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## **BUDDHAHOOD AND METANOIA: THE BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN KOREA**

Buddhism and Christianity are currently the two most dominant religions in South Korea, with approximately one half of the country's population of 44.5 million as their adherents. Among these, about one half are Buddhists and the other half are Christians.<sup>1</sup> Under such circumstances, it is not difficult for anybody to see that the dialogical and cooperative relationship between these two religions in Korea should be a prerequisite or even an imperative for the peaceful and harmonious future of Korean society.

The purpose of this paper is 1) to have a brief survey of the historical background of these two religions in Korea, 2) to analyze the present situation of Buddhist-Christian relationship in Korea, and 3) to explore the questions as to what would be the desirable direction for these two religions to head for in their future encounters. It will be argued that Korean Buddhism and Christianity, realizing what important historical and religious functions they can perform in Korean society, should 'work together' and "think together" for the socio-ethical welfare and spiritual well-being of Korean people.

### **Historical Background**

#### **A. Korean Buddhism**

It is traditionally believed that Buddhism was introduced into Korea in 372 C.E. during the reign of King Sosurim of Koguryō, one of the three kingdoms which comprised Korea at that time. Although

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1. According to the government statistics, as of July 1, 1994, Buddhists are 24.4 per cent of South Korea's population, and Christians are 24.1 per cent (Protestants 18.2 per cent; Catholics 5.9 per cent). Quoted in the *Christian Herald U.S.A.*, March 17, 1995, p. 11. It should not be forgotten here that in terms of influence on Korean people's social behavior and ethical attitude, Confucianism, which had been the state religion during the last five centuries, must be considered as strong as, if not stronger than, these two religions.

some scholars arguably claim that Buddhism must have been in the country earlier than that date, the traditional records say that Buddhism was first officially accepted when the king enthusiastically welcomed a monk called Sundo who was dispatched as a member of the delegation from Northern China and built a monastery to house him. Although there is no knowing when was the exact actual date of Buddhism's entry into Korea, it might be safe to say established religion in the that by the middle of the fourth century C.E. it was a relatively well kingdom.

The other two kingdoms, Paekche and Silla, also accepted Buddhism in 384 and 534 respectively. It is well known that Paekche played the major role of introducing and spreading Buddhism in Japan.<sup>2</sup> The golden age of Buddhism came during the Unified Silla period (668-935). During this period, Buddhism was the main force behind the national unity and many highly developed cultural and artistic achievements of the country. Buddhism in full blossom spiritually and intellectually produced a number of such great thinkers as Wŏnhyo (617-687) and Ŭisang (625-702), whose academic reputation and influence were felt in China and Japan as well as in Korea.

Buddhism in the succeeding Koryŏ dynasty (935-1932) was also thriving under the royal patronage. During this period there appeared many memorable achievements, including the carving of more than 80,000 woodblocks and the inventing of the world's first movable types to print the Buddhist canon. There were also some eminent Buddhist monks such as Ŭichŏn (1055-1101), a son of King Munjong, and Chinul (1158-1210), one of the most influential Buddhist thinkers in the history of Korean thought.<sup>3</sup>

During most of this period, however, Buddhism was involved in the political power struggles. Especially around the end of the period, Buddhism with its tremendous land, wealth, serfs, and the other

2. For more detail, see James H. Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History* (Oxford: Larendon, 1989) 46ff.

3. Robert E. Buswell, *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.), and his recent edition, *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992). See also Hee Sung Keel, *Chinul: Founder of the Korean Son Tradition* (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1984).

privileges such as exemption from taxation, military service, conscripted labour and the like, enjoyed the status of being a state within the state.<sup>4</sup> This situation gradually led the Buddhist sangha into corruption, stagnation and decline.

The decline of Buddhism was drastically marked by the establishment of the new Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). "Partly out of conviction, partly out of desire to emphasize a break with the past, and partly to curb the divisive influence of the Sangha", King Taejo, the founder, "declared himself and the new dynasty Confucian".<sup>5</sup> Soon after the first several sovereigns, the suppression of Buddhism was increasingly intensified until it reached its nadir at the dawn of the twentieth century. During this predominantly Confucian period, although there were some eminent monks and Buddhist thinkers, they were overshadowed by the great Neo-Confucian scholars, and Buddhism became almost exclusively the religion for women and old people in the countryside and mountains.<sup>6</sup>

During the Japanese colonial rule of Korea (1919-1945), Japan, largely a Buddhist country, as part of their control of Korea, tried to help Korean Buddhism "revive" itself. This "revival", however, meant mainly "Japanizing" Korean Buddhism. Among other things, Japan forced Korean Buddhist monks to model after the Japanese counterparts in getting married. This and some other attempts to "revive" Buddhism in Korea, in the final analysis, did more harm than good.

After the liberation of Korea in 1945, one of the harms caused by the Japanese control of Korean Buddhism emerged in the form of a miserable power struggle between the married and the celibate monks.<sup>7</sup> This was what Korean Buddhism suffered most from the legacy of the Japanese policy toward it, and this was also one of

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4. Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1994) 179.

5. *Ibid.*, 182.

6. The later part of this period, Buddhist temples were not allowed to be built within the boundary of the capital city of Seoul. Moreover, Buddhist monks were denied access to the city.

7. See Lewis R. Lancaster, "Buddhism in Korea Survives Suppression and Change" in Charles S. Prebish, ed., *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective* (University Park: Pen State University Press, 1975) 216.

the most prominent reasons why Buddhism, even in the religiously pluralistic Korean society, could not be very appealing to the general public in Korea. But this early stage of chaotic and lethargic state of Korean sangha has been gradually changing into a more encouragingly vibrant future. For example, the Chogye Order, the largest sect, has undergone a drastic reform movement since 1994, and this has kindled among the members of Buddhist community a new hope of true revival of Korean Buddhism.

In terms of its relationship to the newly introduced and rapidly spreading Christianity, Buddhism, which has been so severely suppressed so long in Korean history, has not been in a physical and mental position to compete with Christianity, let alone to attack it. Despite some historical records of factional struggles within their own tradition, Buddhism, in this interreligious context, has been on a more passive and pacifist side of the two.

### B. Korean Christianity

Christianity in its Catholic form became known to Koreans during the early part of the seventeenth century through the diplomatic envoys dispatched to China and the Catholic literature they brought into Korea. These books written by the Jesuit missionaries in China were studied by some Korean scholars belonging to the "Practical Learning" (*sirhak*) school as part of "Western Learning". This initial intellectual curiosity in the Western Learning turned into an enthusiastic interest in Catholicism as a worthy religion by the middle of the eighteenth century.

The rapid of Catholicism caused conflict with the Korean government which had adopted Neo - Confucianism as the state religio-political ideology of the time. No matter what were the deeper reasons behind this conflict, it brought the waves of persecutions against Catholic church in Korea.<sup>8</sup> In one persecution in 1871 alone, eight thousand believers, including many priests and missionaries, were slaughtered, a half of the Christians at the time in Korea.

8. For some deeper reasons, see my article, Kang-nam Oh, "Sagehood and Metanoia: The Confucian-Christian Encounter in Korea", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LXI/2, Summer, 1993, 305-308.

The official persecution of Christianity ended in 1884. Around that time, the Protestant missionaries entered Korea. Since then the number of Catholic and Protestant Christians in Korea has increased at such a tremendous speed that the mission work in Korea became known as "one of wonders of modern mission". At the present time, Korean Protestant Christianity has more than thirty thousand churches including the world's largest churches in Seoul. Korean Catholicism had its one hundred heroes and heroines of faith canonized when the Pope John Paul II visited Korea in 1984 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the official foundation of Korean Catholic church, and this has made Korea the world's fourth largest country in terms of the number of Catholic saints.<sup>9</sup> As James H. Grayson says, "moving into the final decade of the twentieth century, the Christian churches, especially the Protestant churches, are the dominant religious fact of modern Korean history".<sup>10</sup>

### **Present Monological Relationship**

It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that up to recent time there has been no direct contact or meaningful encounter between Buddhism and Christianity in Korea. Both religions have been busy concentrating on their own survival and separate development in their relatively isolated confinements. There has been, so to speak, only monologue within their own territories, and no constructive and mutually enriching dialogue.

In most recent years, however, these two hitherto rather independent and mutually indifferent religions in Korea have come into closer contact with each other. One of the main reasons seems to be the rapid urbanization of the Korean society, which gives people more chances to mingle with the people with other religious persuasions. Another reason might be found in the explosive mass media which has tremendously increased the people's exposure to religious beliefs other than their own.

Whatever the reasons may be, the fact is that this phenomenon of increased contact between Buddhism and Christianity has, un-

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9. Chongseuh Kim, "Sōngsārōum-ul P'ap'yōnhwa-inga" (Fragmentation of the Sacred?" in *Hyōnsang-kwa Insik*, vol. 18, no. 4, Winter, 1994, 13.

10. Grayson, *op. cit.*, 206.

fortunately, proved to be more a cause of increasingly greater number of conflicts rather than an opportunity for mutual understanding and acceptance. There have been, of course, some encouraging instances which this closer contact has brought about. For example, there was a meeting, which I was privileged to participate in, for "the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue" sponsored by the Academy House in Seoul in 1986, in which the concerned Buddhist scholars and monks and Christian theologians and ministers gathered together with Professor Heinrich Ott from Basel as a guest speaker. Some conscientious theologians, represented by Dr. Sŏnhwan Pyŏn, the former president of Methodist College in Seoul, have expressed genuine concern and interest in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue as a means to foster mutual understanding and transformation. His most recent festschrift on religious pluralism is a good example of the budding interest among some Christian theologians in religious pluralism in general and Buddhist-Christian dialogue in particular.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, some nuns from the Catholic church, the Buddhist sangha and the Won Buddhist organization got together to discuss possibilities for future cooperation in the areas of social work and meditative life. In February this year, the representatives of Buddhism, Catholic and Protestant churches met with each other to reach an agreement that they would work together for the nation-wide human organ donation campaign.<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding, the general picture of Buddhist-Christian relationship in today's Korean society is rather gloomy, and more often than not, even ugly. To take just a few examples, a number of Buddha statues standing outside were painted with red colored sign of the cross on the foreheads, and in case of the stone statues, some of them were partially destroyed. One army officer closed a Buddhist "dharma hall" in his compound and threw the Buddha image away in the mountains. Some groups of Christians marched carrying placards and shouting "Jesus Heaven; Buddha Hell" or "Buddhist temples are headquarters of devils" and the like. Even some Buddhist temples were burned down by some Christian arsonists.

This type of exclusivism is found not only among ignorant lay people but also some leaned leaders of Protestant churches. Several

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11. Sŏn-hwan Pyŏn, et. al. *Chonggyo Tawŏnjuui-wa Han'guk-chŏk Sinhak* (Religious Pluralism and Korean Way Theology) (Seoul: Han'guk Sinhak Yŏn'guso, 1992).  
 12. *The Vancouver Korean Press*, February 24, 1995, p. A-14.

years ago, Dr. Sŏn-hwan Pyŏn, the above mentioned former president of the Methodist College in Seoul, was deprived not only of his position as the president but also of his professorship and ministerial privileges, mainly because of his sympathetic understanding toward other religions, particularly toward Buddhism. When he stated to the effect that there is salvation outside the church, he was severely criticized by his fellow Christians from almost every denomination in Korea.

This sort of list on the negative responses which resulted from Buddhist-Christian encounters in Korea can go on and on.<sup>13</sup> But even this much seems to be enough to give us some feeling regarding what is happening now in Korea in terms of Buddhist-Christian contact. In order to have a clearer picture, however, we can see a succinct instillation of a Buddhist monk's analysis of the general misconceptions some of their fellow believers belonging to Christianity have regarding the Buddhist religion. According to him, many Christians in Korea accuse Buddhism on such wrong notions as:

- 1) that Buddhism is a superstition,
- 2) that Buddhism is an idolatry,
- 3) that Buddhism believes in a man, the Buddha, while Christianity believes in God, Jesus,
- 4) that Buddhism is a mere enigmatic philosophy, while Christianity is a religion accessible by everyone,
- 5) that Buddhism is responsible for all the wrong doings of some Buddhist monks,
- 6) that all in all, Buddhism is the devil's teaching that should be wiped from the face of the world.<sup>14</sup>

As seen above, the increasingly uncomfortable and sometimes antagonistic encounters between Buddhism and Christianity are caused, in most cases, by religiously exclusivistic attitudes upheld by the vast majority of Korean Christians. It is a relatively well-known fact that

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13. For a longer list of this sort, see Sŏn-hwan Pyŏn, "I ttang'esŏ-ui Chonggyo Kaldŏng Munje" (The Question of Religious Conflict in this Land) in *Tabo*, vol. 13, Spring, 1995, 49-51.

14. *Ibid.*, 50f.

traditionally Koreans were generally flexible towards different religious faiths.

This rather eclectic or pluralistic attitude was aptly observed by Homer B. Hulbert, an early missionary who went to Korea in 1886:

....the reader must ever bear in mind that in every Korean mind there is a jumble of the whole, that there is no antagonism between the different cults.... As a general thing, we may say that the all-round Korean will be a Confucian when in society, a Buddhist when he philosophises and a spirit worshipper when he is in trouble.<sup>15</sup>

It is not to argue here whether or not this type of syncretic tendency is an ideal paradigm for one's relationship to other religions. The point here is that such an open and adaptable attitude is now hardly found among many Koreans, especially among Korean Christian leaders and their followers. As a matter of fact, Korean Christianity as a whole is characterized by its extreme exclusivism against other religions.<sup>16</sup>

It is sad to observe, likewise, that Buddhism and Christianity in Korea have walked in their separate ways with rather tight monologic mindsets. If there had been some serious contacts between them, most of them were irritating and obnoxious encounters, even though they were in most cases initiated by some Christians. Should this kind of situation be allowed to continue without end?

### **Future Dialogical Partnership**

With regard to our need to move from the monologic and antipathetic relationship to the dialogical and amicable reciprocity, Leonard Swidler of Temple University once said:

It is only by struggling out of the self-centered monologic mindsets into dialogue with "the others" as they really are, and not as we have projected them in our monologues, that we

15. Homer B. Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University, 1969, originally, New York: 1906) 403f.

16. See Kang-nam Oh, "Christianity and Religious Pluralism in Korea" in *Religious Studies and Theology*, vol. 6, no. 3. September, 1986, 27-38.



can avoid such cataclysmic disasters. In brief, we must move from the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue.

To emphasize the urgency of dialogical partnership among the religions of the world, he stated graphically, or almost bluntly: "the future offers two alternatives: death or dialogue".<sup>17</sup>

Paul Mojzes argues that the relation between religions can range from war to antagonism, indifference, dialogue, cooperation, and synthesis.<sup>18</sup> Now Korean Buddhists and Christians should make a conscious decision in the face of such a grave consequences that might result from interreligious relationships.

Needless to say, Korean Buddhists and Christians must choose the dialogue rather than death, and dialogue and cooperation rather than war and antagonism. What then do they have to do to move from the age of monologue to the age of dialogue? What do they have to do change the relationship of indifference and antagonism to that of dialogue and cooperation?

Some time ago, while discussing the future possibility of Confucian-Christian dialogue in Korea, I made several suggestions that I believed to be helpful in fostering dialogical and cooperative relationship between the two religious traditions.<sup>19</sup> In this previous discussion, I recommended that Korean Confucians and Christians cultivate the *pluralistic* perspective and thus learn to see the other religion as *complementary* rather than competitive or threatening to their own religion. I also proposed that from this basic perspective, they develop the cooperative relationship or partnership of "working together" and "thinking together." In this discussion of Buddhist-Christian relationship, I would like to make basically the same suggestions as before.

17. Leonard Swidler, John B. Cobb, Jr., Paul F. Knitter, and Honica K. Hellwig, *Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (London: SCM, 1990) viii.

18. "Types of Encounter Between Religions", in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, ed. *Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies toward the Outsider* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mullen Press, 1990) 1.

19. Kang-nam Oh, "Sagehood and Metanoia: The Confucian-Christian Encounter in Korea", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LXI/2, Summer, 1993, 308-315.

First of all, I believe that both Buddhists and Christians should realize that their dialogical relationship would enable them to embark upon what John S. Dunne calls "the spiritual adventure of our time", that is, "passing over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion" and "coming back with new insight to one's own culture, one's own way of life, one's own religion".<sup>20</sup> Through this productive and mutually advantageous interaction, Korean Buddhists and Christians can bring about what is called "the fusion of horizons" which surely will vivify the religious vision and activate the socio-ethical life in Korea. And it seems to me that this process of passing over and coming back between Buddhism and Christianity can be most effectively carried out through what I call "working together" and "thinking together".

A similar idea is expressed by Paul Knitter when he says, "The future will require with ever greater urgency that those of us who choose to live our lives religiously, will have to do so interreligiously". According to him, this means that "the task of understanding ourselves religiously.... will have to be carried out together with persons of other religious traditions".<sup>21</sup> To be exact, Buddhism is not an entirely "other" religious tradition to Korean Christians, and neither is Korean Christianity a completely "other" religious faith to Korean Buddhists, for both of them are spiritualities shared by the half of Korean population. For Koreans, they are in a sense "our religions" shared by *our* people for the spiritual enrichment of *our* people. What could be more important for Korean Buddhists and Christians than trying to understand each other not only to bring about the religious mutuality but also to come to their own religious maturity?

#### A. Working Together

As pointed out in my earlier discussion, in such a complex society as ours no one religion can claim that it can answer to all the questions we face now for or by itself. All religions should cooperate in meeting the challenges of the time. In this sense, it is necessary that both Buddhists and Christians, as well as people belonging to any religions, leave the old paradigms which see every-

20. John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) ix.

21. "Christian Salvation: Its Nature and Uniqueness: An Interreligious Proposal", an unpublished paper sent to me in January, 1995, 1.

thing only in terms of right or wrong, true or false, superior or inferior, and other similar false dichotomies and categories. Instead of spending their time and energy in arguing to prove themselves to be the only "superior, right, and true" religion, they should unite themselves as partners in helping to save the Korean people from all kinds of social, economic, political, ethical, and religious ills and injustice. Furthermore, they should collaborate in the alleviation of the sufferings resulting from ecological problems which are so rampant in Korea now. All in all, they should join together in what Paul Knitter describes as "soterio-centric" concern.

In more concrete terms in the context of Korean society, this means that Buddhists and Christians in particular should put their ideals of compassion (*karuna*) and love (*agape*) together to take tender care of the unprivileged, the alienated, the marginalized, and the dehumanized strata of the people in Korea. This also means that they must put their time and energy together in putting their ideal of "being-for-others" into practice and be concerned to solve the problems caused by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization as witnessed in Korea. This means again that they should unite under the common endeavor of tackling the growing individualism, materialism, and fierce competition found in the new modernized society of Korea. This of course means above all that they should work hand in hand for earlier realization of the reunification of their homeland.

Korean Buddhists and Christians have a good historical precedent for such joint efforts among the religions in Korea. In the March First Independence Movement against Japanese colonial rule in 1919, Korean Buddhists and Christians, together with fellow Koreans belonging to other religions in Korea, were willing to risk even their lives together to bring about the common goal of national independence. By reenacting this beautiful historical example, they could find so many other things Korean Buddhism and Christianity, with their largest number of constituents in Korea, can do and should do together to help bring about a more peaceful, just, fair and humane society in Korea.

### ***B. Thinking Together***

Although cooperative work in constructive socio - ethical joint-projects between Buddhism and Christianity is extremely important,

it should be pointed out that this "soterio-centric" concern on the socio-ethical dimension is not enough. I firmly believe that there should be "thinking together" as well. This thinking together can mean that Buddhism and Christianity should join together in discussing and sharing the fundamental issues in the area of philosophico-theological realms, as suggested by other scholars.

To take a few examples, Professor Masao Abe and his friends propose that the comparison of the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and the Christian idea of *kenosis* (emptying) would be a good topic for the Buddhist-Christian conversation,<sup>22</sup> Professor John Keenan suggests that Christian Christology should be re-examined in the light of Mahayana soteriology;<sup>23</sup> and Professor Seich Yagi of Japan and his colleagues try to show that they can build a bridge between Buddhism and Christianity through the various theological and conceptual frameworks.<sup>24</sup>

It seems to me that Korean theologians and Buddhist scholars can also have a fruitful dialogue by engaging themselves in exploring the concepts of *minjung* and sentient beings (*chungsaeng*). It is interesting to note that in recent years there have appeared some theologians and Buddhist scholars who are interested in "Minjung Theology" and "Minjung Buddhist Movement" both of which are concerned with "people (*minjung*)," especially the suffering and marginalized people.<sup>25</sup>

22. See John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

23. John Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

24. Seichi Yagi and Leonard Swidler, *A Bridge to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1990). For more detail on the other possible topics for the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, see Leonard Swidler's article *ibid.*, pp. 11-37.

25. See Jung Young Lee, ed., *An Emerging Theology in World Perspective* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Pub., 1988); The Commission on Theological Concern of the Christian Conference of Asia, ed., *Minjung Theology: People as the Subject of History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981); and Pöpsöng et. al. ed., *Minjung Pulgyo-ui T'amgu* (In Search of Minjung Buddhism) (Seoul: Minjok-sa, 1989), especially Professor Pil-ho Hwang's comparison and analysis of Liberation Theology and Minjung Buddhism, *ibid.*, 243-281.

I do see that these and many other attempts<sup>26</sup> to have a Buddhist-Christian dialogue on the level of basically metaphysical and theoretical concern are important in building up mutual understanding and congeniality between Buddhism and Christianity. I do not want to deny the possibility that such attempts will bring about great merit to these two religions, as well as to Korean society as a whole. It seems to me, however, that a dialogue on such conceptual level is still somewhat insufficient. It should be carried out on the deepest level.

What is this deepest level in more concrete terms? I believe that it is the level of "ultimate transformation" which is called *kkaech'im* in Korean Buddhism and *metanoia* in Christianity. I am convinced that Buddhist-Christian dialogue, as well as any meaningful dialogues between any other religions, should be carried out on this ultimate level of "consciousness-transformation". This type of dialogue is what I call "metanoia-centric" approach, "metanoia" literally meaning "change of consciousness".

As well known, Buddhism is a religion for *bodhi*, which means wisdom, awakening, enlightenment, and the like. This is what the Buddha experienced under the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgayā. This is the experience that basically all the subsequent Buddhist followers have been seeking after in their religious pursuit. For most Buddhists this awakening experience, *kkaech'im* in Korean, *wu* in Chinese, and *satori* in Japanese, means the ultimate transformation of consciousness which they believe makes them truly free and authentically human. This experience is what they call alpha and omega, heart and womb, the *raison d'être* of Buddhism. Buddhism without this experience, according to many Buddhists, is "a sun without its light and heat".<sup>27</sup>

What about in Christianity? As I argued somewhere else,<sup>28</sup> the central teaching of Jesus' ministry is his idea of *metanoia*, which

26. For the other various theoretical frameworks, see Paul O. Ingram and Frederick J. Streng, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* (Honolulu: university of Hawaii Press, 1986).

27. Cf. D. T. Suzuki: "In all events there is no Zen without Satori, which is indeed the Alpha and Omega of Zen Buddhism. Zen devoid of satori is like a sun without its light and heat." In William Barrett, ed., *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956) 84.

28. Oh, "Sagehood and Metanoia", op. cit., 314.

he proclaimed in his first preaching: "Repent (metanoiete), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand".<sup>29</sup> As Hans Küng says, this is "a radical change in man's thinking and a conversion (Greek, *metanoia*), away from all forms of selfishness, toward God and his fellow men, "which brings about "a changed awareness, a new way of thinking, a new scale of values".<sup>30</sup> It is "a radical rethinking and re-turning on the part of the whole man, a completely new attitude to life", I agree with him when he concludes that this ultimate transformation of the whole being is "of central importance" in Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

What I argue here is that the Buddhist-Christian dialogue should include, and ultimately centre around, this fundamentally crucial question of "ultimate transformation of consciousness". If Buddhists and Christians are engaged in a dialogue to confirm this experience of "ultimate change in consciousness" as a (if not *the*) common goal of their religious endeavour and discuss the various possible methods which might facilitate this experience to be effectively actualized among a greater number of Korean Buddhists and Christians, then their dialogical "thinking together", I believe, will be the most significant and fruitful for both of these religions.

### Conclusion

Hans Küng says, "No survival without world ethic. No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions".<sup>32</sup> Where else can this be more relevant than in the contemporary Korean religious scene and society in general? At the present time Korea is one of the most religiously pluralistic societies. Many people in Korea, believers and non-believers alike, are worried now about the interreligious tension found in Korea.

I believe that both Buddhists and Christians should learn from Wonhyo, the greatest thinker of the seventh century Korea. In his famous *Hwajaeng* (Harmonization of Disputes) theory, he encouraged the pluralistic perspective. With regard to reality, Wonhyo says.

29. Matthew 4:17 and parallels.

30. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London: Collins, 1977) 191.

31. *Ibid.*, 250.

32. *Global Responsibility in Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) xv.

we cannot avoid facing many categorically opposing views such as being and non-being, emptiness and essence, i.e., "eternalist and non-eternalist views". According to him, "if we cling to either one of these two views", we fail to do justice to reality, and that we should not absolutize any one side of the pair but accept both sides as complementary to each other.<sup>33</sup> It seems to me that this type of pluralistic perspective so powerfully advocated by Wonhyo should be reactivated as the base for the future Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

Thomas Merton, one of the greatest twentieth century American thinkers, says, "If the West continues to underestimate and neglect the spiritual heritage of the East, it may hasten the tragedy that threatens man and his civilization".<sup>34</sup> Korean Buddhists should know that even though they are Buddhists they too can underestimate and neglect the deepest level of spirituality in their own tradition and thus should learn to appreciate it again; and Korean Christians should realize that even if they find a great deal of meaning in their newly adopted religious tradition, that does not mean that they should underestimate or neglect the religious traditions of the East.

It is a well-known fact that many aspects of Buddhism in contemporary Korea have been influenced by its encounter with Christianity.<sup>35</sup> As John Cobb, Jr. aptly says, it is also true that "Christian theology is deeply affected by the encounter with

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33. For Wŏnhyo's idea on this point, see K. Oh, "Wŏnhyo's Buddhist Thought for Today", in *Korean Studies in Canada*, vol. 2, 1994, 90-97. Cf. C. G. Jung's statement: "Only the paradoxical comes anywhere near to comprehending the fullness of life. Non-ambiguity and non-contradiction are one-sided and thus unsuited to express the incomprehensible". *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R. R. C. Hull, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, eds. Herbert Read et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 15.

34. Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986) 46.

35. See Chongsuh Kim, op. cit., 13. The more active way of recruiting new members, the reorganization of the administration systems, the popularization of Buddhist teachings through the so-called Buddhist "culture colleges" (Kyoyang taehak), the more regular meetings, and the like are mentioned as some examples of the Christian influence on Buddhism in Korea.

Buddhism".<sup>36</sup> Regardless of what these two religions think, the age of monologue and separate development is already at end. If such encounter and mutual influence is inevitable, it is indeed better for Korean Buddhism and Christianity to consciously engage themselves in a more methodical and meaningful dialogue. This type of congenial dialogue is not only for their own "mutual renewal and transformation" but also, as Küng says, for the peaceful future of Korean society as a whole.

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36. Paul O. Ingram et al., *op. cit.*, 231.