relation to creatures, or any sympathy with them. In his chapter on "God and the World" in *Process and Reality*, Whitehead rejects the doctrine of God as all powerful, at whose decree the world came into being and was ordered. This God is the God of imperial rulers. Whitehead deplores that the "Galilean vision of humility" was replaced with the imperial conception of God and Messiah. He continues, "the Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar."<sup>5</sup> He wants to recover the Galilean origin of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Galilee was a place contrasted not only with Jerusalem, but also with Rome. For minjung theology, Galilee is a symbolic place, the stronghold where suffering people and revolutionaries gather together to fight to liberate themselves from Roman oppressors and their collaborators.<sup>7</sup>

Apparently, Whitehead does not stop at the suffering nature of God, for God is also great. God suffers as God overcomes evil. God understands suffering. Whitehead says: "God has in his nature the knowledge of evil, of pain, and of degradation, but it is there as overcome with what is good."<sup>8</sup> God suffers from pain and evil, but overcomes it by good. This God is a loving God, who does not rule like an emperor, but leads the world with persuasion and insightful wisdom like a poet.

The suffering nature of God is derived from the consequent nature of God. God suffers together with the creatures in the world. God is consequent upon the creative advance of the world; the consequent nature "originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world."<sup>9</sup> Thus, it could be said that the consequent nature of God signifies the God who receives a multiplicity of actual components in the process of creation. God prehends and feels the sufferings, sorrows, failures, triumphs, and joys of every actuality, and God saves these by prehending them in their relation to the completed whole.<sup>10</sup> In other words, God saves the world by leading it with his "infinite patience" so that the world with its own freedom participates in his vision. God is "the poet of the world," who with tender patience leads it by his "vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."<sup>11</sup>

According to Whitehead, both God and the world are "in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty," in a way that "either of them, God and the world, is the instrument of novelty for the other."<sup>12</sup> God's consequent nature and the world are in such a reciprocal

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>7</sup> Ahn Byung-Mu, "Jesus and the Minjung in the Gospel of Mark," *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 145.

<sup>8</sup> Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Meridian, 1960), 149.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 349.

relation that "what is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion--the fellow sufferer who understands."<sup>13</sup>

### **God's Consequent Nature as the Spirit**

God's consequent nature is finite and dependent on the world, while God's primordial nature is infinite in possibility. The God of the consequent nature incorporates temporal entities. This nature in turn affects entities in the world. Thus, while the primordial nature is the "mental pole" of God, the consequent nature is the "physical pole" of God that "incorporates the world by feeling all of its feelings."<sup>14</sup> The consequent nature is the medium of God that accomplishes the "Apotheosis of the World" (the deification of the world, the participation of the world in the divine, or the divinization of the world).<sup>15</sup> Whitehead did not speak of God or God's nature in terms of the Spirit. He did not equate the consequent nature to the Spirit. However, the primordial nature of God, "the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality," requires a mediation that establishes a reciprocal, creative relation between God's primordial nature and the world.<sup>16</sup> In terms of the trinity, Christian tradition assigns that mediating role to the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. The main character of the Spirit lies in its immanence in the world, while remaining as God's transcendent Spirit. We may well conclude that the Spirit and the consequent nature of God connect the primordial nature of God with the world and accomplish the salvation of the world.

John Cobb argues that the consequent nature is the Spirit in Trinitarian terms.<sup>17</sup> Marjorie Suchocki highlights this aspect of Cobb's theology and goes further, saying that we may see Cobb's later works, which deal with concrete social justice issues in the world, as works on the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> It is certain that Cobb as a process theologian deals with social issues upon the basis of his belief in a God who is the origin of all creativity and possibility (the primordial nature) and who is active in the world transforming and saving it (the consequent nature). In this sense Cobb has politicized process ideas, being more concerned with political and justice concerns than any other process theologian. Lynn Lorenzen also

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>14</sup> Lynne Faber Lorenzen, *College Student's Introduction to the Trinity* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 343 and 344.

<sup>17</sup> John Cobb, Jr., "The Relativization of the Trinity," Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, ed. *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 1997): 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Suchocki, "Spirit in and through the World," Ibid. 184.

maintains that the term for the consequent nature of God is the Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

## **A Language Approach**

Theology and metaphysics share important elements in common. Like metaphysics theology describes the universe in a way that not only corresponds to our experiences, but more importantly leads our experience in ever more creative directions. Theology and metaphysics employ language to describe and construct the world. Language creates the world. The world is constructed by language games. However, languages are not without defect; they are not perfect tools mainly because they carry in themselves many different meanings. Therefore, theological or metaphysical expositions of the world by language are always subject to revision. Languages of the Spirit, I believe, play a crucial role in describing the world.

Each of the languages of the Spirit has a distinct referential system. Each has its own context, so each has its own set of meanings. Language is indeterminate because it is conditioned by its environment. A language or a word does not carry a universal or single meaning with it. When we want to trace down the meanings expressed in language and disclose its different nuances, we must look into the ground into which the language is rooted. We can attain the full meaning of a language or a word by explicating the full system that the language fits in.

By revealing new and novel meanings of language, we want to expand our world, overcoming the world that is limited by the current use of the languages of the Spirit in our Protestant Churches. The languages of the Spirit are multiple throughout the world; they are at least as many as the number of religions and traditions of our planet. Approaching the phenomena of the Spirit through language provides a measure of freedom to the discussion by allowing us to freely cross over contextual boundaries within which different Spirit languages have arisen. Languages have a symbolic nature. They are signs that signify meanings. They do not represent hard facts or substances. The languages of the Spirit are more symbolic than most other languages, because the Spirit cannot be identified or observed by the five senses. But as philosophy and theology testify, the Spirit is an integral element of our reality. Spirit constitutes an essential part of the history of a universe whose fundamental feature is suffering.

## **Suffering and Spirit**

Suffering is the fundamental motive that has brought major Asian religions such as Yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism into being. *Karma*, for the minjung, symbolizes, on the one hand, the depth and permanence of suffering in their lives. On the other hand, though, *Karma*, as the doctrine that suffering comes from one's own past acts, is an ideology to perpetuate and justify the situation of the minjung. It is an ideology

---

<sup>19</sup> Lorenzen, 107.

because experiences do not always show that our suffering comes from our past acts. In most cases, suffering is inflicted by outside factors such as unjust economic exploitations and evil structures. Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Yoga address the conditions of suffering and teach the way of liberation. They debase the ontological status of *Karma*, and demystify the pain-causing structures that are inflicted upon Asian minjung. The doctrine of *Karma* arose in a soil like India's where suffering and misery were so prevalent and perpetual that they were regarded as unchangeable fate or unbreakable chains binding the majority of Asian people. But *Karma* is neither final nor absolute. For minjung, *Karma* is only an ideology that justifies suffering-causing structures. In this regard, the doctrine of *karma* played an important role in establishing the caste system in India.<sup>20</sup> The truth of *karma* lies only in the fact that "deeds do not vanish without trace."<sup>21</sup> *Karma* represents an almost absolute power of the past upon the conditions of the present. True, life is affected by the past. However, life must not be dominated by the past. Life is affected not only by the past, but also by the present and the future. Life is not *karma*, but ever changing process. Life is a prehensive reality. Minjung draw for their life upon components of their past in order to create a new future amidst the presence of suffering. Thus, life is an arena where the past and future inter-penetrate each other with reference to the present conditions. If one is free from *tanha* (clinging and craving), she is able to draw the best out of other entities and her own past deeds in order to move toward beauty and liberation. In this way, minjung can live a life toward beauty in the midst, and in spite of, sufferings. Minjung thereby break the binding forces of the past and create a new life.

Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism teach that uniting one's self with *Brahman* or entering into the state of *nirvana* will end the effects of suffering. But can this type of answer have any relevance to the concrete life of minjung? Do these teachings open up the possibility of liberation from craving and clinging? Can they lead to changes in the evil structures that create the life of the minjung? I think that there can be two ways of understanding *Brahman* or *nirvana*. One is an understanding of them as static and inert; the other seems them as dynamic forces and sources of becoming. The static view of *nirvana* and *Brahman* has a strong tendency to leave the status quo intact. This view places emphasis on changing the inner mind, having no interest in changing the historical conditions that perpetuate the sufferings of minjung in Korea and Dalits in India. This view tends to maintain the cruel institution of the Caste System in India. This view lacks the dimension of dynamic reciprocity between the world and heaven, between the world and God. The static and inert view can also be detected in Christianity. Western Christianity has diminished the dynamic, cosmic, and historical dimension of the Holy Spirit and has kept the Holy Spirit in captivity within liturgical and ecclesiastical institutions. Thus, the Holy Spirit is inert unless the clergy initiates it in liturgy. In this way, the Holy Spirit is replaced by the Church's

---

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Chapple, *Karma and Creativity* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>21</sup> The Sanskrit *Dharmapada*, *Karmavarga* vi. Quoted from John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 248.

institutions.

We need another view, a dynamic view of *nirvana* and *Brahman*. This view will find in *nirvana* and *Brahman* creative, dynamic, life-spirit that aids all entities in the universe on their journey toward novelty and beauty. Suffering arises when this journey is obstructed by life-thwarting forces that we may well call "anti-life spirits." An example of this view can be found in the writing of a Korean Buddhist scholar. He states that spirit as *pneuma* is in essence *nirvana*, filling the whole universe.<sup>22</sup> I would go further to interpret Buddha's teaching regarding *nirvana* as follows. We can enter and experience this spiritual power, *nirvana*, by extinguishing our desire and attachment (*tanha*). In this interpretation, *nirvana* becomes a dynamic force in us that lures us to change the world. Similarly, it is correct to state that we experience, and are united with, the Holy Spirit only by emptying ourselves in humble mind. I believe that one of the most progressive and creative interpretations of the Spirit in Eastern religions can be found in the *Donghak* religion in Korea, which will be discussed later on.

### Spirit as Breath

A common element that exists among many Eastern religions and spiritualities is the tradition of Yoga. Yoga is one of the most ancient religious practices in the world. Yoga's beginnings can be traced back to the time of pre-Aryan migration into India (2500-1500 b.c.). Yoga has had a tremendous influence on Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other Eastern religions. Yoga teaches that psychosomatic self-discipline enables men and women to proceed from "the unreal" to "the real", from the dark to the light, from death to life. Yoga is a spiritual and physical discipline that enables us to be liberated from the tragic aspects of life and the sufferings inherent in this world. It seeks to "decondition" men and women from past and present structures that cause sufferings, through physical practice and spiritual meditation. The most important element in Yoga is *Pranayama*, the exercise of breathing, or controlling the breath. *Prana* with a capital P is the sum total of the energy in the universe. *Prana* is the source of life.<sup>23</sup> It is said that life can "attract *Prana* to itself, to store it up and transform it for influence upon both the inner and outer world."<sup>24</sup> *Prana* is equivalent to 氣 (*ki* in Korean, and *chi* in Chinese and Japanese), the mystical source of life. In the East, Taoism, Buddhism, and other religions modified *Pranayama* and developed their own disciplines of breathing technique. Marcea Eliade notes that Lao Tzu and Chung Tzu were already familiar with "methodical respiration." A Chou dynasty inscription in China attests to the fact that the

---

<sup>22</sup> Yong-Ho Pak, *Kumkangkyong: Buddhism Seen from the Perspective of Yoo Young-Mo's Thought*, (Seoul, Korea: Dure Press, 2001) 69-70. *Kumkangkyong* is in Sanskrit *Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra*.

<sup>23</sup> In Hinduism, *atman* is derived from a root meaning 'to breathe. In the *Vedas* it is used of the vital breath, while in the *Upanishads* the word *atman* is often used about man and '*Brahman*' about the universal spirit. '*Brahman*' was identified with 'vital breath'.

<sup>24</sup> Andre Van Lysebeth, *Pranayama: the Yoga of Breathing* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1979), 4.

practice of breathing technique existed in 6th century B.C. China.<sup>25</sup> Eliade also points to the fact that Buddha himself adopted and modified Yogic exercises such as respiration and contemplation in his teachings.<sup>26</sup>

The relevance of Yoga to the situation of the minjung lies in the fact that through psycho-physiological practices people can change an attitude of pessimism and despair arising out of a feeling that one's life is trapped by destiny, into a feeling of empowerment, a feeling which can create possibilities for new, liberating life. The ultimate goal of Yoga is to help minjung overcome their pain-causing life conditions. Yoga presupposed the general painful life situation of the ordinary people in ancient India. It took its roots deep in the suffering lives of Indian minjung. Most Indian people were in despair and stuck in the vicious circle of sufferings. With their everyday lives stricken with sufferings and insecurity, their breathing was no longer rhythmical. *Pranayama* was the refusal to breathe like ordinary people who had yielded to the conditions of their lives. They were impoverished materially and spiritually and had no hope for enlightenment. Therefore, their breathing became irregular and without rhythm. Yoga was a sophisticated discipline to store the life energy and bring new life to minjung by deep and rhythmical breaths and meditation.

Yoga does not accept Sankhya-Hindu ideas that the abolition of metaphysical ignorance and the attainment of Gnostic knowledge can destroy the evil cycles (karma) of life and achieve liberation. While Sankhya-Hinduism was intellectualist, Yoga was physical and action-oriented, although action in Yoga is strictly limited to physical action. Yoga was more practical and experiential in the sense that the physical and psycho-physiological exercises played a primary role. In one of its forms, which focuses on personal liberation, Yoga has not been concerned with historical and social context. But Yoga has another tradition, which has a strong social concern. For example, a contemporary Yogi claims that by storing and transforming the *Prana*, we can change the world and ourselves.<sup>27</sup> It is not difficult to imagine that practical minded Chinese and other Easterners adopted at least some Yoga teachings in their religious and spiritual practices.

The Christian Scripture sees the breath of life as the action of the Holy Spirit, and thereby breathing is seen in a whole new light. In the Gospel of John, the risen Jesus breathed on the disciples and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22). Both Eastern religions and Christianity see breath as a symbol or analogue of the Holy Spirit. Breath is the source of life and the "place in our being that touches the Divine Spirit."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 62.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>27</sup> Lysebeth, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of Heart & Body* (New York: Paulist, 1995), 195. In the same page of the book, Ryan states that "our physical breath is an appropriate symbol for our spirit and God's Spirit. It enlivens, purifies and pacifies us. Breath is a symbol of life in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation."

## **Ki (氣) and Ruah**

The Eastern term *ki* or *chi* (氣) includes various meanings. It means the field of power, like a magnetic field, wind, or the breath of life. *Ki* is equivalent to the Biblical idea of *ruah*, the life force that was moving over the chaotic waters, the spirit of life. In Genesis, the life force moves in all directions like wind. It blows as it wills. This wind is not just a natural power, but it is a force of justice and shalom. It passes judgment to oppressors and monopolizers of material goods. Isaiah's vision was that the shalom within creation and history would be achieved by *ruah*, the life force derived from God (Isa 32:15-18).

In Hebrew, there are two words signifying the breath of life: *ruah* and *neshamah*. *Ruah* is the primordial creative power that moved upon the face of the deep water (Gen 1:2); while *neshamah* was breathed into the nostrils of the first man made of the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7). These two words have different meanings, but later in the Israelite tradition they became exchangeable with each other (e.g., Isa 42:4, 57:16). Originally, however, *ruah* was the life force originated by the creator God and was the divine life force, while *neshamah* was the breath of life that originated from creatures. Thus, *ruah* was the primordial principle and origin of *neshamah*. If *neshamah* is equal to breath in this early tradition, *ruah* can be seen as equal to the mysterious entity called *ki*, life energy. Yogins and Eastern religionists believe that they can attain *ki* by the exercise of breathing techniques. Actually, they experience the life force (*ki*) by practicing *Pranayama* of Indian Yoga, *Qikong* (氣功) of Chinese Taoism, or *Kuksondo* (國仙道) of Korea.

Choi Jae-woo, founder of the *Donghak* religion, taught that the divine spirit (*naeyushinryong*, 內有神靈) resides in all human beings. *Donghak* (東學, literally, Eastern learning) was a typical religion of the oppressed Koreans during the period of the late 19th century to the early 20th century. According to the teachings of *Donghak*, the divine spirit is the center of mind. The divine spirit is not an isolated reality, but resides within all creatures and holds them together as members of the universe. *Donghak* religion explains that the activity of the divine spirit bringing all people together in solidarity is *ki*. Therefore, *ki* is the dynamic dimension of the divine spirit. *Ki* unifies all people and creatures into an egalitarian community. *Ki* and *Shinryong* (神靈, the divine spirit) are like the two sides of the same coin. *Ki* is the fundamental energy that moves the universe. Likewise, *ruah* is sometimes called dynamic wind (e.g., Jer 37:5-6). The religion of the Israelite prophets and the *Donghak* religion share the same vision, that is, a harmonious society with justice and peace. This vision was sustained by their experiences of the divine spirit and its powerful energy, which moves the whole creation into life-filled harmony. *Kihwa* (氣化) is the movement and activity of the energy that moves the universe.<sup>29</sup> According to *Donghak*, in the movement of *ki* (*kihwa*) the *minjung* participate in and experience life power and are then able to

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ki* (氣) is the fundamental energy that moves the universe. *Hwa* (化) is activity and movement.

transform the world.

*Donghak* accepted and transformed ideas derived from Taoism and from Yoga. Each individual is taught by *Donghak* to follow the way endowed by Heaven (Tao). This means that when an individual acts, she is to base her heart and mind on the principles endowed by the divine spirit. Muwi (無爲) literally means no action. Without action we act. Mu (無) means nothing. *Donghak* teaches that when we act, we should not follow our personal desires and interests. We should follow the principles (道) of Heaven. In other words, we must ride on the *Kihwa* (the movement of the divine spirit) when we act. This involves discerning the activity of the divine spirit in our historical circumstances. It involves discerning the signs of the times. Consequently, many *Donghak* leaders changed their names to include the word shi (時, time) in their new names. Choi Shi-hyong is an example; his former name was Choi Kyong-sang. These leaders tried to discern the signs and meanings of their times. They believed that the teachings of the religion should be relevant to the times, and should contribute to resolving the problems of the times.

### **The Eastern Orthodox Church: a Bridge Between Christianity and Eastern Religions**

Interestingly enough, Eastern Christianity was also under the influence of *Pranayama* (the control of breath) and its spirituality. Hesychasm constitutes the heart of the spirituality of the Eastern Church.<sup>30</sup> Hesychast monks employed the techniques of breathing.<sup>31</sup> Gregory Palamas, the "Theologian of Hesychasm," taught people to employ breath control during meditation and prayer. To quote his words: "This is why certain masters recommend them to control the movement inwards and outwards of the breath, and to hold it back a little, in this way, they will also be able to control the mind together with the breath..."<sup>32</sup> With this we see that, as an expert on the spirituality of the Eastern Church notes, Hesychasm occupies "a position midway between the spiritual techniques of the non-Christian East and the mystical methods or spiritual exercises practiced within the Church of Rome."<sup>33</sup> Hesychasts recognize the positive role of the body in "pure prayer." In the Augustinian tradition, the body cannot participate in "pure prayer." In the traditions of the Protestant Church as well as the Roman Catholic Church only Grace and the supernatural can save; nature cannot play any significant role in salvation. Breathing is a bodily function, and thus is a function of nature. In Hesychasm, body and nature are not counter to Grace. In

---

<sup>30</sup> Hesychasm derives from the Greek term hesychia that designates quietude, tranquility, or solitude. Hesychast (hesychastes) refers to a "hermit."

<sup>31</sup> For example, refer to Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality* (Torrance, CA: Oakwood, 1992), 161-67.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques-Albert Cuttat, *The Encounter of Religions* (New York: Desclee, 1960), 87. This is a translation of *La Rencontre des Religions* (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1957).

Hesychasm, breath can become a "providential vehicle" of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> Body and nature can both act as a "a springboard from which one may become aware of Grace, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a foundation for deification."<sup>35</sup>

Gregory Palamas distinguishes the essence and the energies of God. But "God is wholly and entirely present both in His essence and in His energies." Here, the divine essence represents the totally transcendent aspect of God, and the idea of divine "energies" points to an aspect of God being "experienced" and "seen" as an "uncreated and real Presence."<sup>36</sup> I find in this duality a striking similarity with the Whiteheadian duality in God: the Primordial nature and the Consequent nature. If the divine essence is close in its meaning to the primordial nature, the meaning of the divine "energies" is close to the consequent nature and the Spirit. The divine energies are not finite, but infinite and immanent. *Ki* and *ruah* are divine energies. The Spirit is a divine dynamic energy.

In the Western Church, the Holy Spirit has been almost unnecessary. At most, it has been seen as the bond of love that holds the Father and the Son together within the Trinity. The Western Church is a church of Christ, who is seen as the ultimate source of supernatural Grace. The Eastern Church, in its teachings, has restored the Holy Spirit to a more dignified status. In the Eastern Church, the Holy Spirit has been confessed as God who accomplishes and completes the salvation of the whole creation. Juergen Moltmann reinforces this Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Holy Spirit in a socially and environmentally conscious way. Asian theologians must learn the spirituality of the Eastern Church when they want to develop a Christian theology and spirituality that can be absorbed by the people of the East.

## Some Concluding Remarks

The word Spirit is a loaded term. It has multi-layers of meaning. But it has some common features: immanence and transcendence, creativity, energy, dynamism, and ultimate source of life. We have seen that religious traditions that share common understandings of the Spirit can be found in both Eastern religions and Eastern Christianity. Recovering and re-strengthening the various spiritual traditions in the world will contribute to the widening of the spiritual dimension of life. It also will allow for an enrichment of doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity.

I have found Whitehead's philosophy of organism, especially the idea of the consequent nature of God, helpful in providing metaphysical support for constructing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Whitehead's idea of God is experiential and mystical. It seems that his religious ideas more closely correspond to Eastern and mystical spirituality than to the spirituality of the Western Christian Church.

I would like to emphasize the distinct features of the spirituality of the Eastern religions in

---

<sup>34</sup> The Encounter of Religions, 91-92.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Introduction," *The Triads*, 7.

comparison with those of the Christian Church of the West. Eastern religions value physical practices as an effective means to reach a divine and supernatural state. The East holds non-dualist positions regarding Nature and Supernature, divine and human. In the East, the divine is immanent in the natural. The West has been dualist when it comes to the relationship between the divine and the natural or the human. In the West, the divine and supernatural are more transcendental than immanent. In the West, languages of the Spirit have been suppressed and submerged by languages of the Father and Christ.

Finally, languages of the Spirit both in Christianity and in Eastern religions can expand and enrich Christian pneumatology. Pneumatology has been discussed within the boundary of the Trinity. The Spirit has been overshadowed by the other two divine persons. Therefore, the Spirit must be freed from doctrinal and ecclesiastical bondage, and must be restored and experienced in our real lives. Languages of the Spirit can contribute to breaking the chains that have kept the Spirit from being active in the world, human and natural.