Yu Yǒng-mo's theological understanding of God and spirituality

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YU YŎNG-MO’S
THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND SPIRITUALITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Yǒng-mo Yu (1890-1981) was a supporter of religious pluralism in Korea, advocating for a syncretistic conception of God; and for interfaith spiritual renewal, during a period marked by the rejection of these concepts. A study of his work enriches our conception of the 20th century Korean Christianity. The main goal of my dissertation is to first analyze Yu’s theological understanding of God and examine it in relation to the three East Asian major religious traditions as well as a Western ontological understanding of the ultimate reality; and second, through such analyses, to discuss the significance and challenges of Yu’s pluralistic theology and spirituality.

Yu’s own definition of God as Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim” (없이 계신 하느님, “God who exists as Non-Being”) is an ontological understanding of the ultimate reality, which is very different from conservative Korean Protestantism’s understanding of God.
Yu’s understanding of God is very similar to Robert C. Neville’s understanding of God as the creator in that both of them define the ultimate reality as absolute Nothingness (無) or Emptiness (空) transcending both being and non-being. Yu’s understanding of God was also based on the East Asian religious traditions which are Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Therefore, Yu defines Christian God as T’ai-chi and Wu-chi, nothingness, and Tao which are concepts that Yu borrows from the East Asian religions.

Yu’s concept of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim” was formed and developed based on his own spiritual experiences, for example, his experience of spiritual union with God. At the same time, his theological reflection on the ultimate reality also had great effect on his spirituality. In the same tenor, the pluralistic characteristics of Yu’s theology and spirituality are the result of Yu’s creative combination of his ontological understanding of the ultimate reality transcending various religious contexts and the East Asian spirituality focusing on spiritual discipline to develop the divine power given to human beings.

Yu’s creative integration of the ontological analysis of God and the East Asian spiritual tradition can provide a new perspective to Korean conservative Protestantism in understanding other religions, and suggest a new type Christian spirituality in plural Korean contexts.
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INTRODUCTION

Statement of problem

Korean Christianity is generally very conservative in theology and culture albeit there may be trivial differences among different denominations. One of the very typical theological ideas that conservative Korean Christianity rejects is the idea of religious pluralism. However, it is also true that interest in other religions and discussion of religious pluralism are growing in Korean Catholicism and some progressive Protestant denominations. It is against this backdrop that some Korean theologians, who were not held in high regard in the past because of their pluralism, have recently started to be recognized. Yong-mo Yu (1890-1981), a Korean Christian theologian, is known to have championed religious pluralistic thought without being influenced by western religious pluralism and is also known for having sought to integrate East Asian traditional schools of thought such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism with Western Christian thought. He believed that every religion seeks God and every person’s thought resembles the logos of God. Accordingly, Yu Yong-mo’s thought was not regarded to be of any importance; and was rarely researched in Korea because his theology and spirituality is considered to have many elements of religious pluralism. In this dissertation, I will analyze Yu’s theological understanding of God, which was not only affected by Western Christian thoughts but was also based on East Asian thought and his own spiritual experience. Through these efforts, I intend to introduce Yu’s particular theology and
spirituality to the Western academic fields of theology and spirituality, and define the significance of his pluralistic theology and spirituality have in Korean context.

**Significance of the problem**

Most Korean conservative theologians criticize and reject religious pluralism as a very humanistic and speculative theory which has no relation to God’s revelation and transcendental spiritual experience. They also typically reject any study of comparative religions because they think that it is worthless to compare Christianity – understood to be based on the existential experience of God’s revelation – with other religions established on only human desire or myths. In his book, *Religious Pluralism*, Cheol-won Seo (1942 - ), for example, a former professor of the systematic theology at Chongshin University and Seminary (CUS), strongly criticized Korean religious pluralists including Seon-hwan Byeon, Seong-beom Yun, and Won-ryong Gang whose theology is called a “naturalized theology” and emphasizes the communication among different religions. Seo says that religious pluralism was born from human reason–centered theologies affected by the Western Enlightenment movement and caused a crisis to traditional Christology because it replaced the image of God as personal, which is the traditional understanding of the Christian God, with a general concept of the ultimate reality or a kind of boundary of being.¹

Accordingly, most Korean churches and seminaries had relatively little regard for Yong-mo Yu’s theology, as his theology combined Western Christian ideas and various

¹ See, Cheol Won Seo, *Religious Pluralism* (Seoul: Chong-shin University, 2007).
East Asian religious teachings – in other words, his theology is very pluralistic. It is true that Yu’s unique theology combining Christian theology with Korean traditional Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist ideas, and his spiritual teachings and practices, which are similar to the East-Asian traditional self-disciplines, could not be easily positioned within the Korean conservative Christian theology. However, as the numbers of Korean theologians studying Korean theologians are growing nowadays, Yu’s theology is being reassessed in many ways.

South Korea is by no means a Christian country. According to statistical data, the vast majority of the population practice or observe Buddhism. Based on the 2005 consensus, the Reformed Christian population constituted 18 percentage of the entire Korean population. While this is still a significant number, it cannot be said that Korea is a Christian nation. In addition, Confucianism has historically played a very important role not only in the spiritual life but also in the daily culture and Confucian ethical teachings still strongly influence Korean people’s family and social lives. Accordingly, Korean conservative Christianity’s concept of faith, which rejects communication with other religions, is harshly criticized by other religious groups in Korea. So too is the Korean churches’ strenuous effort to convert other religious people to Christianity based on a belief that there is no salvation in other religions.

I expect that my dissertation, which examines Yu’s theology and spirituality, will contribute to both fields of theology and spirituality. Firstly, while most Korean religious

\[2\] Yu seems to explain the Western Christian theology through the East Asian, Korean religious ways. In this sense, his theology is often defined as a Korean or an East Asian Christian theology. Somebody also says that Yu’s theology is the result of the encounter between Jesus Christ and the East Asian sages such as Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu, and the combination of the biblical teaching and the East Asian spiritual teachings.
pluralist theologians developed their ideas based on Western pluralism theories, Yu’s ontological reinterpretation of the concept of God or the ultimate reality which Christianity and the East Asian religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have may suggest a unique pluralistic understanding of God. I will argue that the central theme in the discussion of religious pluralism and comparative religious study should be about the understandings of God or the ultimate reality in different religious traditions. I will therefore examine Yu’s unique understanding of God as the essential theme of Yu’s pluralist theology, which seems simply a combination of the Christian understanding of God and the East Asian traditional understandings of the ultimate reality, but is, I assert, based on his ontological reasoning of the ultimate reality.

In addition, as interest in the discipline of spirituality in Korean Christianity is growing recently, I believe Yu’s indigenous or contextual Christian spirituality, which is the mixture of Christianity and Korean traditional Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist traditions and Western and Eastern spirituality, will be introduced as a particular form of Christian spirituality that is very different from the traditional Korean Christian spirituality. While the traditional Korean Christian spirituality is strongly resistant to religious pluralism, Yu’s indigenous Christian spirituality offers an alternative, pluralist spirituality. However, Yu’s pluralistic spirituality is not the result of the Western pluralism’s influence, but is, I insist, the result of his integration of his ontological analysis of God or the ultimate reality and the East Asian spiritual tradition, which is very self-disciplinary and human-centered.
Method of investigation

Before I start to discuss Yu’s theological understanding of God I will briefly introduce his life and his theological and spiritual background in general. Examining Yu’s life is a particularly important task because his life is the context through which his theology and spirituality was built up and developed.

For the most part, I will analyze Yu’s theology; and for a more qualified research, I will narrow my focus to Yu’s theological understanding of God. I will try to define his unique understanding of God, “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Hananim” (없이 계신 하나님), which translates to “God who exists as Non-Being”, by comparing his to other typical understandings of the ultimate reality, mainly those of Charles Hartshorne and Robert C. Neville.

As I discuss the relationship between Yu’s theology and his spirituality I will examine how his theology and spirituality are related to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. I will also use several theories on the relationship between theology and spirituality in order to analyze Yu’s theology and spirituality. This will be a good chance to introduce today’s spirituality scholars’ position to define the relationship between spirituality and theology in Korea. I will also define the meaning of spirituality in general and the role of spirituality in relation to theology before examining the religious pluralism of Yu’s theology and spirituality.

Finally, to discuss Yu’s theology and spirituality from the religious pluralistic perspective, I will discuss some theological foundations and theories to understand the religious pluralism – focusing especially on John Hick’s pluralistic theology. This work,
I hope, will be helpful for Korean conservative theologians to grasp the true intention of religious pluralism.

In order to discuss the aforementioned content, I will divide the list of my bibliography into four categories: (1) sources of Yǒng-mo Yu and the East Asian religions; (2) sources of theological understandings of God or the ultimate reality; (3) sources of spirituality; and (4) sources of religious pluralism and comparative theology.

**Main sources of the study**

As the prime source to examine the whole theology and spirituality of Yu Yǒng-mo, I will use *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok* (多夕柳永模語錄, *Quotations of Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo*) and his writings of meditations including *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo’s Book of Meditations: Truth and Cham-Na* (참나, true self) and *The Last Lectures of Tasǒk*. I will employ various secondary sources of Yu’s theology and spirituality, and also use Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoistic scriptures such as *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), *the Avatamska Sutra* (華嚴經), *the Analects of Confucius* (論語) through which Yu communicated with the East Asian sages.

Before examining Yu’s concept of God, we need to know that Yu’s understanding of God is quite different from the traditional Korean Christian understanding of God. The “God” Yu understood is what cannot be named, absolute nothingness, whole being, and emptiness (虛空). This understanding of God or the ultimate reality is very different from the traditional Korean Christian understanding of God as a person. In order to analyze Yu’s unique understanding of God, I will mainly refer to Robert Neville,
especially his books discussing the ontological understanding of the ultimate reality including *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology volume I, God the Creator, Behind the Masks of God, A Theology Primer, and Soldier, Sage, Saint.*

I will also refer to Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology I,* which mainly deals with God as the ground of being or Being itself. Neville and Tillich assert that God or the ultimate cannot be a person, but instead God must be the ontological creative act itself (Neville) or ground of being (Tillich). I will also refer to Charles Hartshorne’s books such as *The Divine Relativity, Man’s Vision of God, Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes, Reality as Social Process,* in order to examine whether Yu’s understanding of God is panentheistic or not by comparing it with Hartshorne’s panentheistic view of God.

Yu’s understanding of God as the one who exists as Non-Being and his emphasis on spiritual union with God to know God can be viewed in relation to the apophatic tradition which emphasizes the way of negation to know God. According to Philip Sheldrake, “the apophatic element […] emphasizes ‘not knowing’, silence, darkness, passivity and the absence of imagery.”\(^3\) Vladimir Lossky also asserts that God transcends all being and all knowledge, and union with God can be attained only by renouncing everything known by sensing or understanding.\(^4\) (Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of The Eastern Church,* 27) In order to compare Yu’s understanding of God with apophatic and mystical understandings, I will briefly refer to several mystical theologians’ writings.

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In order to define Yu’s spirituality, I will refer to sources of Korean spiritual theologians and Yu’s disciples such as Heung-ho Kim, Young-ho Park, In-sik Choi, Jeong-sook Oh. While spirituality studies had not yet been fully established as an academic field or area of research, these Korean scholars tried to overcome the extremely contradictory attitude of Korean Christianity – Korean Christianity emphasizes dogmatic theology and ignores spirituality in the academic field, but it teaches to live spiritual life based on personal or communal spiritual experience instead of theological teachings in practice.

And the sources for the understanding of the definition of spirituality and its relation to theology will be the books and articles of various scholars in the field of spirituality including Bernard McGinn, Claire Wolfteich, Philip Sheldrake, and Sandra Schneiders. In order to define the relationship between spirituality and theology, I will refer to some important articles and books by scholars, mainly Sheldrake’s *Spirituality and Theology*, Schneiders’ “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” and St. Bonaventure’s “The Journey of The Mind to God.”

To discuss the issues of religious pluralism in Yu’s theology and spirituality, first I will briefly refer to several key scholars’ theories which are perceived to have affected Korean religious pluralism, for example, Paul Knitter’s, Karl Rahner’s, and Vatican Council documents including “The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” and mainly refer to Hick’s books including *God Has Many Names, A Christian Theology of Religions, Problem of Religious Pluralism*, and *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. Furthermore, in order to examine the religious symbols to
mediate the meaning of the ultimate reality into human knowledge, I will again refer to Tillich’s and Neville’s books.

**Working outline**

The main goal of my dissertation is to first analyze Yu’s theological understanding of God and examine it in relation to the three East Asian major religious traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and second, through such analysis, discuss the significance and challenges of Yu’s pluralistic theology and spirituality. To achieve such purpose, I will pursue the following interrelated processes:

In the chapter II, I will examine Yu’s theological understanding of God or the ultimate reality by comparing it to some Western scholars’ understandings. Most Korean Christian theologians understand God as personal which is based on both the Bible and Christian traditional doctrines of God as a Trinity. God is personal in that He has both intention and the ability to act, so that He created this world and came to this world by incarnation in order to save the created. Yu’s theological understanding of God is very different from this traditional or orthodox view of God. Yu’s “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Hananim” denies a theistic understanding of God as an only conceptual view. According to Yu, “Ŏpshi-gyeshin,” which is interpreted as “existing as non-being,” has nothing to do with all conceptual explanations about God. Yu says, “It is unnatural to name God because we all already know God. God does not have a name. […] What does not have a name is God. If God is any place it is not God. Someone that is named at a certain time at a certain place through some sort of event or incident is not God.”

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5 “신(神)이라는 것은 우리가 다 아는 것인데 이름을 붙이는 것이 좀 이상하다.
Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* provides us with a hint that helps us understand Yu’s theological idea of God. Tillich confirms, “[God] does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore to argue that God exists is to deny him.”⁶ He also sees God’s creation as God’s relation with the world and explains creation as becoming from essence (the potential) to existence (the actual). For Tillich, God is not a being but the ground of being or the existential boundaries of being having power to cause the potential to be the actual. God cannot be subjected to spatial or temporal categories. Because Yu’s understanding of God, as the one who exists as Non-Being, is very different from the Korean Reformed Christian understanding of God, as personal, his theology can be studied and discussed from other religious viewpoints such as that of Confucianism or Buddhism.

Furthermore, Yu’s understanding of God as Ḍopshi-gyeshin-Hananim can be viewed in relation to the apophatic tradition which emphasizes the way of negation to know God because he indicates that God is not in bright light (光明), but can be found in total darkness (黑巖). Yu also asserts that human beings must meet God as *Cham Na* (참나: 眞我 – true self) because when one meets true self one can recover oneself and live rightly in this world. For Yu, God is the true self of human beings. He says, “People can understand themselves only when they understand God. For God is myself. For God is the true self (Eol-Na). The man (君子) as the son of God uses the heaven to make an

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한아님의 이름은 없다. [...] 이름 없는 것이 신이다. 신이라는 것은 어디 있다면 신이 아니다. 언제부터 있었다고 하면 신이 아니다.” (Yǒng-mo Yu, *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ōrok*, 49-50.)

effort to train his or her body and mind (自強).” Yu’s thought of meeting God as one’s true self seems to be related to the mystical union with God in the Eastern Orthodox theology.

In the chapter III, I will analyze Yu’s understanding of God from East Asian perspectives. Yu’s understanding of God as a combined idea of both the West and the East compromises the transcendence and the immanence of God. He believes that the only way to return to God is to enter into ourselves. Accordingly, he calls God “nature” (性) as in the Confucian perspective, and “naught, or nothing” (空) as in the Buddhist perspective. First of all, Yu tries to understand Christian God through the idea of T’ai-chi (太極, the Great Absolute or the Great Ultimate) and Wu-chi (無極, the Ultimateless or the Nothingness) or the balance of Yin and Yang (陰陽, negative and positive) from the Confucian perspective. According to Yu, God is also understood as Nothingness or Emptiness (無 or 空虛) from the Buddhist perspective. These East Asian concepts that attempt to explain the ultimate reality are all included in Yu’s understanding of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Hananim.

Jin Kim, a professor in University of Ulsan, addresses that in Yŏng-mo Yu’s theology T’ai-chi is always one, and at the same time this absolute one is Wu-chi (無極, everlasting or the unbounded). Only “Ůpshi-gyeshin-Hananim” (God who exists as Non-Being) can exist everlasting, and T’ai-chi and Wu-chi, in other words, being and non-

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7 “ 사람은 하느님을 마음속에 가질(모실) 때 참나(眞我)를 갖게 된다. 하느님이 참나(열나)이기 때문이다. […] 하느님의 아들인 그이(君子)는 하느님을 스스로 힘쓰는 데(自強) 쓴다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok, 56.)
being can be united only in this understanding of God. For Yu, if non-being or nothingness can be separated from being it is not true nothingness, and therefore in order that God can be the Absolute One, God must be related to nothingness. The ontological understanding of God is the core idea of the East Asian understanding of the ultimate reality and the key theme to understand Yu’s idea of “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Hananim”.

In the chapter IV, I will examine the important traits of Yu’s unique theology in relation to his spirituality affected by East Asian spiritual teachings. In 1942 Yu experienced a spiritual rebirth, 38 years after he was baptized. After he was spiritually born again as a true Christian, Yu entered into the life of asceticism. From that moment on, he started to practice a life of “Il-Ee-Gwan-Ji” (一以貫之) which can be translated to “piercing as one.”9 “Il-Ee-Gwan-Ji” life is to stop gluttony (食), sexual desire (色), and desire for honor (名), and to practice ascetic life. He felt true freedom by emptying his mind and stopping his desire for possession. Such forms or methods of his spiritual life resemble the East Asian traditions including Buddhism and Lao-tzu (老子)’s teachings.

Yu’s spiritual teachings are basically rooted in his understanding of God. As he read the Bible and received Christian faith he reinterpreted Christian God in accordance with his own way – a way that was influenced by the Korean traditional religious context including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The goal of Yu’s spiritual training and life is to return to the ultimate reality, in other words, to spiritually unite with the ultimate reality.

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9 This is Confucius(孔子)’s words from the Analects (論語). “子曰, 參乎, 吾道一以貫之”.
realism. Yu defines “returning to the ultimate reality”, from the Buddhist tradition, to realize there is God’s seed in us, overcome human greed like appetite, desire for honor, and sexual desire, and then become “Eol-eun” (얼은 – grown man) as the stage of entering Nirvana. Furthermore, Yu uses “filial piety” (孝) of the Confucian teachings to explain the spiritual relationship between God and people. Accordingly, Yu understands the biblical relationship between the Father and the Son as the Confucian relationship between worldly father and son; and defines the divine-human relationship as the father-son relationship of Confucianism. According to Yu, the goal of true filial piety is not to do good to parents, but to be a true human, to sprout and bloom the divine seed inside us and bear fruits – to unite with God. That is Yu’s Christian spiritual reinterpretation of Confucian filial piety; and also the goal of Yu’s spirituality.

Finally, in the chapter V, I will analyze Yu’s understanding of God and spirituality from the religious pluralistic perspective, and try to define the significance and challenges of Yu’s pluralistic theology in the Korean Christian theology and spirituality. Yu’s pluralistic Christian theology, according to my research, is based on his existential personal faith, and as such, has some significance. Yu opened the multiplicity of religious ways over sixty years ago, before religious pluralistic discussion began in Western theology. The reason that Yu’s theology can tap into pluralism can be found in his particular understanding of God as “Ŏpshi-gyeshin” (being in non-being). The understanding of God as “Being in Non-Being” can go beyond and include all religious teachings because it is free from all conceptual sayings of God. According to Neville, all

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10 Yu thinks “filial piety” and “Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin” (父子有親 – There must be affection between father and son) as the most important thoughts in Confucianism.
conceptual sayings of God from which, Yu thinks, true God must be freed are religious symbols in religious communities. Of course, religious symbols play important roles in tying certain communities together with their pasts, and they also tie different parts of the community into systematic interrelationship.

In *The Truth of Broken Symbols*, Neville says, “Part of the pluralism of religious life today is that in most countries a given cultural-linguistic religious system shapes only a small sphere of behavior with much determinateness, leaving vague symbolic implications for the rest of life. Those other spheres of life are shared with people of different religious symbolic system.”¹¹ I will discuss Neville’s and Tillich’s concept of religious symbols or symbol system as the media to understand the ultimate reality and revelations of the divine reality.

Even though Korean conservative Christians believe themselves to be able to deal with all aspects of life including both the secular and the spiritual, such a task seems impossible to accomplish in these pluralistic communities. Yu’s understanding of God, however, allows him to use various religious symbols from different religious communities such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity to deal with all spiritual aspects of life.

**Yǒng-mo Yu’s life and the basis of his thought**

Jeong-sook Oh, in *Korean Christianity of Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo*, divides Yu’s life into three stages: the first stage to hear God’s words (1890 – 1942); the second stage to

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cultivate the inner self (1942 – 1955); and the third stage to preach the word of God (1955 – 1981). I will examine important events in Yu’s life by following Oh’s time-
division of Yu’s life.

The first stage (1890 – 1942): Hearing God’s words

Tasŏk¹² Yu Yǒng-mo (柳永模) was born in 1890 when the Joseon Dynasty was collapsing, western civilized cultures were flowing into Korea, and the mission of the Reformed Christianity was beginning. When Yu was a child, he studied Chinese classics(漢學) in a Seodang (書堂: a village school to mainly teach Confucian classes) and he learned modern sciences in elementary school and middle school. He particularly liked mathematics, physics, and astronomy. His preoccupation with death naturally led Yu to live the life of “the seeker of the way”(求道者).

[ Becoming a Christian ]

In 1905, when Yu was 15, he started to go to Youndong Presbyterian Church as a Christian through the invitation of Jung-sik Kim (金貞植) who was the first Korean manager of the YMCA. Yu was so enthusiastic to be able to attend a morning service in Youndong Presbyterian Church, have a united service in Seungdong Church in the afternoon, and have a service in Saemoonan Presbyterian Church at night. At this time, Yu quit a Seodang in which he studied Chinese, and started to study Japanese in the Kyung-Seong Japanese School (京城日語學堂) in order to understand and ultimately try

¹² "Tasŏk" (多夕) is Yu’s pen name (號).
to defeat Japanese Empire that extorted the national sovereignty of Korea through the conclusion of *Eul-Sa-Neuk-Yak* (乙巳勒約, the Protectorate Treaty between Korea and Japan in 1905).  

In 1907, Yu moved to *Kyungshin School* (儆新學校) and studied the Bible, Christian history, Chinese (漢文), English, physics, arithmetic, algebra, astronomy, natural history, geography, and Korean history. In 1909, before graduating from the third grade, Yu became a teacher at *Yangpyeong School* through the recommendation of the president of *Kyungshin School*. However, as he criticized Japanese imperialism in class Yu quit teaching and returned to Seoul under treat from the Japanese Military Police.  

[ *Osan School* ]

While Yu was a science teacher of *Osan School* (五山學校) for two years from 1910 when he was 20, he built a close relationship with Seung-hun Lee (李昇薰, 1864 – 1930) his teacher, who was the founder of *Osan School* and one of the leaders of the First of March Independence Movement), and Seok-heon Ham (咸錫憲, 1901 – 1989) his disciple, who as a Korean philosopher devoted himself to the non-violence peaceful movement for democracy in *Osan School*.

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14 *Kyungshin School* (儆新學校), which a private school having curriculum of middle class, was established by Horace Grant Underwood, the first missionary in 1886.

15 Ibid., 26-27.
At the *Osan School*, Yu taught physics, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, and so on, and before beginning his class he prayed and taught the Bible to his students. It gave him the chance to propagate Christianity all over *Osan School*, and for Seung-hun Lee, the founder of the School, to become a Christian. *Osan School* went on to produce great Christians such as Kee-cheol Ju (朱基徹), Seok-heon Ham, Ju-hang Kim, Kyung-chik Han (韓景職). Yu was one of the early Christians who created the Christian spirit of *Osan School*.\(^{16}\)

[ Unorthodox Christian ]

However Yu, who had been a full-hearted Christian, gave up the legitimate Christian faith (正統信仰) when he left *Osan School* two years later. According to Young-ho Park, the dramatic change from the orthodox faith to the unorthodox faith (非正統信仰)\(^{17}\) means the change from Christian doctrinal belief, which emphasizes Atonement through the event of Jesus dying on the cross, to the spiritual belief, which emphasizes individual rebirth as the eternal life\(^ {18}\) through the Holy Spirit.\(^ {19}\) Park provides three reasons that Yu ventured into unorthodoxy: the influence of Leo Tolstoy (1828 – 1910); the influence of the *Buddhist Scriptures* (佛經) and Lao-tzu (老子); and the experience of the death of Yǒng-mok, his younger brother.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 32.

\(^{17}\) Yu defines his own faith as an unorthodox faith.

\(^{18}\) For Yu, this eternal life means “the true self” or *Eol-Na* of human being. We will discuss about Yu’s concept of *Eol-Na* (human true self) in the chapter IV.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 34.
Park insists that Yu’s unorthodox faith was strongly influenced by Tolstoy’s thought. He believes that this occurred when Yu was 22 based on the fact that Yu had said at this age that he was unorthodox like Tolstoy even though he joined Christianity at 15 and had been an orthodox Christian until 22. It was when Yu was teaching in the *Osan* School that Yu first heard and learned about Tolstoy. Kwang-soo Lee, who was also teaching students in the *Osan* School, bought Tolstoy’s complete collection from Japan, and he introduced Tolstoy to Yǒng-mo. Tolstoy was a great writer who was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church because he harshly criticized the church, and his thought was one of the most influential in the world from 1910 to 1920.

There is no specific record to say what particular aspect of thought or spirituality of Tolstoy Yu was deeply influenced by, but it is true that Yu declared he was an unorthodox Christian like Tolstoy and was much influenced by Tolstoy in his many writings. In-sik Choi, in “Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo’s understanding of Christ,” sees Tolstoy’s theological influence as one of the most important backgrounds of Yu religious thought, and tries to find the relationship between them. Choi devides the characteristics of Tolstoy’s faith into three. First, Tolstoy denied the Church’s traditional denominational doctrines just as Yu rejected the doctrinal faith. Second, Tolsoty denied the deification of Jesus Christ, so that he insisted that Jesus was one of the great teachers in history like

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Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-tzu. Yu also asserts that Jesus is not different from those East Asian sages, but he understands Jesus as the one who found the divine seed within himself and completed the union with God (歸一). In this sense, it cannot be said that Yu denied Jesus Christ as the divine reality at all like Tolstoy. We will discuss in more detail Yu’s understanding of Jesus Christ in chapters IV and V. Third, Tolstoy thought that the spiritual and the corporal were mutually antagonistic. The opposition between the spirit and the body is also remarkably found in Yu’s spirituality. As Yu says that Mom-Na (bodily self) must die for Eol-Na (spiritual self) to live, he asserts the need to control bodily desires and make an effort to find and train the spiritual self. Tolstoy’s Christian thoughts, especially his emphasis on the spiritual aspect of Jesus Christ rather than the bodily aspect; his critics to the deification of Jesus; and his critical attitude against the request of the absolute belief by absolutizing the traditional doctrines surely influenced the young Yŏng-mo Yu.23

Don-gu Kang also compares Yu’s thought with Tolstoy’s faith. He points out that Tolstoy found the reason for corruption of Christianity within the depraved hieratic class, the belief on supernatural miracles, and the blind faith in the scriptures. For Tolstory, true faith cannot be irrational, and therefore, cannot be contradictory to the modern knowledge.24 Kang also says that the asceticism25 of Gandhi who was influenced by

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23 Ibid., 179.


Tolstoy’s thought had a great deal of influence on Yu’s spirituality. Gandhi’s thought is from Tolstoy’s in that Gandhi emphasized the uniqueness of each religion, and it may be, Kang surmises, because the religious context of India where Gandhi was living was pluralistic. Gandhi respected the uniqueness of each religion, and therefore, insisted on the harmony of religions; in other words, unity in diversity of religions instead of the unification of religions.26

Meanwhile, while Yu was teaching in the Osan School, Yu’s younger brother, Yŏng-mock, suddenly died. Yu started to explore other religions besides Christianity and the Bible after the death of his beloved brother. It became a turning point for Yu to start to understand Western Christology from the Korean traditional perspective. Yu had a lot of chances to discuss and communicate with other teachers and students in Osan School because Yu lived in a dormitory with them. According to Young-ho Park, Yu started to read the Buddhist Scriptures and Lao-tzu on the advice of Joon Yeo (呂準)27, who was nick-naem “a god (神)” because he was extremely knowledgeable, and Chea-ho Shin (申采浩)28, a historian.29 We will more discuss in more detail the influence of the East

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26 Kang, Ibid., 345.

27 Joon Yeo (呂準), a Korean independence activist in the period of Japanese occupation, founded a military school (新興武官學校), and organized and trained Korean independence army in Manchuria (滿洲). After the March First Independence Movement (三一運動), Yeo reformed the Korean Independence party (韓國獨立黨) in Shanghai.

28 Chea-ho Shin (申采浩) was a Korean independence activist, and a historian. Shin made an effort to boost national consciousness by publishing national hero biographies and articles on history as a journalist in famous newspapers like Hwangsung Shinmmon (皇城新聞) and Dachan Maeil Shinbo (大韓每日申報). He is known to build up the foundation of Korean modern history.
Asian scriptures and the personal experience of his younger brother’s death in Yu’s theology and spirituality in the following chapters.

[ Yu and Uchimura ]

After two years of work in the Osan School, Yu went to study abroad in Tokyo, Japan where Yu had a chance to take a lecture of Kanzo Uchimura (內村鑑三, 1861-1930), who was a famous advocate of the nonchurch movement (無教會主義). Many scholars believe that Yu, under the influence of Uchimura’s thought, denied the church as the institution and the building, denied sacraments and sacred professions, and rejected denominationalism.\(^\text{30}\) As a descendant of the samurai (武士) which was the Japanese traditional governing class, Uchimura felt pride in that he was a Japanese. After joining Christianity, which was restricted in Japan for 250 years as a heresy (邪教) and was regarded a Western religion that threatened Japan, Uchimura continuously maintained his pride in being Japanese. Uchimura’s effort to keep Japanese pride was well expressed by his thought of “Two Js,” and these two Js implied his commitment to “Jesus” and “Japan.”\(^\text{31}\) This Uchimura’s faith was essentially different from the Japanese Christians of those days who simply received Christianity as a cultural religion or as a trait of a world-citizen. Hyeon-hye Yang indicates that Uchimura’s unique attitude toward Christianity shows the idea of the de-westernized (脫西歐的) Christianity which tries to


\(^{30}\) Kang, “The genealogy and significance of Yu Yŏng-mo’s religious thought,” 351.

distinguish the essence of Christianity from the existence of the Western Christianity because Uchimura strongly believed that true Christians can be saved only by the gospel of Christ not by others’ belief, and was convinced that the Japanese were not inferior to Westeners in either spirit and culture, but rather had their own identity. This idea of Uchimura was naturally connected to the second characteristic of his Christian thought that sought an existential Christianity that allowed the maintenance of the Japanese identity.\textsuperscript{32} For Uchimura, for the Christian gospel to save Japan it had to be embodied into Japanese spirit without depending on foreign missionaries.\textsuperscript{33}

Uchimura’s advocate of the nonchurch movement was also the product of the thought of the “Two Js.” He thought that Christianity was not the institution, the Church, nor words of Christ, but the living person, that is, Jesus Christ himself who does not change at all eternally.\textsuperscript{34} Accordingly, Uchimura criticized and rejected any human religious system, ritual, doctrine, or sacerdotalism which is intended to directly mediate the relationship between God and the human being because for him, Christian faith can be experienced only within the human existential context, and cannot be achieved with any other’s help or power. Uchimura, therefore, rejected the institutional church as man-made anthropocentrism, and insisted that the true church must be a community of love that people who believe in Christ make by being naturally united.\textsuperscript{35} Uchimura’s faith is similar to Yu’s emphasis on the human inner and spiritual experience itself instead of

\textsuperscript{32} Hyeon-hye Yang, “Kim Kyo-shin, Ham Seok-heon, and Uchimura Kanzo,” in Kyeong-mi Park etc.,\textit{ The Autonomous Acceptance of The Western Christianity}, 124.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 129.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
doctrines or institutions, but for Yu, who sought a spiritual theology and faith transcending even nationalism and the absoluteness of Jesus Christ, Uchimura’s theology and faith was still orthodox and a doctrinal position. While Uchimura stuck to the faith of the Atonment of Jesus Christ and overlooked the importance of the East Asian religions, Yu defined Jesus as a man like other human beings. For that reason, Yu distinguished his own faith from Uchimura’s nonchurch movement, but rather, defined it as being the same as Tolstoy’s faith. 

After finishing his preparatory course of physics in Tokyo, Yu gave up on further college education and returned to Korea in order to live as a farmer. He believed that the Joseon Dynasty was collapsing because of the Yangban system (兩班制度: Korean aristocrat system). Yu believed that going to college to gain knowledge stems from the thought to be comfortable and be treated with respect and awe. This is exactly what Yangban thought was, and the thought of putting government above people.

[ Yu’s disciple, Seok-heon Ham ]

In 1921, Yu was selected as the principal of Osan School following Man-sik Cho (曺晩植). When Yu was asked to be the president of Osan School he first hesitated to

36 Kang, Ibid., 347.


38 Man-sik Cho (曺晩植) was a Korean politician and Korean independence activist. Later, Cho as the president of Chosun Ilbo (朝鮮日報) newspaper company contributed to the development of national journalism, and led the nonresisting nationalist movement.
accept it because had he wanted to return to Osan School Yu would have finished a college education in Japan. Yu did not have any plan to be a teacher again, and that is why he quit college education and planned to be a farmer. Yu, however, returned to Osan School after 11 years, and was appointed as the principal because he worried about the existence of Osan School which was at stake, and thought of Seung-hoon Lee, the founder of Osan School, who recommended Yu while he was in prison. As he was staying about one and half year as the principal in Osan School, Yu met Seok-heon Ham who was the disciple Yu really loved. Yu even said that he returned to Osan School in order to meet only Seok-heon Ham. Ham said that his spiritual life took two dramatic leaps; the first time was when he met Yu, and the second time was when he met Uchimura.

As an early Christian and a pro-democracy activist Ham had an unchallenged position in Korean modern and contemporary history from the Japanese colonial era to the period of military dictatorship and the time of democratization after the Korean liberation in 1945. Ham accepted Christianity, a Western religion in the Japanese colonial era, and then he developed Christianity into a creative and autonomous Korean Christian thought by embodying it within the Korean religious-cultural sensitivity and the

39 Park, Yu Yong-mo, A Great Thinker Who Was Doing Philosophy in Our Language, 43.

40 Yu was not approved as the principal of Osan School. Young-ho Park guesses the reasons why Yu did not receive the approval to be the principal from Japanese educational authorities as follows: the first reason is because Yu’s father, Myung-geun Yu, served his sentence for storing the funds of independence movement; the second reason is because Yu looked like a nationalist for always wearing Han-bok (韩服, Korean traditional clothes) which Japanese imperialism disliked; and the third and final reason is because Yu did not have a college graduate certification. (Ibid., 44-45.)

41 Ibid., 46.
social-historical context. While Yu more focused on individual spiritual discipline and personal spirituality to follow the way of Jesus, Ham, as a Christian practician and a prophetic social activist, captured people’s hearts in the Korean modern period, which was full of a series of hardships and frustrations. Kyung-mi Park highly appreciates Ham’s balance between spiritual power of execution and creative Christian thought. She compares Ham with Wonhyo (元曉), the Great Master, in Buddhism and Jae-woo Choi (崔濟愚) in Donghak (東學) who achieved both social reformation and creative idea formation.⁴²

Yu thought that contemplating prayer to seek for only eternal life is much more valuable than specific verbal prayer to seek secular needs, so he decided to quit verbal prayer. However, when Ham was serving time in prison in Pyongyang (平壤), Yu restarted verbal prayer for Ham.⁴³ In 1948, Yu delivered a lecture to support his disciple at the Sunday Class (日曜講座) which Ham started. Ham tried to emulate his teacher, Yu, from head to foot, so he liked to wear Han-bok (韓服), and had only one meal a day like Yu.⁴⁴

⁴² Kyung-mi Park, “Ham’s Understanding of Jesus in Relation to The Doctrine of Atonement (贖罪論),” in Kyeong-mi Park etc., The Autonomous Acceptance of The Western Christianity.


⁴⁴ Ibid., 49.
[ Yu’s wife and children ]

In 1915, Yu married Hyo-jeong Kim (金孝貞), who was from Chungcheongnam-do (忠清南道) Hansan (寒山). Two years later, she gave birth to their first son, Eui-sang (宜相). She went on to give birth to their second son, Ja-sang (自相) and their third, Gak-sang (覺相). Without “sang (相)” to express the same generation of Yu’s family, three brothers’ names, “Eui–Ja–Gak (宜自覺)”, mean that “Realize for oneself!” Five years after giving birth to the third son, they had a daughter, Wal-sang (月相), so Yu had three sons and a daughter.45

[ Yu and Kyo-shin Kim ]

In 1928 when he was 38, Yu started to teach bible study at the YMCA, and it is similar to the way that Uchimura led his own group by giving lectures without any organizing system. Yu delivered lectures at the YMCA for 35 years until 1963. By that time Yu met Kyo-shin Kim (金敎臣). It was Seok-heon Ham and Uchimura Kanzo who played the role of the link that held Yu and Kim. Kim and Ham, who were both born in 1901, were alumni when they studied in Tokyo (東京). After the experience of the Sam-II Independence Movement (三一運動) in 1919 and the self-awareness of nationalism, Kim and Ham attended the Bible Study Class (聖書硏究會) of Uchimura and learned the basis of Christianity from him. After their return from Japan, Kim and Ham as teachers gave their best to the national education, and sought a new national identity based on

Christianity by publishing *SungeoJoseon* (聖書朝鮮) ④⁷ Kim heard about Yu’s thought from Ham, and he misunderstood Yu to support the nonchurch movement (無敎會主義運動). In 1927, as he published *SungeoJoseon* (聖書朝鮮) and propagated the nonchurch faith, Kim asked Yu to participate in the nonchurch movement, but Yu rejected to be with Kim. Yu made clear that he was not a nonchurch activist but only an unorthodox Christian.

Kim and Ham seemed to believe that Uchimura’s thought and methodology could help to find a good way to join their mother country with Christianity, and furthermore teach how to save their country. They wanted to bring the Bible as the universal truth into Joseon (朝鮮) as the concrete and specific context (場) and use it as the ideological starting point to decide Joseon’s cultural and historical direction. By doing that, they intended to make Joseon the ideal country to hope and prove the global order of God.⁴⁸ In short, the essence of Kim and Ham’s nonchurch belief was to realize and practice the critical resistant spirit for freedom and independence, which was understood as the truth of the Christian gospel within the Korean context under Japanese Imperialism.

For Yu, Uchimura’s and Kim’s nonchurch belief stood on the side of the orthodox faith. Young-ho Park strongly refutes the argument that Yu was a member of the

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⁴⁶ *SungeoJoseon* is the literary coterie magazine (同人誌) which the nonchurch movement members (無敎會主義者) including Kyo-shin Kim (金敎臣) established in July 1927. It was discontinued by the Japanese Empire in 1942 because it dealt with the revival of Korean nationality.

⁴⁷ Yang, “Kim Kyo-shin, Ham Seok-heon, and Uchimura Kanzo,” 120-121.

⁴⁸ See, Seok-heon Ham, “First Publication (創刊辭),” *SungeoJoseon* (聖書朝鮮) (July, 1927.). Also see, Seok-heon Ham, “Commentary of SungeoJoseon (聖書朝鮮解),” *SungeoJoseon* (聖書朝鮮) (April, 1935.). (I cite at second-hand from Yang, Ibid., 135.)
nonchurch movement because of Yu’s rejection of Kim’s suggestion.  

Nevertheless, Yu continued to have a good relationship with Kim. In January 1937, Yu revealed his unique spiritual faith through his interpretation of John 3:16 at Kim’s Bible study meeting. I will more deal with Yu’s unique interpretation of John 3:16 in more detail when I discuss Yu’s Christology. Kim who had the doctrinal faith was surprised, but he highly appreciated Yu’s religious thought and had a closer friendship with Yu.  

For the friendship with Kim, Yu also worked as a writer of *SungeoJoseon*. In 1942, *SungeoJoseon* was closed down by the Japanese Empire because Kyo-shin Kim’s preface of *SungeoJoseon* 158 had been intended to awaken Korean national spirit, and Kim got arrested. At this time 300 writers and regular subscribers were arrested, and Yu and his son Eui-sang were also arrested. 57 days later, Yu was released because he was not indicted.  

[ Yu as a farmer ]

In 1935, when he was 45, Yu moved to Goyang-gun (高陽郡), and started to farm. Yu believed that the only life that allowed one to love God, love the earth, and love one’s neighbors was farming (農事). Yu wanted his sons to be farmers by following his will.

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51 See, Ibid., 69.

However, Eui-sang, the first son, worked at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul because of his English language skills and finally emigrated to the U.S. Gak-sang, the third son of Yu, worked as a correspondent in a merchant ship for a very long time with excellent skills in communications technology, and lived in Japan. Only Ja-sang, the second son, worked as an elementary school teacher, and when he was 41 he moved to Gangwon-do (江原道) Pyeongchang (平昌) in order to become a farmer. Yu was very proud of Ja-sang because he followed Yu’s wishes.\(^{53}\) Yu thought that going to the city was to follow color (色), but going to the mountain village (山村) or the fishing village (漁村) was to seek for emptiness (God, \(\text{空}\)).\(^{54}\) Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality or God as emptiness (空) will be discussed in the chapter III.

The second stage (1942 – 1955): Cultivating spiritual self

[ Yu’s spiritual experience ]

In 1942 Jan 4\(^{th}\) when he was 52, Yu faced the most dramatic turning point in his whole life. He experienced spiritual union with God. This meant that Yu finally entered into a new spiritual stage 38 years after he became a Christian.\(^{55}\) After his experience of spiritual union with God, as the second stage of Yu’s life, Yu started the life of spiritual discipline and training. Yu chose \(Il-sik\) (一食), \(Il-ean\) (一言), \(Il-jwa\) (一坐), and \(Il-in\) (一仁) as his self-disciplinary practices. These mean respectively: one meal a day;

\(^{53}\) Park, Ibid., 86-87.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{55}\) Oh, 70-71.
abstinence; always sitting on his knees; and always walking anywhere. Yu made an effort through this type of spiritual training to remove the “Three Poisons (三毒),” by which he meant the three human agonies (煩惱) that hinder one from entering Nirvana (涅槃): greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (痴).

[Yu’s asceticism]

Yu thought that truly living means to transcend gluttony (食) and sexual desire (色). If we transcend and control gluttony and sexual desire, we can also transcend life (生) and death (死). For Yu, the human body is meaningless; just skin to take off, and the true owner of human being is the spirit.56 In 1942, after his experience of spiritual rebirth through the Holy Spirit, Yu started to sit on a nut pine plank in the daytime and to sleep on it at night, and he kept using it for 40 years. This plank was also used as wood for the coffin, and after his death Yu was also laid on the plank. Young-ho Park explains why Yu lived on the plank as two reasons: first, for health reasons; to spread the backbone evenly during sleeping, and second, for reasons of faith; to see life and death as one.57 It can also be seen as a spiritual training to kill and control the body to save the spirit. We will discuss the relationship between body and spirit in Yu’s thought when we define Yu’s spirituality.

Not long after Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule, in June 25th 1950, North Korean troops launched an invasion into South Korea. During the Korean War, Yu

56 Park, Ibid., 83.

57 Ibid., 84.
and his family also had many painful experiences, and after fleeing to Busan (부산) Yu delivered many public lectures at the Busan YMCA.

The third stage (1955 – 1981): Preaching and living the word of God

[Tasŏk li-ji]

In 1955 when he was 65, Yu predicted the due date of his death as April 26th 1956, and started to write his diary until the date of his death. He started it in order to more honestly and more sincerely live for a year until his death, but he did not die after a year, so that this diary, Tasŏk li-ji (多夕日誌, the journal of Tasŏk), continued for about 20 years. According to Jeong-sook Oh, Tasŏk li-ji is important for understanding Yu’s theology and spirituality because Yu wrote the words that he gave birth to (生産) from his inside in this diary. Therefore, Yu named his diary as Jai-Sori (제소리, my words), and it means his own thought not others’ thought. Jai-Sori is not the sori (words or thought) of the ego (小我) but the sori of the higher self (大我) or the spiritualized self by the Holy Spirit. Oh thinks that Yu became the higher self (大我) when he was 65 through ascetic practice for about 10 years after his spiritual rebirth when he was 52. And Jai-Sori, Yu’s diary, is Yu’s spiritual proclamation of God’s words.

There is an anecdote to clearly show Yu’s view of life and death. In 1961, Yu fell from about three-meter high rooftop in order to protect his granddaughter, and was

58 Oh, Ibid., 86.

59 “Sori (소리)” literally means “sound” or “voice.”

60 Ibid., 84.
unconscious and hospitalized for 16 days. According to the nursing record of Kyu-sik Ju who nursed Yu, Yu unconsciously said that to die is nothing (November 30th 1961). Yu also said that it is difficult and easy to know human life, so that it will be okay to live naturally (December 5th 1961). This story shows Yu’s life style of Mu-wui-ja-yeon (無爲自然, leaving nature as it is) which is Taoism’s teaching and his spirituality not to be afraid of death.

In 1977 when he was 87, Yu left home to set out on a wandering life as Tolstoy did, but on the third day he was found unconscious by a policeman and was brought back home. Young-ho Park, Yu’s disciple, looked back on the communication with Yu when he visited Yu’s house at that time, and he said that Yu’s mental state was normal. According to Park, the reason why Yu had left home might have been because he wanted to find the right place to die as Tolstoy had. After that, Yu prepared for his death by sharing his property with the poor. But Yu had to quit sharing his possessions because too many beggars who had heard the news visited Yu’s house. Yu defined death as the need to give, give, and give all, and finally give my life.62

[ Yu’s death ]

From 1975 Yu stopped writing his diary, and in 1978 he became quiet and showed signs of old age in many aspects of his body and mentality. In July 31st 1980 Hyo-jeong Kim, his wife, passed away, but Yu did not realize even his wife’s death. Six months after his wife’s death, on February 5th 1981, at 6:30 p.m. Yŏng-mo Yu died at the

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61 Park, Ibid., 109-110.
62 Ibid., 112-113.
age of 91. Yu said in his lifetime that he wanted to be cremated (火葬) after his death.

Yu asserted that people must be cremated after death because everything comes from dirt and returns to dirt and everything emerges from nothing and disappears. It is useless to make an effort to leave something in this world. The eternal is the only true life. We have to abandon the misinformed idea of receiving a memorial service from descendants by preserving our own grave. However, his bereaved family buried him together (合葬) with his wife, Hyo-jeong Kim within a grave. In 1998 a flood washed their grave away so then their grave was moved in Pungsan park cemetery of Byungcheon.

\[\text{Ibid., 116.}\]
While there are different ways to spell out human understandings of God, we classify human understanding of God under two primary positions, one of which is to understand God as a personal one and another way is to define God as impersonal. Understanding of God as personal or as impersonal, like all other understandings of God, has much to do with understanding and defining the God-world or God-man relationship. As mentioned in the Introduction, the mainstream Korean protestant theological understanding of God is “personal God” based on individual believer’s confessional faith. Yu Yong-mo’s understanding of God as “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim” (없이 계신 하느님, translated to “God who exists as Non-Being”), however, is quite different from that of mainline Korean protestant theology. One of the most important reasons why Yu’s theology developed to the religious pluralism’s direction can be found in his distinctive understanding of God. I will further discuss the relationship between Yu’s understanding of God and his pluralistic theology in the fifth chapter. In this chapter, I will analyze Yu’s understanding of God based on the God-world relationship and examine Charles Hartshorne’s and Robert C. Neville’s understanding of God to provide clearer understanding about Yu’s theology.

**Yu’s understanding of God: Defining ultimate reality in Yu’s theology**

As Jin Kim analyzes Yu’s understanding of God in *Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s Religious Thought*, he says that Yu defines God or the ultimate reality as various different names.
For Yu, God has no name, and therefore God can be known by various names based on the human specific situation and mind.\(^1\) Various names like “Ha-neu-nim (하느님, Heavenly God)”, “Father”, “Logos”, “Taiji (太極, the great ultimate)”, “Tao (道)”, “Bim (빔, empty)”, and “Nirvana”, which Yu employs to explain the ultimate reality, can be divided into two groups: Being names and Non-Being names.\(^3\) In other words, Yu categorizes “Ha-neu-nim”, “Father” or “T’ai-chi (太極)” as the Being name; and “Mu (무, 무, nothingness)”, “Gong (공, 空, naught)” or “Wu-chi (無極, limitlessness or endlessness)” as the Non-being name.

In consideration of the Being and Non-being aspects in Yu’s understanding of God, “Ŏpshi-gyeshin”, which is translated into “existing as non-being”, must be the representative name including both Being names and Non-being names of God in Yu’s theology. “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim” embraces both being and non-being.\(^4\) It has also been witnessed through many writings and lectures of Yu that sometimes he explains God from the existence perspective but sometimes from the non-existence perspective.

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\(^1\) See, Jin Kim, *Religious Thought of Tasôk Yu Yong-mo*, 35.

\(^2\) Until now, the Korean Catholic Church uses this term as the name of Christian God while the Korean Protestant Church uses “Ha-na-nim” which more emphasizes the meaning of “one God”. “Ha-nu-“ is from the word, “ha-neul (heaven)” and “Ha-na-“ means “one”.

\(^3\) Yang-mo Jeong’s analysis of Yu’s naming of God by the positive-negative (the cataphatic-apophatic) theological approach is also related with the fact that Yu’s understanding of God includes both the existent aspect and the non-existent aspect of the ultimate reality. (See, Yang-mo Jeong, “How does Tasôk understand God?”, in *I see Tasôk like this*, 29-36.)

\(^4\) “Ŏpshi (없이)" means “without being”, “gyeshin (계신)" is the respect form of “existing”, and “Haneunim” means “heavenly God.”
In order to clearly understand Yu’s definition of God, which seems self-contradictory, we need to look into his own words:

What if God does not exist? God exists without being. He exists without being because he is non-being as a material (a being), but exists as “Eol (열, spirit)” and “Bim (빔, emptiness)”. He, however, gives and takes all materials (beings). God is always clear and pure because he exists without being. God has materials (beings), but he is not a material (a being). God is Eol (spirit) forming all materials (beings), and Bim (emptiness) containing and taking all materials (beings). (1957)\(^5\)

Yu explains that God does not exist as a material but exists as Eol and Bim. On the face of it, he seems to believe that God does not exist as a material having a certain form and mass, but exists solely as a spiritual being. However, we need to properly understand the meaning of Bim which Yu adds to God’s attributes. Yu gives us more information about the meaning of Bim as follows:

We have to know that “Bintanghan-dae (빈탕한데, 虛空, emptiness or void)” is God’s appearance. God’s inner life is “Eol (spirit)”. “Bintanghan-dae”\(^6\) is my translation of 虚空 (emptiness or void) into plain Korean without reference to any Chinese character. (1957)\(^7\)

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\(^5\) “하느님이 없다면 어떠한가?. 하느님은 없이 계시는 분이다. 몬(물질)으로는 없고 열(성령)과 범(虚空)으로 계시기 때문에 없이 계신다. 그러나 모든 물질을 내고 거두신다. 하느님은 없이 계시므로 언제나 사원하다. 하느님은 물질을 지냈으나 물질이 아니다. 하느님은 모든 물질을 이룬 일이요 모든 물질을 닮은 범이다. 모든 물질을 거둘 범이다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 56.)

\(^6\) “Bin-tang-han (빈탕한)” means “empty”, and “dae (데)” is a noun suffix which means “place”.

\(^7\) “우리가 알아야 할 것은 ‘빈탕한데’(虚空)가 하느님의 결모습이라는 것이다. 하느님의 속생명은 열(성령)이시다. ‘빈탕한데’는 허공을 내가 순 우리말로 말해본 것이다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 54.)
To be short, God’s reality is defined as *Bintanghan-dae* or emptiness. In the same notion, Yu insists that it is wrong to give God a certain name. He says:

It is abnormal to name God because God is already known to us. God has no name. When Moses asked what God’s name is God answered, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14) instead of “El” or “Yahweh”. What cannot be named is God. [...] If one has been since a certain time and is in a certain place it cannot be God. Something which can be called a certain name is not God.

In the relative world One (一; absolute) means God. The whole as the union of 有 (being) and 無 (nothingness) is only One. One is the absolute (絶對). I cannot understand that people talk about 有神論 (theism) or 無神論 (atheism). I am wondering if they even know what is (being) or not (nothingness). (1956)

Here, the sentence, “[I]f one has been since a certain time and is in a certain place it cannot be God” implies that God cannot be a finite being. Therefore, it is wrong for Yu to define God or the ultimate reality as a finite name. Yu thinks that the ultimate reality which can be understood as “One (一; absolute)” has both the characteristics of “being” and “nothingness” inside itself. For such reason, Yang-mo Jeong asserts that Yu’s “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim” is the very definition of God that includes both of God’s

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상대세계에서는 하나(一, 절대)라면 하느님을 말하는 것이다. 유(有)와 무(無)를 다합친 전체는 하나뿐이다. 하나뿐이라 절대(絶對)이다. 이 전체요 절대이 하나(一)가 하느님이다. 사람들이 유신론이라 무신론이라 떼드는 소리가 무슨 소리인지 모르겠다. 있다 없다가 무엇인지 알고나 하는 소리인지 모르겠다.” (*Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ᵐᵒʳᵒk*, 49-50.)
transcendence and immanence. Jeong-Hyun Youn also discusses Yu’s understanding of God as the idea of the union between God’s transcendence and immanence. For Yu, “the Ultimate Reality as God is completely inclusive and completely exclusive; wholly transcendent and wholly immanent; wholly personal and wholly impersonal.” From the God-world relationship point of view, Yu defines God as the transcendent reality which cannot be called by a worldly name and cannot be fully grasped by finite beings. However, he also thinks that God is immanent to the world as he believes that God can be found in each of us and other beings. In other words, for Yu, “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim” is the right name of God who is transcendent and immanent.

Meanwhile, if we accept the fact that the ultimate reality cannot be directly understood by human finite language and mind, then, we need an alternative way to say something about God. Paul Tillich, who argues against the traditional western Christian understanding of God’s existence and defines God as the ground of being instead of personal God, asserts that all divine attributes we entitle to God are only symbolic.

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10 Jeong-Hyun Youn, The Non-Existent Existing God: An East Asian Perspective with Specific Reference to the Thought of Ryu Young-mo (University of Birmingham, 2002), 478.

11 Yu says, “The only way to God is to enter our maeum (마음, mind or heart). Entering mind or heart means deeply thinking by denying (closing eyes to) the world, transcending (forgetting) self (제나, 自我), and making utmost effort (至誠). Thus one can find God’s spirit in self by making his or her virtue (제속알, 德) bright, so that he or she does not get lost even if walking in the world like a black night.” – “하느님께로 가는 길은 제 마음속으로 들어가는 길밖에 없다. 마음속으로 들어가는 길은 세상을 부정하고(눈을 감고) 제나(自我)를 초월하고(나를 잊고) 지성(至誠)을 다하여 길이 생각하는 것이다. 그리하여 제속알(德)이 받아져 하느님의 영을 깨닫으면 아무리 침착한 밤중 같은 세상을 걸어갈지라도 길을 잃어버리는 일은 없을 것이다.” (Taśok Yu Yŏng-mo ὁροκ, 43.)
According to Tillich, God or the ultimate is the answer to the existential question in human nature because God is and must be the ground of all finite beings. Therefore, God cannot be understood as a being, but rather must be the ground of being and being-itself. For Tillich, the statement that God is being-itself is only a non-symbolic statement for God because it does not point beyond itself, and it means what it says directly and properly. Except this very statement that God is being-itself, all other assertions about God are symbolic, because concrete assertions or descriptions about God use finite experience in order to say something about God. Tillich strictly confirms that God “[…] does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore to argue that God exists is to deny him.”

Robert Neville also indicates that there are lots of models of the ultimate which have been developed by religions. According to Neville, the ultimate, however, cannot be modeled in any ways because models refer iconically. Only determinate things can have isomorphic relation with the determinate elements of models. Nevertheless, this kind of modeling has been developed by using symbols or thematic motifs of thought as signs for the ontological ultimate reality. Such thematic motifs are understood as models of ultimacy, but in truth they are not. The most common examples of models for the ontological ultimate reality are “personhood”, “consciousness”, and “emergence”, which, of course, cannot model ultimacy. They can be valid models for engaging ultimacy only if their reference is indexical, not iconic, in other words, only when they carry over something important in that act into the experience of the people using them.

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13 See, Neville, *Philosophical Theology I*, 401-408.
Neville asserts that the ultimate cannot be understood as a person. For Neville, the term “God” is considered as a broken-symbol model for the ultimate. Personified symbols of ultimacy, however, can be used for engaging the ultimate reality. Personified symbols are not true in a theological sense even though they can be interpretively true if they bring what is important in the ultimate into the interpreters in their context.¹⁴ I will discuss in detail Neville’s understanding of the ultimate through his creation theory later in this chapter.

From Tillich’s and Neville’s perspective of the ultimate reality, Yu also uses diverse symbols to explain God or the ultimate based on his ontological understanding of God as Ḟpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. Yu thinks that the ultimate cannot be clearly understood as a certain being or concept. Because God is not what can be clearly defined by human thought and logic, God is what must be worshiped and served above all men’s and lives’ heads. Yu says:

God governs the natural world, but we cannot see God. God works, but makes all to be without showing Himself. God is not an object that we can think and serve. God does not appear in a thing or event that we would understand and know. We never affirm that God is what or how. Therefore, God is only what we have to worship and serve over our head. If there is something that we want to serve as an absolute ideal (絶對理想) it is God. (1957)¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 442-446.

¹⁵ “하느님은 자연계를 다스리는데 보이지 않는다. 하느님은 일을 하시지만 통히 나타나지 않고 저절로 되게 하신다. 하느님은 우리가 생각하고 있는 대로 우리가 높이 받드는 대로 그렇게 계신 분이 아니다. 우리가 듣고 알 만한 일에 그의 존재를 나타내시지 않는다. 하느님이 어떠한 분이라는 것은 결코 단언할 수 없다. 그래서 하느님은 모든 생명과 모든 사람이 머리 위로 받들어 이어야 할 분이시다. 우리가 절대 이상(理想)으로 삼고서 모시고 싶은 이가 있다면 그 분이 곧 하느님이시다.” (1957) (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo örok, 64.)
In this regard, Yu calls God as the name, “Han-uh-nim (한웅님).”\textsuperscript{16} Han (한) means “one” or “the greatest”, “uh (웅)” means “up” or “above”, and “nim (님)” means “something or someone to be placed over the head”. Jin Kim sees Yu’s “Han-uh-nim” as “the name of the absolute which is the origin of myself and the whole cosmos”.\textsuperscript{17} Surely, even “Han-uh-nim” is not a clear definition of God, but is merely a symbol as an expression of our agreement to recognize the ultimate.

Yu’s understanding of the ultimate is related to “God” of Christianity, “T’ien (天, heaven)” of Confucianism, “Nirvana (涅槃)” of Buddhism, and “Tao (道)” of Taoism. Yu’s understanding of God, however, does not exactly correspond with “T’ien (天, heaven)”, “Nirvana (涅槃)”, and “Tao (道)”, but rather Yu uses those concepts as symbols to explain Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, his ontological understanding of the ultimate. In other words, Yu’s understanding of the ultimate was molded or formed by the existential collision as well as fusion between the Korean or the East Asian traditional understanding of the ultimate like “T’ien”, “Nirvana”, and “Tao” and Christian understanding of God.

Don-gu Kang briefly explains each understanding of the ultimate in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in a relation to Yu’s understanding of the ultimate. Confucius (孔子) believes in “T’ien” which includes the presider’s (主宰的) characteristics. However, Neo-Confucianism (性理學) scholars like Chu Hsi (朱熹) emphasizes the

\textsuperscript{16} Yu often uses the term, “Han-uh-nim” for the name of God since September 1956. (Jeong, Ibid., 23.)

\textsuperscript{17} Kim, Ibid., 37.
principle’s (理法的) characteristics of \( T’ien \). Therefore, \( T’ien \) as the ultimate cannot be thought to have only the presider’s nature or only the principle’s nature. Confucian \( T’ien \) is \( T’ien \) as the presider and the principle (主宰的, 理法的 天). Furthermore, Confucian \( T’ien \) has transcendent (上帝, 神) and immanent (太極, 道, 理) aspects at the same time; and it is personal and impersonal. Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality corresponds with Confucian \( T’ien \). In Taoism, \( Tao \) can be understood as many different meanings like a personal god (人格神), as \( Ki \) (氣, spirit or energy), \( Mu \) (無, nothingness), or \( Hur \) (虛, emptiness). Yu’s understanding of God also relates to those characteristics of \( Tao \). In Buddhism, the ultimate is called and defined by a lot of different names. Yu especially uses the concept of \( Nirvana \) in a relation to his understanding of God.\(^{18}\)

In that Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality includes both of God’s transcendence and immanence, Sang-il Kim indicates that Yu’s understanding of God is similar to that of process theology.\(^{19}\) In the system of process theology, God is transcendent and immanent. God affects the world and is affected by the world. Charles Hartshorne, a process theologian, calls his understanding of God, “panentheism” which is transcendent and immanent to the world at the same time. Literally, panentheism means that everything “is in” God. It is very different from “pantheism”, meaning that everything “is” God. While in pantheism God and the world are not distinct, in panentheism the world is in God but God is bigger than the world because even though

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God is immanent in the world, God conjunctively transcends the world. Therefore, panentheism holds that the ultimate cannot be understood as only a being because the ultimate transcends all beings; and the ultimate cannot be simply defined as an ontological structure because it is immanent alongside with all in the world.

Returning to Yu’s understanding of God, many Korean theologians thought that Yu’s understanding of God is pantheistic on the ground that Yu understands God through Taiji (太極) of Confucianism, which is the origin of all creation, and Ki (氣) of Taoism, which is the origin of all beings; and Yu insists that human beings must find the divine inside of them not outside of them by emphasizing the spiritual union with God. The spiritual union with God in a relation to Yu’s spirituality will be further discussed in the

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20 Yu believes that there is a desire for the ultimate (性慾) in all human nature. He says, “If someone asks me, ‘Does God exist?’ I answer that God does not exist. If someone asks me, ‘Do you know God?’ I answer that I do not know. However, I believe in God because I know that human beings live with their head toward skies, and their mind and heart long for One (絶對, the absolute). […] I think that the holy one that we desire and miss is God.” (1956) (Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo örok, 38.) (“하느님이 계시느냐고 물으면 나는 ‘없다’고 말한다. 하느님을 아느냐고 물으면 나는 ‘모른다’고 말한다. 그러나 사람이 머리를 하늘로 두고 산다는 이 사실을 알기 때문에 또 사람의 마음이 하나(絶對)를 그린다는 이 사실을 알기 때문에 나는 하느님을 믿는다. […] 우리들이 바라고 그리는 전체의 거룩한 날을 나는 하느님이라고 한다.”) Yu’s concept of the desire for the ultimate (性慾) reminds us of Tillich’s ultimate concern that is the ground of human religions.

21 Yu declares that he rejects pantheism in the God-cosmos relation. He says, “As we are living by following only one god in a bright world, we tend to treat the cosmos if it were only an inanimate matter, rather than living thing. The cosmos is not fairly treated by men. Whether or not the cosmos is fairly treated there is something in the cosmos. As a monotheist, I dislike pantheism. I think of only one God. (1956)” (Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo örok, 199.) (“우리가 유일신을 따라서 쪽 밖은 세상에 사는데 우주라는 것을 아무 무생물 취급을 하는 수가 많다. 우주를 산 것이 아닌 생명 없는 것으로 알고 물건 취급을 한다. 우주가 사람들에게 평등 대접을 받지 못하고 있다. 우주가 사람들로부터 대접을 받는 못받듯 거기에는 무엇인가 있다. 유일신을 받는 사람은 있어서만유신론(萬有神論) 범신론(汎神論) 같은 것을 아주 싫어한다. 생각하는 것은 오직 한 하느님뿐이다.”)
These days, however, some theologians like Don-gu Kang take the position that Yu’s understanding of God is more similar to panentheism rather than pantheism because it emphasizes not only God’s immanence but also his transcendence. In order to understand Yu’s thought of the God-world relationship, I will discuss Hartshorne’s panentheistic understanding of God as the divine relativity and Neville’s understanding of God based on his metaphysical creation-theory.

**Hartshorne’s understanding of God: Panentheistic View; the Divine Relativity**

**Criticism of the Classical Theism**

Hartshorne argues that the classical theism which is supported by the traditional metaphysical theories has failed to understand what God really is. Classical theists like Aristotle and Aquinas define God as only an absolute and necessary being. According to Hartshorne, one of the most serious mistakes of the classical theism is to distinguish “[…!] God from other beings by terming him simply necessary, infinite, independent, eternal, while the others are simply contingent, finite, dependent, temporal […]”.  

In his *Man’s Vision of God and the Logic of Theism*, Hartshorne proposes three exclusive theistic alternatives:

I. There is a being in *all* respects absolutely perfect or unsurpassable, in no way and in no respect surpassable or perfectible. (Theism of the first type; absolutism, Thomism, most European theology prior to 1880)

II. There is no being in all respects absolutely perfect; but there is a

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22 Hartshorne indicates that Aristotle took God’s immutable perfection literally. Aristotle and Aquinas believed that there are relations between God and the world, but these relations do not qualify God but qualify only the world because God is immutable and changeless. (See, Chales Hartshorne, *Aquinas to Whitehead: Seven Centuries of Metaphysics of Religion*, 5-6.)

23 Ibid., 22.
being in some respect or respects thus perfect, and in some respect or respects not so, in some respects surpassable, whether by self or others being left open. Thus it is not excluded that the being may be relatively perfect in all the respects in which it is not absolutely perfect. (Theism of the second type; much contemporary Protestant theology, doctrines of a “finite-infinite” or perfect-perfectible God.)

III. There is no being in any respect absolutely perfect; all beings are in all respects surpassable by something conceivable, perhaps by others or perhaps by themselves in another state. (Doctrines of a merely finite God, polytheism in some forms, atheism.)

The first proposition – “God is absolutely perfect in all aspects” – implies that God does not change and does not grow. Therefore, there is no way for men to bring any additional value to God. The second proposition – “God is absolutely perfect in some respects but not in all respects” – means that God is relatively perfect. For examples, God may grow in joy through men’s worship for him without changing in his righteousness. The third proposition – “God is not perfect in any respect” – means that there cannot be an absolutely perfect being, and therefore there cannot be a perfect God. In this case, God is not worthy to be worshiped. Among these three possible theistic positions, the first and the third ones have posed serious issues between the traditional theism and atheism. The classical theism corresponds with the first position.

Hartshorne indicates that the classical theism’s two assertions that God as the absolute reality is not affected by any other being; but on the other hand, God can be a personal reality to be known, depended, and loved by other beings, are incompatible statements. To define God as the absolutely perfect is to deny any relation between

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26 Gragg arranges Hartshorne’s criticism of the classical theism by six examples related to God’s attributes such as God’s absoluteness, omnipotence, changelessness, omniscience, love, and bliss. (See, Gragg, *Charles Hartshorne*, 79-82.)
God and the world in all aspects. In that sense, the classical theism ironically conflicts with the biblical understanding of God who is “one with us in our suffering.”

Even though Hartshorne expresses strong opposition to the first type of theism, he also denies the third type, which supports that God is not perfect in any respect. He considers it as atheism because “[…] one could place no ultimate reliance upon a deity in every way subject to imperfection and alteration.”

Hartshorne proposes his panentheistic understanding of God as an alternative to these two extremes of classical theism and atheism. His understanding of God, therefore, is also called the “neoclassical theism” in a sense that it tries to overcome the limitation and inconsistency of classical theism.

**Relative God**

Panentheism, which is the term representing Hartshorne’s view of the relationship between God and the world, basically means that the world is included in God, but God is not identical with the world itself. It means that God is bigger than the world, but God cannot be separated from the world, in other words, God depends on the world. From the panentheistic perspective, Hartshorne asserts that God and the world are inter-dependent with one another; and therefore God is relative to other beings and events of the world. It implies that God can change and grow as the world changes. In this sense, we have to give up the classical theism’s view that God is absolutely perfect in all respects, and admit the second theistic view that God is absolutely perfect in some respects and

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28 Ibid., p. 155.
relatively perfect in other respects. God is relatively perfect. Hartshorne also distinguishes his understanding of God from the pantheistic view.

If “pantheism” is a historically and etymologically appropriate term for the view that deity is the all of relative or interdependent items, with nothing wholly independent or in any clear sense nonrelative, then “panentheism” is an appropriate term for the view that deity is in some real aspect distinguishable from and independent of any and all relative items, and yet, taken as an actual whole, includes all relative items. In other words, Hartshorne’s understanding of God is different from the classical theism because God is relative and immanent in the world; and different from pantheism because God also has absolute and transcendent aspect apart from the world.

For Hartshorne, that God is relatively perfect does not mean that God is imperfect. The relative perfection of God means that God cannot be surpassed by any other being except God himself. Hartshorne suggests a new interpretation of divine perfection. According to him, divine perfection means “the self-surpassing surpasser of all.” He believes that religion does not need any other interpretation of divine perfection except it. Hartshorne’s new definition of divine perfection as “the self-surpassing surpasser” seems to intend that God can change, but God is not one of the world or the world itself; rather God is perfect and excellent because there is no other being to surpass God except God himself.

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29 Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity, 89.

30 Hartshorne says, “[…] let us define perfection as an excellence such that rivalry or superiority on the part of other individuals is impossible, but self-superiority is not impossible. Or again, let us say that the perfect is the ‘self-surpassing surpasser of all.’” (Ibid., 20.)

31 See, Ibid., 21.
Hartshorne also tries to harmonize God’s absoluteness and relativity by the term “surrelativism”. Surrelativism implies that the “relative” or “changeable”, which depends on the various relationships and changes with these relationships, includes and exceeds the “absolute” or “immutable” because “the concrete includes and exceeds the abstract.” From this point of view, Hartshorne asserts that God, who is supremely excellent and concrete, must be defined as the supremely-relative one, that is, “surrelative” instead of as the absolute or immutable. For Hartshorne, therefore, God must be more absolute than what the classical theism defines as absolute because the absoluteness in the classical theism means “non-relative”, and it cannot be understood as “all-inclusive” or “supreme”. He says, “The absolute is not more, but less, than God – in the obvious sense in which the abstract is less than the concrete.”

As we have seen in the above, Hartshorne denies the traditional understanding of God that God is solely absolute and changeless without any relation to the world. In Hartshorne’s panentheism, God is not distinguished from the world; but rather the world exists as the part of God. It implies that as the world cannot exist without God, God cannot exist without the world. Hartshorne believes that God’s love that we can find in the bible shows clearly the validity of his God-world relationship theory. Love always presupposes a relation between one giving and another receiving. However, the classical theism or the traditional theology, whether or not it intended, denied the notion of God’s love in order to hold the notion of God’s perfection which is absolute, eternal, and

32 Ibid., ix.
33 See, Ibid., ix.
34 Ibid., 83.
unchangeable. If God is not relative there cannot be love between God and the world. In
order to achieve the religious motivation in all religions the real relation of God and men,
like love between God and the world, must be presupposed.35

God’s Dipolar Natures

According to Hartshorne, God who is relatively perfect has a dipolar nature. Dipolar
nature of God is the basic and essential concept in Hartshorne’s panentheism. This theory
seems to be influenced by Morris Cohen’s “Law of Polarity”, which indicates that two
components of ultimate contraries are mutually interdependent and correlative, so that
they must be affirmed as true.36 Unlike the classical theism, Hartshorne asserts that “God is,
in uniquely excellent ways, both necessary and contingent, both infinite and finite, independent and dependent, eternal and temporal.”37 For examples, in Man’s Vision of God, Hartshorne asserts that wholly necessary and immutable God cannot know about the contingent and changeable world. In order to know the contingent and changeable world, God must have some contingent aspects.38 However, God is not wholly contingent because God is not a finite being. God, therefore, must have the dipolar nature including both the infinite and finite aspects.

35 Hartshorne asks, “Is not the noblest aspect of religious aspiration the wish to have a
cause to serve, some value to enrich by our contributions, which is more satisfying as an object of service than mere men?” (Hartshorne, Man’s Vision of God and the Logic of Theism, 117.

36 See, Gragg, 84.

37 Hartshorne, Aquinas to Whitehead: Seven Centuries of Metaphysics of Religion, 22.

Gragg also points out that Hartshorne’s doctrine of God cannot be correctly understood by defining God’s being as simple. According to Gragg, in Hartshorne’s system, God’s reality must include both his abstract existence and concrete actuality. God’s abstract existence is the principle of possibility, but his concrete actuality is related to the actuality of all beings in time.\(^{39}\) However, this contrast between two extreme poles does not mean that God’s nature is self-contradictory because each pole of God’s nature corresponds to a different aspect of God. “For instance, God’s actual knowledge is finite because it is limited to the actual world at a given time, but his potential knowledge is literally infinite because it knows the potentially infinite worlds as potential.”\(^{40}\)

Therefore, God’s dipolar nature makes it possible that God can be eternal in one aspect and, at the same time, be temporal in another aspect.\(^{41}\) Hartshorne’s idea of God’s dipolar natures is directly contrary to the doctrine of God’s simplicity of the classical theism.

Hartshorne seems to insist by God’s dipolar natures that God is still transcendent while he is immanent in the world through the concrete and relative relationship with the world. In order to understand how Hartshorne harmonizes God’s dipolar natures, let us discuss his understanding of God’s relation to the world.

\(^{39}\) See, Gragg, 83-84.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{41}\) “[…] There is God in his essential, and God in his accidental, functions. The only way such distinctions can be made conceivable is in terms of time; the essential being the purely eternal, and the accidental being the temporal or changing, aspects of the divine.” (Hartshorne, *Man’s Vision of God, and the Logic of Theism*, 234.)
Hartshorne’s understanding of the God-world relation

In Hartshorne’s panentheism God is independent and dependent at the same time in relation to the world. That means that God is transcendent and immanent at the same time. For Hartshorne, the divine creation theory must presuppose action and reaction between the creator and the created beings. “[In the Bible] There was the Covenant between God and Israel. The whole thing was a social transaction.”42 This social transaction means that there cannot be any presupposed stuff without being related with God’s creation. Every being or every event that influences God has been influenced by God too. In other words, God influences the world, but at the same time he is influenced by the world through the creation process.43 According to Hartshorne, all beings including men in nature have social structure. Therefore, Hartshorne does not accept the traditional creation theory, creation ex nihilo (out of nothing) because it is impossible to prove that there is any matter or source for creating the world apart from social relations.44 Furthermore, for Hartshorne, God is not only the creator in one aspect, but also both of the creator and the created in another aspect. In this sense, he defines God as “supreme cause of all effects, supreme effect of all causes.”45 For Hartshorne, God as social cannot be understood by the traditional view of God as the world creator.

In other words, for Hartshorne, the God-world relationship means that God and the world create each other. Hartshorne compares the God-world relation to the mind-

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42 Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 77.


44 See, Ibid., 29.

body relation. The mind-body or the soul-body relation is not a one-to-one relation but one-to-many relation. As a body consists of billions of cells God’s cosmic body is a society of individuals, so that God as the world soul is “the individual integrity of the world.” He continues to say, “As each of us is the supercellular individual of the cellular society called a human body, so God is the super-creaturely individual of the inclusive creaturely society. Simply outside of this super-society and super-individual, there is nothing.” This mind-body analogy is helpful to understand Hartshorne’s interdependent relationship between God and the world.

Hartshorne’s understanding of the God-world relationship is also well summed up in the preface of *The Divine Relativity*:

> In the depths of their hearts all creatures (even those able to “rebel” against him) defer to God because they sense him as the one who alone is adequately moved by what moves them. He alone not only knows but feels (the only adequate knowledge, where feeling is concerned) how they feel, and he finds his own joy in sharing their lives, lived according to their own free decisions, not fully anticipated by any detailed plan of his own.

In Hartshorne’s theory of the God-world relation, we cannot find any domination or governance of God over the world. Rather, there is lots of freedom in all creatures, and God’s joy depends on their free decisions. This is Hartshorne’s social relationship between God and the world. God knows all creatures, but God is also influenced by them. On the contrary to classical theism, which emphasizes God’s independence from all

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46 See, Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 59.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

creatures, Hartshorne believes that a higher being must be more dependent on others.

Especially, “sympathetic dependence” is the most excellent among all kinds of dependence. He says:

> The eminent form of sympathetic dependence can only apply to deity, for this form cannot be less than an omniscient sympathy, which depends upon and is exactly colored by every nuance of joy or sorrow anywhere in the world.\(^{50}\)

For Hartshorne, God rules or orders the world not by the method of compulsion but persuasion. “Persuasion”, which is Whitehead’s term referring to the divine method to order and control the world, means that “[…] God can rule the world and order it, setting optimal limits for our free action, by presenting himself as essential object, so characterized as to weight the possibilities of response in the desired respect.”\(^{51}\) God who is relative to the world and persuades his creatures does not seem to be the solely and absolute creator who creates the world out of nothing. Rather, Hartshorne’s divine relativity or social God may be defined as a co-creator with the world or his creatures to create and develop each other. Hartshorne says as follows:

> “[…] God, in his latest concrete state, is jointly ‘made’ or produced by God and the world in the prior states of each. We are not simply co-creators, with God, of the world, but in last analysis co-creators, with him, of himself.”\(^{52}\)

As we have seen, Hartshorne denies the classical theism’s belief that God creates the world out of nothing. Even though he emphasizes God’s independent and transcendent aspect alongside its dependent and immanent aspects, God in his

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 142.

\(^{52}\) Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 113.
panentheism seems not to exist without the world because God is not only the first cause of the world but also the latest effect of all beings and events of the world.

**Neville’s understanding of God: God as the Creator**

As we have discussed above, according to Hartshorne’s theology, God and the world are inter-dependent to each other in creation. On the one hand God creates all created beings, but on the other hand, without the world God cannot exist, and God is also created by the world. Therefore, Hartshorne opposes the traditional creation theory that God creates the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Contrary to Hartshorne’s position, Neville proposes his God-world relationship theory by the traditional view that God creates the world *ex nihilo*. Neville, unlike Hartshorne, tries to maintain both of God’s transcendence and immanence through his creation theory.

In his many books and writings, Neville uses “divinity”, “divine matters”, or “the ultimate reality” to indicate “God” which is the familiar term in the western theological tradition. He believes that these terms can provide a more neutral stance to understand God and the alternatives of the various religions of the world. For Neville, God or the ultimate reality is necessary to explain all beings of the world and the order of beings because it is impossible to explain the world and the world order only through the

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53 “The term ‘divine matters’ is used in order to indicate the need for a kind of conditional neutrality with regard to the idea of God and its alternatives. … It is better to think of theology as studying ‘divine matters’ rather than simply ‘God’ because there may be more differences than meet the eye between the Indian Hindu idea of Brahman, for instance, and the Christian notion of God […]” (Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 2)
determinate beings of the world. Therefore, before examining Neville’s understanding of God, we need to understand Neville’s metaphysical theory of being.\textsuperscript{54}

**Determinate beings: Harmonies of essential and conditional features**

To discuss in detail the entirety of Neville’s metaphysical theory of being will be too extensive. Yet, we need to briefly examine his metaphysical theory of being in order to clearly understand the ultimate reality and the relationship between God and the world in Neville’s philosophical theology.

First of all, Neville asserts that any being in the world is defined as a harmony of essential and conditional features. According to Neville, all beings that we can see or know are determinate beings, and determinate beings have two aspects for their identity. A determinate being’s identity is determinate in relation to other beings. This means that a being is conditioned by other beings yet, at the same time, conditions others. On the other hand, its identity also has its own essence. Neville calls it “self-identity” which is

\textsuperscript{54} In *The Cosmology of Freedom*, Neville explains the differences between metaphysics, ontology, and cosmology as follows: “In accordance with tradition, the study of the transcendental properties of determinateness can be called *metaphysics*. It is systematic and perfectly universal in the sense that it studies what is transcendental. Traditionally, the study of the transcendentals has been distinguished from the study of being as being. In contrast to asking about the characteristics of determinateness as such, we may ask about the conditions for there being anything determinate at all, and for the intelligibility of determinateness. This can be called *ontology*. It is especially complex since the condition for any determinateness is not itself determinate in an ordinary way, and yet the theory about it must be determinate to be intelligible. […] A more specific study than either ontology or metaphysics is the examination of the system of categories distinguishing, integrating, and interpreting all the various kinds of determinations there are. This study works with conceptualizations of all the different things there might be on a sufficiently abstract level that they can be related systematically. It is the kind of speculative philosophy Whitehead and Peirce did, and it can be called *cosmology*. It must be inclusive, systematic, abstract, and capable of specification into the particulars of experience.” (Neville, *The cosmology of Freedom*, 26-27.)
distinguished from conditional identity.\textsuperscript{55} For conditional features of a being, Neville sums up as follows:

\ldots a determinate thing contrasts with other determinate things when conditional features on both sides define the things in part in terms of one another in relevant respects. This is a cosmological contrast and is necessary for any determinateness at all. There can be no determinateness without a plurality of things related by conditional features.\textsuperscript{56}

Essential features have two distinct roles. One is to provide an ontological position for the conditional features, and another is to order the conditional features.\textsuperscript{57} The essential features are the “expressions of the power of self being” because they constitute the self-identity of a determinate being. Nevertheless, Neville does not give any priority to essential features. The function of essential features is to order the conditional features, and therefore, without being related to these conditional features the essential features cannot be determinate. Neville says, “Only as harmonies of conditional and essential features do determine things contrast with one another and stand over against non-being.”\textsuperscript{58} All determinate beings are harmonies of essential and conditional features, but their unity is not “determinate third thing over and above the features that integrate them.”\textsuperscript{59} Rather, Neville calls it a \textit{de facto} unity in terms of that determinate beings just fit together within harmonies.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{55} See, Neville, \textit{Recovery of the Measure}, 102.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{57} See, Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} See, Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
A de facto unity implies that a determinate being must be together with other beings in “an ontological context of mutual relevance.” All determinate beings are harmonies of essential and conditional features, so that the mutual relations of the cosmological conditions depend on a certain deeper ontological connection. “That deeper connection, that ontological context for mutual relevance, is the fact that the things are created together. The context is their mutual being-created.” This ontological context is not another determinate being. Rather, it is the eternal act of being created together.

In this sense, for Neville, God is being-itself. As the ground of all determinate beings, being-itself must be a context of mutual relevance and, therefore, must be indeterminate. If we assume that being-itself is also determinate it needs another context for its relation to other beings. In other words, God or being-itself cannot be a person or a being because “if there were a perfect being with infinite divine closure alongside the world, there would still have to be a deeper creator to make possible that alongsidness in an ontological context of mutual relevance.” Many philosophers and theologians have thought that multiplicity presupposes a unity that is the ontological one. In order to define what the nature of being-itself is, Neville correlates being-itself with the ontological one and tries to find how being-itself unifies the many determinate beings. Whether being is predicated either analogically or univocally is “whether there is more

61 Neville, Behind The Masks of God: An Essay toward Comparative Theology, 14.
62 Ibid.
63 See, Ibid.
64 Neville, Eternity and Time’s Flow, 177.
than one kind of being with no common element or being-itself is one and common to all things that are.” Neville says:

It is in the context of mutual relevance that the many determinations find their ontological unity. Therefore, we must find the character of being-itself as the ontological one for the ontological many manifesting itself in some close connection with the context.

Neville believes that pluralistic solution for the problem of the one “and” the many is false because the one “for” the many determinate beings cannot be a determinate being. Hence, being-itself must be indeterminate with respect to all determinate beings. If being-itself cannot be determinate, then it must transcend the determinations. Furthermore, the transcendence of being-itself must be present to all determinate beings as a unifier. On the other hand, being-itself is immanent to the world because being-itself is always present within all determinate beings as the act of creation.

Likewise, if we admit that God or being-itself is indeterminate, we cannot discuss or define it because all words are determinate. We can discuss being-itself only in a relation to the determinate world, in other words, we can only define it as the creator of the world. Let us further look into Neville’s creation theory, creation *ex nihilo*.

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65 Neville, *Behind the Masks of God*, 16.

66 Ibid., 59.

67 See, Neville, *God the Creator*, 60.

68 Vaught also points out that Neville tries to preserve both God’s transcendence and the immanence in a relation to the world. (See, Carl G. Vaught, “Being, Nonbeing, and Creation Ex Nihilo”, *Interpreting Neville*, eds. By J. Harley Chapman and Nancy K. Frankenberry, 149.)

69 For Neville, as the creator of all determinate beings God can have a determinate character. “God may give himself a determinate character in creating […] And he does at least give himself the determinate character of being creator.” (Neville, *Soldier, Sage, Saint*, 105.)
Neville explains his understanding of God as the creator through the traditional Christian term, creation *ex nihilo*. Neville thinks that if God or being-itself is indeterminate before the creating act, the world must be created *ex nihilo*. This means that there cannot be anything prior to the act of creation. All determinate beings, which are not only physical determinate beings but also intellectual beings and logical forms, are created out of nothing. If God creates the world from “something” which is determinate, then God must be determinate because he is related to something determinate in order to create.

According to Neville, creation *ex nihilo* has three identifiable features: the creative activity, the source of creation, and the world. These three features are united and related, and each feature depends on the other two. “There could be no activity without the actual creation of something; there could be no world without its being created; and there could be no creator without the creating.”

It reminds us of the traditional Christian understanding of God as the Trinity. Neville compares these three features of creation *ex nihilo* to three persons of the Trinity: the source and the Father; the world and the Logos-Son; and the creative act and the Spirit. As each person is distinct from the other two, but all three persons are one God in a Trinitarian understanding of God, three features of creation *ex nihilo* are also a single act. Therefore, God’s creative act, the source of creation, and the world as the result of creation cannot be separated.


71 “In the act of divine creation, three elements are necessarily involved: God as source of everything determinate, God as the product or end point of the creative act, and God as the creative activity itself.” (Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 39.) Also see, Neville, *Behind the Masks of God*, 16-17.
God cannot be defined apart from his creative act and the world, and nothing as the source of creation is identical with indeterminate God. For Neville, God is nothing or meaningless without creating. God as the ontological creative act does not have any determinate character except the character of being the creator. Therefore, creation *ex nihilo* cannot be defined and be real apart from the creating act, but can be defined and be real only in the act of creation.72

According to Neville, the created world is dependent on the source of creation, but the source is not dependent on the created world. It is a very different view from Hartshorne’s view that the relationship between God and the world is inter-dependent. For Neville, the source of creation is nothing (indeterminate), so that “the source is not even source except through creating.”73 However, this “nothing” is not a contrast term for some “things”, which are determinate beings, but rather, nothing in Neville’s system is the contrast term for being of all determinate beings. Therefore, here, the term “*ex nihilo*” (out of nothing) indicates the source of creation, but at the same time, it implies the transcendence of God that is indeterminate before creating. In that sense, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* itself is determinate as it gives God a determinate name, that is, the creator.

In *Soldier, Sage, Saint*, Neville asserts that God can be called nothing as followings:

The hypothesis is that everything determinate is created by a creator who transcends the entire system of determinations. Because God cannot be determinate in himself, he can be called Nothing or Emptiness, with an

72 See, Ibid., 73-74.

73 Ibid., 15.
appropriate switch of metaphors. If God did not transcend the entire system of determinations, but was one of them, then the determinate harmony of God and the rest would be inexplicable. [...] The conception of God, then, is the conception of whatever God is as creator.\(^{74}\)

Neville’s understanding of “nothing” as the transcendent source of creation seems similar to Yu’s understanding of God as nothingness (無) or emptiness (虛) which are based on the very East Asian understanding of the ultimate reality. As we have seen in the above, in Neville’s system, we cannot define God by any words because words themselves are determinate without being related to the act of creation. However, God must also have other reality apart from the determinate connection to the world although God is determinate as the creator of the created world.\(^{75}\) In short, for Neville, God as the creator has the determinate reality, but God before creating has the indeterminate reality, that is, nothing. In some of his writings, Neville seems to identify God with nothingness. In *Eternity and Time’s Flow*, Neville describes God as the abyss:

> Insofar as the created world consists of all things determinate, the creator is the abyss, the great nothingness whose only character is to be the source of other things.\(^{76}\)

And in *Theology Primer*, he also defines God apart from the act of creation as nothing:

> We cannot say that there is a potentiality in God to create the world apart from creation, because that potentiality would either be determinate (hence created) or vacuous (and different in no way from utter lack of potentiality). [...] Apart from creation, God is indistinguishable from nothing.\(^{77}\)

\(^{74}\) Neville, *Soldier, Sage, Saint*, 104-105.

\(^{75}\) See, Neville, *God the Creator*, 99.

\(^{76}\) Neville, *Eternity and Time’s Flow*, 203.

\(^{77}\) Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 40.
Neville seems to maintain the divine transcendence by identifying God before creating with nothingness as he explains God’s determinateness or immanence in a relation to his act of creation.

Neville also asserts that God’s act of creation – creation *ex nihilo* – is perfectly free. Neville sees the relationship between God and the world as asymmetrical. It means that there is no necessity in the act of creation. Even though the world depends on God, God does not depend on the created world. In this sense, Neville’s understanding of the God-world relation is clearly different from Hartshorne’s. If God creates all determinate beings out of nothing, there cannot be any determinate principle or direction of creation ontologically prior to the act of creation. Therefore, God is not bound to create the world in a certain way or with a certain intention.\(^78\)

**Transcendence and Immanence of God:**

**Comparison between Hartshorne’s, Neville’s, and Yu’s View**

As he criticizes the classical theism, Hartshorne asserts that his panentheistic understanding of God, divine relativity, can maintain the divine dipolar natures which are concrete and abstract natures. Hartshorne tries to explain both of God’s transcendence and immanence through his theory of divine relativity. In his system, the relationship between God and the world is inter-dependent. God as the relative and changeable reality is the cause and effect of the world, and his joy is growing by influencing the world and being influenced by it. It means that God is not or meaningless without the world. Accordingly, Hartshorne denies the traditional creation theory, creation *ex nihilo*,

\(^{78}\) See, Neville, *Soldier, Sage, Saint*, 107.
and understands God’s creation and the source of creation only within the relation to the determinate world.

Hartshorne also replaces the classical theism’s understanding of God’s perfection which is absolute and immutable with his own understanding of the divine perfection, that is, “the self-surpassing surpasser of all.” In fact, because Hartshorne insists that God’s concrete and relative reality is higher in value than his abstract and absolute reality, God’s transcendence or his independence apart from the relationship with the world may not be his major concern. From these perspectives, Hartshorne’s understanding of God is very different from Yu’s, which defines the divine reality as non-being79 rather than some being to be named.

In consideration of the fact that Hartshorne focuses on the close relation of God to the world, and even sees God’s perfection as relative, his panentheism can be compared to some of Yu’s East Asian theology. For instance, Yu’s Taoistic understanding of the ultimate defines God as the energy of all beings (Ki, 氣) or the rule of the whole world (Tao, 道) as Hartshorne believes that God can be found in all beings of the world. And for that reason, today many Korean theologians define Yu’s understanding of God as panentheism. However, for there is no clear explanation for the divine reality without being related to the finite world Hartshorne does not seem to provide a clear account for God’s transcendence. In other words, Hartshorne’s understanding of God as the divine relativity has a good position to explain the God-world relation from the God’s immanent perspective; however, it seems to fail to unify God’s absolute and abstract aspect with its

79 As we have seen in the above, Yu understands God or the ultimate reality as nothingness (無) or emptiness (虛).
relative and concrete aspect. Yu also talks about God’s relation to the world as the origin (根源) of all beings (萬物) or the formative principle of the cosmos, but he believes that to define God only in relation to the world or from the human perspective has some limitations to truly understand and meet the divine reality. Therefore, Yu insists that our understanding of God must progress from Taiji (太極, the Great Ultimate) toward Wuji, (無極, the endlessness or limitless), in other words, toward Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim
(God who exists as Non-being). Yu says:

I want to talk about nothingness (無). From several decades ago, I have wanted to talk about it but it was hard for me to start. I mean to go to Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. The Great means to reach to Ŭpshi-gyeshin (being as non-being). I mean to advance from T’ai-chi (太極, the Great Ultimate) toward Wu-chi, (無極, the limitless). This is the conclusion of my philosophy. For that reason, I says T’a-chi t’u shuo (太極圖說, the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate). It is not a matter of whether Chou Lien-his (周濂溪)80, Jesus, Buddha, or whoever wrote it. This is inside of me.81

Here, Yu moves from T’ai-chi to Wu-chi while Chou starts with Wu-chi, and then talks about T’ai-chi. This difference of the order of T’ai-chi and Wu-chi between Yu’s and Chou’s ideas shows the difference between the order of knowing and the order of being. In other words, while Chou develops his theory of T’ai-chi to Wu-chi with the

80 Another name of Chou Duni (周敦頤), who was a Neo-Confucianism thinker and is the author of Taiji Tushuo (太極圖說).

81 “나는 없(無)을 말하고자 한다. 수십 년 전부터 내가 말하고 싶었는데 말머리가 망대로 틀이지 않았다. 나는 없이 계시는 하느님께로 가자는 것이다. 없이 계시는 데까지 가야 크다. 태극(太極)에서 무극(無極)에로 가자는 것이다. 이것이 내 철학의 결론이다. 그래서 내가 태극도설(太極圖說)을 말한 것이다. 이걸 주림계가 썼거나 예수가 썼거나 석가가 썼거나 누가 썼던 문제가 안 된다. 이게 내 속에 있는 것이다. (1960)” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 73)
intention to explain the ultimate reality and the world based on the ontological order, Yu tries to reach the understanding of the ultimate reality by following the order of human knowing, the empistemological order. We will discuss in more detail the theory of T’ai-chi and Wu-chi in the following.

On the other hand, Neville denies the inter-dependent relationship between God and the world that is the core idea of Hartshorne’s understanding of God. Neville tries to maintain God’s transcendence and immanence by re-interpreting creation theory in his own metaphysical way. Neville defines God as the ontological creative act itself instead of a personal being which is the traditional western Christian understanding of God. In Neville’s system, God as the creative act means being-itself or the ontological one for the many. As he also agrees that God cannot be described and is meaningless without creation, Neville’s understanding of God seems similar to that of Hartshorne. Neville, however, starts his theory of God by metaphysically analyzing God’s transcendence in contrast of Hartshorne’s focus on the inter-dependent relationship between God and the world. For Neville, in order to be the ontological one for all determinate beings, God must be indeterminate. When God is indeterminate rather than a determinate being, God can give all determinate beings, which are harmonies of essential and conditional features, the ontological context of mutual relevance. In this sense, God must be being-itself rather than a person or a being. God as being-itself is indeterminate, but God can have a determinate character after creating or in a creating relation to the creatures. This determinate character of God means God’s immanence to the world.
For Neville, God’s immanence means God’s presence in all determinate beings by the act of creating them. As Yu does, Neville also defines God, the ontological creativity, as *Tao* (道). Neville says:

Ontological creativity is the presence of the wholly transcendent God beyond God creating the determinate creatures of the earth but without determinate character of divinity apart from creating.

Because of God’s immediate presence in all determinate beings they can exist without any medium between God and them. In Neville’s system God’s immanence cannot mean that God is identical with the world as in pantheism. Rather, his creation *ex nihilo*, at least in dealing with God’s immanent aspect, can be seen as panentheistic, “because the world is the terminus of the divine creative act, and the act and source are not reducible to the world.” There is a qualitative difference in defining God’s immanence between Neville’s and Hartshorne’s positions. For Hartshorne, God is growing through his relation to the world, in other words, God is also dependent on the world as well as the world is dependent on God. For Neville, all determinate beings depend on the ontological creative act and the source of creation, but the creator or the creative act does not depend on the created world at all.

In the sense that Neville rejects any possibility to say about the ultimate reality apart from the act of creation, Neville does not seem to clearly define the doctrine of God of the traditional Christian theology. However, unlike Hartshorne, Neville leaves enough

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83 Ibid., 63.

84 See, Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 41.

room to think of God’s transcendence by defining God before the creation as indeterminate or nothingness. Furthermore, Neville’s analysis of God’s transcendence enables his understanding of God be compatible with, for instance, the apophatic tradition’s negative theology, Christian mysticism, or spiritual experience because God as indeterminate or nothingness is beyond human knowledge and reason. Neville says:

In the logic of creation *ex nihilo*, we do not know the ground of being, but rather the relation between the ground and the created world. That is, we know the creation relation, which only conditionally applies to the creator-ground. Thus the ontological ground is never an object of knowledge. Nothing is not an object. 

Even though Neville’s understanding of God seems to solely depend on the metaphysical analysis of being, I think, it is possible to speak of God from the mystical or spiritual perspective.

Yu also speaks of God’s immanence in a relation to the human concrete spiritual life as he maintains God’s transcendence by asserting that it is impossible to define Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim by means of human reason and language. While Neville speaks of God’s transcendence and immanence through his metaphysical analysis which is the Western philosophical way Yu retains God’s transcendence and immanence on the basis of his East Asian thoughts which are Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. I will discuss in more detail Yu’s understanding of God from the East Asian perspective in the next chapter.

Another merit of Neville’s understanding of God in discussing the East Asian understanding of the ultimate reality including Yu’s is to provide different religious groups a ground to share their own religious concepts or symbols of the ultimate reality.

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86 Neville, *Behind the Masks of God*, 93.
In “Being, Nonbeing, and Creation Ex Nihilo”, Vaught indicates that Neville’s understanding of God can be a basis to compare different interpretations of the ultimate reality and to share different religious experience.\footnote{See, Carl G. Vaught, “Being, Nonbeing, and Creation Ex Nihilo”, 149.} For Neville, God as being-itself is beyond all human knowledge and language, but this God can have some determinate character by having relation with determinate beings, in other words, creating them. Therefore, the determinate characters of God can be religious symbols to illustrate God without losing God’s indeterminate or transcendental character. Furthermore, as we compare the religious symbols with one another, these symbols can be “alternative ways of interpreting the significance of the determinate dimensions of religious experience.”\footnote{Ibid.} In this sense, Neville thinks that theology must be arbitrary. According to Neville, “theology is always incomplete and ready to be revised; in this sense even the best theology is arbitrary. But good theology limits arbitrariness to the residue after careful judgments have opened the best vision possible under the circumstances.”\footnote{Neville, \textit{Behind the Masks of God}, 50.} For Neville, each religion’s understanding of the ultimate reality is only determinate because everything that is created or comes up in human mind is determinate. Therefore, if any religion declares that its own understanding of God is only true, it is false.

Even though Yu also believes that Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, and Christian understandings of the ultimate reality seem to be different from one another, these different understandings or interpretations of the ultimate reality point to and speak of the One, \textit{Opshi-gyeshin-Haneunim}. Sung-won Kim, in “The Study of The Creation Theory
of Robert Neville, A Neo-Whiteheadian”, asserts that Neville’s metaphysical creation theory can be an outstanding global and interreligious philosophy by providing a common ground for different religious groups to communicate with each other. As Kim points out that Neville’s deep interest on and understanding of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism, he anticipates that analyzing Neville’s metaphysical creation theory can help to open the new possibility to find or re-interpret the traditional metaphysical thought of the East Asian philosophies.  

As a result of the above discussion, I do not agree that Yu’s understanding of God can be defined as panentheism for the reason that Yu’s Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim has more transcendent character of the ultimate reality than Hartshorne’s divine relativity. On the other hand, Neville’s metaphysical theory of creation seems more helpful to define Yu’s understanding of God. For Yu, various interpretations of the ultimate reality in different religions including Taiji (太極), Mu (無), Tao (道), and Logos are just different expressions for the One, Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. Yu believes that there is something absolute beyond the relative world. He says:

[…] However, if man is captured by the relative world his knowledge (知) becomes fixed. When he fails to grab the absolute world, he is then captured by a delusion that he knows everything without knowing anything. He becomes arrogant and stubborn and finally becomes a fool. (1956)


91 Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ᣿rok, 99. (“[…] 그런데 사람이 상대세계에 빠져 버리면 얻(知)이 굳어져 버리고 만다. 절대세계를 놓치고 아무것도 모르면서 무엇이든지 다 앓는 것 같은 착각을 일으키게 된다. 그리하여 완고하고 교만해져 자기를 제일로 알게 되는 어리석은 생각에 빠진다.”)
According to Yu, God is defined by human knowledge and reason in the relative world through each religious symbolic medium, but true God is beyond the relative world because God absolutely and eternally exists as Ŭpshtı-gyeshin-Haneunim.

I shall continue to discuss in more detail how Yu’s understanding of God is formed and developed under the direct influence of the traditional East Asian thoughts.
CHAPTER III
YU’S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD FROM THE EAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Yu’s approach to describe and understand the ultimate reality are the combination of Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, and Christian concepts of the ultimate reality. Yu’s approach exhibits the fact that he freely chooses and uses any concept of the ultimate reality of various religious traditions to explain his Ĭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. The only criteria for Yu in choosing and using these concepts is whether or not they correctly define and explain the ultimate reality without standing its ground and obsessing over a certain religious position.¹

The core and foundation of Yu’s theology and spirituality is his understanding of the ultimate reality. Yu’s Ĭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim is not different from God of Christianity. For Yu, however, Ĭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim is not defined as only the Christian God, but rather Yu declares that his Ĭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim or God is the name of the Absolute who is the origin of ourselves and the cosmos.² In this chapter, we will examine how Yu borrows and uses the East Asian concepts to explain his understanding of the ultimate reality.

¹ Yu defines his theological methodology to “beg door to door”, in other words, learning from various religious orders. He says, “I do not eat only the Bible. I also eat the Confucian scriptures and the Buddhist scriptures. I cannot eat well because of my poor living, so that I beg door to door. Therefore, I eat anything such as the Greek philosophy or Indian thought, but it rarely harms my health because my digestive power is enough to digest them.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 147-148.)

² See, Young-ho Park, Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo’s Thought and Faith, 66.
Yu’s understanding of God in relation to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism

Yu and Confucianism

Like almost all people who are under the Confucian influence, Yu also identifies the thought of T’ien (天, heaven) with his understanding of God. In Confucianism, two most important names to indicate the concept of the ultimate reality are T’ien and Shang Ti (上帝, the heavenly ruler). The word T’ien can be interpreted as 1) sky in a spatial concept; 2) the heavenly god (天神) which is spiritual and absolute; or 3) the universal principle of human ethics and the world operation. In the period before Confucius (孔子, 551-479 BC), both terms T’ien and Shang Ti were used together as a complementary concept for each other. Shan Ti is the more personified term of T’ien. However, in the time of Confucius, T’ien started to play a more important role than Shan Ti in Confucianism. Wing-Tsit Chan depicts that up to Confucius’ time the ultimate reality was called Ti (帝, the Lord) or Shang Ti (上帝, the Lord on High), which was understood as an anthropomorphic reality. However, “Confucius never speaks of Ti. Instead, he often speaks of T’ien (Heaven).” ³ It implies that the concept of T’ien is changed from the personal god to the impersonal ultimate reality. Mencius (孟子, 385-303/302 BC) also depersonalizes T’ien and believes that it is inherent in human and all other beings based on the pantheistic position.⁴

³ Wing-tsit Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, 16.
⁴ See, Il-bong Park, History of Chinese Philosophy, 55.
It is natural that Yu’s understanding of God is influenced by the Confucian understanding of T’ien because as we saw in the Introduction, Yu read and studied Confucian scriptures from his childhood. Therefore, Confucian thoughts and languages are easily found in Yu’s writings. For examples, Yu expresses that the Heaven (天) is God as follows:

One can possess true self by possessing the heaven. For the heaven is myself. For God is the true myself. We hate to possess the heaven. The heaven is useless in the world. If we can sell it, many people would want to sell it. However, the man (君子), the son of the heaven, uses the heaven to reinforce himself (自强)\footnote{Yŏng-mo Yu, Life to Death, Hope to Despair, 126.}

In many parts of his writings, Yu uses God and the heaven as the same meaning.

One of the most crucial points, which show the relation between Yu’s understanding of God and Confucianism is that Yu understands the relationship between God and Christ through the concept of Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親, “There must be affection between father and son”). Yu says:

Even though the Son (Eol-Na, the soul self) is longing for the Father (the Heavenly God) day and night the Son is longing for his own face. The Father is patient and continues to wait. The Son is looking for, and the Father is waiting. In the end, they meet each other, and their encounter is “in” (仁, Goodness). Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親, “Father and son maintain a close relationship”) is identical with In (仁). (1956)\footnote{“아들(열나)이 아버지(하느님)를 밤낮으로 그려보아야 제 얼굴을 그리는 것이다. 아버지는 참고 참고 곧잘 기다린다. 아들은 찾고 아버지는 기다리고 그리하여 마침내 아버지와 아들의 만남이 인(仁)이다. 부자유친(父子有親)이 인(仁)이다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo ὅrok, 43.)}

The thought of “Father and son maintain a close relationship” is based on Confucian concept of “filial piety (孝)”, which is the foundation of the family and social relationship
in the East Asian culture. Confucius teaches that the foundation of Confucian scriptures is benevolence (仁); and the foundation of benevolence (仁) is filial piety (孝). Yu sees Jesus as the filial (devotional) Son (孝子) who is the completion of the virtue of Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親). According to Yu, Jesus was the filial Son of the Heavenly Father because he perfectly knew and completely obeyed the Father’s mind and will. In Yu’s theological understanding, Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin does not mean the relationship between parents and children in the relative world, but means the union with God (神人合一) by returning to the absolute One (归一) beyond the relative world. For Yu, the union with God is Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親).8

Father and Son are two, and one. Father and Son cannot be two (父子不二). This is Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親). It is human nature (本性) to long for Father God who is the beginning and truth. Our thinking [of the Father] is from longing for [the Father]. Because we long for [God], we start to think of [God]. This is sincerity (誠意) which means true mind of human beings. (1957)9

Yu believes that the spirit of Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin is inherent within human beings as a nature, and a holy man (聖人) is the person in whom this nature is revealed.

Confucianism’s deep influence is also found in Yu’s spiritual self-discipline, which we will examine in the fourth chapter. Young-ho Park indicates that one of the main reasons why Yu likes Confucius is because Confucius was always weary that he

7 “[…] 君子務本, 本立而道生. 孝弟也者, 其為仁之本與” (“A Gentleman (君子) makes an effort to establish the foundation. When the foundation is firmly set up, the Tao grows. Filial piety(孝) and fraternal love(弟) are the basis of practicing the Goodness (仁).” (The Analects of Confucius (論語), Book 1:2. (學而篇))

8 See, Jeong-sook Oh, Korean Christianity of Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo, 141.

9 Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo örok, 59.
would not practice the truth even though he found it; he would not convey the truth even though he learned it; and he would not bring the true world into his life even though he knew it to be true. Yu respects and wants to emulate this Confucius’s self-examination, which is still influencing the East Asian ethical culture. In Confucianism, self-examination or self-discipline is expressed as Sal-shin-seong-in (殺身成仁), which translates into “achieving the Goodness by killing body”, and Su-shin (修身), which translates into “controlling and training body”. Sal-shin-seong-in (殺身成仁) means to look for the Goodness (仁) by giving up one’s body or bodily desires (身) which symbolizes one’s self. Su-shin (修身) means to fight against the self until one completely embodies and practices the Goodness (仁). In this sense, Yu emphasizes the importance of an ascetic life in order to be a spiritual child of God.

Yu and Buddhism

When Yu was twenty, he experienced his younger brother’s death and read the Buddhist scriptures and Tao Te Ching (道徳経). Yu started to be concerned about the futility and emptiness of life after reading those books. Even though Yu agrees that Confucianism is one of the good religions, he also acknowledges that Confucianism lacks deep metaphysical insight compared to the teachings of Buddhism. Confucianism, especially Neo-Confucianism, by nature, is the study of human nature, and then it is not

10 See, Young-ho Park, Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s Thought and Faith, 77.

interested in salvation or afterlife as much as Buddhism is. Yu believes that Jesus completed Confucian Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親), but Buddha (如來 or 釋迦如來) is “四顧無親” (“there is no relative (親) despite looking all around”), which means that Buddha realizes that there is nothing to rely on. In this sense, Buddhism strongly influences Yu’s thought of “nothingness (無)” and “emptiness (空)”. Yu rejects some position that sees Buddhism as a religion without having any god, but he realizes Nirvana (涅槃) in Buddhism corresponds to God in Christianity. While Christianity and Hinduism possess and call upon the name of God, Buddhism does not name Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. Such is in respect for the high God.

_Mu-a_ (無我), which means “absence of ego”, is the representative thought in Buddhism. Yu thinks that a foolish person says _Na_ (나, I or oneself) is here or there, but Buddha says _Na_ is not, that is, the absence of ego (無我). According to Yu, the absence of ego (無我) does not mean the absence of oneself, but means to find ‘true self’, which always resides in the truth and is unchangeable. Jeong-bae Lee points out that when Yu asserts that we have to negate the relative world and look for the absolute Oneness, the absolute Oneness is not the theistic absolute being in Christianity but the “nothingness (無)” in Buddhism, which exists in all human beings and is only known by human transcendental nature, in other words, Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. The state of “absence

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12 See, Park, _Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo’s Life and Thought_, 313.
13 See, Young-ho Park ed., _Meditations of Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo_, 70-71.
14 See, Park, _Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo’s Thought and Faith_, 88.
of ego (無我)” means to reach the state to get out of the “Three Poisons (三毒)”15: greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (癡). Yu says that human state without this Three Poisons is human true-self (Cham-Na, 真我).

Self (我) means ego (自我) which has greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (癡) of the brute nature (獸性). Faith removes ego which is false-self. Therefore, we must become non-self (無我) without ego. When we become non-self (無我), we can remove our brute nature. The state without the brute nature is non-self (無我). […] When ego (自我), false-self, disappears true self (Cham-Na, 真我) is exposed. (1957)16

Buddhism’s non-self (無我) is one of important principles in Yu’s spiritual discipline as well as Confucian training body (修身). For Yu, there is no distinction between Jesus and Buddha. There is only spiritual concentration on the oneness (ha-na, 一) because the thing which is not one cannot be the absolute. If something is the truth or the absolute, it must be one (ha-na, 一). Therefore, for Yu, God and Nirvana must be One.

**Yu and Taoism**

In 1959 he translated Lao-tzu (老子)’s *Tao Te Ching* (道德經) into Korean. He also lectured on *Tao Te Ching* at YMCA. Yu identifies Lao-tzu’s Tao with Christian God as the ultimate reality as he identifies Buddhist Nirvana with it. Young-ho Park

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15 In Buddhism the Three Poisons (三毒) means three human agonies (煩惱) to hinder entering Nirvana (涅槃). Those three agonies (greed, anger, and ignorance) is also called the “Three Temptations (三惑)”.

16 “아(我)는 탐진치(貪瞋痴) 수성(獸性)을 지닌 제나(自我)를 말한다. 신앙이란 거짓나인 제나를 없애는 것이다. 그러므로 나(我)가 없는 무아(無我)가 되어야 한다. 무아(無我)가 되면 법타적인 것이 없어진다. 수성(獸性)이 없어지는 것이 무아(無我)이다. […] 거짓나인 제나(自我)가 없어질 때 참나가 드러난다.” (*Tasók Yu Yóng-mo ōrok*, 107.)
evaluates Yu’s translation is the best one among all Korean versions of *Tao Te Ching*, citing the sayings of Hang-yong Song, a professor at Sungkyunkwan University and a researcher of the Lao-Chuang philosophy (老將思想), and Yong-ock Kim, a professor of East Asian philosophy at Hanshin University. As we examine many writings of Korean theologians, philosophers, and historians who investigate Yu Yŏng-mo, it is true that the number of cases which relate Yu’s theology and spirituality with Taoism are relatively small, in a comparison to the relation of Yu and Buddhism, or Yu and Confucianism. However, if we think of Yu’s deep understanding of Lao-tzu’s philosophy, we can easily assume that Taoism also has a vital influence upon Yu’s theology and spirituality.

Young-ho Park sees that for Yu *Tao* (道) means the transcendent truth beyond the world. *Tao* is gained when we have a servant mind to serve the master without any desire for anything. If we want to truly find the truth we have to risk our life practicing the truth. In this sense, for Yu *Tao* means the true self (*Cham-Na*, 眞我). This is what Lao-tzu calls as “non-action (無為)”.

Yu, however, rejects the religious Taoism’s method of self-discipline to seek for “eternal life” or “immortality” (長生不死), aiming for being a Shin-seon (神仙, Taoist hermit who has miraculous and supernatural powers). Religious Taoism (道教) is the religion which originated from China and is different from *philosophical Taoism* (道家),

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17 See, Young-ho Park, *Tasǒk Yu Yŏng-mo: The Man of Truth, Vol. II*, 190. On December 2012 in Seoul, I had a chance to meet and interview Mr. Young-ho Park, who is a living disciple of Yŏng-mo Yu, through the introduction of Dr. In-sik Choi, who was my M.Div dissertation advisor. At that time Mr. Park also stressed on Yu’s deep and exceptional understanding of Lao-tzu’s philosophy.

18 See, Ibid., 192.
the study of the teaching of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. In a broad sense, the word “Taoism” includes both of these two terms; but in East Asia, they are always distinguished as a religion and a philosophy school. In Korean history, after religious Taoism (道敎) as the religion of the common people was introduced into Korea in the fourth century, it has been ingrained into people’s religious and cultural life. However, many scholars and intellects, especially in the Joseon Dynasty period, were more interested in philosophical Taoism (道家) than religious Taoism (道敎). Yu also uses philosophical Taoist concepts based on Lao-tzu’s teachings, which are a metaphysical philosophy and a cosmological theory, to build up his theology and spirituality as he rejects religious Taoism (道敎).

According to Young-ho Park, Yu believes that religious Taoism (道敎) has nothing to do with Lao-tzu’s teachings.

Seeking for eternal life (永生) or the life of a Taoist hermit with supernatural power (神仙) in the world means to destroy all teachings of Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism. [...] People wish to be a神仙 and to live eternal life (永生不死). People believe in Jesus only for the goal of eternal life. It is people’s greed for bodily (몸동이) eternal life. To wish not to burn within the fire and to eternally live (長生不死) in this world is not the life to seek for Tao (道). The only eternal and unchangeable thing is the spirit of truth.20

19 Yu often uses the term, “body” or “bodily” (몸, 몸뚱이) as the contrast term to “mind” or “spiritual” (정신, 영적인).

Accordingly, we can conclude that Yu’s theology and spirituality are deeply influenced by Lao-tzu’s teachings (道家), but his understanding of God has nothing to do with religious Taoism (道教).

Now, I will more concretely examine Yu’s important concepts of the ultimate reality in a relation to the East Asian thoughts.

God as Wu-chi (無極) and T'ai-chi (太極): Wu-chi is T'ai-chi (無極而太極)

In many of his writings, Yu identifies the ultimate reality as T'ai-chi (太極, the Great Ultimate) as below:

I want to talk about nothingness (無). From several decades ago, I have wanted to talk about it but it was hard for me to start. I mean to go to Ḍṣpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim. The Great means to reach to Ḍṣpshi-gyeshin (being as non-being). I mean to advance from T'ai-chi (太極, the Great Ultimate) toward Wu-chi, (無極, the Ultimateless). This is the conclusion of my philosophy. For that reason, I talks about T’a-chi t’u shuo (太極圖說, the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate). It is not a matter of whether Chou Lien-his (周濂溪)21, Jesus, Buddha, or whoever else wrote it. This is inside of me.22

Yu also says:

God is the absolute and One (一). Wu-chi is T’ai-chi (無極而太極), and there is only God. Being and non-being (有無), life and death (生死),

21 Another name of Chou Tun-i (周敦颐).”

22 “나는 없(無)을 말하고자 한다. 수십 년 전부터 내가 말하고 싶었는데 말머리가 맘대로 트이지 않았다. 나는 없이 계시는 하느님께로 가자는 것이다. 없이 계시는 데까지 가야 크다. 태극(太極)에서 무극(無極)에로 가자는 것이다. 이것이 내 철학의 결론이다. 그래서 내가 태극도설(太極圖說)을 말한 것이다. 이걸 주렴계가 썼거나 예수가 썼거나 석가가 썼거나 누가 썼던 문제가 안 된다. 이게 내 속에 있는 것이다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 73)
matter and mind (物心), past and present (古今), self and other (自他), up and down (上下), inside and outside (内外), good and bad (善悪), high and low (仰俯) are all relative. To decide right from wrong (是是非非) is a ghost that I made. There is neither right (是) or wrong (非). If we believe in God (絶對, the absolute) and are content, all problems disappear. The problem of right and wrong can be resolved when we reach the level of the Wise man (哲人); and the problem of knowing and unknowing can be solved when we find the One God (唯一神). When we stand in the absolute (絶對) we can overcome the relative (相對). We have to awaken in the absolute (絶對) instead of getting lost in the relative (相對). We have to realize our ignorance (無知). Even a lot of relative knowledge (相對知) is nothing compared to the absolute knowledge (絶對知). Therefore, to encounter and know the absolute, total, and one truth (God) is the utmostan urgent priority (急先務) in life. (1957)23

Here, “Wu-chi is T’ai-chi” (無極而太極) is the term that implies both of intangibleness and existence of the ultimate reality which is the ground of the whole cosmos. It is the concept which Chou Tun-i (周敦頤) firstly used in his T’a-chi t’u shuo (太極圖說, the Explanations of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate). In order to understand the ultimate reality as T’ai-chi and Wu-chi in Yu’s theology, we need to examine the theory of T’ai-chi and Wu-chi of Chou Tun-i and Chu Hsi, who are both Neo-Confucian scholars.

23 “하느님은 절대요 하나(一)이다. 무극이태극(無極而太極)이라 오직 하느님뿐이다. 유무(有無), 생사(生死), 물심(物心), 고금(古今), 자타(自他), 상하(上下), 내외(内外), 선악(善悪), 앙부(仰俯)가 모두 상대적이다. 시시비비(是非非) 따지는 것은 내가 지은 망령이요, 시(是)도 아니고 비(非)도 아니다. 하느님(絶對)을 믿고 만족하면 일체(一切)의 문제가 그치고 만다. 시비의 문제는 절대(絶對)의 경지에 가야 끝이 나고 알고 모르고는 유일신(唯一神)에 가야 넘어서게 된다. 절대(絶對)에 서야 상대(相對)는 끝어진다. 상대에 빠져 해매지 말고 절대에 깨나야 한다. 자기가 무지(無知)임을 알아야 한다. 아무리 상대지(相對知)가 많아도 절대지(絶對知)에 비하면 없는 것이나 마찬가지다. 그러면 절대요 전체요 하나인 진리(하느님)를 깨치는 것이 가장 급선무(急先務)이다.” (Tasôk Yu Yong-mo órok, 64-65.)
First of all, Chou Tun-i (1017-1073), considered as the pioneer of Neo-Confucianism, introduces Confucian metaphysics in his *T’a-chi t’u shuo*. According to Chou’s *T’a-chi t’u shuo*, *Wu-chi* is *T’ai-chi*; *T’ai-chi* produces *yang* (陽, the positive) through its movement (動); as the movement reaches its limit, it is followed by the quietness (靜); the quietness produces *yin* (陰, the negative); […] as *yang* transforms and unites with *yin*, water (水), fire (火), wood (木), metal (金), and earth (土) are produced; these five *ch’i* (氣, element or energy) smoothly spread and make the four seasons proceed in their course; the five elements (五行) are the one *yin* and *yang*; *yin* and *yang* are the one *T’ai-chi*; *T’ai-chi* is fundamentally *Wu-chi* […] 24. *T’ai-chi* (太極, the Great Ultimate) is the origin or ground of the two forms (陰 and 阳); and the two forms produces the five elements (五行) of the world. Chou Tun-i tries to introduce a new ontological understanding of *T’ai-chi*, which is understood as the origin and the principle of all beings (萬物), and explains the ontological order of being by relating *Wu-chi*, which is the term from *Lao-tzu* (老子), with *T’ai-chi*. That “*T’ai-chi* is fundamentally *Wu-chi*” seems to imply both the immanent and transcendent properties of the ultimate reality.

Chu Hsi (朱熹, 1130-1200) is known to have developed Chou Tun-i’s theory of *T’ai-chi*. Wing-Tsit Chan (陈荣捷) indicates that Chu His gave Neo-Confucianism a new meaning and influenced not only Chinese philosophy but also Korean and Japanese

24 無極而太極; 太極動而生陽; 動極而靜; 靜而生陰; […] 陽變陰合; 而生水火木金土; 五氣順布 四時行焉; 五行一陰陽也; 陰陽一太極也; 太極 本無極也 […] Also see, Yu-Lan Feng, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* vol. II, 435-437.
thoughts for centuries. Chu Hsi tries to explain *T’ai-chi* within his *Li-Ch’i* theory (*理氣論*). In the very first part of his *Chu Tzu Yulei* (*朱子語類*), Chu Hsi answers to his disciple’s question as follows:

**Question (問):** The Great Ultimate (*太極*) is not a thing existing in a chaotic state before the formation of heaven (*天*) and earth (*地*), but a general name for the principles of heaven and earth and the myriad things. Is that correct?

**Answer (曰):** The Great Ultimate is merely the principle (*li*, 理) of heaven and earth and the myriad things. With respect to heaven and earth, there is the Great Ultimate in them. With respect to the myriad things, there is the Great Ultimate in each and every one of them. Before heaven and earth existed, there was assuredly this principle. It is the principle that through movement (*動*) generates (*生*) the *yang* (*陽*). It is also this principle that through tranquility (*靜*) generates the *yin* (*陰*).  

The sentence “*T’ai-chi* (太極, the Great Ultimate) is merely *li* (理, the Principle)” means that *T’ai-chi* is not the physical object. According to Wing-Tsit Chan, the sentence means that each being has the Great Ultimate as the principle within it. While Chou Tun-i thinks that *T’ai-chi* involves movement (*動*) and quietness (*靜*), Chu Hsi thinks that *T’ai-chi* is only the principle of movement and quietness. In this sense, Wing-Tsit Chan points out that Chu Hsi’s theory of *T’ai-chi* lacks the explanation of how *T’ai-chi* produces *yin* and *yang* as the material forces if it is only the principle rather than material

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force. Chu Hsi does not seem to clearly define what *T’ai-chi* is as he simply says that *T’ai-chi* is merely *li*.

Yu Yamanoi criticizes that Chu Hsi’s philosophy has a tendency to focus on the *T’ai-chi* theory. According to Yamanoi, the concept of *T’ai-chi* is not an important factor in Chu Hsi’s *li-ch’i* theory (理氣論), and insists that *li* (理, principle) must be placed in the supreme position in Chu Hsi’s philosophy.29 Ryutaro Tomoeda, however, in “The System of Chu Hsi’s Philosophy”, asserts that Chu Hsi’s concept of *T’ai-chi* can be understood as the ultimate reality of Christian theology or western philosophy as we consider the logical structure and the ethical purposiveness of his *T’ai-chi* theory. Even though Tomoeda talks only about his religious experience to support his thought, he seems to point out *T’ai-chi*’s dual characters as the foundation and principle.30 As we examine Chu Hsi’s own writings about *T’ai-chi* we will see that it may be too excessive to say that Chu Hsi defines *T’ai-chi* as the ultimate reality, but it is also true that the concept of *T’ai-chi* supports *li*’s ontological perspective. In this sense, Chung-ying Cheng is correct when he defines *T’ai-chi* as “ontological *li*.”31

Han-sang Kim notices that Chu Hsi defines *T’ai-chi* as “standard *li*” or “the best *li*” among all principles, and Kim then concludes that *T’ai-chi* has a normative character

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28 See, Ibid.


beyond all phenomena (現像).\textsuperscript{32} Chu Hsi understands \textit{T’ai-chi} as the principle of the cosmos, and examines the relation of \textit{T’ai-chi} and all things (萬物). He tries to build up a new metaphysical structure within which he can define both humanity and nature. According to Han-sang Kim, \textit{T’ai-chi} in Chu Hsi’s thought is not the third concept that can be discussed outside of the \textit{li-ch’i} theory. \textit{T’ai-chi} is not a being (物) but a principle (\textit{li}, 理); but it is not a general name. \textit{T’ai-chi} as the order system of the world is within the world (天地), but at the same time \textit{T’ai-chi} exist “before”\textsuperscript{33} the world (理先氣後 \textsuperscript{34}). Even though this order is innately given to human and nature, it is also axiological order for the ideal of humanity. Accordingly, \textit{T’ai-chi} can be seen as not an empirical concept to be inductively gained but \textit{a priori} truth.\textsuperscript{35}

In the year when he completed \textit{The Commentary of T’ai-chi t’u shuo} (太極圖說解), Chu Hsi sent a letter to Yángzi zhí (楊子直), one of his disciples. In this letter, Chu Hsi explained about Chou Tun-i’s sayings, “\textit{Wu-chi} is \textit{T’ai-chi}” and “\textit{T’ai-chi} is fundamentally \textit{Wu-chi}” as follows:

[That \textit{Wu-chi} is \textit{T’ai-chi}, and \textit{T’ai-chi} is fundamentally \textit{Wu-chi}] does not mean that \textit{Wu-chi} (無極) produces \textit{T’ai-chi} (太極) or \textit{Wu-chi} exists before \textit{T’ai-chi}. And that “the five elements (五行) are \textit{yin} and \textit{yang} (陰陽), and \textit{yin} and \textit{yang} are \textit{T’ai-chi} does not mean that \textit{T’ai-chi}

\textsuperscript{32} Han-sang Kim, “The Concept of \textit{T’ai-chi} (太極) in Chu Hsi’s Thought,” \textit{Philosophical Discussion, Vol. 30.}, 100.

\textsuperscript{33} Here, “before” does not mean any time order, but an ontological order as we have seen in Neville’s creation theory.

\textsuperscript{34} 理先氣後 means that \textit{li} (理) exists “before” \textit{ch’i} (氣).

\textsuperscript{35} See, \textit{Ibid.}, 100-101.
produces yin and yang and the five elements or T’ai-chi exists before yin and yang and the five elements.36

In The Commentary of T’a-chi t’u shuo (太極圖說解) Chu Hsi also says:

The work of the heaven (上天) has no sound (聲) and no smell (臭), and therefore, it is truly the central axis (樞紐) of harmony (造化) [of all beings] and the ground (根底) of all kinds of things (品彙). For that reason, one said that Wu-chi (the Ultimateless) is T’ai-chi (the Great Ultimate), but this does not mean that there is Wu-chi which is a different reality from T’ai-chi.37

Here, Chu Hsi rejects the time order between T’ai-chi and yin-yang. T’ai-chi does not exist “before” all beings (萬物); but rather it exists together with all beings. In other words, T’ai-chi as the principle of all beings can be understood as a metaphysical reality which always is with or within all beings. The relationship between Wu-chi and T’ai-chi has two different characteristics as identical and differential. For Chu Hsi, Wu-chi does not exist as a different reality from T’ai-chi and vice versa. There is no differentiation between them, and they are identical to other. However, we cannot say that they are completely the same. Each of them corresponds to two sides of the primary principle of the world which are transcendence and existence.

Yu wants to find metaphysical reality in Confucianism of his time which seems to lack metaphysical ideas by paying attention to “Wu-chi is T’ai-chi (無極而太極).” Yu explains “Wu-chi is T’ai-chi” as follows:

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36 “然曰，‘無極而太極，太極本無極，’則非無極之後別生太極，而太極之上先有無極也。又曰，‘五行陰陽，陰陽太極，’則非太極之後別生二五，而二五之上先有太極也.” (朱子大全，答楊子直，卷45.)

37 “上天之載，無聲無臭，而實造化之樞紐，品彙之根底也，古曰無極而太極，非太極之外，復有無極也.” (太極圖說解, 近思錄, 1:1.)
The physical (形而下) thing is felt as the inherency (固有); and the void (虚空) of the eternal cosmos is felt as the futility (虛無). The total unity of these two is God. The futility is Wu-chi and the inherency is T’ai-chi. Wu-chi and T’ai-chi are one; and this one is God. (1957)38

Yu defines T’ai-chi as the inherent character of all beings and Wu-chi as the futility or the void. Yu’s own expression of “Wu-chi is T’ai-chi” is “Non-being (없음, 無) is Being (있음, 有).” Non-being (無) corresponds to the futility (虛無); and Being (有) corresponds to the inherency (固有). Yu continues to stress on the oneness of T’ai-chi:

T’ai-chi is One; and therefore it is not acceptable to say that One (一, 絕對) is divided into two because T’ai-chi produces yin and yang (陰陽 or 兩儀). [...] It is possible to say that yin and yang came from One (一), but it is impossible that T’ai-chi as the One is divided into two. Chaos (混沌) of the void is always the one T’ai-chi. Ever since people started to say that yin and yang are two, Confucianism started to deteriorate. It is to divide the head and body of T’ai-chi. How can T’ai-chi exist if its head and body are divided? (1956)39

In regard to the above statement, Jeong-hyun Youn interprets Yu’s understanding of T’ai-chi in terms of both the absolute and relative concept. According to Youn, Yu believes

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38 “형이하(形而下)의 물건은 고유(固有)한 것으로 확실하다고 느끼는 것과 무한우주의 허공을 허무(虛無)한 것으로 느끼는데 이 둘을 하나로 합친 전체가 하느님이시다. 허무는 무극(無極)이요 고유(固有)는 태극(太極)이다. 무극, 태극은 하나인데 하나가 하느님이시다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ārok, 66-67.)

39 “태극이 하나인데 태극이 음양(陰陽)인 양의(兩儀)를 낳았다고 하여 하나(絶對)가 둘로 나뉘졌다고 하면 이것을 무조건 인정해서는 안 된다. [...] 하나(一)에 음양이 나왔다고 하면 모르겠으나 하나인 태극이 음양인 둘로 나누어졌다면 말이 달라진다. 허공의 혼돈(宇宙)은 언제나 하나(絶對)인 태극인데 음양이 둘이다 하고 나온 데서부터 유교가 아주 병에 걸려 버렸다. 이것을 말하자면 이것은 태극의 머리와 몸을 잘라버린 것이 된다. 이래서야 어떻게 태극이 살 수 있는가?” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ārok, 436.)
that the ultimate reality appears as *Wu-chi* in the absolute concept, but as *T’ai-chi* in the relative concept. Yu understands *chi* (極, the Ultimate) as a limiting point which human cognitive faculty can reach. Therefore, in Yu’s system, *Wu-chi* means the ultimate reality beyond the limiting point; and *T’ai-chi* means the ultimate reality under the limiting point.⁴⁰

Yu’s view of the relation of *T’ai-chi* and *yin-yang* is very similar to Chu Hsi’s thought. Chu Hsi says:

*T’ai-chi* is the mystery of the primary principle (本然之妙) [as it harmonizes and transcends movement (動) and quietness (靜) of all beings]. Movement and quietness are a kind of vehicle (小乘之機); and *T’ai-chi* gets on it and reveal its activity. *T’ai-chi* is the metaphysical (形而上) *Tao* (道, principle), and *yin-yang* is the physical (形而下) object (器物). Therefore, as we see the exposed things movement and quietness cannot exist together at the same time (同時); and *yin* and *yang* cannot exist together at the same place (同位). However, *T’ai-chi* always exists within and between them [within and between *yin* and *yang*].⁴¹

For Chu Hsi, *T’ai-chi* as the mystery of the primary principle (本然之妙) is the reality that cannot be separated from *yin-yang* (the world of humanity and nature); but at the same time cannot become *yin-yang* itself. Yu believes that the reason why Chou Tun-i uses the concept of *Wu-chi* to explain *T’ai-chi* is to express the two ontological aspects of *T’ai-chi* as the ultimate reality. *Wu-chi* corresponds to the transcendent aspect of the ultimate reality; and *T’ai-chi* corresponds to its immanent aspect. Here, we can see Yu’s understanding of the ultimate that being (있음, 有) and non-being (없음, 無) coexist


⁴¹ 喬太極者本然之妙也, 動靜者所乘之機也. 太極形而上之道也, 陰陽形而下之器也. 是以自其著者而観之, 則動靜不同時, 陰陽不同位, 而太極無不在焉. (朱熹, 太極圖說解, “近思錄” 1:2)
within One. Only the totality including both of them can be the ultimate reality. In Yu’s system, therefore, Wu-chi and T’ai-chi is one reality.

Likewise, Yu borrows Chou Tun-i’s thought that Wu-chi is T’ai-chi (無極而太極) to define the ultimate reality as being co-existent of non-being and being, and furthermore, emphasizes that they are one. These ideas of “being as non-being” and “oneness” consist of Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality as 东营-gyeshin-Haneunim (God who exists as Non-Being). I think that Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality as “Wu-chi is T’ai-chi” challenges Korean Christianity to turn its attention from being (有) to non-being (無). Ki-sang Lee also highly values Yu’s searching for holiness and sanctity within nothingness and emptiness. Lee believes that Yu reminded us that darkness is bigger than brightness; nothing (無) is deeper than something (有); and non-being is more fundamental than being.42 Yu’s focusing on non-being (없음) is more clearly found in his Buddhist understanding of the ultimate reality.

God as Nothingness or Emptiness (虚空, Bintanghan-dae)

Buddhist thoughts affected Yu’s theology and spirituality as much as Confucianism did. Buddhism which originated from India was introduced to Korea in the fourth century through China. Buddhism that naturalized to the Korean culture and emersed with Confucianism has played important roles in Korean religious life, culture, and politics. Especially, the Koryeo Dynasty (高麗時代: 918-1392) deemed Buddhism

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as the national religion and fundamental policy of politics. However, in the Joseon Dynasty (朝鮮時代: 1392-1910), which was based on Neo-Confucian movement, Korean Buddhism started to have more religious and spiritual characters than cultural and political properties. Yŏng-mo Yu encountered Buddhist scriptures when his Christian faith started to change after experiencing the death of his younger brother Yŏng-mook; but it took quiet some time for Buddhism’s theories such as emptiness (空思想) and non-self (無我論) to become important themes of Yu’s theology and spirituality.

I read the Buddhist scriptures and Lao-tzu (Tao Te Ching) when I was about 20 years old. However, I did not appreciate nothingness (없, 無) and emptiness (빔, 空) back then. Nowadays, I became intimate with emptiness (空). Buddhism says we can reach bin-dae (빈데, empty place) by taking a major step out of extremities (百尺竿頭). As long as we are caught in extremities, we cannot go to emptiness. (1960) 43

Even though Buddhism was found by Buddha (釋迦), it does not worship Buddha as a god because Buddhism never understands the ultimate reality as personal. The ultimate reality in Buddhism is emptiness (sūnyatā, 空). The theory of sūnyatā (空思想) is one of the core doctrines in Mahāyāna Buddhism (大乘佛教) 44. Hans Waldenfels considers the doctrine of emptiness in Buddhism has a central role to understand

43 “나는 20살 전후에 불경과 노자(老予)를 읽었다. 그러나 없(無), 빗(空)을 줄길 줄은 몰랐다. 요새 왜서야 비로소 빗(空)과 친해졌다. 불교에서 백척간두(百尺竿頭)에서 진일보(進一步)해야 빈데 갈 수 있다고 한다. 백척간두에 매달려 있는 한 벌에 갈 수가 없다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo őrok, 220.)

44 It is one of the two major streams of Buddhist philosophies with Hīnayāna Buddhism (小乘佛教). Mahāyāna Buddhism tends to emphasize help for others (利他主義, altruism) while Hīnayāna Buddhism seeks to complete self-realization (自利, perfection of self).
Nāgārjuna’s view of the Middle Way (中道). Waldenfels quotes André Bareau’s analysis of the development of the doctrine of sūnyatā in Buddhism and asserts that Nāgārjuna’s understanding of sūnyatā means absolute nothingness or absolute emptiness rather than relative one.

According to Bareau, while in original Buddhism emptiness means empty of the self (dharma), in Mahāyāna Buddhism it means empty of all beings’ nature (svabhāva). “To take a classic Mahāyāna example: ancient Buddhism compared things to empty vessels, while Mahāyāna rejects the existence of the vessels themselves and thus arrives at a total absence of substance. Everything is empty, everything is dissolved in universal emptiness.” In Nāgārjuna’s understanding of sūnyatā, sūnyatā is pratītyasamutpāda (緣起, dependent arising). Nāgārjuna defines true reality (the ultimate reality) in Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (中論, Fundamental of the Middle Way) as follows:

When the domain of thought has been dissipated, “that which can be stated” is dissipated. Those things which are unoriginated and not terminated, like nirvana, constitute the true doctrine (dharmatā). Everything is “actual” (tathyam) or “not-actual,” or both “actual-and-not actual,”
Or “neither-actual-nor-not-actual”: This is the teaching of the Buddha. “Not caused by something else,” “peaceful,” “not elaborated by discursive thought,” “Indeterminate,” “undifferentiated”: such are the characteristics of true reality (tatttva) (18:9)

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45 Nāgārjuna (龍樹: about 150-250 CE) as one of the founders of Mahāyāna Buddhism is considered as the most important philosopher in Buddhism after Buddha.


47 Bareau, Der Indische Buddhismus, 153. (I recite it from Waldenfels, Absolute Nothingness, p. 18.)

48 Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, chapter xviii. 7-9. (Streng’s translation, Emptiness, 72.)
In a relation to Nāgārjuna’s understanding of true reality, Streng also indicates that sunya (empty) is beyond human expression, and it is the nature of the ultimate reality. He says, “emptiness is not used to designate a state of existence, but rather a condition which precludes a static ontological character.”49

In this sense, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki compares Buddhist understanding of the ultimate reality, which is nothingness or emptiness, with Meister Eckhart’s concept of “Godhead.” Suzuki explains Eckhart’s distinction between God and Godhead as below:

> Though he [Eckhart] often fails to make a clear distinction between the two […] With him God is still a something as long as there is any trace of movement or work or of doing something. When we come to the Godhead, we for the first time find that it is the unmoved, a nothing where there is no path (apada) to reach. It is absolute nothingness; therefore it is the ground of being from where all beings come.50

According to Suzuki’s analysis, Eckhart’s concept of Godhead is beyond psychological understanding of God because Eckhart wanted to know where our soul and all other beings come from. It is an ontological question, and he found that it is “pure nothingness” (ein bloss nicht).51 And Suzuki concludes that Eckhart’s notion of Godhead as pure nothingness is identical with the Buddhist doctrine of sūnyatā. These understandings of true reality as nirvana or Godhead as emptiness remind us of Neville’s understanding of the ultimate reality as indeterminate or Neo-Confucian concept of Wu-chi.

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49 Streng, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning, 72.

50 Suzuki, Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist, 15.

51 See, Ibid., 16-17.
Yu uses his own term, *Bintanghan-dae* (빈탕한데, 虚空, empty place)\(^{52}\) as the same meaning of the Buddhist term *sūnyatā* (空) to define the ultimate reality.\(^{53}\) For Yu, emptiness means ‘one’ reality which is beyond the world of phenomenon as the relative world, and enables all beings of the world to be. He believes that the fundamental basis of all beings is nothingness or emptiness (空); and in the end, all beings return and enter into emptiness.\(^{54}\) Yu also identifies *nirvana* with God. He says:

I do not find any difference between *Nirvana* in Buddhism and God. [Buddhism] is not to worship Buddhas such as Sakyamuni (釋迦牟尼), Amitabha (阿彌陀佛), Avalokitesvara Guan Yin (觀世音菩薩), Ksitigarbha (地藏菩薩). Everything is to finally return to *nirvana* as the only one truth (*Dharma*). To interpret or understand it in this or that way depends on people’s subject view. (1956)\(^{55}\)

Yu attempts to express God through the spatial image instead of the personalized image as he defines God as *Bintanghan-dae*. But this spatial image of God does not mean the actual physical spatiality, but such spcial image is an ontological symbol to describe the

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\(^{52}\) Here, the term “place” does not mean any physical space, but rather is used as an ontological symbol. Yu’s concept of *bintanghan-dae* reminds us the image of the endless sky, but truly means emptiness or void (空).

\(^{53}\) “We have to know that ‘*Bintanghan-dae* (빈탕한데, 虚空, emptiness or void)’ is God’s appearance. God’s inner life is ‘Eul (열, spirit)’. ‘*Bintanghan-dae*’ is the pure word into which I translate 虚空 (emptiness or void).” (1957) (Tasŏk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 54.)

\(^{54}\) See, Yǒng-mo Yu, *The Lectures of Tasŏk*, commented by Young-ho Park, 420.

\(^{55}\) “불교 역시 니르바나(Nirvana)님이 하느님하고 다른 것이 무엇인지 모르겠다. 석가모니, 아미타불, 관세음보살, 지장보살 등 많이 있는 봉다를 다 섞기는 것이 아니다. 마침내 단 하나 있는 진리 (Dharma)의 니르바나님에게 돌아가기 때문이다. 그것을 이리고 저리고 해석하는 것은 사람의 자기가 주(主)가 되어 여러 가지로 말이 나오게 되는 것이다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 49.)
ultimate reality which cannot be recognized by human senses. In this sense, Yu does not hesitate to describe the ultimate reality as *Wu-chi* or absolute emptiness. Emptiness or nothingness is an essential concept to consist of Yu’s understanding of ‘reality (實在)’ with the concept of oneness. “God is a non-existent one, only oneness. Therefore, he is God of *Bintanghan-dae* (void or emptiness) who exists as non-being.”56 As Yu understands *Bintanghan-dae* as the origin and the end of the world *Bintanghan* (empty) can be seen as a different expression of *Wu-chi* (無極) in Chou Tun-I’s “*Wu-chi is T’ai-chi*.”

Yu prefers to use absolute emptiness (絶對空) instead of emptiness (空) which is a general translation of *sūnyatā*. He says:

> I adore absolute emptiness (絶對空). After our death, there remains nothing. Only absolute emptiness (虛空) which has nothing can be the truth (眞, God). [...] Where can we find truth or existence without emptiness? Without emptiness, cosmos cannot exist. There is nothing that can exist without emptiness. Cosmos exists because emptiness exists. (1957)57

As he emphasizes absoluteness of emptiness, Yu seems to borrow his understanding of the ultimate reality as *sūnyatā* from Mahāyāna Buddhism’s concept of *sūnyatā*. For Yu, absolute emptiness or absolute nothingness (絶對無) means transcendence of the ultimate reality beyond the relative concept of being and non-being (有 and 無). Like “*Wu-chi is

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56 *Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok*, 215.

57 “ 아주 빈 절대공(絶對空, 하느님)을 사모한다. 우리가 죽으면 어떻게 되나 아무것도 없다. 아무것도 없는 절대의 허공이라야 참(眞, 하느님)이 될 수 있다. [...] 허공 없이 진실이고 실존이고 어디 있는가? 허공이 없으면 우주도 존재할 수 없다. 허공 없이 존재할 수 있는 것은 없다. 우주는 허공이 있기 때문에 존재하는 것이다.” (*Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok*, 57-58.)
"T'ai-chi," (無極而太極) the ultimate reality as Bintanghan-dae transcends and integrates both of being and non-being. In this sense, Yu agrees with the Buddhism’s teaching, “thing is nothing; and nothing is thing (色卽是空 空卽是色”).

The passage, “thing is nothing; and nothing is thing” is from Prajñāpāramitā (般若心經, The Perfection of Wisdom). Prajñāpāramitā is the essential teaching and practice of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Yu recognizes the importance of Prajñāpāramitā as the basis to understand whole Buddhism as a whole. Prajñāpāramitā teaches that being and non-being are not different but identical from each other:

Thing is not different from nothing (色不異空); nothing is not different from thing (空不異色); thing is nothing (色卽是空); nothing is thing (空卽是色); feeling, thought, will and consciousness are also like that.

<\textit{Prajñāpāramitā}>

Here, thing (色) can also be interpreted as matter or being; and nothing (空) as void or non-being. In a relation to this passage, Yu says as follows:

Because we do not realize [the truth], nothing (空) and thing (物) seem different from each other; but if we realize it they may be same. The saying, “thing is nothing; and nothing is thing (色卽是空 空卽是色),” may be true. (1960)

In this passage, the only condition that is required to know that nothing and thing are not different but same is the “realization” of the truth or the ultimate reality. This realization

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58 Yu says, “if we know Prajñāpāramitā in detail we can understand whole Buddhism. Anyone who thinks of eternal life must know Prajñāpāramitā clearly.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo örok, 427.)

59 “우리가 깨치지 못했으니 공(空)과 물(物)이 다른 것 같지만 깨치면 같을지 모른다. 색즉시공 공즉시색(色卽是空 空卽是色)이 사실일지도 모른다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo örok, 426.)
is Vimutti (解脱, free from suffering) in Buddhism and attaining Tao (得道) in Confucianism and Taoism. Yu believes that this realization occurs in human soul or heart, so that he understands the ultimate reality as absolute nothingness in relation to the human heart and mind.

As he defines the ultimate reality as emptiness, Yu declares that emptiness is human maeum ( 마음, heart or mind). That maeum and emptiness are one means that we must make our heart and mind empty. “To know that maeum (heart or mind) and Bintang (빈탕, empty) are one is the truth (참). We must return to emptiness (虚空). We do not realize this because our hearts are not calm if our heart cools down it becomes one with emptiness.”60 Because for Yu, the ultimate reality is emptiness and emptiness must be our maeum, God must be found in our heart and mind rather than outside of us.61 Emptiness is the original status of human maeum; and empty (虚) means holy. Therefore, for Yu, emptiness means the holy status of human mind and heart through the union with God.62 Emptiness of human heart naturally reminds us of the Buddhist concept of non-ego (無我). In Buddhism, non-ego is the human inner status without egoism. Yu declares that only when we reach the status of non-ego we can exist as true-self (참나,

60 “ 마음하고 빈탕이 하나라고 아는 게 참이다. 허공에 가야 한다. 마음이 식지 않아 모르지 마음이 식으면 허공과 하나가 된다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 219.)

61 Jeong-sook Oh points out that Yu’s identification between human heart and the ultimate reality is affected by one of Buddhist teachings, “heart is Buddha (心卽是佛)”. (Oh, Korean Christianity of Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo, 113.)

62 Yu says: “Empty (虚) means nothing but extremely holy. What is holy must be empty.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 218.)
眞我; and God exists within it. In Buddhism, this true-self (眞我), of course, is the nature of Buddha (佛性); and Yu identifies it with the ultimate reality. To say that emptiness (虚空) of heart is true-self means to admit that God is the root of our self. Yu says:

God is my true-self (참나, 眞我). We have to know that because self exists, God exists. For self is a shadow of true-self. Without true-self, our self cannot exist. In reality, however, we are captured by ego (제나, 自我) which is the false-self and think that God as true-self is far from us. (1960)

We will discuss the true-self and ego (眞我 and 自我) in more detail in the following chapter that deals with Yu’s spirituality.

In short, Yu borrows the concept of nothingness or emptiness from the Buddhist theory of sūnyatā (空思想), and tries to explain the characteristics of the ultimate reality that transcends both of being and non-being, and integrates one another. Therefore, he uses the term “absolute nothingness” or “absolute emptiness” (絶對空) in order to distinguish it from relative nothingness (相對空). Yu’s Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim can be understood as the ultimate reality that is Wu-chi and T’ai-chi, and absolute nothingness that transcends and integrates being and non-being.

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63 See, Oh, Korean Christianity of Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo, 115.

64 “하느님은 종당엔 나의 참나(眞我)다. 나가 있으니 하느님도 계시다는 생각을 해야 한다. 나는 참나의 그림자와 같기 때문이다. 참나가 없으면 이 나가 있을 수 없다. 그런데 우리는 거짓나인 제나(自我)에 사로잡혀 큰나오 참나인 하느님을 멀게 생각한다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo ōrok, 71.)
God as One or Tao

One (ha-na, 一) or oneness is one of the more significant concepts for Yu to understand the ultimate reality. Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality as One is deeply rooted in Lao-tzu’s Taoist thought (老子哲学). When he was twenty, Yu started to read Tao Te Ching (道德经), the main scripture of Taoism (道教), as well as Buddhist scriptures; and in 1959, when he was sixty nine, Yu translated Tao Te Ching into Korean. While Tao (道) in Confucianism is a human ethical doctrine related to human value issues, Tao in Lao-tzu’s philosophy is used as an ontological and cosmological principle. Before examining Yu’s understanding the ultimate reality as One or Tao, I will discuss what Tao is in Lao-tzu’s Tao Te Ching.

Lao-tzu’s understanding of Tao

Lao-tzu also wanted to establish ethical norms as Confucians did; but he tried to establish the basis of ethical norms – Tao – not on humanity and society but on the cosmos. Lao-tzu’s Tao as the cosmological origin of all beings can be understood as the absolute one beyond human knowledge and ethics. Chapter 1 of Tao Te Ching displays Tao’s characters very well:

The Tao that can be spoken of is not the true Tao; (道可道非常道)
The name that can be named is not the true name. (名可名非常名)
The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; (無名天地之始)
The named is the mother of all things. (有名萬物之母)
Therefore, the subtleties of Tao are always apprehended through non-being, (故常無欲以觀其妙)
The limits of things are always seen through being. (常有欲以觀其徼)
These two (the form and the formless) have the same source but different names. (此兩者同出而異名)
Both of them can be called deep and profound, (同謂之玄)
The deepest and the most profound, the door of all mysteries. (玄之又玄
眾妙之問)

<Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1.>65

Here, “the nameless (無名)” means Tao’s character of non-being; and “the named
(有名)” means its character of being. Lao-tzu declares that non-being of Tao and being
of Tao are not independent realities; but rather, they are only different names of one Tao.
It implies Tao as the origin or mother of all beings is both non-being and being, or neither
non-being or being. Tao’s unnamable and non-existent character is more explained in
Chapter 14:

You look at it, but it cannot be seen; it is called the Formless.
(視之不見 名曰夷)
You listen to it, but it cannot be heard; it is called the Soundless.
(聽之不聞 名曰希)
You grasp it; but it cannot be caught; it is called the Incorporeal.
(搏之不得 名曰微)
Because these three attributes cannot be thought [independently];
(此三者 不可致詰)
They must be One. (故混而為一)
Its upper side is not bright, and its underside is not dark;
(其上不朙 基下不昧)
Because it is infinite and boundless, and then it cannot be named;
(繩繩不可名)
It returns to non-being. (復歸於無物)
[Therefore], it is called the shapeless shape. (是謂無狀之狀)
Because it is the shapeless shape it is called the vague.
(無物之狀 是謂恍惚)
Even though you face it you cannot see its head; (迎之不見其首)
Even though you follow it you cannot see its back. (隨之不見其後)
If you control [or understand] beings at present by holding on to the
ancient Tao; (執古之道 以御今之有)
You can know the origin [of all beings], which is the essence of Tao.
(能知古始 是謂道紀)

65 I retranslated Tao Te Ching’s Chinese text based on the translation of He Guanghu, Gao
Shining, Song Lidao and Xu Junyao. (See, A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi, 15.)
In the above passage, Lao-tzu defines Tao’s characters as formless (夷), soundless (希), and incorporeal (微). Tao which has these attributes cannot be named, and therefore it is called the shapeless shape. The name of Tao, “the shapeless shape (無狀之狀).” reminds us of Yu’s name of God “Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim (God who exists as Non-Being).”

For Lao-tzu, Tao, which transcends being and non-being, and is the origin of all beings of the cosmos, is even prior to God who rules the whole cosmos (象帝).67

It is vague whether Lao-tzu implies a real time-order or an ontological order when he says that Tao is prior to God, but we can discover a certain similarity between Lao-tzu’s understanding of Tao and Neville’s understanding of God. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Neville suggests an ontological order between the indeterminate God, which we cannot know or talk about, and God as the creator, which is determinate to the created world. Lao-tzu, in Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42, states clearly that Tao is the origin of the creator. “Tao gives birth to the One; the One gives birth to the Two; the Two gives birth to the Three; and the Three gives birth to all beings.”68

According to Youn’s explanation, the One means ch’i (氣); the Two means yin and yang (陰陽); and the Three means Heaven (天), Earth (地), and Humanity (人).

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66 In order to translate this passage I referred to Youn Jeong-hyun’s translation as well as the translation of He Guanghu, Gao Shining, Song Lidao and Xu Junyao. (See, Youn, The Non-Existent Existing God, 421.; and A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi, 28.)

67 “[…] I do not know whose child it [Tao] is. But it may be prior to God who is ruling the whole cosmos.” (吾不知誰之子, 象帝之先.) (Tao Te Ching, chapter 4.)

68 “道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生萬物.” (Tao Te Ching, chapter 42.) I retranslated it based on A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi. (A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi, 62.)
Such explanation means that all beings including principles and concepts are productions of Tao. In this sense, Lao-tzu’s Tao can be seen as the indeterminate God because it is unnamable and cannot be reached by determinate beings including human beings (迎之不見其首, 隨之不見其後); yet at the same time, it can be seen as the creator of the world because it is the mother (母) of all beings (萬物). These Tao’s self-contradictory characters are the very characteristics in the East Asian philosophy as we have observed in the saying, “Wu-chi is T’ai-chi.”\(^69\) In Lao-tzu’s Taoist thought, the ultimate reality as Tao is beyond human knowledge and experience, but at the same time it can be experienced through mystical or spiritual ways.

Lao-tzu asserts that we have to return to the principle of Tao, the origin of all beings and the order of nature, in order to solve all problems in human society and culture. The way to return to or recover Tao, according to Lao-tzu, is “letting nature be without action (無為自然)”. “Without action” or “non-action” (無為) does not mean to live an idle life. Lao-tzu explains non-action (無為) in chapter 37:

_Tao_ invariably does nothing, and yet there is nothing left undone. (道常無為而無不為)
If kings and princes can preserve it, all things will be harmonized naturally and spontaneously. (侯王若能守之萬物將自化)
If someone tries to make them to do artificially, I will knock down him or her with the nameless log. (化而欲作 吾將鎭之以無名之樸)

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\(^69\) Lao-tzu also confirms Tao’s these characters in _Tao Te Ching_ , chapter 25 as follows: “There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before Heaven and Earth. Soundless and formless, it depends upon nothing external, operating in a circular motion ceaselessly. It may be considered the root (Mother) of all beings under Heaven. I do not know its name, and call it Tao. Inadequately giving it another name, I call it the Great. […]” (有物混成，先天地生。寂兮寥兮，獨立不改，周行而不殆，可以為天下母。吾不知其名，字之曰道，強為之名曰大.) ( _Tao Te Ching, chapter 25. A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi, p. 41._)
The nameless log does not have any desire. (無名之樸 夫亦將無欲)
Without any desire and being quiet, the world under Heaven will
naturally find its equilibrium. (不欲以靜 天下將自定)
<Tao Te Ching, Chapter 37.>70

“The nameless log (無名之樸)” symbolizes Tao. Tao is not only the origin or mother of all beings, but also the power to make all beings to be naturally and spontaneously harmonized (萬物將自化). Therefore, in Lao-tzu’s understanding, Tao is the creator of the world who not only created the world, but is also sustaining all created beings to be harmonized. Furthermore, Tao is the goal which all beings must return to in order to overcome all problems and difficulties in human life.

The ultimate reality as the One or Tao

We can easily find Lao-tzu’s Taoism’s influence in Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality. For example, Yu explains the relationship between God and the world as follows:

God is ruling the natural world (自然界), but is invisible. God is working; but without appearing, he makes things to be naturally and spontaneously. God is not what we think of or expect. God does not reveal its reality within things that we can hear and know. We cannot assert who God is. It is the reason why all lives and all people place God above their head. If there is something for us to regard as the absolute ideal (理想) and worship, it is nothing but God. (1957)71

70 I retranslated the Chinese text based on A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi. (See, A Taoist Classic The Book of Laozi, 55.)

71 “하느님은 자연계(自然界)를 다스리는데 보이지 않는다. 하느님은 일을 하시지만
통히 나타나지 않고 저절로 되게 하신다. 하느님은 우리가 생각하고 있는 대로 우리가 높이 받드는 대로 그렇게 계신 분이 아니다. 우리가 듣고 알 만한 일에 그의 존재를 나타내시지 않는다. 하느님이 어떠한 분이라는 것은 결코 단언할 수 없다. 그래서 하느님은 모든 생명과 모든 사람이 머리 위로 받들어 이어야 할 분이시다. 우리가 절대 이상(理想)으로
According to the above passage, the God who Yu explains is very similar to Tao Lao-tzu describes. For Yu, God, like Tao, is the origin or the creator of all beings (萬物) and is understood as the inner activity to fulfill and control all phenomena of the world without revealing itself. This Tao’s transcendence, which cannot be reached by human knowledge and language, is interpreted as the absolute oneness in Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality. Yu uses One (ha-na, 一) as the same meaning as Tao and God:

We cannot help but conclude that our being originates from One (一, the absolute, the whole, God), and finally returns to One. And we have a compulsive desire to do so. Mentally sound and healthy people have this compulsive need. All great thinkers sought for, believed in, and talked about this One (一). To say that saints (聖人) or Buddha realized Tao (道), achieved Tao, or gained Tao means to know One (the absolute). (1957)72

For Yu, Tao is the absolute one truth, and as such, he defines the ultimate reality as “non-existent One, only One (無一唯一)”73. Yu makes sure that his understanding of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim is identical with the formless, soundless, and incorporeal Tao, which is the origin and destination of all beings. Yu’s understanding of

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72 “우리는 하나(一, 絕對, 全體, 하느님)로 시작해서 마침내 하나(一)로 돌아간다는 생각을 여러 번 없이 하게 된다. 또 그렇게 되어야 하겠다는 강박한 요구가 우리에게 있다. 이러한 강박관념은 마음이 신경증에 걸린 사람보다도 건전한 사람이 앞선다. 대중교인이나 대사상가는 모두가 이 하나(一)를 찾고, 믿고, 말했다. 성인(聖人)이나 뭅다 (Buddha)가 도(道)를 깨달았다. 도를 이루었다. 도를 얻었다는 것은 다 하나(絶對)를 안다는 말이다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok, 60-61.)

73 “God is ‘non-existent One, only One’ (無一唯一). Therefore, it exists as non-being, and is God of Bintanghan-dae (虛空). Only non-existent One (無一) is only One (唯一).” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok, 215.)
Tao as the absolute One, like the absolute nothingness, also transcends the differentiation between being and non-being; and harmonizes both of them in itself.

One majority in using Tao or the absolute One instead of other concepts to define the ultimate reality is the more practical aspects of Tao. As a representative example, his teaching of “returning to One (歸一)”74, which is the core of Yu’s spiritual life and teaching, is deeply based on the theory of Tao as the origin and final destination of all beings including human beings. Yu’s theory of “returning to the One (歸一思想)” is expressed as follows:

We are to return to the top (or the best). It is to return to the origin (元). It is to return to the One (歸一). We return where we come out from. It is to come back to the beginning (回初). (1956)75

The theory of “returning to the One” is Yu’s spiritual teaching and the foundation of his spiritual life; and it is very similar to Lao-tzu’s theory of Tao. As Lao-tzu tries to build the ethical ways to overcome or solve all problems in human society through Tao which is the ontological origin and principle, Yu also emphasizes on seeking for Tao as the absolute One in order to overcome many problems and difficulties in the relative world, and reach the absolute world. Therefore, Yu symbolizes all the relative things in the world as the Two in a contrary to the absolute One. He says:

Human beings must seek for One (the whole, the absolute). For Jesus to seek for the Father means to seek for One. Do not fall in the Two (relative one), but find and gain One (一, the whole). God as the oneness

74 We will discuss more in detail about the theory of “returning to One” in the next chapter.

75 Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo őrok, 49.
cannot be known conceptually, but rather must be practiced by the realization of experience. (1957)76

Here, Yu asserts the importance of spiritual realization77 through personal experience in order to find the whole, absolute truth. Yu’s emphasis on spiritual and inner experience of the ultimate reality is related his understanding of God as Tao because for Yu, God is not only transcendent like the formless, soundless, and incorporeal Tao, but also immanent like the inner power to make all beings to be harmonized naturally and spontaneously. In this sense, Yu’s statement that all lives and all people must place God above their heads, and pursue it corresponds to Lao-tzu’s saying, “Man has the way of Earth as the norm, Earth has the way of Heaven as the norm, Heaven has the way of Tao as the norm, Tao has the way of itself as the norm.”78

In short, Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality as Tao is expressed the absolute One. It has an ontological meaning as the origin of all beings and as the inner power within the natural world to make all beings to be harmonized, and also has a very practical meaning as the norm or law for all beings to seek for and follow. Especially, Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality as One (一) or Tao (道) plays an important role to build up his spiritual life and teaching.

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As we have discussed above, Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality and the world be summarized as the synthetic result of the thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. One of the major characteristics of Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality is that he uses the concept of nothingness or emptiness from the East Asian perspective to define it. Yu defines the ultimate reality as the absolute nothingness which is from the Buddhist concept of sūnyatā; and this absolute nothingness is also understood as the absolute One which is identical with Tao in Lao-tzu’s philosophy. Jin-hui Kim also indicates that Yu’s concept of nothingness is very similar to the concept of Tao, which is the origin of all beings, and the destination within the circulating movement of the cosmos. In this sense, Yu’s understanding of nothingness from the East Asian perspective is quite different from the traditional western philosophical understanding of nothingness, which is just the opposite meaning of being. Kim, however, points out that nothingness in Yu’s theology does not exactly correspond with Tao even though there are lots of similarities between the two. Because nothingness is the concept to represent the transcendence and soleness of the ultimate reality, it cannot be replaced by the concept of Tao, which is dwelling within and with nature even though it seems transcendent as the nameless and incorporeal reality. Tao can be thought in relation to the immanence of the ultimate reality rather than the transcendence. In this sense, Kim concludes that Yu’s concept of nothingness has a good understanding with the negative theology of Apophatic tradition, pointing out Yu’s emphasis on the unknowable and invisible God, in spite of his acceptance of many Taoist expressions.79

Neville asserts that as long as *Tao* is the origin of all beings, it cannot be thought as indeterminate, and therefore, *Tao* is determinate because it is related to determinate beings. For that reason, Jin-hui Kim’s idea is right, thinking that Yu’s understanding of God as *Tao* can express only the immanent aspect of the ultimate reality. On the other hand, Chou Tun-i’s concept of *Wu-chi* (無極) and *T’ai-chi* (太極) seems appropriate to represent Yu’s absolute nothingness. *Wu-chi* is not a different reality from *T’ai-chi*, but while *T’ai-chi* is related to the determinate world *Wu-chi*, which is indeterminate, represents the transcendence of the ultimate reality. In other words, there is the ontological order or difference between *Wu-chi* and *T’ai-chi* as we have seen in Neville’s theory of the ultimate reality as the creator. Even though Yu does not seem to clearly define this ontological order between the indeterminate and the determinate as he develops the concept of *Ŏpski-gyeshin-Haneunim*, Yu tries to grasp both of the transcendence and the immanence of the ultimate reality the East Asian concepts such as *Wu-chi*, *T’ai-chi*, *sūnyatā*, and *Tao*.

Needless to say Yu’s unique understanding of God, which was established by means of the East Asian traditional thoughts (儒, 佛, 道) had a deep influenced on his spirituality. Interesting is that Yu’s spirituality developed on the basis of the extreme dualistic perspective, that is, the distinct separation between the body and the soul, which is thought as the West philosophical tradition. Even though Buddhism suggests asceticism to be free from the bodily existence, it is true that the East Asian traditional thoughts generally do not have a distinct division between human being’s body and spirit; but rather, understand them as the whole being. For examples, Confucianism generally stresses to straighten out the bodily behaviors as well as to train spirit; and Taoism
teaches the union and communion with nature. We will discuss how Yu’s understanding of the ultimate reality – the mixture of Christian and the traditional East Asian thoughts – and his spirituality interact with one another in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

Yu Yong-mo’s spirituality:

The relationship between theology and spirituality

My goal of this chapter is to examine how Yu’s theological understanding of the ultimate reality is related to his spirituality. Before I discuss Yu’s spirituality, we need to define what spirituality is; and examine several significant ideas of the general relationship between theology and spirituality. Korean Protestantism has dealt with the term “spirituality” or “Christian spirituality” vaguely both in the academic and the practical fields. In my personal experience, the theology taught in most Korean denominational seminaries is very conservative, and the seminaries usually do not allow much room for free and constructive discussion on the development of theology. The most significant characteristic of Korean denominational Protestant theology is that it defines God as the “personal God” which can directly communicates with human beings in some ways.

On the other hand, until very recently spirituality has been discussed only in relation to hands-on spiritual training such as meditational prayer in Korean denominational seminaries. While Christian spirituality has been studied as an independent academic discipline in the West, in Korean Reformed Christianity spirituality has been understood as spiritual training or specific activity programs administered for the numerical growth of a church even though there are many other traditions and practices outside of the church – traditions and practices based on Confucianism or Buddhism. It was not until very recently that spirituality started to be
recognized as an academic discipline in Korean seminaries. Even though nowadays much research is conducted in the academic field of spirituality in Korea, in practice, the concept of spirituality is vaguely defined in individual or communal Christian life.

Korean Reformed Christianity distinguishes the spiritual things from the secular things based on the Biblical teachings. Such tendency stems from the influence of the Protestant spirit, “returning to the Bible”, but it can also be found in the Korean traditional culture that emphasizes the importance of the scriptures of Confucianism and Buddhism. *Ki-bok* ($祈福$) tradition$^1$ is rooted in the ancient Korean shamanism which only focuses on transient fortunes and blessings. As such, most Korean Christians think that prayers of their individual problems that are answered and/or solved are more spiritual or better in all aspects of spirituality than prayers that are not answered (the way they have prayed) even though that praying person may have won a peace of mind rather than getting what he/she sought for. Korean Protestant theology has developed with these traits of spirituality emphasizing the Bible, personal experience, and worldly, transient blessing. Accordingly, Orthodoxy theologies based on the biblical source and theologies of God as personal, who can bless believers in both of this world and the next, have been the main theologies in Korean Reformed Christianity. If a theology talks about something beyond the Bible or defines God as something different from God as personal, it is judged as heretic or other religious theories or often just ignored.

Korean spirituality under the conservative Korean theological perspective has been considered as one of the necessary conditions that theology must embody. However,

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$^1$ *Ki-bok* ($祈福$) faith or *Ki-bok* tradition literally means to “seek for” ($祈$) “good fortune” ($福$).
the academic field of the Korean Reformed Christianity has refused spirituality until very recently labelling it as a nonacademic and a very limited concept, characterizing spirituality as relating only to subjective and relative interpretations of the Christians’ personal or communal experience. As such, examining the relationship between Yu’s theological understanding of God and his spirituality on the basis of Korean Protestant understanding of theology and spirituality under these premises may be meaningless. Defining the general meaning of spirituality and the general relationship between spirituality and theology based on modern spirituality scholars’ views is more helpful in understanding Yu’s concept of God and his spirituality.

Definition and Methodology of Spirituality

General understanding of spirituality

Walter Principe, in “Toward Defining Spirituality,” distinguishes three different levels to define spirituality. The first is the existential level, which is “the lived quality of a person. The spirituality of this level means the way certain people understand and live a specific religious or transcendent ideal within their historical context.” The second level of spirituality is “the formulation of a teaching about the lived reality” which is influenced by outstanding spiritual persons. Principe says, “Sometimes the way of life and example of such a person becomes a pattern for others; sometimes it is the writings of a person judged to be gifted in providing insight or guidance that furnishes the

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doctrine."³ These doctrines can develop in more formal theological presentations or in more practical works for spiritual growth.⁴ The third level of spirituality is “the study of the first and the second levels of spirituality.” The spirituality of this level means a discipline using many methods and resources of other disciplines, and it can be either the study of various doctrines (the second level) or the analysis of different practices (the first level).⁵

Wolfteich indicates that many contemporary scholars in the field of spirituality are convinced that there is an interrelationship between spirituality and theology, yet they keep trying to define spirituality as a distinct discipline. While spirituality is an interdisciplinary field of study, and as such is related to many other disciplines, it is not subordinated to any specific discipline.⁶ To define Christian spirituality in a simple sentence is not an easy task because the term “spirituality” implies many different concepts. Bernard McGinn, in the Introduction of Christian Spirituality I, defines spirituality two ways:

What is contained in this and the subsequent volumes is obviously not Christian spirituality in the first instance, the actual lived experience itself, but reflection upon the historical manifestations of this experience, that is, Christian spirituality as a discipline. The academic discipline of Christian spirituality is a rather new one that does not, as yet, have a commonly accepted niche or definition.⁷

³ Ibid., 48.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., 49.
McGinn defines spirituality as lived experience and as reflections on that experience. First of all, spirituality is deeply related to our personal experience rather than any other theory or system.

In *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God*, Philip Sheldrake points out that the roots of contemporary spirituality can be found in today’s postmodern trend that emphasizes our personal experience. According to Sheldrake, postmodernism enables us to liberate religions from notions or doctrines purely on the basis of rational grounds while modernism generally reduces our reality to the rational area. Postmodernism is contextual, and it can easily understand the distinctive ideas of particular and different religious traditions. Therefore, postmodernity can make Christian spirituality to be itself in a different way from modernity. He asserts that postmodernism defends the particularity and difference of all people in different contexts “by resisting attempts to reduce events or people to mere instances of some overarching theory” Postmodernism’s emphasis on context leads us to concentrate on human experience. Secondly, however, talking about raw experience without relating the experience with our interpretation of or reflection on such experience is impossible or meaningless if such discussion is possible.

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9 Ibid., 12.

10 For instance, David Lonsdale indicates that even Scripture and the Christian tradition are understood as “a record of a community’s experience of God” and reflections on that experience. (David Lonsdale, “Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Toward a Theology of Spiritual Direction,” *The Way*, October 1992, 317.)
In the sense that we understand spirituality as various reflections on existential and concrete human experience, Sandra Schneiders gives us good insight in defining spirituality. Schneiders suggests, as many other scholars point out, that we must examine the formal object and the major methods of spirituality as an academic discipline in order to define spirituality. The formal object of a certain academic discipline defines its true nature and shape. Schneiders tries to define the phenomenon of spirituality as follows:

[… ] Spirituality refers to the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.  

However, she also indicates that there cannot be a definition of generic spirituality or spirituality in general. She says:

Every spirituality is necessarily historically concrete and therefore involves some thematically explicit commitments, some actual and distinct symbol system, some traditional language, in short, a theoretical-linguistic framework which is integral to it and without which it cannot be meaningfully discussed at all.

Therefore, according to Shneiders, we have to communicate with others who have very different world views while we try to integrate self-transcendence with the ultimacy.

Schneiders’ definition of spirituality has several important features. Firstly, this definition is very anthropological because it focuses on the human dimension of spirit by which human beings transcend themselves. Secondly, the nature of the object toward which human beings transcend is not clearly defined, and therefore it can be anything insofar as it is perceived by someone as the ultimate. In this sense, spirituality can be

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11 Sandra Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?”, *Horizons* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1986), 266.

12 Ibid., 267.

13 Ibid.
Thirdly, spirituality mainly refers to particular human experience, and therefore the particular type of experience of the ultimate is found in a particular group or community. She also indicates that as a formal discipline, spirituality’s methodological style is very participative, so that spirituality is similar to psychology because real participation and rational understanding intertwine in both disciplines.

Schneiders also tries to examine several characteristics of spirituality as the academic discipline, and by doing that, she intends to distinguish spirituality from other related disciplines. Firstly, according to Schneiders, spirituality is intrinsically an interdisciplinary discipline because the lived human experience, which the formal object of the discipline of spirituality, is multi-faceted. In that sense, Christian spirituality must include at least theology, biblical studies, study of comparative religion, and psychology in a relation to its subject matter.

Secondly, spirituality is an analytical and/or critical discipline rather than normative discipline. Christian theology in most cases applies absolute principles or norms, which are derived from experience of revelation and Christian traditions to the

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14 “If the ultimate value is the Transcendent itself, the Deity, the spirituality is explicitly religious. But the avoidance of specifically religious language in many discussions of spirituality is an attempt to recognize that there are people whose lives are lived consciously within the horizon of ultimate concern but who do not recognize that ultimate value as God.” (Ibid., 266-267.)

15 “The term spirituality, like the term psychology, is unavoidably ambiguous, referring to (1) a fundamental dimension of the human being, (2) the lived experience which actualizes that dimension, and (3) the academic discipline which studies that experience.” (Schneiders, “Spirituality in the Academy,” Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays, edited by Bradley C. Hanson, 17.)

Christian life. However, spirituality tries to understand Christian experiences as they are. Even though scholars of spirituality also evaluate or judge human experiences by using certain norms and principles which are derived from various related disciplines including Christian theology, they do not apply those principles or norms to human experiences but rather they criticize such experiences.17

Thirdly, spirituality is intrinsically an ecumenical and multi-cultural discipline. In relation to this ecumenical or pluralistic character of spirituality, Ewert H. Cousins proposes a definition of spirituality which is similar to Schneiders’ understanding. While Schneiders sees that spirituality can be religious or non-religious, for Cousins, spirituality is considered only as religious because he believes that spirituality is concerned “with the experiential, with the inner – but not apart from the outer – with the real, the transcendent, the divine.”18 Cousins asserts that spirituality must be understood within a global context, and therefore Christian spirituality must be examined in relation to other spiritual traditions in different contexts in order to say it is true.19 This anthropological understanding of spirituality has very inclusive and universal meaning because if we follow Schneiders’ and Cousins’ understanding of spirituality, spirituality can be valid within different contexts of the world.

17 Schneiders says: “spirituality studies not principles to be applied nor general classes or typical cases but concrete individuals; persons, works, events.” (Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” 268.)


19 Ibid., 44.
On the basis of these characteristics of spirituality, McGinn introduces in “The Letter and the Spirit” three approaches to the study of spirituality. Those are the anthropological, the historical-contextual, and theological approaches. Claire Wolfteich also considers in “Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology” these three approaches as the prominent approaches to the study of spirituality.20

Firstly, the anthropological approach is one that emphasizes the universality of spiritual experiences. In this sense, spiritual experience can be seen as a dimension of human nature beyond different cultures and traditions throughout the world. The anthropological approach often uses methods of social sciences in order to understand the common experience. According to Wolfteich, the benefit of this approach is in its ability to invite people into interfaith dialogue and to facilitate scholarship about the wide range of spirituality.21 However, this approach has a risk to simply reduce the particular characteristics of a certain spiritual tradition into a vague common pattern by failing to deeply understand it, and easily ignore the contextual characteristics of spirituality. Wolfteich addresses that even though the anthropological approach is an efficient way for the study of spirituality, it must be in relationship with other two approaches.22

Secondly, the historical-contextual approach, like the anthropological approach, also focuses on human experiences and practices. “Rather than exploring spirituality as a


21 Wolfteich, 131.

22 Ibid., 132.
dimension of universal human experience, however, the historical-contextual approach carefully investigates the particularity of the historical and cultural contexts out of which a spiritual community, tradition, or practice arises.”23 Spirituality is conditioned by historical and cultural contexts. McGinn seems to focus on the historical-contextual approach more than other approaches. He asserts that the study of spirituality does not need to be done within a particular theology or religious tradition. Rather, it must ask how religious people or religious communities actually experience their spiritual experience. McGinn admits that the historical-contextual approach alone cannot address normative questions, and therefore, the historical-contextual approach is complementary to both the anthropological and the theological approaches.24

Walter H. Principe also agrees with the importance of human context in spirituality as he warns the danger to study spiritual texts in isolation from the historical and cultural context. For Principe, human context plays a role of “the microscope or opera glass factor”, which helps to study or practice spirituality.25 Spiritual text alone, without considering its context, cannot provide a true meaning or understanding of particular spiritual traditions or styles. Principe asserts that we must locate spirituality within a specific time and place in order to correctly examine and understand it. Therefore, we must try to “situate such persons in their history by using such methods as

23 Ibid.


social-psychological history, and by examining the mentalities of the time.”26 Schneiders, however, indicates that the historical-contextual approach deals with available data only within time and space, so that it is subject to natural laws of cause and effect. Even though this approach can be applied to many realities which have historical and contextual aspects, there can be also many “transhistorical” spiritual realities.27

Thirdly, as Wolfteich points out, both of the anthropological and the historical-contextual approaches do not have responsibility to judge the authenticity and truthfulness of a particular spiritual tradition or teaching.28 The theological approach plays the role of the critical task by providing normative frameworks for a concrete spirituality. The theological exploration of spirituality reflects on spiritual experience and practices, provides criteria for judging them, and builds spiritual communities. It is difficult to deny that there is a cooperation of theology and spirituality to examine spiritual experience or traditions, but many spirituality scholars fear that deeply relating spirituality with theology may cause to reduce spirituality to “a mere appendage of dogmatic or moral theology.”29 Even though they support the inter-relationship between theology and spirituality, they do not agree to define spirituality as a sub-discipline of theology. We will discuss more about the relationship between spirituality and theology in the next part of this chapter.

26 Ibid.


28 Wolfteich, 133.

In addition, Schneiders introduces another approach to the study of spirituality. She names this approach as the hermeneutical approach, which she seems to consider as a more adequate approach than other three approaches. The hermeneutical approach involves three steps, which are only theoretically sequential because these three phases mutually condition each other. The first step is to describe the phenomena of spiritual experience. The second step is to critically analyze the phenomena of spiritual experience, and this step includes theological criticism. The final step is to constructively interpret them in order to understand a concrete spiritual experience in the fullest sense. Schneiders concludes that the hermeneutical approach is the most efficient methodology to the study of spirituality. She defines the hermeneutical approach of spirituality as follows:

The hermeneutical methodology is necessarily inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural, and inter-religious and, insofar as it is the study of Christian spirituality, necessarily involves, but is not subordinate to, biblical, historical, and theological content and methods.

Wolfteich proposes the practical theological approach to the study of spirituality. She believes that practical theology and spirituality are similar in their understanding of transformation as the goal and as the constitutive part of the disciplines. The practical theological approach uses all of other approaches – the anthropological, the historical-contextual, and the theological approaches, and integrates them with “an eye toward critical reflection on and quidance of spiritual practice and communities today.” This approach has several advantages because practical theologians play an important role of

31 Ibid., 57.
32 Wolfteich, 42-43.
providing various contemporary spiritual practices. First of all, this approach can support faith communities and individuals by helping them to practice their spirituality within their own context. Second, practical theology also can help faith communities by using its traditions in order to response their spiritual needs or questions. Third, this approach can bring past spirituality and present spirituality into dialogue by reflecting on both present spiritual practices and the past spiritual traditions. Fourth, this approach can inform and facilitate the processes of spirituality in different contexts which include social, economic, political, and environmental contexts.

All of these approaches of spirituality can be used to examine Yu’s spirituality. As we consider inter-religious and synthetic characters of Yu’s spirituality which includes Christian and the East Asian spiritual traditions, the historical-contextual approach and the hermeneutical approach are very important methodologies to understand Yu’s spiritual experience. The theological approach is also important in examining and understanding Yu’s spirituality in relation to his theological concepts of the ultimate reality because the main goal of this chapter is to examine the relationship between Yu’s theological definition of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim and his spirituality. Let us continue to discuss the relationship between spirituality and theology.

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33 “The purpose of this step of inquiry is to take seriously contemporary spiritual questions and practices and to reflect critically upon them in light of the rich and complex traditions of Christian spirituality.” (Ibid., 43-44.)

34 Ibid.
The Relationship of Spirituality and Theology

In *Christian Spirituality – a historical sketch*, George A. Lane defines the relationship between spirituality and theology as follows:

Now there is a distinction between a systematic understanding of the Christian response and the lived experience of the spirituality. Ideally they should coincide and infuse one another. But the problem is that the lived experiences of the great founders of religious orders is a unique thing, and it dies out with the people who have had that experience. It is not the lived experience which stays on to influence us; it is the theology or the way that experience was explained and interpreted that survives.35

It means that, for example, we cannot criticize the desert monks’ life experience; but we can criticize or evaluate their articulation of that experience in order to find what can be valid for our own spiritual or theological purposes.36

In *Christian Spirituality*, Pannenberg asserts that a particular piety must involve a specific theological reflection on particular human experience as he tries to define the reason of the emergence and decay of Christian piety. He believes that this effort to define the intrinsic relationship between piety and the realities of human life can provide more appropriate forms of Christian spirituality.37 He says, “A particular type of piety involves not only a specific theological focus and corresponding life-styles but also a particular conception of the human world, the world of human experience.”38

Powell examines three dimensions of the Christian faith in order to define the relationship between theology and spirituality. The first dimension is the regulative. The

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36 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
regulative dimension implies function of doctrine by which the Christian faith is
distinguished from other religious believes and by which boundaries are established to
determinate what are and what are not authentic expressions of the Christian faith. According to Powell, there is the tendency for Christians to think of doctrine only in cognitive terms, and therefore, this tendency separates belief from practice. He says, “The fact that the regulative dimension of doctrine pertains to both belief and practice brings it into close connection with Christian spirituality.”

A second dimension is the hermeneutical dimension which means “the act of understanding the Christian faith according to the ideas and intellectual methods that are available to us.” Powell points out that this dimension shows that there cannot be any absolute perspective on the truth in human historical context and that there is no knowledge that is beyond critique and improvement.

The third dimension of faith is the ethical dimension which most strongly connects theology to spirituality. According to Powell, belief and ethical action are two aspects, which are distinguishable but not separable, of the Christian faith. Belief and action are two sides of the same coin of faith, and this insight uncovers the close relationship between theology and spirituality. Powell concludes, “The spiritual life of Christians, whether in the form of devotional exercises or expressly ethical activity in the

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 8.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 9.
world, is the Christian faith in one of its forms, the form of lived-out activity, just as belief is the Christian faith in another form, the form of cognitive affirmation.”

Sheldrake asserts that in Christian history there was no distinct division of spirituality and theology until the twelfth century when scholasticism began as he describes the historical process of Christian spirituality and theology’s divorce. Early Christian theology included intellectual reflection and spiritual life as a whole. Therefore, various kinds of methods such as sermons, saints’ spiritual life, and monastic rules can be good media of theology. In this early Christian sense, theology was more than only an intellectual reflection or knowledge, and early Christian theologians did not need to use the term, spirituality as today’s use because theology was an united concept which included spirituality. However, as the scholastic schools became the center of Christian theology, the unity of theology started to be divided into various disciplinary parts. Sheldrake describes the situation of the divorce of spirituality and theology, which started under the influence of scholasticism, as follows:

Whatever the intentions of the early theologians of the schools, dogmatic theology finally grew apart from what we would call spirituality. This was a tragedy for both. […] To put it more simply, reason began to triumph over imagination and the ability to define truth over experiences of the sacred.

The Enlightenment in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was one of the most essential factors that intensified the separation between spirituality and theology. As scientific enquiry was considered as the best way to gain truth and certainty, religious

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44 Ibid.


46 Ibid., 40.
truth or faith was also expressed in terms of “propositional truths”\textsuperscript{47} which proposed to be perfectly understood and proved by human intelligence. This trend to define theology as a science made spirituality as an unrealistic and optional concept to be related to only the subjective and unscientific part of theology because spiritual experience and teachings by nature were not considered to be examined, proved, or explained through scientific intelligence. Sheldrake also points out that value-free knowledge which was produced by science cannot be deeply engaged with spirituality because theology which is defined as only a science isolated theology from human context and subject feeling.\textsuperscript{48} As spirituality is deeply based on human experience, it cannot produce value-free knowledge which is isolated from human context.

Until the modern period, Protestantism appeared to have little to no interest in spirituality. First of all, Protestantism did not emphasize spirituality because they were afraid that it could cause to justify human self-santification, instead of only grace. According to Sheldrake, Protestantism reversed the order of human knowledge of God or the revelation of God. Before the era of Protestantism, God was thought as an object to be reached by human spiritual and contemplative efforts, but within Protestant position God alone seeks us, and descends to us because as sinners we human beings cannot know or find God by our own ability.\textsuperscript{49} On the other hand, Protestantism did not need to define spirituality as a distinct field apart from theology because Reformers like Luther and Calvin accepted the fundamental relationship between spirituality and theology.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 46.
Reformers sought to know the nature of the relationship between God and human beings, and they believed that it must be found in our daily spiritual life and in the Church. This ambivalent attitude of Protestantism is in some sense similar to today’s Korean Protestantism’s attitude to see spirituality. It shows the characteristic of Korean Protestantism’s understanding of spirituality that spirituality has been recently discussed only within personal spiritual life and in relation to special disciplines of churches rather than being studied in academic fields.

As the importance of spirituality is stressed, we need to discuss and reestablish the relationship between spirituality and theology. Let us look at several important theories that discuss relationship between the two.

**Spirituality and theology as partners**

In her article “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” Schneiders tries to define the relationship between Christian theology and spirituality. Schneiders asserts that Christian spirituality exists ontologically and psychologically prior to Christian theology because theology always emerged as the result of human reflection on spiritual experience in light of biblical revelation and philosophical frameworks. On the other hand, however, once theology has emerged as Christian reflections on spiritual experience, theology begins to obtain the power and the responsibility to criticize or evaluate spiritual experience. It means that on the one hand, theology is generated by spiritual experience, and on the other hand, theology is the primary judge and critic of spirituality. Theology judges whether a particular spirituality

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50 Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?” 270.
has adequacy or not in the light of the Christian traditions. She also indicates that even though theology is one of the most important disciplines to the field of spirituality, theology is not the only one because the spiritual life includes the whole human experience which is also open to many other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and ethics.\footnote{Ibid., 271.}

Schneiders also offers good insight to explain the relationship of theology and spirituality as academic disciplines.\footnote{Schneiders divides the meaning of theology into two ways. In a broad sense, “theology” is often used as a term to cover all religious studies. If theology is understood in this manner spirituality as the Christian discipline comes to belong under theology as one field that focuses on religious experience in an interdisciplinary way. However, theology is also understood as the term to refer to the specific studies, which are systematic theology and moral theology. If theology is understood in this limited sense, it cannot include biblical studies, church history, practical disciplines, or spirituality. On the contrary to the theology in this narrow sense, spirituality is pluralistic and interdisciplinary because of the nature of human lived experience, the object which spirituality studies. (Ibid., 271-272.)} The objectives of spirituality as the discipline are distinct from those of the discipline of theology even though they are closely related to each other. The objectives of spirituality are always theoretical and practical like the discipline of psychology. Therefore, according to Schneiders, students of spirituality as an academic discipline cannot maintain distance from their subject matters in order to be objective. Schneiders asserts, spirituality as an academic discipline is like the arts more than the sciences.\footnote{Ibid., 273.} Schneiders seems to believe that spirituality and theology can be good partners only if they function in mutuality and respect each other’s autonomy. According to her, spirituality must not be conceived as a subdivision of one of the traditional theologies such as systematic, historical theology or Christian ethics.
Theology cannot perfectly contain spirituality as its subordinated part because spirituality is inherently interdisciplinary in nature and is no longer limited to the practical applications of theological doctrines only. Rather, at least in the order of emergence, spirituality can be said as being prior to theology.

Mark McIntosh’s understanding of the relationship between spirituality and theology is also similar to Schneiders’ position. As he depicts that encounter with God is the common and essential ground of spirituality and theology, McIntosh describes the interrelationship between them as follows:

So while it is very true that theology provides an indispensable critical function for spirituality, it is no less true that spirituality affords a radically critical perspective equally necessary for the health of theology. […] The critical function which spirituality serves for theology is not a matter simply of adding one more source for theology to consider; it is not a matter of judiciously taking people’s experiences seriously along with supposedly more “rational” thought, but a matter of exposing theology to the profound questioning that animates the very heart of the community’s struggle to be faithful.

Balance between spirituality and theology: Bonaventure’s doing theology

In his article “Is Spirituality the Future of Theology?: Insights from Bonaventure,” based on Bonaventure’s understandings of theology Ilia Delio suggests that spirituality will be the future of theology. Delio indicates that today’s theologians

54 “[…] One might think initially in terms of encounter with God as the common ground of spirituality and theology: spirituality being the impression that this encounter makes in the transforming life of people, and theology being the expression that this encounter calls forth as people attempt to understand and speak of the encounter.” (Mark McIntosh, Mystical Theology, 6.)

55 Ibid., 17. I re-quoted it from Wolfteich, “Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology,” 134. As quoting McIntosh’s point, Wolfteich agrees that the relationship between spirituality and theology is not a one way relation but rather an interdependent connection.
must contemplate the mystery of God which can be found in God’s creation and “do” theology from the heart. Delio believes that the Franciscan tradition can make a contribution to the union of spirituality and theology because the Franciscan theology takes spirituality as the starting point for its theology. St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), one of the most prominent Franciscan scholars, asserts that theology is the affairs of faith, and therefore it transcends human reason or intelligence.

Delio believes that Bonaventure’s theology can be a good model to define the good relationship between spirituality and theology. Bonaventure defines theology as “the things of faith which transcends human reason or understanding.”

For Bonaventure, theology is not just speculative knowledge but rather practical knowledge because in order to know the spiritual realities, we need to participate in the objects. In this sense, Delio defines Bonaventure’s theology as doing theology:

The integral relation between spirituality and theology suggests an integral relationship between “being” and “doing.” The theologian is not first one who “studies” theology but one who “lives” theology. “Doing theology” means becoming a theological person; that is, there is no objective theology apart from the person of the theologian.

The key to Bonaventure’s doing theology lies in his unique way of combining the speculative and the symbolic. Therefore, in doing theology, there cannot be a distinction between pure speculative knowledge and pure conceptual knowledge. Rather, theology has to lead believers toward encounter with God through love. If doing theology is to search the depths of God, it cannot be restricted to only intellectual disciplines. In his

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56 George Tavard, Transiency and Permanence: The Nature of Theology according to St. Bonaventure, p. 247. I recited it from Ilia Delio, “Is Spirituality the Future of Theology?: Insight from Bonaventure,” Spiritus 8, no. 2 (Fall 2008), 150.

57 Ibid., 153.
famous work, “The Journey of the Soul into God”, Bonaventure declares that the spiritual journey to God is only the way to know God. Bonaventure says:

Let us not believe that it is enough to read without unction, to speculate without devotion, to investigate without wonder, to observe without joy, to act without godly zeal, to know without love, to understand without humility, to strive without divine grace, or to reflect as a mirror without divinely inspired wisdom.58

For Bonaventure, theology cannot and must not be reduced to only intellectual knowledge because God reveals Himself in the concrete person of Jesus Christ, instead of abstract ideas. Bonaventure suggests a ladder as a symbol for explaining a right theology. On one side of the ladder there are reading, investigation, speculative knowledge, intellectual understanding, among others. These represent the scientific elements of theology. On the other side, there are love, joy, divine grace, wonder, among others. These represent the spiritual elements of theology.59 Theology is not a sum of doctrines but a living reality. Therefore, the spiritual journey to God cannot begin with human ability or effort, but it begins with the divine assistance, in other words, God’s grace.60

Bonaventure does not seem to exclude speculative or intellectual knowledge in his doing theology, but his doing theology seems to seek for a good balance between spirituality and theology.


59 Delio, 151.

60 “Yet we cannot rise above ourselves unless a superior power lifts us up. No matter how well we plan our spiritual progress, nothing comes of it unless divine assistance intervenes. And divine assistance is there for those who seek it humbly and devoutly, who sigh for it in this vale of tears by fervent prayer.” (St. Bonaventure, “The Journey of The Mind to God,” 9.)
Sheldrake suggests apophatic tradition to discuss the important role of spirituality or mysticism in knowing God. The apophatic tradition emphasizes silence, passivity, or darkness in knowing God while the cataphatic tradition emphasizes image. God in the apophatic tradition is hidden from human knowledge and senses. The reality of God is beyond all human categories. God is not intelligibly recognized and cannot be approached by human rational ways. Sheldrake explains this paradoxical knowledge of God as follows:

Through our relationship with God as revealed in creation, and in the midst of our affirmations, we come to realize that God never becomes our possession or an object of rational knowledge.\(^{61}\)

Sheldrake affirms that we have to realize that God and the world are absolutely beyond our reason and senses, and this incalculability of God and the world lead us to return to wonder as the heart of theology and spirituality.\(^{62}\) Pseudo-Dionysius (the late fifth century – the early sixth century) also emphasized the negative way to know or unite with God. I will discuss Dionysius’ negative way to know God more in detail when I analyze Yu’s spirituality later in this chapter.

Therefore, spiritual experience of God, whether it is personal or communal, becomes an important source in spirituality and theology. In relation to human experience, Sheldrake also points out a major contemporary shift found in Western theology. The shift is from trans-cultural theology towards reflections on experience of God within particular and plural cultures, and it results in the same changes in the spiritual life. The first change is that the term “spirituality” starts to describe and


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 27.
interpret the deepest human experience without referring to any particular religion. This means that spirituality is not limited anymore only to religious leaders. Second, spirituality started to be associated more with theology and biblical exegesis than before. It can be seen that many theologians and many theological schools concentrate on human experience as an important subject for theological reflections. Third, context became a primary ground to interpret and evaluate a certain experience in both fields of spirituality and theology, and it means that all human experience is determined and influenced by cultural elements.63

Even though Sheldrake accepts the important role of experience in the relationship between spirituality and theology, he does not subordinate theology to human experience because he thinks that theology is one of the most important contexts of influence on human spiritual experience. He says:

Theology cannot be reduced to a second-order reflection on prior (naked) experience. Religious experience presupposes a context of beliefs and symbols within which it can be known precisely as religious experience.64

Sheldrake makes it clear that contemporary spirituality’s emphasis on experience never excludes references to theological traditions.

If we follow Sheldrake’s view of the relationship between spirituality and theology, a theology which does not pay attention to human experience cannot be defined as true theology. On the contrary, if a certain spiritual experience is not rightly addressed within context including theology, then the experience cannot convey any spiritual

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63 Ibid., 55-59.

64 Ibid., 21.
meaning within that context. Therefore, I believe that spirituality and theology must be
good partners to each other, but they must not be dealt as the same discipline. In this
sense, I agree with Sheldrake’s model of the relationship between spirituality and
theology. Sheldrake believes that the relationship between spirituality and theology is
inherent and essential. Spirituality and theology need to be reintegrated for the sake of
each. If theology is not related to spirituality, it becomes only abstract and rationalistic.
On the other hand, if spirituality is cut adrift from theology, it not only risks becoming
uncritical devotionalism but also loses touch with the broader tradition of faith.
Spirituality cannot be fully understood by theology alone and cannot be reduced to a sub-
discipline of theology because spirituality is inherently interdisciplinary, and therefore it
uses a great variety of methodologies and genres of literatures. There seems to be a
necessary relationship between two disciplines without subordinating one to the other.
In addition, for the theological perspective, I think that Bonaventure’s theology can be a
good model as it balances the relationship between spirituality and theology well.

**Yu’s Spirituality**

Union with God: Returning to the One (歸一思想) and Kungshin (究神, seeking for God)

The final goal of Yu’s spirituality, which is found in his spiritual self-discipline
and teachings, can be summed up in the union with the ultimate reality. Yu’s union with
God is understood through the Confucian teaching of *Bu-ja-yu-chin* (父子有親, it
translates into “There should be affection between father and son”) and his thought of
“returning to the One” (歸一). For Yu, *Bu-ja-yu-chin* (父子有親) is the Confucian
expression of the union with God. The relation of the Father and the Son in Christianity
must be understood as the relation of Bu-ja-bul-yi (父子不二, it translates into “the father and the son are not two”), and it is the spiritual foundation of human union with God. Yu interprets Confucian filial piety (孝) as a spiritual principle to realize the union with the ultimate reality or Bu-ja-yu-chin in a relationship with God. Jeong-bae Lee says that for Yu, spiritual understanding of filial piety enables us to be spiritual being like the absolute God who transcends the relativity, and to complete the divine nature within us.65 Yu defines Confucian union with God as follows:

God the Father and the Son are two, but at the same time they are one. The father and the son are not two. (父子不二) This is also 父子有親. It is human nature (本性) to long for God the Father. Idea or thought comes from longing. We think of God because we long for God. It can be called as sincerity (誠意), which is human’s true nature. This sincerity must be realized. (1957)66

Yu believes that all human beings by nature long for and think of the ultimate reality, and explains this human nature through the term Kungshin (窮神, seeking for God).

Yu emphasizes the life of Kungshin (窮神, seeking for God) as the way to realize the union with God. Yu says:

Human mind or heart must be in the position of Kungshin and always think of God. Kungshin is nothing but trying to know God. God is nothing but ourselves; we are the very God. Now we cannot disclose the divine ability, but it is true that we all finally return to God. In the end I


66 “하나님 아버지와 아들은 돌이면서 하나다. 부자불이(父子不二)다. 이것이 부자유친(父子有親)이라는 것이다. 맨 첫이고 참되시는 아버지 하느님을 그리워함은 어쩔 수 없는 사람의 본성(本性)이다. 생각은 그리움에서 나온다. 그립고 그리워서 생각을 하게 된다. 이를 사람의 참뜻이라 하여 성의(誠意)라고 한다. 이 뜻은 꼭 이루어져야 한다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo órok, 59.)
become one with God and return to God’s position. *Jai-Na* (제나, self) as false self must die, and God as true self (참나, 본我) must live. (1956)67

Here, Yu insists that we can find God as true self within ourselves by denying ego as false self. Yu seems to insist that the union with God is possible not through the extrinsic experience but through the intrinsic experience of human beings. In other words, to find and save our divine nature is the only way to reach union with God. Therefore, in order to understand Yu’s spiritual union with God, we first have to discuss his understanding of the human self.

### Jai-Na and Eol-Na

Yu’s spirituality denies the life to believe *Jai-Na* (自我, ego) as true self instead of *Eol-Na* (얼나, spiritual self). Yu asserts that there are two kinds of human selves, and we should make a distinction between one who is born from below and one who is born from above which are based on John 3:368 and 8:2369. These two selves are *Jai-Na* (自我), which is from bodily parents, and *Eol-Na* (靈我), which is from God. Also Jesus

67 “사람의 마음은 언제나 하나님을 생각하고 그리는 궁신(窮神)하는 자리에 있어야 한다. 하나님을 알려는 것이 궁신이다. 하나님이란 딱 게 아니다. 우리들이 바로 신인 것이다. 지금에는 신의 능력을 나타내지 못할망정 이 다음에는 하나님께로 돌아가는 것만은 사실이다. 궁극에는 내가 하나님과 하나되겠다는 것이 아닌가. 하나님의 자리에 돌아간다는 말이다. 거짓나인 제나(自我)로는 죽고 참나인 하나님으로 숟나자는 것이다.” *(Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŭrok, 39.)*

68 “In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’” (NIV)

69 “But he continued, ‘You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.’” (NIV)
comes bodily from below (parents); and spiritually from above (God). *Jai-Na*, which is from below, is the life to be destroyed, but *Eol-Na* which is from above, is the eternal life. Yu is highly confident of the existence of *Eol-Na* based on his own experience. He says:

> We do not know what we were before wearing this body and what will happen to us after being removed from it. If I know, I can be arrogant. However, it is certain that there exists *Eol-Na* which is the eternal life. Because the eternal life (*Eol-Na*), which was found within Jesus and Buddha, also appeared within me, it is certain fact that the eternal life (*Eol-Na*) exists beyond time and space. (1960)

Yu’s distinction of *Eol-Na* from *Jai-Na* reminds us of Eckhart’s theory of inner detachment. McGinn, in “The God beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart,” indicates that for Eckhart inner detachment from the self is a necessary precondition for us to unite with God because only when a soul become a completely naked one, it can unite with the naked God who is hidden from human senses and knowledge. Eckhart believes that human soul is truly divine in its deepest ground, and therefore, the essential goal of human life is “the attainment not just of similarity and unity but of true and undifferentiated oneness with God.” Here, the true union or oneness with God means the union in which no distinction between human soul and God

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71 “우리는 이 갑질(용)을 쓰기 전 또 벗어버린 뒤에 어찌될 줄은 모른다. 이것을 알면 나도 거만할 수 있을 거다. 그러나 영원한 생명인 열나가 있는 것은 틀림없다. 예수, 석가에게 나타났던 영원한 생명(열나)이 나에게도 나타났으니 영원한 생명(열나)은 시간, 공간을 초월하여 존재하는 것만은 틀림없다.” (*Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok*, 141-142.)


73 Ibid., 5.
can be found. As Eckhart thinks that human soul is divine, Yu believes that human
Eol-Na is the divine seed which is already given us from God. And as Eckhart
emphasizes inner detachment from the self in order to spiritually unite with God, Yu also
stresses on removing Jai-Na as the false self which is easily led by bodily desires for the
spiritual union with Ŭpsi-gyeshin-Haneunim.

We must live knowing Eol-Na as our true self, and this Eol-Na is God. To live as
ture self also means the life of self-cultivation. While Jai-Na absolutizes the value of
bodily desire, Eol-Na relativizes bodily desire. Therefore, the method of Kungshin (窮神,
seeking for God) is to control mind and body not to be governed by bodily desire. For
that reason, Yu’s spiritual discipline and teachings by nature have ascetic characters.
However, In-sik Choi indicates that Yu’s asceticism does not deny the human body itself,
but rather the human bodily self to identify body and bodily desire with the self. Yu
stresses the importance of the body, and asserts that our body must always be kept
healthy and be respected.

Many people wanted to develop their spirituality by overcoming or controlling the
limitations of the material body. Meredith B. McGuire, a sociologist, however, argues
that there is a close relationship between spirituality and bodily practice or training.
McGuire points out that spirituality must involve not only human minds and spirits but
also the body. That spirituality should involve human body does not mean only moral

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74 See, the footnote, Ibid.

75 In-sik Choi, “Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo’s theology of spirit and body”, Theology and Mission
(30), 440-441.
control of the body and its impulses is necessary.\textsuperscript{76} As she emphasizes lived religion, which was experienced and practiced by people in the content of everyday lives, McGuire concludes as follows:

Human bodies matter, those practices involve people’s bodies, as well as their minds and spirits. […] Our material bodies come to be linked with spirituality through social senses and through the ritual restructuring of our sense of space and time. […] Individuals’ religions become lived only through involving their bodies, as well as minds and their emotions, as well as their cognitions. Spirituality is developed by just such embodied practices.\textsuperscript{77}

Like McGuire’s argument, Yu’s spirituality did not ignore human material bodiness, but rather he focused on training the body and controlling bodily impulses because he acknowledged the close interrelationship between human body and spirituality.

**Spiritual self-discipline: 修身 (Confucian self-cultivation)**

We can find Confucianism’s deep influence in Yu’s spiritual self-discipline. Young-ho Park points out that one of the main reasons why Yu likes Confucius (孔子) is because Confucius was always afraid that he would not practice the truth even though he found it; would not convey the truth even though he learned it; and would not bring the true world into his life even though he knew that it is true. Yu respects and wants to emulate Confucius’s self-examination, which is to this day still influencing East Asian ethical culture.\textsuperscript{78} In Confucianism, self-examination or self-discipline is expressed as

\begin{itemize}
  \item Meredith B. McGuire, “Why Bodies matter: A Sociological Reflection on Spirituality and Materiality,” in *Minding The Spirit*, 118
  \item Ibid., 131.
  \item See, Park, *Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo’s Thought and Faith*, 77.
\end{itemize}
Sal-shin-seong-in (殺身成仁⁷⁹), which translates into “achieving the goodness by killing oneself”, and Su-shin (修身), which means “controlling and training oneself.” Sal-shin-seong-in (殺身成仁) means to look for the goodness (仁) by giving up one’s bodily desire (身) which symbolizes one’s ego. Su-shin (修身) means to fight against the ego until completely embodying and practicing the goodness (仁). In this sense, Yu emphasizes the importance of an ascetic life in order to be a spiritual child of God.⁸⁰

Following Confucius’ thought of Il-yi-gwan-ji (一以貫之⁸¹), which translates into “penetrating (all) by the one,” Yu practiced the life of Il-jwa (一座), Il-sik (一食), Il-eon (一言), and Il-in (一仁).⁸² These all represent traditional East Asian practices to train the spirit by controlling the body or bodily desires. First of all Il-jwa (一座) means to always bend the knees when seated. Yu did not sit on his knees only for prayer and meditation. He always sat on his knees when he received visitors, read books, or had meals. Therefore, he never fell into idleness. Yu said that we must live tensely in any time and any place as serving the heavenly Father (天父侍下)⁸³.

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⁷⁹ This Chinese character, “身” literally means “body”, but here means bodily desires of human beings and Jai-Na in Yu’s term.


⁸¹ “吾道一以貫之.” (“My Tao is to penetrate by the one”) (論語 [the Analects], 里人篇, ch. 15.)

⁸² Here, “Il (一)” means one or oneness.

Second, *Il-sik* (一食) means to eat only one meal a day.⁸⁴ According to Yu, our body or bodily self is a beast. As he comments that we have to properly feed and starve the beasts in order to domesticate them, Yu asserts that we also need self-control of our body not to have its own way. For self-control, we have to practice food abstinence (斷食) and sexual abstinence (斷色).⁸⁵ Yu kept practicing “one meal a day” (一日一食) for 40 years from 1941 until 1981 until he passed away.⁸⁶

Third, *Il-eon* (一言) means abstinence from sexual relations. In 1941, as he started to practice 一日一食 (eating a meal a day) Yu declared *Hae-hon* (解婚, separation from his spouse), which means to abstain all sexual activities with his wife, not divorce (離婚).⁸⁷ According to Yu, Jesus was a good model who was not greed. He said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15, NIV) Yu believed that Jesus lived an ascetic life, so that he did not get married. Jesus said, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28, NIV) According to Yu, these phrases exhibit Jesus’ teaching about sexual abstinence.⁸⁸

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⁸⁴ “The height of worshiping God is to eat a meal a day. It implies that spirit eats body, and it means to offer bodily sacrifices to God.” (1956) (*Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok*, 230.)


⁸⁶ Ibid., 21.


⁸⁸ Young-ho Park, *Jesus and Christianity in Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s thought*, 61-62.
Fourth, Il-in (仁) means to always walk anywhere. Yu loved to walk. He said that people must walk with a heart loving God and neighbors so that they can attain, as *Chuang-tzu* (莊子) said, the stage of breathing through the soles of their feet.  

All these spiritual self-trainings are ascetic self-disciplines that deny bodily desires of human beings. In relation to his emphasis on spiritual self-disciplines, Yu sees prayer as a part of spiritual self-disciplines (修行), and emphasizes to exercise prayer of whole body instead of prayer of mouth:

Life of prayer is self-disciplines (修行), and in Confucianism prayer is 修身 (Confucian self-cultivation). It means to pray with the body not with the mouth only. We can return to God (through prayer of body) in the end. To pray means to raise our true self to be children of God. Our hope is here. (1957)

From Confucian perspective Yu’s denial of bodily desires does not mean denial of human body itself, but can be understood as the integrated spiritual disciplines to help spiritual awakening through controlling the body. In this sense, 修身 (self-cultivation), which is a Confucian discipline, becomes one of the important principles and practices of Yu’s spirituality.

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90 “기도의 생활을 하는 것을 수행(修行)이라고 하는데, 유교(儒敎)에서는 기도를 수신이라고 한다. 입으로 기도하는 것이 아니라 몸으로 한다. 그러면 마침내 머지않아서 하느님께 다시 이르게 된다는 것이다. 기도하는 것은 하느님의 아들이 되도록 참나를 길러 가는 것이다. 여기에 우리의 희망이 있다.” (*Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok*, 234-235.)
Negation of self to find true self: 無我 (non-ego, absence of ego)

Buddhism’s non-ego (無我) is also one of the important principles in Yu’s spiritual discipline as well as Confucian self-cultivation (修身). Non-ego (無我), which means “absence of ego,” is the representative spiritual principle in Buddhism. According to Yu, a foolish person says Na (나, I) is here or there, but Buddha says Na is nothing, the absence of ego (無我). For Yu, the absence of ego does not mean the absence of oneself, but means to find true self, which always resides in the truth and is unchangeable.91

Jeong-bae Lee points out that when Yu asserts that we have to negate the relative world and look for the absolute Oneness, the absolute Oneness is not the theistic absolute being in the traditional Christianity but the “nothingness (無)” in Buddhism, which exists in all human beings and is only known by human transcendent nature, in other words, ᄀبش-gieši-Haneunim.92

Heung-ho Kim, one of Yu’s disciples, explains that Lao-tzu’s concept of non-action (無為) means to kill Jai-Na (ego, 自我), throw away the world (世上), and pursue God (Tao of Heaven, 天道) without clinging to anything but Tao (道). It also means that we can do everything that fits the divine will.93 Young-ho Park says that for Yu, Tao is the truth which transcends the relative world. We can realize Tao when we have a servant mind to serve the lord without any desire. If we really want to realize the truth we have to practice it at the risk of our life. It is Lao-tzu’s concept of Tao of non-action,

91 See, Yu, Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s Book or Meditations: Truth and Cham-Na, 70-71.
92 See, Park, Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s Thought and Faith, 88.
which is true self (眞我). According to Park, Yu believed that Jesus also talked about Tao of non-action as Lao-tzu said as follows:

> My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. (John 7:16-17, NIV)

> I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (John 5:19, NIV)

Based on these sayings, Yu seems to think that Jesus also taught to do only what fits God’s will and it has a good understanding with Tao of non-action which means to naturally do all things by following Tao of the heaven without anything artificial.94

Yu strongly encourages us to negate the material world (物質界) which can be sensed by human five sensory organs (五官) like hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. Saek (色) means material. Nature as the material world consists of Saek, and it is wicked. Material in the universe is worthless, so that we do not need to long for it.96 First of all, we have to negate our body as material. If we believe that our body is Cham-Na (true self), we cannot enter into our Maeum (마음, 心, heart and mind) to find God.

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94 Ibid.

95 Saek (色) literally translates into “color” in English, but it means the material world and in some cases, sexual desires in Buddhism.

96 Young-ho Park, Jesus and Christianity in Taso k Yu Yong-mo’s thought, 20.

97 “Maeum (마음, 心)” is the East Asian term to include both of human heart and mind.
Only when we sacrifice Mom-Na (몸나, bodily self), the darkness of Mom-Na takes over and the morning of Eol-Na (열나, spiritual self) dawns.\(^98\)

And then, we have to negate our Maeum itself. During the period of identifying Maeum with our true self, we cannot approach God. We must even empty Maeum. Once Jai-Na (ego) dies Maeum is empty. The dead Maeum means the great emptiness (Bintang, 太空) of Maeum. There is no lack if the kingdom of Heaven or Nirvana comes into the empty Maeum. Buddhist scriptures and the Bible teach that we have to kill Maeum.\(^99\) In this sense, for Yu Eol-Na can be said to mean the absolute emptiness (Bintang, 絶代空), in other words, Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim.

The state of non-ego (無我) addresses the state to get out of the “Three Poisons (三毒)”\(^100\): greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (痴). Yu believes that the human state without these Three Poisons can be seen as human true-self (眞我):

Self (我) means ego (自我) which has greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (痴) of the brute nature (獸性). Faith removes ego, the false-self. Therefore, we must become non-self (無我) without ego. When we become non-self (無我), we can remove our brute nature. The state without the brute nature is non-self (無我). [...] When ego (自我), the

\(^{98}\) Park, *Jesus and Christianity in Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo’s thought*, 21.

\(^{99}\) Ibid.

\(^{100}\) In Buddhism the Three Poisons (三毒) means three human agonies (煩惱) to hinder entering Nirvana (涅槃). Those three agonies (greed, anger, and ignorance) is also called the “Three Temptations (三惑)”. 
false-self, disappears true-self (*Cham-Na*, 真我) is naturally exposed. (1957)\(^{101}\)

Jeong-sook Oh addresses that for Yu these Three Poisons, which are essential characteristics of *Jai-Na*, are original sin which in the Christian view, all human existence is chained to. Yu’s thought that we can be *Eol-Na* only by getting out of Three Poisons seems to be related to Buddhist disciplines such as penance (*苦行*), self-mortification (*修行*), which are necessary process to find true-self (*見性*) and enter Nirvana (*成佛*). In this sense, Oh thinks that Yu’s spiritual discipline for the union with God is similar to Chinul\(^{102}\) (*知訥*)’s *Don-o-jeom-su* (*頓悟漸修*), which translates into “sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation.” *Don-o-jeom-su* (*頓悟漸修*) means that in order to enter Nirvana (*成佛*), gradual cultivation (*漸修*) must be followed after sudden and mystical enlightenment (*頓悟*).\(^{103}\) For Yu to reveal true-self or to realize non-ego is possible through gradual spiritual cultivation.

It is within human self that Yu finds the only way for the union with *Ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim* who cannot be reached by human knowledge and senses. It is the

\(^{101}\) “[…] 아(我)는 탐,진,치(貪瞋痴) 수성(獸性)을 지닌 제나(自我)를 말한다. 신앙이란 거짓나인 제나를 없애는 것이다. 그러므로 나(我)가 없는 무아(無我)가 되어야 한다. 무아(無我)가 되면 베타적인 것이 없어진다. 수성(獸性)이 없어지는 것이 무아(無我)이다. […] 거짓나인 제나(自我)가 없어질 때 참나가 드러난다.” (*Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ὄροκ*, 107.)

\(^{102}\) Chinul (知訥, 1153-1210) was the great master of Korean Buddhism. He tried to integrate two different traditions of Sonjong (*禪宗*), which supported the sudden enlightenment (*頓悟*), and Kyojong (*敎宗*), which supported the gradual enlightenment (*漸悟*). (See, Jeong-hyun Youn, *The Non-Existent Existing God*, 391-396.)

\(^{103}\) Oh, *Korean Christianity of Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo*, 121.
traditional East Asian spiritual way, but is also based on Yu’s understanding of Jesus Christ.

**Christ as Eol-Na: Jesus who realized the union with God**

To discuss in detail the entirety of Yu’s Christology will be a too extensive and broad considering the goal of my dissertation. However, in order to properly discern the union with God which is the final goal of Yu’s spirituality, it is unavoidable to discuss his understanding of Jesus Christ. And I will deal with Yu’s Christology more in relation to religious pluralism because Christology is always a hot issue in discussing religious pluralism. As he relates Yu’s philosophy of body to his spiritual Christology, In-sik Choi defines Yu’s Christology as plural even though Yu sees Jesus Christ as the important way to return the ultimate reality.\(^{104}\) Yu asserts that Jesus is not the only son of God:

[…] Is Jesus is the only son of God? No, he is not the only son. Anyone who is reborn as *Eol-Na* by receiving the Holy Spirit is, as *Eol-Na*, a son of God the Father. If I realize that as the realized *Eol-Na* I am a son of God and rise up by following *Eol-Na*, I can be near the kingdom of God and receive the eternal life even though I do not know whether I am going to God or God is coming to me. *Eol-Na*, which God gives us, is the kingdom of God and the eternal life. […] We have to believe that *Eol-Na* as the life (seed) of God, which came to our heart, is the only son of God. If we do that we die as *Mom-Na* (bodily self), but we do not die as *Eol-Na*. […] *Eol-Na* as the eternal life has continued on without ceasing from pre-Jesus times until now because it is the life of God. Jesus just realized this truth really big and taught it to us. (1957)\(^{105}\)

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\(^{105}\) “예수만이 혼자 하느님의 아들(독생자)인가? 그렇지 않다. 사람은 누구나 하느님 아버지의 성령을 받아 얼마나로 거듭나면 얼마나로는 하느님 아버지의 아들인 것이다. 내가 깨달은 얼마나로는 하느님의 아들인 것을 알고 얼마나를 받고 괜찮 위로 올라가면 내가 하느님께로 가는지 하느님께서 내게로 오는지 그것은 모르겠지만 하느님 나라는 146
Here, Yu seems to define historical Jesus as an example or model that became a son of God by finding and developing *Eol-Na*, which is the eternal life, within himself instead of the only son of God as the Christ. Jesus said about his own birth as follows, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (John 8:23, NIV)” According to Young-ho Park, in Jesus’ saying coming from “below” means coming through a mother’s body; and coming from “above” means coming as God’s *Eol* (the Holy Spirit). “Being of this world” refers to the bodily life which is born and dies; but “being not of this world” means *Eol*-life which as God’s *Eol*, is not born and does not die. *Mom-Na* (bodily self) of Jesus came from below because he was born from Joseph and Maria, but *Eol-Na* of Jesus came from God. Jesus came from above because he left or negated his *Mom-Na* as the false self and lived as *Eol-Na*. Like this, Yu considers Jesus’ saying that he is from above as his self-testimony about his rebirth as *Eol-Na* by overcoming *Mom-Na.* It means that Jesus realized *Eol-Na*, which God gave him, as the true self, and did not acknowledge *Mom-Na*, which came from his parents, as the true self.

가까워지고 영원한 생명을 얻는 것이 된다. 하느님께서 주시는 얼나가 하느님 나라요 영원한 생명인 것이다. […] 자기 마음속에 온 하느님의 생명(씨)인 얼나가 하느님 아버지 외아들인 것을 믿어야 한다. 그러면 누구나 몸나로는 죽어도 얼나로는 멸망치 않는다. […] 영원한 생명인 얼나는 하느님의 생명이라 예수 이전에서부터 이어 내려오는 것이다. 예수는 단지 우리가 따라갈 수 없을 만큼 이 사실을 크게 깨닫아 우리에게 가르쳐 주었다”

(Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok, 159.)

106 Park, Jesus and Christianity in Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s thought, 26.
When Nicodemus visited Jesus in the Bible, he tried to find a token of the son of God in Jesus, but Jesus could not show that he was reborn as Eol-Na to Nicodemus. Instead, Jesus answered, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit107. (John 3:8, NIV)” The Spirit (Eol-Na) is God, who transcends all ideas and thoughts (無念無想), and cannot be sensed by human five sensory organs (五官).

However, if we are reborn as Eol-Na, our Eol-Na controls brutality (獸性) of Jai-Na which is bestial, and therefore, achieves truth (真), goodness (善), and beauty (美) instead of doing evil deeds (惡行) such as greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (痴).108

The basic premise of Yu’s Christology is that any human being cannot be worshiped as a god, and therefore, Yu strongly criticized the deification of Confucius, Buddha, Lao-tzu, and Jesus in each religion. Park indicates that in Yu’s exegesis of John 10:30, “I and the Father are One” (NIV), to become one does not mean that only Jesus and God can become one. In this sense, for Yu to say that Jesus is God is wrong, but rather Jesus as a man became one with God through the spiritual self which is from God. Anyone as the spiritual self can become one with God.109

Yu believes that Jesus surely taught about Jai-Na and Eol-Na. Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” (Matthew 16:25, NIV) For Yu, this phrase can be reinterpreted that whoever wants to save Jai-Na will lose Eol-Na, but whoever loses Jai-Na for Eol-Na will find and gain

107 Here, “the Spirit” can be replaced by Eol-Na. (Ibid., 61.)

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid., 242.
Therefore, Yu believes that we must lose Jai-Na in order to find Eol-Na as the spiritual seed.

Jeong-bae Lee also addresses that, for Yu, incarnation of the Word (Eol, the spirit) is not the sole event of Jesus, but rather the common event of all humanity. In the same vein, Yu asserts as follows:

To follow and look at Jesus does not mean to see and follow his body (色身). Jesus taught that sok-al (속알), which means God’s seed (Eol, the spirit), is the true life. Therefore, we must follow sok-al within us. Sok-al is the true life (Eol-Na) of Jesus, and also my true life (Eol-Na).

The body of Jesus like mine is just a shell to die. (1960)

Yu’s Christology seems to be similar to Tillich’s understanding of Jesus Christ as the New Being. Tillich, like Yu, rejects the traditional Christian view of Jesus that God became a human being. According to Tillich, Christ “who is supposed to overcome existential estrangement must participate in it and its self-destructive

110 Ibid., 67.

111 Yu, Yu Yǒng-mo, Words of SSi-al: The Correct Understanding of Tasǒk’s thoughts, Park Young-ho’s commentary, 119.

112 Sok-al literally means “inner seed”, and it is understood as the same meaning of Eol-Na in Yu’s theology and spirituality.

113 “예수를 따르고 그를 쳐다보는 것은 그의 몸(色身)을 보고 따르자는 것이 아니다. 예수는 내 속에 있는 속알 곧 하느님의 씨(열)가 참 생명임을 가르쳐 주었다. 그러므로 먼저 내 속에 있는 속알에 따라야 한다. 그 속알이 참 예수의 생명(열나)이요 나의 참 생명(열나)이다. 몸으로는 예수님의 몸도 내 몸과 같이 죽을 깨데기지 볼 수 없다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok, 168.)

114 Tillich defines human existence as the status that is estranged by experiencing the loss of being. Tillich thinks that human status before “the Fall” is essential being, and therefore for him the Fall actually means human transition from essence to existence. (Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology II, 29.)
consequences.” Christ as the New Being is the essential being which appears in the human existential context. It means that the New Being in Jesus Christ implies “a personal life which is subjected to all the consequences of existential estrangement but wherein estrangement is conquered in himself and a permanent unity is kept with God.” In *The New Being*, as he defines Christianity as the message of the New Creation, Tillich affirms that the New Being which appeared with (in) Jesus is the very reason to call Jesus as the Christ. Tillich says:

In Him [Jesus as the Christ] we look at a human life that maintained the union in spite of everything that drove Him into separation. He represents and mediates the power of the New Being because He represents and mediates the power of an undisrupted union. Where the New Reality appears, one feels united with God, the ground and meaning of one’s existence.

Furthermore, Tillich asserts that all human beings are asked to participate in the New Being which means to be united with God. In the sense that we can participate in the New Being which appeared in Jesus as the Christ, for Tillich Christ is a symbol participating in the reality which it refers to.

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115 Ibid., 97.
116 Ibid., 135.
118 Ibid., 17.
119 Tillich addresses that because the word ‘revelation’ means the manifestation of something hidden, revelation must be understood by the word, ‘mystery’. “Whatever is essentially mysterious should not lose its mysteriousness when it is revealed.” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 109.) For Tillich, the word, ‘mystery’ cannot be used for something that ceases to be mysterious after it was revealed, and here we can guess where Tillich placed ‘symbol’ in his theology. It implies that revelation is revealed, not directly, but through a mediate method. Any reality, thing, or event can be a bearer of the mystery of being and enter into a revelatory correlation because nothing is worthy in itself to represent our ultimate concern. In other words, if we can say that a certain thing or event bears the revelatory mystery, it is not because the thing or event itself is mysterious, but because the revelatory origin that the thing
Insofar as he denies deifying or absolutizing Jesus himself, Tillich’s understanding of Jesus as the Christ is identical with Yu’s understanding of Jesus Christ who realized true self. The New Being, which transcends the chasm between essence and existence of human beings, can be seen as Yu’s Eol-Na, which becomes one with Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, and therefore transcends the division between non-being and being.

For Yu, to find and realize true divine self (Eol-Na) by removing or controlling bodily self (Jai-Na) can be understood as a spiritual symbol for finding and realizing Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim inside of human self – in other words, being unified with the ultimate reality – and all human beings can and must participate in that symbol. This spiritual participation is the union with God in the Christian sense, and at the same time, it is the spiritual self-realization in the East Asian religious sense.

In short, the union with God, which Yu’s spirituality seeks for, means to find divinity within ourselves by removing our bodily desires, and live following divinity which is our true self. Accordingly, the union with God in Yu’s spirituality can be understood as the spiritual expression of faith that transcendent God (Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim), who cannot be reached by finite beings, can be spiritually found and grasped through our divine nature from God.

**Yu’s Spirituality and his understanding of God**

As we have seen in the above of this chapter, Schneiders provides us with a good model to address the relationship between spirituality and theology. According to her, theology is generated as the reflections on personal or communal spiritual experience, but depends on is mysterious.
once it has emerged, theology has the duty and power to interpret or evaluate spiritual experience within the community which has developed the theology. Schneiders’ theory can also be applied to the relationship between Yu’s spirituality and theology. Yu grew up under the Confucian culture, but he became a Christian relatively early when he was fifteen. In 1910, Yu started to impassionedly propagate Christianity in Osan School, but he suddenly turned from the traditional Christian faith to the non-traditional faith\textsuperscript{120} after he experienced his beloved younger brother, Yǒng-mook’s death. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was also the same time when Yu started to read Lao-tzu’s \textit{Tao Te Ching} (道德經) and Buddhist scriptures.\textsuperscript{121} Yu says about his experience of his brother’s death as follows:

When I was 22, my younger brother died at the age of 20. Since then I have thought there is nothing completed in this world. [In this world] To complete a thing just means to make one more thing to complete. (1960)\textsuperscript{122}

Through his brother’s death, Yu realized that this world is all relative, and the absolute truth, therefore, could not be found within the world. When Yǒng-mook passed away, Yu was announced by a doctor that he could not live past 30.\textsuperscript{123} (However, Yu died at the age of 91.) From these experiences we can imagine how deeply Yu thought about death. The following statement evidences his intense thought on death.

\textsuperscript{120} Yu defines his theology and faith as the non-traditional in a comparison to the traditional Christianity.


\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ôrok}, 190.

\textsuperscript{123} Young-ho Park, \textit{Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo: A Great Thinker Who Was Doing Philosophy in Our Language}, 36.
The core of religion is death. To practice death is philosophy, and to try to overcome death is religion. The goal of the practice of death is to cultivate the eternal life. Fasting (斷食) and sexual abstinence (斷色) are the practice of death. Bodily life is not [real] life, and to die is not [real] death. To live means that the spirit lives by consuming the body. Fasting means that I consume my body. (1957)\textsuperscript{124}

“Consuming the body” here denotes removing or controlling bodily desires (Jai-Na, ego) so that spiritual life (Eol-Na, true self) lives and governs human self. In order to gain eternal life, therefore, an acetic life is needed including fasting and sexual abstinence. These existential experiences seem to have led Yu’s theology to define the ultimate reality as the One who cannot be found within the relative world.

Being is not true being; and non-being is not true non-being. We keep on saying that something is or is not in the state of confusion and illusion trapped in the problem of life and death. There is no one to really know being and non-being (有無). (1957)\textsuperscript{125}

Through his experience of death, Yu realized the transience of the relative world, and started to seek for the ultimate truth, in other words, Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim who transcends and integrates being and non-being. This demonstrates that Yu’s spiritual experience and his reflection on this experience influenced his theological understanding of the ultimate reality.

\textsuperscript{124} “종교의 핵심은 죽음이다. 죽는 연습이 철학이요 죽음을 이기자는 것이 종교이다. 죽는 연습은 영원한 생명을 기르기 위해서다. 단식(斷食)하고 단색(斷色)하는 것이 죽는 연습이다. 우리가 몸으로 사는 것은 사는 것이 아니요 죽는 것이 죽는 것이 아니다. 산다는 것은 육체를 먹고 정신이 사는 것이다. 단식하는 것은 내 몸을 내가 먹는 것이다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok, 180.)

\textsuperscript{125} “있다는 것도 참으로 있는 것이 아니고 없다는 것도 참으로 있는 것이 아니고 없다는 것도 참으로 없는 것이 아니다. 생사에 빠진 미혹과 환상에서 있느냐 없느냐 야단이다. 유무를 참으로 아는 사람은 없다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok, 182.)
On January 4th, 1942, Yu faced the most important spiritual turning point in his life. After his experience of spiritual union with God, Yu settled January 4th as the day of his rebirth. Yu always believed that all faiths or ideas are just “an unfinished manuscript” even though they seems very thorough and firm. Of course, it was related to his experience of the loss of his brother. He says:

We do not need to distinguish ideas by applying epithets such as “East” or “West” to them. Ideas, as long as they have the One (God), can be eternal ideas. Ideas are realized because people found the One (God). But all ideas are unfinished manuscripts, and there is no completed idea. All ideas and thought, which human beings have left, are only the records of confessions that “I have reached here” in the process of reaching the eternal absolute (God). [...] Many people believe in a certain idea or a certain religion as a completed manuscript by saying that if people do not follow it they will die, but in reality there cannot be a perfect or completed idea in this world. Nevertheless, to have asserted our ideas or creeds are completed and perfect is human history. (1957)

Like this, Yu always seeks for open theology and spirituality as an unfinished manuscript, so that his mystical experience and new confession through that experience are possible. In January 4th, 1942 at the age of 52, Yu experienced spiritual

126 Oh Jeong-sook compares Yu’s experience of spiritual union with God to John Wesley and St. Augustine’s experience of conversion. (Oh, Korean Christianity of Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo, 74.)

127 “사상(思想)에 군이 동양, 서양의 수식어를 달아 구별할 필요가 없다. 사상은 다 하나(하느님)를 담아서만이 영원한 사상인 것이다. 사상이 이루어진 것은 사람들이 하나(하느님)를 찾아서 때문이다. 그러나 아직도 미정고로 완결된 사상이란 없다. 인류가 남긴 모든 사상은 영원 절대(하느님)에 이르러는 과정에서 ‘나는 여기까지 왔다’는 고백적인 기록을 남긴 것이다. [...] 따라서 어떤 사상 어떤 종교를 내세워 이것을 따르지 않으면 죽는다고 하면서 완전고(完全稿)처럼 떠돌지만 실은 그런 것은 있을 수 없다. 그런데도 자기들의 사상이나 신조가 완전고라 떠돌고 내려온 것이 인류역사다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo ŏrok, 83-84.)
rebirth, and this means that he realized ‘Eol-Na’ in his inside, which is eternal life from
God. Unfortunately, there remains no material to describe what Yu’s spiritual
experience was in detail. However, we can witness how profoundly his experience of
rebirth changed his life and theology through some writings which Yu wrote for
SungeoJoseon (聖書朝鮮). Below is one of Yu’s writings for SungeoJoseon (聖書朝鮮)
titled, “Song of the one who entered the faith”:

I do not have any anxiety at all
From now on.
You occupy (占領) me,
Govern (保管) me,
And have (所有) me.
I gave up my body and face (箛)129;
I threw away all of mine.
[…]
Looking up and down in all the world,
I am not there.
Flashed Light!
By becoming one who does not have any desire (位而無人, 脫私我).
<John 1:4>
It is the face facing You,
And the light embodying the Words.
It is the face to see You,
And the body to read the Words.
It is the face to be loved,
And the body to follow the [Your] will.
Amen.130

128 Park, Tasǒk Yu Yŏng-mo: A Great Thinker Who Was Doing Philosophy in Our
Language, 81.

129 The “face” (箛) here symbolizes personal honor or self-respect in the East Asian
culture rather than real human face.

130 “나는 시름 없고나, 이제부터 시름없다. 난이 나를 차지(占領)하사, 난이 나를
맡으셨네(保管), 난이 나를 가지셨네(所有), 몸도 낫도 다 버리네, 내것이라고는 다 버렸다.
[…]

155
As we can see through this writing, Yu seems to experience the union with God. He talks about his experience that not only his anxiety but also himself totally disappeared. He experienced being completely occupied by God, in other words, the spiritual union with God. Yu also confessed as follows:

Didn’t God call me 38 years ago in spring of 1905? Since then, haven’t I lived with a crippled faith? […] If we keep holding something to die, we will die and disappear. I saw that one became the body which opens spiritual (Eol) life by sacrificing the body which will die soon.131

Here, Yu defines his life before that spiritual experience as crippled faith. In this sense, Yu seems to believe that even though one received God’s calling, he or she needs to enter a higher spiritual stage, in other words, the spiritual union with God in which the division between God and human self disappears. It can also be understood as the experience of the Holy Spirit as Young-ho Park points out that Yu experienced the Holy Spirit coming from God after he removed himself (自我).132 Meanwhile, it can also be seen as Yu’s theological interpretation of his spiritual experience. Yu believed that he experienced the union with Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim which is his ontological understanding of the ultimate reality.

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온 세상을 뒤져 봐도. 그 곳에는 나 없으니. 位而無인(脫私我)되어 반짝! 빛! (요한 1:4)

님을 對한 낮으로요. 말씀 體(本)한 빛이로다. 날 봐온자는 낮이요, 말씀 읽을 몸이라. 사랑하실 낮이요, 빛을 받들 몸이라. 아멘.” (Kyo-shin Kim, SungseoJoseon, 157 (1940. 2.), 36-37.)

131 Kyo-shin Kim, SungseoJoseon, 157 (1940. 2.).

Like this, Yu developed his theological understanding of God, which is very different from the traditional and conservative Korean Christian theology, on the basis of his own spiritual experiences. However, once his understanding of God as ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim was theologically settled, it started to lead and evaluate his spirituality. Yu’s spirituality, which in practice focuses on removing Jai-Na (ego) by giving up bodily desires such as greed (貪), anger (瞋), and ignorance (癡), and finding divine nature as Eol-Na (spiritual self) in the inner side of human being, is deeply related to his theological understanding of God as ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, which means both of transcendent and immanent God. In other words, Yu’s theory of ŏpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, who on the one hand, as our true self is related to the world, but on the other hand, as Wu-chi or nothingness absolutely transcends this relative world, leads Yu’s spirituality towards the ascetic direction.

Yu’s spirituality developed through the interrelationship with his theological understanding of the ultimate reality. Yu’s understanding of God, which is the theological basis of his spirituality, is not simply a mixture of Christian concept of God and East Asian spiritual concepts for the ultimate reality, but rather has a formidable value as the ontological understanding embracing both of being and non-being, and transcendence and immanence as Neville’s understanding of the ultimate reality does. Furthermore, Yu’s ascetic spirituality is not simply based on the traditional self-discipline of the East Asian religions, but rather is based on his ontological understanding of God. In the sense that he seeks for the spiritual union with God, Yu’s spirituality reminds us of
the apophatic tradition’s negative way to know God or the mystical union with God which Eastern Orthodox theologians emphasize.¹³³

Pseudo-Dionysius (the late fifth century – the early sixth century) divides the ways to know God into two theological ways: the cataphatic theological way and the apophatic theological way. The cataphatic way or the positive way to know God gives us some knowledge of divinity, but it cannot provide us perfect knowledge of God. According to Dionysius, the only perfect way to know God is the apophatic way or the negative way, which leads us to total ignorance because God by His nature is absolutely unknowable to human reason and sense.¹³⁴ In the first chapter of Mystical Theology titled “What is the divine darkness?” Dionysius states:

By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is. [...] Since it is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being.¹³⁵

Dionysius denies any definition of God as a being, and sees God by His nature as non-being. Here, “an abandonment of yourself and everything” is similar to Yu’s spiritual way of non-self (無我) to know the divine nature, and “the Cause of everything which surpasses all being” is also similar to Yu’s understanding of God as Ὄψις-

¹³³ Vladimir Lossky, an Eastern Orthodox theologian, defines Christian theology’s ultimate end as mystical union with God from the Eastern Orthodox perspective. Lossky says: “we are finally led to a conclusion which may seem paradoxical enough: that Christian theory should have an eminently practical significance; and that the more mystical it is, the more directly it aspires to the supreme end of union with God.” (Lossky, The Mystical Theology of The Eastern Church, 8.)

¹³⁴ Ibid., 25.

Dionysius also denotes that the negative way is the only way to reach the perfect knowledge of God because human soul should move beyond its reason and knowledge to perfectly know God through mystical union with God.\textsuperscript{136} For Dionysius, the divine darkness means that human soul can reach the unknowable divinity only through negation of all beings. Lossky, an Eastern Orthodoxy theologian, even declares that the way to know God must be the way of deification, which for him means union with God. As Lossky says, if spiritual or mystical union with God is the only way of knowledge of God, “all true theology is fundamentally apophatic.”\textsuperscript{137} In this sense, Dionysius’ trial to keep the soul “outside everything which is correlative with its own finite nature”\textsuperscript{138} seems to correspond to Yu’s negation of self (bodily desires, \textit{Jai-Na}).

As he arranges the relationship between spirituality and theology, Philip Sheldrake also stresses the concept of the hiddenness of God, which comes from the traditional apophatic understanding of God. According to Sheldrake, while the cataphatic tradition emphasizes the affirmative way or way of image as the method to know God, the apophatic tradition emphasizes the negative way, that is, “not knowing” to know God.\textsuperscript{139} Sheldrake insists that all religious language is relative and therefore, religious definitions should be treated as provisional, as he contrasts images of God with the

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\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{136} “Such a way guides the soul through all the divine notions, notions which are themselves transcended by which is far beyond every name, all reason and all knowledge. Beyond the outermost boundaries of the world, the soul is brought into union with God himself to the extent that every one of us is capable of it.” (Pseudo-Dionysius, \textit{The Divine Names}, from \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius The Complete Works}, 130.)
\item \textsuperscript{137} Lossky, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Pseudo-Dionysius, \textit{The Divine Names}, from \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius The Complete Works}, 130.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Sheldrake, \textit{Spirituality and Theology}, 25-26.
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushright}
hiddenness of God. He concludes that the apophatic stance in knowing God cannot simply be seen as a branch of theological approach. Rather it is “an attitude which should undergird all theological discourse, and lead it towards the silence of contemplation and communion.”¹⁴⁰

Thomas Merton and Yu

Jeong-hyun Youn analyzes that Yu’s understanding of human self is based on spiritual realization. Spiritual realization means to accomplish the oneness with God by emptying self. According to Youn, Yu’s understanding of human self is understood in relation to self-disciplines (修德) and realization (覺) better than in relation to the theology of grace. Therefore, Yu’s theological understanding of the relationship between human self and God is very similar to that of the apophatic tradition, which is based on Dionysius’ emptying self or negation of self.¹⁴¹ Youn also thinks that Yu’s concept of human self is similar to that of Thomas Merton (1915-1968) who is called to inherit the negative tradition of apophatic theology.¹⁴² In reality, there are many similarities between Yu’s concept of self and Merton’s in spite of the essential difference in their understanding of Jesus.

In *Zen and The Birds of Appetite*, Merton states that the great religions in the world are all simple, and they all emphasize direct confrontation or encounter with the


¹⁴² Ibid., 208.
ultimate reality, which can be expressed in different ways in each religious context.\textsuperscript{143} Merton admits that the confrontation with God in Christianity is very “theological and affective,” and therefore, is expressed by “word and love,” while the confrontation in Zen (禪) Buddhism (Mahāyāna Buddhism, 大乘佛教) is “metaphysical and intellectual,” and is expressed by “insight and emptiness.”\textsuperscript{144} However, he stresses that Christianity also has the apophatic tradition of knowledge of God through the way of negation.\textsuperscript{145} As he examines the idea of Kitaro Nishida, the eminent Japanese Zen philosopher, Merton defines Prajña (wisdom) which is the mature grasp of sūnyatā, which is the ultimate reality in Zen Buddhism, as follows:

This wisdom is the direct experience not of the “One” and the “Absolute” in the abstract, but of “the Self” or “the Buddha nature.” For this unitive awareness which Nishida sees as a union of love, he uses the term “Spirit.”\textsuperscript{146}

Here, the terms “self” and “the Buddha nature” seem to be replaced by human self and Eol-Na as the divine nature in Yu’s theology and spirituality. As Yu defines human ego (Jai-Na) as false self to be removed in order to find true self, which is the divine nature of human being, Merton also insists that human being has to go out of ego in order to find [true] self.\textsuperscript{147} And he identifies true self with non-self as follows:

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\textsuperscript{143} Thomas Merton, \textit{Zen and The Birds of Appetite}, pp. 61-62.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{147} “In order to become myself I must cease to be what I always thought I wanted to be, and in order to find myself I must go out of myself, and in order to live I have to die. The reason for this is that I am born in selfishness and therefore my natural efforts to make myself more real and more myself, make me less real and less myself, because they revolve around a lie.” (Thomas Merton, \textit{New Seeds of Contemplation}, 47.)
\end{flushright}
The man who has truly found his spiritual nakedness, who has realized he is empty, is not a self that has acquired emptiness or become empty. [...] He is one with God and identified with God and hence knows nothing of any ego in himself. All he knows is love.\textsuperscript{148}

Merton considers the state of union with God as the state of non-ego or emptiness in which there is no bodily desire. Christ, as one who perfectly became one with God, can be the savior of the world by making all beings participate in the divine and ultimate reality.\textsuperscript{149} Merton believes that Jesus Christ is God because his human nature and divine nature are perfectly united in himself. It is very different from Yu’s Christology. In Yu’s Christology, Jesus himself cannot be identified with Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim even though he is the best model to be united with God by removing his ego and realizing the divine seed within himself. However, when Merton says that Christ, through the mystical union with God, became the source and principle of divine life of human beings,\textsuperscript{150} he seems to believe the possibility to find the divine nature, which is the Buddha nature in Zen, in all human beings. In these aspects, there are some similarities between Yu’s and Merton’s understanding of human self.

In short, Yu’s theological understanding of the ultimate reality was formed and developed by his spiritual experiences. At the same time, Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim as his theological reflection on his experience of God, which cannot be grasped by human reason and ability, had great effect on his spirituality and led it toward mystical union to

\textsuperscript{148} Merton, \textit{Zen and The Birds of Appetite}, 129.

\textsuperscript{149} “For in Christ God is made Man. In Him God and man are no longer separate, remote from one another, but inseparably one, unconfused and yet indivisible. Hence in Christ everything that is divine and supernatural becomes accessible on the human level to every man born of woman, to every son of Adam.” (Merton, \textit{New Seeds of Contemplation}, 150.)

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 159.
explain important religious issues such as salvation, revelation, or knowledge of God. Insofar as he believed that mystical union with God is the only perfect way to know and experience unknowable God, Yu’s spirituality is similar to Dionysius’ negative way to know God. However, Yu’s spirituality is unique in regard to his trial to find the basis of mystical union in the inside instead of outside of human being. For this reason, some scholars evaluate Yu as a pantheist or a panentheist. For Yu, union with God means to find Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim that exists inside of human being and realize it. And for these reasons, Yu’s spirituality naturally had him focus on spiritual self-disciplines in his daily life in order to remove false or bodily self and reveal the divine nature as true self. Yu’s understanding of human self is also reflected in his Christology. As Merton sees the state of mystical union with God as the human state spiritually transcending self without ego, his understanding of human self seems similar to Yu’s. However, while Merton defines Christ as God who is qualitatively different from human being, Yu denies any ontological difference between Jesus and human beings even though he believes that Jesus is the most perfect example that realized union with God.

Yu’s spirituality starts with the premise that Cham-Na (참나, true self) or God can be found within all human beings. He believed that anyone can be the Christ when he or she cultivates sok-al (the divine seed). Therefore, Christ means nothing but the status that human sok-al is perfectly embodied, and the possibility for all human beings to be Christ is Yu’s Eol-Christology’s essence. Yu says:

We have to succeed and continue the eternal will of God. That is the duty of the only-begotten son (獨生子). […] We, all human beings,
already have the son of God. It is our duty to keep and cultivate the seed (the son of God).^{151}

This shows that Yu does not see the son of God as the unique characteristic of historical Jesus, but rather he regards the son of God as the universal spiritual seed of all human beings to be divine beings.

We cannot completely understand Yu’s theological concepts of the ultimate reality without knowing his spirituality, and we cannot correctly grasp the direction and goal of Yu’s spiritual teachings and practices. These important factors such as his definition of the ultimate reality, his understanding of the relationship between God and human being in relation to human self, and his Christology in which his understanding of God and spiritual self are reflected necessarily leads Yu’s theology and spirituality to the way of religious pluralism. In the next chapter, I will discuss and examine Yu’s theology and spirituality from the pluralistic perspective.

^{151} “영원한 하느님의 뜻을 잇는게 우리의 일이다. 그게 독생자다. […] 우리는 하느님의 아들을 맡아 있다. 이 씨를 꼭 지켜서 키우는 것이 우리의 할 일이다.” (Yŏng-mo Yu, Life to Death, Hope to Despair, 224. I cite at second-hand from Lee, Upsi kyesinŭn hananim dŏl ǒpnŭn ingan, 318.)
CHAPTER V
YŎNG-MO YU AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

General understanding of religious pluralism: John Hick

In order to discuss Yu’s theology and spirituality from the religious pluralistic perspective, we need to deal with some important and controversial issues of religious pluralism. Most religious pluralists do not agree that Christianity is the only true religion or the best one among all religions. They generally consider the absoluteness or uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the historical and cultural view in some communities because they believe that all religions have contextual limits. Therefore, no one has any right to criticize or evaluate other religious traditions or claims on the basis of one’s own religious perspective. It implies that all religions have true claims to the divine or ultimate reality even though those claims are not absolutely true beyond all contexts. In the religious pluralism’s view, Jesus Christ is considered as one of the religious leaders or founders in the world. There are numerous pluralistic theologians and thinkers to examine in relation to the question between the Christ-centered view and God-centered or ultimate reality-centered view, for examples Wilfred Cantwell Smith or Paul Tillich; but in this chapter, I will discuss religious pluralism by mainly examining John Hick’s pluralistic understanding of the ultimate reality and Christology. As Hick (1922-2012) can be seen as a contemporary western version of Yu (1890-1981), and he, like Yu, reached religious pluralistic thought from the position of evangelical Christianity or fundamentalism through philosophical theology, Hick’s pluralism will be a good
comparative study to examine Yu’s pluralism which is based on East Asian understanding of the ultimate reality and Christology.

Christian attitudes toward other religions: Exclusive and Inclusive

Christianity’s responses to this religious pluralistic view can be broadly divided into two ways on the basis of many theologians’ classification method.

The first response to the religious pluralism is the exclusive way, which is the traditional and conservative Christian response. The exclusive response means to adhere to the position that because only Christianity holds the divine truth, all other religious traditions, which express different views about the divine truth from Christianity, are heretical or false. Korean mainstream protestant churches’ theology supports this response because they believe that Jesus Christ is the only criterion to evaluate if a religious claim is true or false. As he criticizes the Christian exclusive attitude against other religions, Paul Knitter indicates that Christianity’s confessional belief in Jesus Christ must be seen within its historical and cultural context.¹ Knitter, therefore, asserts as follows:

The many texts that present Jesus as "the Son of God," even "the only begotten Son" (John 1:14), will also be heard differently. Their primary intent will not be to exclude anyone else as a possible son or daughter of God, but to urge all hearers to take this Jesus seriously, as authoritative. The point these texts are making is that just as any son can tell us much about his father, so Jesus is a reliable revelation of God.²

¹ See, Paul Knitter, No Other Name? 184-186.
² Ibid., 185.
Another response to the religious pluralistic issues is the so-called inclusive way, which is a more favorable attitude for non-Christian religions. Even though the inclusivism shows more generous attitude for other religious claims, it still considers Jesus Christ as an absolute and superior truth over other religious truths. This inclusive attitude for other religions can be clearly found within Vatican Council II, (1962-1965) through which the Roman Catholic Church showed its new stance on other religions as follows:

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too many achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.”

The Roman Catholic Church declares that those who seek the divine reality by following their conscience in any religious tradition can be saved. As a Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner also tries to secure the possibility for other religions to convey the truth of God by using his famous term, “anonymous Christian.” According to Rahner, Christianity has a beginning in history, and it means that Christianity has “a temporal and spatial starting point in Jesus of Nazareth and in the saving event of the unique Cross and the empty tomb in Jerusalem.”

Rahner recognizes non-Christian religions as lawful:

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5 Rahner defines ‘a lawful religion’ as follows: “A lawful religion means here an institutional religion whose 'use' by man at a certain period can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a
Christianity has to consider the members of other religions not as mere non-
Christians but as “someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect
as an anonymous Christian.”

In *Problem of Religious Pluralism*, John Hick criticizes both exclusive and
inclusive attitudes of Christians toward other religions. First of all, Hick points out that
salvation as the actual transformation of human life cannot be known as *a priori*
knowledge. He says:

One can only look at the living of human life in its endlessly varied
circumstances and try to discern the signs of this transformation. Except
in those whom we call saints, in whom the transformation is sufficiently
advanced to be publicly evident, such discernment is often extremely
difficult; for salvation/liberation […] is to be found in many stages and
degrees in the varying qualities of true humanity […].

Especially, for the inclusive attitude that is represented by Rahner’s new term “an
anonymous Christian,” Hick asks why we give a Christian label to non-Christians if
salvation can be found in people who have other faiths without any connection to the
Christian faith. Accordingly, Hick suggests pluralism, which, according to Hick, is the
view that salvation is taking place in different ways within different contexts of all
religious traditions, as the third and best answer to the question of salvation in non-
Christian religions. Hick believes that we can find the greatest and highest reality
means which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation.” (Rahner, Ibid., 125.)

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6 Ibid., 121.
7 Ibid., 133.
9 Ibid, 34.
10 Ibid.
beyond the natural world in every great religion. The ultimate reality is the One, and giving oneself freely and totally to this One is human salvation. The divine reality in each religious tradition exceeds human language and thought, and is therefore infinite and eternal. In this sense, Hick suggests to use a term which is available to all religious traditions, Ultimate Reality or the Real, instead off some particular names used in the particular religions.  

In order to understand Hick’s concept of the ultimate reality, we need to know Kant’s epistemological understanding of God.

### Hick’s understanding of the Real: perception of God

Hick believes that there are various particular forms of religious awareness, and these particular forms are established by the presence of the ultimate reality. This presence of the ultimate reality enters into human consciousness through the different religious concepts and meanings which function within the different religious traditions. People cannot encounter or recognize the ultimate Deity or the Absolute in general, but always experience it through specific forms. In order to explain his understanding of human experience of the ultimate reality, Hick borrows Kantian language. Hick seems to distinguish, as Kant did, between the thing itself and a thing as phenomenon which is perceived by human subject. In Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics, Kant says that “inquirers into pure reason have conceived, besides the things of sense, or appearances

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11 Ibid., 39.

12 Hick divides concepts of God or the ultimate reality into two basic concepts as followings: “One is the concept of Deity, or God, i.e. the Real as personal; and the other is the concept of the Absolute, i.e. the Real as non-personal.” (Ibid., 41.)

13 Ibid.
(phenomena), which make up the sensible world, certain beings of the understanding (noumena), which should constitute an intelligible world.”14 He continues to say, “[…] we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself but only know its appearances, namely, the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something.”15 It implies that if there are some pure concepts of the understanding outside of our perception they do not have any meaning for us. We can only think of them through our experiential perception.16

Hick adapts Kant’s view of human perception, which is perception of the physical world, and applies it to the spiritual or supernatural area. In *A Christian Theology of Religions*, Hick defines Kant’s concept of human perception as an active process rather than a passive activity, which includes various processes of selecting, grouping, relating, extrapolating, and endowing with meaning. Hick says:

This [Kant’s understanding of human perception] led him to distinguish between the noumenal world, the world as it exists unperceived, and the phenomenal world, that same world as humanly perceived, with all the difference that the act of perception makes. I am suggesting applying this insight to our awareness of the Real, by distinguishing between the noumenal Real, the Ran an sich, and the Real as humanly perceived in different ways as a range of divine phenomena.17

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15 Ibid., 62.

16 “[If] even the pure concepts of the understanding are thought to go beyond objects of experience to things in themselves (noumena), they have no meaning whatever. They serve, as it were, only to decipher appearances, that we may be able to read them as experience.” (Ibid., 60.)

Here, Hick tries to define human experience or perception of the ultimate reality by using Kant’s view of human perception. Hick applies in more detail Kant’s theory to human religious experience as follows:

In Kant's own analysis of sense-experience the schematisation of the basic categories is in terms of time; but religious experience occurs at a much higher level of meaning, presupposing and going beyond physical meaning and involving much more complex and variable modes of dispositional response. Schematisation or concretisation here is in terms of ‘filled’ human time, or history, as diversified into the different cultures and civilisations of the earth. For there are different concrete ways of being human and of participating in human history, and within these different ways the presence of the divine Reality is experienced in characteristically different ways.18

Therefore, the Real or the ultimate reality in itself as noumenon cannot be directly known to human reason, but rather the presence of the Real can be experienced by human beings through various ways within different contexts. Hick summarizes his application of Kant’s view to human experience of the ultimate reality as follows:

[We] may distinguish between, on the one hand, the single divine noumenon, the Eternal One in itself, transcending the scope of human thought and language, and, on the other hand, the plurality of divine phenomena, the divine personae of the theistic religions and the concretizations of the concept of the Absolute in the nontheistic religions.19

As we have examined, Hick tries to divide the concept of the ultimate reality into two kinds: one is the ultimate reality in itself which cannot be grasped by human scope, and another is the ultimate reality as experienced by human senses which is deeply rooted within specific contexts. Hick’s distinction between two concepts of the ultimate reality reminds us of Yu’s ontological understanding of God as absolute nothingness who cannot

18 Hick, Problem of Religious Pluralism, 41.

19 Hick, God Has Many Names, 53.
be known to human beings and spiritual understanding of God as *Eol-Na* who can be experienced by human beings. On the basis of Kantian concept of the ultimate reality or the Real, Hick develops his pluralistic Christology.

**Hick’s Christology**

Hick’s pluralistic theology is notable for his so-called “Copernican revolution.” According to his own words, Copernican revolution in theology means “a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is *God* who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him.”

Hick sees that differences in the revelatory events of various religions would be serious obstacles to the Copernican revolution in theology because every religion has its own founder and scripture, and also asks its followers or believers for absolute response of faith. For Christianity, for example, this absolute response has been developed in “the doctrine that Christ was uniquely divine, being God the Son incarnate.” In order to make Christianity give up the absoluteness of the doctrine of Christ, in *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age*, Hick strongly criticizes Christian traditional view that Jesus Christ was God incarnate.

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21 Hick distinguishes three kinds of differences between the world religions. “We can distinguish three kinds of difference and conflict between the world religions – differences in their modes of experiencing the divine reality; differences of philosophical and theological theory concerning that reality; and differences in the key, or revelatory, events to which the different streams of religious experience trace their origins and by means of which they focus their worship.” (Ibid., 148.)

22 Ibid., 149.
In the Preface of this book, Hick clearly summarizes his critics on the traditional Christology and his own viewpoint in six points. First, Jesus himself never taught that, as the orthodox Christians believed, he was God incarnate. Second, the dogma that Jesus Christ has two natures which are humanity and divinity cannot be explicated in any reasonable way. Third, as it has been observed within history, Christian traditional dogma has frequently been used to justify human evils. Fourth, the idea of divine incarnation must be understood as a metaphor instead of literal truth. Fifth, Jesus must be rightly understood as the one who made God real to us and whose life and teaching made us to live in God’s presence. Sixth, if Christianity which is based on the new understanding of Jesus admits itself as one of various human responses to the ultimate reality, it can help the development of world community and peace. In Hick’s new type of Christology, his main point may be the fourth one. To give up the absoluteness of the dogma that Jesus was God incarnate, and to understand the dogma as metaphorical rather than as literal can be said as Copernican revolution to both traditional Christianity and non-Christian religions.

For Hick, all theology is the work of human thought and the result of human reflection on experience of the ultimate reality. Even if in Jesus’ time, many people found themselves also in the divine presence and in the claim to love God and neighbors through his life and teaching, it is true that Christians, especially theologians, have developed metaphysical systems to conceptualize the significance of historical Jesus. He says, “Theology begins with religious experience — the experience of encountering God in Christ and in one's own life - and then tries systematically and consistently to interpret

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this and to relate it to our other knowledge.”24 In this sense, the Christian theology and
tradition is always changing, and Hick points out the two main factors to transform the
Christian tradition: first, scientific knowledge and technological power, and second, its
encounter with other world religions.25 It implies that on the one hand, Copernican
change in Christianity, which means to give up the absoluteness of Christology, makes
Christianity to share its theological and spiritual ideas with other religions; but on the
other hand, its encounter with other religious traditions also can make its traditional
Christology to change.

Spiritual experience of the ultimate reality, which is transcendent, and therefore
cannot be reached by human knowledge and senses, always takes place only within
specific context, and for that reason it can convey some knowledge or concept of the
ultimate reality to human mind and senses. In this sense, Hick’s position to see the
dogma that Jesus was God incarnate as a metaphor seems to provide a good way for
Christianity to be with religious pluralism. However, there are other theologians who try
to define religious claims, ritual, and doctrines including Christian understanding of Jesus
Christ as symbols which are, in my view, more elaborate and appropriate concepts than
metaphors to refer to the spiritual or religious. Even though there are lots of theologians
and scholars to speak of religious symbols, here I will discuss Tillich’s and Neville’s
ideas of religious symbol.

24 Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion, 93.
25 Ibid., 94.
Religious symbols: Tillich and Neville

Contextual theology

What is a religion? What is faith? What are religious experiences? These are and will always be very difficult questions to be answered objectively or even subjectively. These kinds of questions, however, should be answered in any possible way: for someone as a believer in daily life and for someone as a theologian in academic areas. Roy A. Rappaport, an anthropologist, gives a good key to answer these questions. Rappaport, in *Ritual and Religion in The Making of Humanity*, tries to clarify the meaning and features of rituals because he believes that ritual plays the core role in every religion. It may be easy to agree with Rappaport’s idea insofar as we notice how much ritual takes parts of religious life. If we agree that ritual is a core element to understand religion, a main or only way to express our faith and a faithful factor to make religious experiences possible, then, we should answer again what ritual is. Rappaport also provides a clue for this question for ritual as follows:

In attending to ritual’s form we must not lose sight of the fundamental nature of what it is that ritual does as a logically necessary outcome of its form… ritual contains within itself not simply a symbolic representation of social contract, but tacit social contract itself. As such, ritual, which also establishes, guards, and bridges boundaries between public systems and private processes, is the basic social act.\(^{26}\)

According to Rappaport, ritual is understood as social acts or social contracts among people. This means that ritual can be identified with human culture. In this sense, Kathryn Tanner, in *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, also defines theology as a part of culture. She asserts:

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Theology is something that human beings produce. Like all human activities, it is historically and socially conditioned; it cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of human social cultural practices. On the basis of Rappaport’s and Tanner’s ideas, it can be said that religious activities such as rituals and theologies are cultural combination of or religious reflection on experience of people who belong into one religious community.

As Hick points out, Christian theology like other religions’ theologies has been built within specific contexts, and therefore there are countless kinds of contextual theologies in the world. Each theology has been developed on the basis of religious experience, and each religious community develops its own ritual and doctrines according to its particular context. More detailed context is classified, more detailed theologies or rituals that response to each detailed context emerge. Then, can we say that all theologies are contextual insofar as they embrace in-group experience? Can we also say that all theologies are right insofar as they are established on the basis of their own context and insofar as they express their own faith in their own ways? For example, I am an Eastern Asian; I am a conservative Korean Evangelical Holiness Church’s pastor; I am a heterosexual man; I am a Protestant believer. If I try to evaluate, for instance, a particular Queer theology, I may be criticized by gays or lesbians that I have no right to evaluate or criticize their theology because I do not or cannot share their experience, their context. It is not difficult for me to merely respect theologies or Christian groups that have different context from mine. At the same time it is also easy to ignore or reject

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27 Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology, 63.

28 For example, “womanist theology” is built up by black women differently from existing feminist theology. Garry Dorrien defines womanism as follows: “womanism is the name given by black feminists to a spiritual sensibility to women of color.” (Gary Dorrien, Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity, 253.)
them. However, to understand their experience correctly and communicate with them truly is not easy, at least in my experience.

In this circumstance, Tillich’s concept of the religious symbol seems to provide proper understanding of all different religion and help to make communication between different religious groups possible. Tillich sees religious symbols as media for human being to understand God’s revelation. He also, like Rappaport and Tanner, thinks that in all religious activities, there are always some contributions of human beings.29

Tillich’s religious symbol

For Tillich, religion is the depth dimension in all of human being’s cultural and spiritual life, and religion is human being’s ultimate concern. The fact of “concern” and the dimension of “ultimacy” point to the existential characteristic of religious experience. Tillich derives formal criteria from this existential characteristic. Firstly, “the object of theology is what concerns us ultimately. Only those propositions are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of ultimate concern for us.”30 Secondly, “our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not-being. Only those statements are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of being or not-being for us.”31 Tillich addresses that because the word “revelation” means the manifestation of something hidden, revelation should be

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29 “Although God in his abysmal nature is in no way dependent on man, God in his self-manifestation to man is dependent on the way man receives his manifestation.” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 131.)

30 Ibid., 12.

31 Ibid., 13.
understood by the word “mystery.” “Whatever is essentially mysterious should not lose its mysteriousness when it is revealed.” It means that the word “mystery” cannot be used for something that ceases to be mysterious after it was revealed, and here we can guess the position where Tillich’s symbol is placed in his theology. It implies that when revelation is revealed, not directly, but through something mediate. Any reality, thing, or event can be a bearer of the mystery of being and enter into a revelatory correlation because nothing is worthy in itself to represent our ultimate concern. In other words, if we can say that a certain thing bears the revelatory mystery, it is not because of the thing itself but because of the revelatory origin on which the thing depends.

Tillich thinks that systematic theology must consider the cognitive function of ontological reason in developing the concept of revelation because revelation is the manifestation of the ultimate reality as the ground of being for human knowledge. In every act of knowledge, union of the subject and object of cognition always occur. For Tillich, the statement that God is being-itself is a non-symbolic statement. It does not point beyond itself. It means what it says directly and properly. Except this statement that God is being-itself, any other assertions or descriptions about God are symbolically expressed because concrete assertions use finite experience in order to say something

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32 Ibid., 109.

33 According to Kelsey, “a religious symbol may arise as the ‘expression’ of the fact that the revelation took place.” (David H. Kelsey, “The Fabric of Paul Tillich’s Theology,” 21.)

34 Tillich says that religious concerns are ultimate. All other concerns except the ultimate concern become the preliminary concerns. The ultimate concern is unconditional and independent of any conditions of character, desire, or circumstance. Tillich defines that the ultimate concern is to determine our being or non-being. Human “is ultimately concerned about that which determines his ultimate destiny beyond all preliminary necessities and accidents.” (Tillich, Systematic Theology I, 14.)
about God. Although the assertions include this empirical experience, they transcend its content. Tillich says, “The segment of finite reality which becomes the vehicle of a concrete assertion about God is affirmed and negated at the same time.” This means that the segment of finite reality becomes a symbol because the meaning of symbolic expressions is denied by what it points to. And, on the other hand, it is also affirmed by what it points to, and “this affirmation gives the symbolic expression an adequate basis for pointing beyond itself.” According to Tillich, religious symbols point beyond themselves, and symbolize something infinite even though symbols themselves are finite.

Tillich argues that religious symbols are directed not only toward something infinite that they symbolize, but also toward something finite that they symbolize it through. They force the infinite one down to finitude and the finite one up to infinity. Tillich gives examples, “if God is symbolized as ‘Father,’ he is brought down to the human relationship of father and child. But at the same time this human relationship is consecrated into a pattern of the divine-human relationship. […] (And) if God’s self-manifestation is called ‘the word,’ this not only symbolizes God’s relation to man but also emphasizes the holiness of all words as an expression of the spirit.” Even though Tillich emphasizes that religious symbols are related to the ultimate reality, in some mystery ways these symbols must be defined and affected by the context within which those symbols emerged and developed.

35 Ibid., 239.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 240-241.
Neville’s understanding of Jesus as a symbol

Neville, in *Symbols of Jesus: A Christology of Symbolic Engagement*, introduces four premises for symbolic engagement of his Christology as following 38:

1. Religious symbols are schematized images of the ultimate reality, which is transcendent and infinite, given to human experience. The ultimate reality that religious symbols present is relevant to important human issues. When religious symbols are used to be confused with theological conceptions of the ultimate reality, theological mistakes can happen.

2. There is a theory of religious symbols to understand how religious symbols can be schematized images of the ultimate reality. This theory implies two important things: first, how religious symbols engage people with the ultimate reality, and second, how those engagements are sometimes true and sometimes false.

3. Particular religious (Christian) symbols can be proved to be true under particular conditions.

4. Christological symbols will be public to anyone who might be interested, not only to members of Christianity because symbols of other religions must also be schematized images in their contexts.

Neville argues that this engagement happens not indirectly but directly because religious symbols represent objects directly rather than the conceptions of objects.39

From these ideas of Neville, we can derive some characteristics of religious symbols.


39 “People engage the ultimate directly through the symbols, not indirectly as if the theological conceptions were the real signs for engagement and the symbols represented the conceptions, not the object.” (Ibid., 2.)
First of all, as we can see on number 1, religious symbols are understood as a medium to know the ultimate. Number 2 shows that there is a process how religious symbols are engaged. Number 3 implies that religious symbols should be understood and verified under particular context. As Tillich says that except the statement “God is being-itself”, any other assertions about God are expressed symbolically, Neville also declares that most important expressions about God can be understood only through the schematized images of the religious symbols.

According to Neville, to decide whether certain religious symbols are true or false depends on interpretations. “An interpretation takes a sign to stand for an object in a certain respect.”40 The interpretation, which is an act of engagement, can be formed as a complex proposition that is subjective. Human interpreters always interpret with assumptions and purposes affected by perception and the cultivated structures of intention. Religious symbols also play interpretive roles in religious practice. Here, we can see that in religious practice, there is room for human interpretation, and this interpretation may be caused or affected by human intention. Neville defines the character of interpretation as triadic, that is, signs, objects of signs, and interpretations. He also shows three important issues related to the triadic character of interpretation. Those are “the definition of symbols, the nature of reference, and the significance of interpretive context.”41 First, religious symbols are or should be defined within certain symbolic system.42 Second, there are primary reference and secondary reference.

40 Ibid., 11.
41 Ibid., 13.
42 Neville takes the symbol of Jesus as Lamb of God for an example. The symbol of Jesus as Lamb of God is defined within different symbolic systems such as the symbol system of
Primary reference is conventional, iconic, or indexical, and secondary reference is the qualification of the interpreter to engage the logical object with the symbol properly.

Third, interpretations always occur in concrete contexts. Neville says:

> The contexts have both purposive elements and given elements of time, place, and circumstance. The purposes are deeply shaped by cultural values and projects, by the needs of the circumstance, and also by personal considerations.\(^{43}\)

It means that all interpretations are affected by actual contexts and these contexts reflect certain intention or purpose of the members of a certain community. As theology and spirituality can be defined as interpretations of human experience of the ultimate reality, both theology and spirituality must be contextual. If we agree that theology and spirituality are core components of religions including Christianity, we can conclude that all religions or religious claims are contextual.

In *The Truth of Broken Symbols*, Neville introduces the cultural-linguistic approach to religious symbols. The cultural-linguistic approach helps to see “how religious communities are constituted with both diachronic and synchronic dimensions.”\(^{44}\) This means that religious symbols play the role to tie a religious community with its past, and also tie different parts of the community into a kind of systematic interrelationship. Therefore, lack of religious symbols causes both the symbols and the religious communities to be fragmented.\(^{45}\) Perhaps, this idea can be applied to today’s concrete situations such as the situation of extreme breakup of Korean the Levitical sacrifice cult, that of the Passover, and that of the Book of Revelation.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{44}\) Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbol*, 21.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 22.
Christian denominations. Even though all societies are individual cultural-linguistic systems, they are not completely systematized. Rather, most communities can be understood as a mass of different cultural-linguistic systems. In the same manner, religious communities cannot exist only on pure religious dimension. Neville continually says:

Part of the pluralism of religious life today is that in most countries a given cultural-linguistic religious system shapes only a small sphere of behavior with much determinateness, leaving vague symbolic implications for the rest of life. Those other spheres of life are shared with people of different religious symbolic system.

It is true that today, a certain cultural-linguistic religious system has effects on only small social range. In real, however, to share spheres between different religious symbolic systems is not always easy because there are also strong religious communities to push their members to follow their criteria in all spheres of life. Even though these interactions among different religious systems can provide chances for some types of enrichments, they can also be a threat to the integrity of certain religious symbolic system. Neville responds to such issue as follows:

“[In] our pluralistic time one important criterion for the health of a religious symbolic system is the degree to which it is flexible in accommodating itself to other religious (and anti-religious secular) systems without losing its integrity.”

46 “They do others things such as teach, bring comfort and aid, and pursue political and moral goals in the larger community. These other behaviors can also be shaped more or less tightly by networks of religious symbols.” (Ibid., 23.)


48 Neville also indicates this possibility as follows: “Some religions have attempted to develop religious symbolic networks that would shape absolutely every aspect of life. But there is too much plenitude, variability, and density of life for this to be much more than a dream; even a brilliant rabbinate cannot provide interpretations fast enough.” (Ibid.)

49 Ibid.
In addition, religious communities can be in continuity with their past development by attending to religious symbols to their depths.

As Hick distinguishes between religious metaphors and presence of the Real, Neville also distinguishes religious symbols from presence of the ultimate reality. Neville says that the interpretation is neither the simple repetition of the religious symbol, nor “the naked presence of the divine.”\(^{50}\) Rather, the interpretation of the religious symbol is the difference made in experience by the referent which is God or something divine, and the symbol makes the referent effective.\(^{51}\) Therefore, interpretations of religious symbols can be changed if experiences or contexts are different, and the effectiveness of religious symbols depends on their ability to form the social practices.

Neville argues as follows:

> In theological contexts, the interpretation takes the form of cognitive representations of the religious referents. In the intentional contexts of practically ordering life according to religious symbols, the effectiveness of the divine symbols, if truly interpreted into the assumptions and habits of social life, consists in forming the social practices to acknowledge the divine matters and their practical implications.\(^ {52}\)

This means that the interpretation of religious symbols in intentional contexts makes the divine or the ultimate reality effective and shapes human life in those contexts. Religious symbols can make their referents effective only if they are interpreted and proved to be true.

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., 119.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.
In the comparison with Tillich’s concept of religious symbols, Neville’s analysis of religious symbols has a distinctive difference. First, as we saw in the above, while Tillich says that the symbol cannot be produced intentionally, Neville seems to say differently. For Neville, the interpretation of religious symbols is affected by intentional contexts. If the interpretation that connects the symbol and the object or the referent can be affected by intentional contexts, it is also possible that certain intentional context affects the forming of the symbol.

Second, in my interpretation, even though Tillich defines the difference between the religious and the secular as dimensional, he seems to place the religious in higher position than the secular. Neville, however, seems to define religious symbolic systems in the relation other social or secular symbolic systems. He, therefore, emphasizes the interactions among different symbolic systems, and sees a particular religious symbolic system as a part of larger social symbolic systems. If religious symbolic systems can be considered as the same as secular or social symbolic systems, although each context is different, the interpretation of religious symbols and, moreover, religious symbols themselves can be affected by intention of certain in-group members or by context that they are built on.

I surely agree with that we must respect others’ own contexts and their respective religious practices and claims. Nevertheless, if there is something that exists beyond contexts in religions, it may be found through spiritual or mystical ways not through theoretical or logical ways. If we believe that we have some experience of the divine reality which is transcendent and eternal, our interpretation of that experience must be affected by specific contexts within which we are living. This means that while we
cannot know or encounter the ultimate reality (Neville), the ground of being (Tillich), or the Real (Hick), we can think of and talk about it through religious symbols or metaphors.

Furthermore, if we accept these scholars’ understanding and analysis of the role, characteristics, and system of religious symbols or metaphors, which are the media to understand or explain the ultimate reality, we may understand how and why the necessity of religious pluralism arose between different religious groups in the world. In other words, if we can admit that all religious claims, rituals, practices, and dogma, even Christ in Christianity, are religious symbols made and interpreted by intentional human contexts, and that the ultimate reality in itself cannot be directly known to human reason and senses, there may be no difficulty to respect and understand other religious claims and practices as different symbols for the ultimate reality which are rooted in their respective different context.

In this sense, I believe that Yu’s understanding of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, which is transcendent but at the same time, is experienced through spiritual way, can be one of the best theological models to understand and explain religious pluralistic theology and spirituality.

Yu’s pluralistic understanding of Jesus and Christ

As we have discussed above, for Christianity, the critical problem of religious pluralism is about Christology because religious pluralism strongly challenge the essential belief or dogma of Christianity that Jesus was God incarnate and he is the only way through which human beings can be saved. For that reason, most Korean conservative Reformed theologians criticize and reject religious pluralism as only a
humanistic and speculative theory which has no relation to the absoluteness of Jesus Christ as God’s greatest and final revelation. They also typically reject any study of comparative study of different religions because they think that it is worthless to compare Christianity – understood to be based on existential experience of God’s revelation – with other religions established on only human desire or myths.

In “Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo’s understanding of Christ,” In-sik Choi analyzes that today’s theology is more open to and focuses on religious pluralism as it admitted religious study’s methodologies and challenges. However, it is true that in Korea, most Reformed Christians stick to exclusivism and Catholic churches hold inclusivism, so that religious pluralism is discussed among only religious scholars and a small number of theologians. Choi looks for the reason why religious pluralism receives an unkind treatment in Korea in the traditional Korean Reformed Christian faith which is represented by “only Jesus.” As the theological trend of the world moves more and more toward religious pluralism, the mainstream theology of the conservative and traditional Korean Reformed Church will hold to the faith of the absolute Christology more rigidly which shows its identity. According to Choi, religious pluralism is a challenge of reformation for the traditional Reformed Christianity which follows Luther’s, Calvin’s and Wesley’s theological traditions because religious pluralism tries to build up pluralistic understanding of Christ by deconstructing Reformed Christian faith of “only Jesus.”

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Due to these specific circumstances of Korea, it is very difficult for Reformed theologians to create an atmosphere of peaceful interaction with other religions while maintaining their traditional and confessional faith. Nevertheless, Choi addresses that such animosity between the conflicting values of faith and pluralistic understanding of Christ must be solved by Korean Reformed theologians who appreciate this situation as a dilemma, rather than by other religious scholars or other theories. In the same vein, Choi believes that Yu’s unique understanding of Jesus and Christ can be a good key for Reformed Christian theologians to solve the antinomical problem, so-called “only Jesus vs pluralistic understanding of Christ.”

In January 1937, as I mentioned in the chapter I, Yu declared his Christology by interpreting John 3:16 in his own creative way at the Bible study meeting which Kyo-shin led. Dal-young Yu who was a disciple of Kyo-shin Kim and a member of the Bible study group remembers Yu’s lecture at that time as follows. Yu said that his own thought of Jesus is extremely different from the orthodox Christian thought of Jesus. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, NIV) Yu asked back how we can believe that God loves the world if God kills His own Son. If God can kill His own Son, God can hate the world. For Yu, that God gave his one and only Son means that God puts God’s life (the Holy Spirit) into human Maum (heart and mind). The ultimate goal of human life is to develop the divine nature (seed), and finally become oneness with God. In this sense, Yu said that the nature of Buddha, the personality of Confucius, and the spirituality of Jesus are all same. And Yu surprised all members of the group by

54 Ibid., 209.
criticizing the members of Kyo-shin Kim’s nonchurch movement and saying that Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius are same.\(^{55}\)

**Is Jesus God’s revelation?**

Choi asserts that for Yu, it is impossible and meaningless to discuss merits and demerits of different religious truths.\(^{56}\) Furthermore, it is absolutely meaningless for a religious group to insist its superiority over other religions based upon its revelatory truth.

Yu says:

> In the morning I heard from Catholic broadcasting station that a good religion is a revealed religion, not an ethical one. However, I want to ask why this is. (1960)\(^{57}\)

Yu also declares:

> Human beings have to find God and finally discover \(Eol-Na\) (spiritual self) which is already given to them. When Jesus said, “[A]sk, seek, and knock” in the Bible, he meant to seek \(eol-Na\) which God gave to us. Prayer is to seek eternal truth \((Eol-Na)\). Confucianism also received all needed revelations. (1960)\(^{58}\)

Like this, when Yu talks about religion, sages, and scriptures he never understood from a doctrinal perspective. The existing doctrinal and theological ideas were not Yu’s major concern; but rather, his only concern was to encounter and experience of the Word,


\(^{56}\) Ibid., 203.

\(^{57}\) *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok*, 295-296.

\(^{58}\) “사람이란 하느님을 찾아 마침내 제 맘속에 있는 열나를 밝히는 것이다. 성경에 예수가 구하라, 찾아라, 두드리라는 게 하느님께서 보내 주신 열나를 찾으라는 것이다. 기도는 영원한 진리(열나)를 추구하는 것이다. 유교도 계시받을 것을 다 받았다.” (*Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok*, 254.)
God, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the goal of his life was to live as a son of God like Jesus.\(^59\) Yu wanted to follow the example of Jesus:

> Jesus lived with God, and called God as the father with whom he had lived from the beginning. I want to say one word that I will also live as a son of God like a true human being. \(\text{(1957)}\)^60

Jesus has an important meaning for Yu only because he realized the father-son relationship with God. For Yu, Jesus cannot be the divine reality, and the only reason why Yu wanted to enter into a relationship with Jesus is because the goal of Jesus’ life was to go or return the highest and perfect Father. Yu firmly asserts as follows:

> Religion is not to worship a person. The reason why people worship a person and want the person to be the divine is because people do not correctly know God Itself. For the same reason, people put Jesus in the position of God, and Catholic people worship Maria. \(\text{(1960)}\)^61

Yu’s understanding of Jesus is very similar to Hick’s understanding of Jesus who is God incarnate as a metaphor not as a literal truth, and Neville’s view of Jesus as an important symbol in the Christian symbol system. In this sense, Yu’s understanding of Jesus is nonreligious, non-doctrinal, and unorthodoxy, and as such it seems natural to be judged as a heretical idea in the conservative Korean Reformed Christian tradition. Choi, however, asserts that Yu’s Christology which formed Yu’s theology and spirituality must be understood and evaluated in the context of the East Asian cultural and religious tradition.\(^62\)

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60 *Tasǒk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok*, 153.

61 *Tasǒk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok*, 171.

62 Choi, “Tasǒk Yu Yŏng-mo’s understanding of Christ.”, 207.
Is Jesus God incarnate?

As we have seen in the previous chapter, for Yu, Christ is nothing but “Eol” of God. Jesus is Christ not because he is the divine reality himself but because God’s eol incarnates in Jesus. Even though Yu believed God’s incarnation within Jesus as a real fact, this incarnation is not a literal, mythical fact, but rather has spiritual meaning that Jesus, a man, revealed divinity in his life by finding and cultivating Eol-Na, which was already given to him. For that reason, unlike the Christian tradition, Yu could see Jesus as the same level as other East Asian sages. “Christians say that only Jesus is Christ, but [in Yu’s Christology] Christ is not only Jesus. Christ is Holy Spirit coming from God who is eternal life. (1960)”

For Yu, Lao-tzu and Buddha are also Christ as Jesus is Christ. Yu says:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Eol-Na which God gave us is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus realized that eol-Na, which God sent to Jesus’ heart and mind, was his own way, truth, and life. Jesus realized that true self (eol-Na) and the way, true self and the truth, and true self and the life are not two [but one]. It was Lao-tzu (老子) who expressed true self (eol-Na) as the way (道); it was Buddha who expressed true self as the truth; and it was Jesus who expressed true self as the life. (1956)

Yu more directly and strongly says as follows:

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63 Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok, 470.

64 “‘내가 곧 길이요 진리요 생명이니 나로 말미암지 않고는 아버지께로 올 자가 없느냐’(요한 14:6) 하느님이 주신 열나가 길이요 진리요 생명이다. 예수는 하느님이 예수의 마음속에 보낸 열나가 예수 자신의 길이요, 진리요, 생명임을 깨달은 것이다. 예수는 참나(열나)와 길, 참나와 진리, 참나와 생명이 들이 아닌 것을 깨달았던 것이다. 참나(열나)를 길(道)로 표현한 이가 노자(老子)요, 참나(열나)를 진리로 표현한 이가 석가요, 참나(열나)를 생명으로 표현한 이가 예수다.” (Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok, 97-98.)
Is Jesus alone a son of God (the only son)? No, he is not. Anyone who is reformed to *eol-Na* by receiving the Holy Spirit is a son of God as *eol-Na*. If I know that as *eol-Na* I am a son of God, and I constantly go up by following *eol-Na*, the Kingdom of God comes close even though we do not know whether God comes to us or we go to God, and we receive eternal life. *Eol-Na* which God gives us is the Kingdom of God and eternal life. (1957)\(^65\)

Yu, therefore, believes that there were or could be other Christ(s) as *Eol-Na* or the Holy Spirit before and after Jesus.\(^66\)

For the above reasons, Il-seop Sim addresses that Yu distinguished Jesus as life of *Jai-Na* (bodily self) from Christ as life of *Eol-Na* (spiritual self or true self),\(^67\) as he tries to answer if Jesus is God incarnate. How and why did Yu distinguish “the Christ” from “Jesus?”

### Uniqueness of Jesus versus pluralistic Christology

Choi states that there cannot be only one center in the relative world, but rather every position can be the center. Absolute uniqueness is impossible in the relative world. Only the plural are possible. However, in Yu’s understanding of God, the absolute position of God is essentially “one,” and it cannot be plural. This “absolute One” is not the one which remains after denying another one or others, but the one which include and embrace plurality. When this “One” appears in the relative world, it is experienced not as

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\(^65\) *Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok*, 159.

\(^66\) “There was one who was sent. The one who was sent (*Eol-Na*, the Holy Spirit) existed in Adam’s time. The uniqueness of Jesus is to realize and complete the seed of God (*Eol-Na*).” (1960) *Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo ŏrok*, 298.

an exclusive one but pluralistic “Ones.” Choi seems to say that in Yu’s theological and spiritual system, the ultimate reality which is the absolute and unique oneness is experienced as plural and different ones in the relative contexts. According to Yu’s Christology, Lao-tzu, Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus, they are plural, but as long as they reveal God’s spirit (Eol) they are one. Whatever they are doctrinally named, they are pluralistic expressions of “One.” In this sense, Yu’s understanding of Christ can be defined as pluralistic.

However, we have to think of the specific way and power of salvation to reach the “One”, because knowledge to affirm the “One” from the theoretical perspective cannot be identified with actual and practical life to reach or receive the “One.” And in order to find the way and power to reach the “One,” we need spiritual help. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Yu got a final answer to this practical question through his own spiritual experience, which was the spiritual union with God, when he was fifty three. “I have been thirsty for over fifty years to meet the right one and to seek the truth. Who will and can make the world one? It must be the Eol-eun (얼은, the elder or the grown-up) who is right.” According to Choi, the Eol-eun for Yu must be the one who gives the power of execution (實踐力) in order to be the savior for him. Even though Yu found Eol of God within Lao-tzu, Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus, the realization and discovery itself did not provide any way to reach God as the Father, Nirvana, or the law of nature

69 Ibid., 210.
70 Yŏng-mo Yu, Jai-Sori (제소리), 360. (I cite at second-hand from Choi, “Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo’s understanding of Christ,” 210.)
Therefore, the essential question is “Who gives the power of execution, the power of salvation?” Finally, Yu declares who is the Eol-eun, the savior for him: “Today when I am reborn (重生), I want to testify that the name of Jesus gives us the power of life through the Spirit of the truth.” This evidences that Yu did not stay relatively within plural ‘ones,’ but instead, he existentially confessed the uniqueness of Jesus.

In relation to Yu’s Christology, Jeong-sook Oh points out that Yu’s idea to follow Jesus, even though he believed that Eol or the Holy Spirit of Lao-tzu, Buddha, or Confucius is not different from the Eol-Na of Jesus. However, Yu’s faith for Jesus Christ is very different from the traditional Christian faith, which defines the relationship between men and Jesus Christ as the relationship between sinners and the savior. Yu defines the relation of men and Christ as the relation of disciples and the teacher. For Yu, the teacher is one who can be a good example or model, and can give the actual power of execution. Therefore, for Yu, to believe in Jesus unlike the traditional understanding, means to realize that true self or spiritual self is the way, the truth, and the life through the teacher, Jesus. It especially implies the East Asian teacher-disciple relationship (師弟之間), for examples, Buddha and Kasyapa (迦葉) in Buddhism, and Confucius and Yan Hui (顔回) in Confucianism. Yu says as follows:

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71 Yu, Jai-Sori, 356. (I cite at second-hand from Choi, “Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s understanding of Christ,” 210.)

72 Choi, “Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s understanding of Christ,” 211.

73 See, Oh, “Yu Yong-mo’s Korean Christianity,” 249-250.

74 Ibid., 251.

75 One of ten disciples of Buddha.
It is Jesus Christ who teaches, advises, and scolds (責善) me. It is Jesus Christ who I cannot truly and eternally forget by the end. [...] Jesus is the only teacher for me. Knowing Jesus as the teacher is quite different from believing in Jesus as the savior. I have only one teacher, Jesus.

It is needed “to review the old and to learn the new” (溫故知新) between a teacher and a disciple. [...] When a disciple learns from a teacher, and seeks a new way, the true relationship between a teacher and a disciple can make the new benevolent way (仁道). (1957)

Yu’s unique definition of Jesus as the teacher tells us that we can be saved by following the example of Jesus unlike the traditional Christian doctrines. The cross of Jesus itself does not have the power to save human beings, but we can be saved by being reborn through the Holy Spirit only when we follow Jesus’ way, which means to bear our own cross. Oh indicates that even though Yu believed in and depended on Jesus only as a teacher instead of the divine reality, his dependence on Jesus was absolute. Therefore, Yu’s relationship with Jesus can be understood as absolute as much as the traditional Christian belief in Jesus Christ.

Jeong-bae Lee also indicates that Yu’s pluralistic Christology is different from the Western pluralistic understanding of Jesus Christ. According to Lee, Yu understood the way (Tao) of the Christ as the universal possibility of all human beings instead of only a

76 “내게 책선(責善)을 하는 이는 예수 그리스도이다. 내가 참으로 마지막까지 영원히 잊을 수 없는 이는 예수 그리스도이다. [...] 내게 선생이라고는 예수 한 분밖에 없다. 예수님 선생으로 아는 것과 믿는다는 것과는 사뭇 다르다. 나는 선생님이라고는 예수 한 분밖에 모시지 않는다.

스승과 제자 사이에는 온고지신(溫故知新)이 있다. [...] 제자는 스승에게 배워 새로운 길을 찾아가는 것이 참된 사제의 관계가 이루어지고 거기에서 새로 인도(仁道)가 서게 된다.” (Tasók Yu Yǒng-mo ōrok, 148-149.)

77 Oh, “Yu Yŏng-mo’s Korean Christianity,” 251.
few religious founders’ spiritual occupation. Yu, however, did not deny that Jesus Christ is absolutely unique for him. Even though Yu quite freely read many East Asian scriptures and spiritually communicated with East Asian sages, Jesus who showed him the way of the Cross is the only spiritual teacher.\(^{78}\) In this sense, Lee insists that Yu strongly believed in Jesus’ Cross event as the historical fact while he reinterpreted the event in the East Asian thoughts. But here, the meaning of the Christ as the teacher (先生) is different from the meaning of Christ as the savior. It is true that Yu confessed Jesus as the only one whom he must return to (歸依) in “Song of the one who entered the faith”\(^{79}\). For Yu, “returning to (歸依)” the Christ implies to believe that Jesus and he are in the Bul-yi (不二, not two) relationship. However, “not two (不二)” does not mean “oneness (一)”. According to Lee, it may be a spiritual decision to go to the way and finally become the way itself.\(^{80}\) Yu’s understanding of Jesus as the teacher is most definitely based on the East Asian, especially Confucian, thought. (In the East Asian culture, the relationship between a teacher and a disciple (師弟) is similar to the relationship between parents and offsprings.)

Yu seems to believe that Christian dogmatic theology has nothing to do with Jesus’ true life and teaching even though Jesus became one of the most important elements which form today’s Christianity as a religion. Yu thought that his theological and spiritual ideas are very different from Christianity’s ideas, but are perfectly identified

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\(^{78}\) Jeong-bae Lee, Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim and Dŏl-ŏpnŭn-Ingan (God who exists as Non-being and Human who exists as more being), 253.

\(^{79}\) See, Kyo-shin Kim, SungseoJoseon, 157 (1940. 2.), 36-37.

\(^{80}\) Lee, Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim and Dŏl-ŏpnŭn-Ingan, 253.
with Jesus’ ideas.\footnote{Young-ho Park, \textit{Tasŏk Yu Yŏng-mo: The Man of Truth, Vol. II}, 138.} For this reason, many Christians who listened to Yu’s lectures in YMCA misunderstood his theology as a religious syncretism because his teaching was different from the traditional Christian theology. When Yu talked about Jesus in company with Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu, he did not intend to worship them as the divine reality, gods. Yu’s intention was only to learn their thoughts and teachings about the truth of God which they realized. In this sense, Young-ho Park asks back how Yu’s theology, which insists to worship only one God, can be a religious syncretism.\footnote{Ibid.} The true meaning of Yu’s thought is that there is no division between Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu in their Eol (the Spirit), and such is also the true reason why, for Yu, Jesus is not the only Christ.

Accordingly, we can say that Yu also had confession of faith as a Christian even though he did not follow the traditional Christian way. However, as we have observed, Yu claimed the cosmological universality of God’s Eol and the pluralistic Christology which even seems pantheistic. Because his pluralistic Christology was impossible to be accepted within the traditional church in Korea, Yu left the church and sought pluralistic theology and spirituality based on the universal \textit{Parousia} of God’s Eol through the unorthodox ways. Yu tried to distinguish Jesus as a human being from Christ as the Eol of God. For him, Jesus means a specific example or a religious symbol to show and prove the possibility to realize the human inner divinity, which is already given to us, while Christ means the absolute divinity itself; in other words, the ultimate reality or God.

According to Choi, Yu’s pluralistic Eol-Christology is indeed unorthodox, but it is deeply
rooted in Jesus’ life and teaching. If we agree with Choi’s analysis of Yu’s Christology, it is true that any pluralistic understanding of the Christ cannot provide the actual power of execution to be united with the ultimate reality as long as it is only a universal theory or principle without a specific and existential confession of faith for the unique example or symbol.

As Jesus said “Before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58, NIV), he also talked about Eol-Na not Mom-Na. Eol-Na transcends the limitation of time and space. That Jesus was before Abraham, therefore, means that the eternal life, which God gives us, has no specific name because there is no division of individuals in the eternal life. In this sense, Yu decided to name only Jesus’ Eol-Na as the Christ instead of Jesus’ whole person including Jai-Na (Mom-Na) as well as Eol-Na. For Yu, true religion must not only provide the universal knowledge of the ultimate reality, but also make the power of salvation in reality possible to experience. Perhaps, the former was the task of theology and the latter was the task of spirituality in Yu’s religious thought and spiritual life.

**Yu’s pluralistic theology and spirituality**

**Yu’s understanding of religions**

Kyung-jae Kim, in *Christian Spirituality in Religious Pluralism Age*, says that in the religious pluralism age, faith must intrinsically have an open-attitude to other beliefs. In this sense, Yu’s belief in Jesus Christ may be suitable for today’s religious

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83 See, Choi, “Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s understanding of Christ,” 212.

84 Young-ho Park, ed., *Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s Book of Meditations*, 358.

pluralistic context. Choi summarizes Yu’s understanding of religion as the “philosophy of religion.” Choi generalizes that Yu’s thought and methodology cannot be identified with both of the religious study’s objective approach and theology’s existential approach. If philosophy of religion can be defined as an effort to seek the universal principle by overcoming the limitation both of objectivism and subjectivism, Choi says that we can define Yu’s whole thought of religion as religious philosophy.86

I do not agree with Choi’s understanding of religious study, theology, and philosophy of religion because I do not think that they can be distinguished in such simple way. There must be countless of overlapping areas between them. However, I can understand his intention to define Yu’s theological and spiritual thought in the way he did; and I at the very least agree that Yu’s whole ideas of God and religion transcend the division between objectivism and subjectivism. More specifically, Yu’s ontological understanding of God is relatively very objective, and in this sense, his understanding of the ultimate reality seems to belong to philosophy of religion or philosophical theology. On the other hand, Yu’s existential understanding of human self, and his theory of experience of God or spiritual union with God is very subjective, and they can be said to belong to the field of spirituality. Choi also describes Yu’s whole spiritual life as the saying “grasping the truth by fingers” (眞理把指), which means that Yu made an effort to practice his understanding of the universal principle of all different religions in his life.87

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In fact, Yu’s attitude for existing Korean traditional religions was completely neutral. Yu could not understand the criticism or judgement on other religious claims or rituals based on one’s own religious perspective. Rather, he believed that in order to know one’s own religion in depth, one needs to understand other religions. Choi provides two parts of Yu’s own words to support Yu’s neutral attitude toward other religions as follows:

What do we know? We do not know anything. Christians regard Confucianism as heresy and criticize Buddhism for idolatry. Buddhists criticize Jesus, and say that Confucianism is bad. Confucianism also despises Christians for Jesus-holic (예수쟁이) and slanders Buddhism. But they do not know anything about each other. If we do not know others we cannot also know ourselves. In order to become the noble man (君子), we must know other noble men. We are living in a stupid age. 

(1956)

Dong-ya-ja-yi-ya (同也者異也) means that sameness is difference. Therefore, we must not rashly call others as heresy. If something different is heresy everything except oneself is heresy. […] There is a different thing within a same thing. We all will finally become same. 

(1960)

For Yu, each religion is just a container in which the Word is stated. All religions are worthy because they have the Word of the One. Containers are useless if there is not the Word inside of them. For Yu, containers themselves are not important, but the only problem is whether they have the Word. Therefore, Yu says as follows:

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88 *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok*, 259.

89 *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok*, 405.

90 Yu quotes “不知言 無以知人也”, which means that if we do not know words we cannot know people, from the Analects (論語), and insists that we have to know the Word of God which is the unique and highest word. And he believes that we can meet God through the words of the great sages like Jesus, Confucius, Buddha, Lao-tzu. We cannot find the right way or rightly live without knowing the Word of God. (*Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ŏrok*, 16.)
Only Jesus is made by the Word (Logos). Even dog dung is made by the Word. Jesus also said, “He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:2-3.) I cannot understand Christians’ thought. They believe that only Jesus was made by the Word and we are differently made. […] There is nothing but the Word to believe in. […] I do not believe in nothing but the Word. Not only Christianity has the Word (Logos). Buddhism also has the Word. Buddhism’s Word is called “preaching dharma” (說法). Dharma (法) means the truth. (1960)91

In other writing, Yu also emphasizes not to compare different religions with each other because the comparison between different religions may be possible only by the Absolute (God).92 For those reasons, Choi concludes that Yu was not interested in any principle or theory to integrate all religions into one93 because Yu did not have any interest in religion itself. Yu denied unifying different religions. Yu believed in nothing but the Word. He reminded us that many sages (聖賢) left the Words which are still remaining. He said he did not like unification because unification of all religions is impossible. Yu only wanted to talk about returning to the One (歸一).94

Yu’s understanding of religions seems to have something in common with Neville’s view of religion, which defines religious rituals, disciplines, scripture, dogma, and claims as metaphors or religious symbols to bring presence of the ultimate reality into human knowledge and senses. In other words, Yu, who believed that each human

91 Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ōrok, 31.

92 See, the conversation between Yu and one man. (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ōrok, 295.)

93 Choi, “Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo’s understanding of Christ,” 204.

94 “나는 다른 아무것도 믿지 않고 말씀만 믿는다. 여러 성현(聖賢)들이 수천 년 뒤에도 썩지 않는 말씀을 남겨 놓은 걸 섞어 봤어요. 이렇게 말하면 종교통일론 갈지만 그렇지 않다. 나는 통일은 싫다. 통일은 되는 게 아니다. 귀일(歸一)이라야 한다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo ōrok, 36.)
being already has divinity as spiritual self, did not have any difficulty admitting that each religion has a symbol to find and realize the ultimate reality.

Yu defines religious scripture as walking on the road which others left behind because the meaning of Chinese character “經”, which translates into “scripture”, can also be interpreted as walking on the road traveled.\(^\text{95}\) Yu’s disposition in dealing with the scriptures of different religions was also very open-minded that he thought that all religious scriptures are related (會通) to one another. Yu even suggests that Christians have to consider other religious scriptures as the Old Testament.\(^\text{96}\)

**Four related religions (四敎會通)**

Don-gu Kang, in “The genealogy and significance of Yu Yǒng-mo’s religious thought”, states that the history of Western religions was generally to distinguish a religion from others on the basis of its doctrines or tradition, and to enforce its thought as the orthodox. As such, he defines the western religious history as the history of struggle between the orthodox and the heretic. Even though it is true that there had been lots of conflicts between religions or between religious sects in the East Asian religious history, Kang points out that there had also been the continuous efforts and traditions to see different religions to be related to each other.\(^\text{97}\) Kang insists that Yu suggested the theory that “four religions are related to each other” (四敎會通), in which four religions are

\(^\text{95}\) See, *Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo őrok*, 405.

\(^\text{96}\) “I see that at least the New and Old Testaments as religious scriptures have the truth which will not disappear for a long time. [...] It is true [for Christians] to see the holy scriptures of other religions as same as the Old Testament.” (1956) (*Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo őrok*, 406.)

Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity. Yu’s theory of the relation is based on the traditional East Asian theory of three religions’ harmony or relation which has been in existence for a long time in East Asian context. According to Kang Yu’s theory of four related religions was not just a shallow eclecticism because Yu had wide knowledge of not only those four religions, but also Western and East Asian general thoughts and philosophies.  

Kang also agrees that Yu’s pluralistic thought can provide a theological clue to be promotive of the communication between different religions. As he indicates that any religion that holds an exclusive attitude to other religions is losing its footing in the world today, the particular religious situation of Korea – already existing religions like Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and Christianity which is a relatively new religion from the west, maintain similar power – naturally request mutual interactions between these religions. According to Kang, the communication or interactions between different religions are generally forced by political or social situations. The dialogue or interactions tend to take place for non-religious causes more than religious reasons.

Therefore, in order to have a good relationship between different religions in a homogeneous country like Korea, each religion has to have the inclination to nationalism because something in common can be found within the fact that all believers of different religions are people from the same nation or ethnic background. This reminds us of Neville’s theory of the religious symbol system because a homogeneous country means

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98 Ibid., 380.

99 Ibid., 381.

100 Kang gives an example of the Smil (3.1.) Independence Movement of Korea, in which all religions participated in 1919 to ask Japan for the independence of Korea. (Ibid.)
that all members of the country share the same context such as the same language, same culture, and same history, which are understood as symbol systems.\textsuperscript{101} Therefore, even though each religion’s religious symbols, which may be some doctrines or rituals, are quite different from each other, if they are from the same national groups and have a common cultural symbol system in the common context, they can communicate and interact through the common symbol system.

Kang, however, adds that it is not impossible to find the interaction and cooperation between different religions from the religious perspective. He points out that Yu’s religious thought, which is based on his interest in the doctrinal similarity of religions, can help different religions to communicate and interact with each other from the religious perspective.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, for the reason that Yu’s religious thought is not mainly based on a particular religious tradition, it can provide a clue to relate religious claims, rituals, and teachings between different religions beyond common context (for example, the same nationality). In addition, Kang analyzes that Yu’s pluralistic thought is very similar to Paul Knitter’s “unitive pluralism” because Yu’s pluralism accepts that different religions can be equally true instead of removing all cultural or historical differences between all religions, or his pluralism evaluates or includes other religious traditions from the angle of the particular religion.\textsuperscript{103}

Jin Kim, in “Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo and Raimundo Panikkar,” also discusses Yu’s thought of the “Four related religions” (四敎會通). First of all, Kim asserts that the

\begin{footnotes}
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., 382.
103 Ibid., 383-384.
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reason why Yu did not distinguish the Western thought which is represented by the Christian theology and the East Asian thoughts such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism is because Yu believed that all religious traditions are seeking God.  

Therefore, Yu’s theological and spiritual thought naturally became to represent religious pluralism. Kim sees Yu’s pluralistic understanding of religions is clearly marked by his assertion that Jesus, Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-tzu said and taught the same truth. Yu says, “It is most pleasant that the truth is only one even though religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism are all different from each other.” This means that Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism as religions are very different in their rituals and doctrines, but the truths Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius taught are same. As Kim indicates that Yu thought that all religious scriptures have the story of the people who realized the Eol-Na, he argues that, for Yu, the common denominator which can be found in all religions is the “Eol”.

It implies that for Yu, a particular theology or philosophy is no matter, but only important thing is if it is possible to go to the ultimate reality through a theology or philosophy.

In addition, Kim sees Yu’s understanding of religion is similar to Kant’s view of religion that there are many types of religions in the world, but in reality there is only one

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105 Ibid.

106 “예수교, 불교, 유교 등 믿는 종교는 다르지만 진리는 하나밖에 없는 것을 얘기하니 이보다 더 좋은 줄거움이 어디 있겠는가?” (1956) (Tasǒk Yu Yǒng-mo örok, 240.)

107 Kim, 249.
true religion. However, on the basis of my understanding of Yu’s view of religion, it is doubtful that Yu sought for the one true religion like Kant. Yu does not think that each religion such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity has an imperfect and partial truth, but they reached the one truth through their own respective ways to realize the Eol-Na. In this sense, for Yu, there is the one truth, but there can be many religions to reach the one truth in human existential context. In other words, the final goal of religion is to realize the Eol-Na as the inherited divinity in human beings because the ultimate reality itself cannot be ontologically reached by human beings, and therefore, if a religion can accomplish this goal that religion can be said to have the truth. Yu’s idea is related with Neville’s theory to explain all religious elements through the symbol system and modern spirituality scholars’ theory that spirituality is formed, interpreted, and developed under the influence of various human contexts.

Yu thinks that the enlightenment of each religion, the rebirth as the Eol life, takes place only by receiving God’s “Eol”, not by any doctrine or creed. God or the ultimate reality that is realized through Eol is the One God in any religion. Even though Yu admits that the truth of the ultimate reality can be found in various religions as different patterns, he stresses the oneness of the ultimate reality as the one truth in all religions as follows:

We are eager to find the absolute truth (God). But it is hard to find the truth. “Only One, Not Two (唯一不二)”, this is the absolute truth, and there is the way to find it. […] We have to realize the greatest One (元一, God) as the absolute truth. What I want to say on the day of my death is

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108 Ibid., 250.

109 Ibid.
the greatest One (는-一). The essential one is the greatest One, which is the only one, not two. (1957)\textsuperscript{110}

Kim concludes that Yu’s religious pluralism basically aims for the theory of “Four related religions,” and therefore, it is not prejudiced for a particular religious tradition, but emphasizes the absolute “one” which is the root or origin of relative symbols.\textsuperscript{111} In my point of view, even though Yu experienced the spiritual union with God through Jesus Christ, the reason why Yu’s theology and spirituality is not biased toward Christianity is that he clearly distinguished between his ontological understanding of Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, which cannot be experienced by human beings in any way, and his own spiritual experience, which is based on his spiritual life and disciplines, and is affected by specific context.

Yu’s pluralistic spirituality

In Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim and Deolopneun-Ingan,\textsuperscript{112} Jung-bae Lee sees Yu’s religious pluralism to be based on Confucian thought, and names Yu’s understanding of Christianity as “the new transcendence.” According to Lee, Yu interpreted his own experience of Christ as Confucian, and therefore he can give Christ kerygma a new meaning.

\textsuperscript{110}“우리는 절대진리(하느님)를 찾고 싶다. 그런데 찾기가 어렵다. 유일불이(唯一不二) 이것이 절대진리이고 그칠 찾을 길도 있다. […] 우리는 절대진리인 원일(元-一, 하느님)을 깨달아야 한다. 내가 죽을 때까지 말하고 싶은 것은 원일(元-一)이다. 본래의 하나가 원일이다. 원일은 유일불이다.” (Tasǒk Yu Yong-mo orok, 70.)

\textsuperscript{111}Kim, 250.

\textsuperscript{112}This title translates into “God who exists as non-being and Men who exist as less non-being”, and here “less non-being” implies men’s existent and relative characteristics.
In short, first, Yu explains the Tao (道) of the cross as the way to find God in my own nature (本然之性) which God gives me and live by following the nature (本性).

Second, Yu defines religion to embody the truth through constant spiritual practice and training. In Lee’s point of view, as Yu believed that anyone can be the same as Jesus by following the divine nature through spiritual practice, he opened the possibility of the, so-called, self-atonement instead of Jesus Christ’s substitute-atonement which is the traditional Christian doctrine. The emphasis on the individual responsibility for the sin and the salvation is very Confucian rather than Christian. However, Lee adds that here, the self-atonement does not mean the salvation through one’s own efforts because heavenly seed is already given to all human beings like God’s precedent grace. Human responsibility is only to germinate the seed and raise it. Lee concludes that Yu’s thought of the self-atonement is the Confucian practice of Jesus’ words “take up one’s cross and follow me!” and to complete, like Jesus, the salvation through the self-atonement or self-discipline is Yu’s kerygma.

In addition, while researchers of historical Jesus failed to explain the inevitable relationship between Jesus and us, Yu’s Eol-Christology confesses Jesus as the only-begotten son of God. We are identified with Jesus in the sense of sok-al (Eol) – the universal substance (本覺) – but we have to know that our practical life is different from that of Jesus in the sense of the real existence (始覺). Yu found the power of

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113 Jung-bae Lee, Õpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim and Deolopneun-Ingan, 252-253.
114 Ibid., 253.
115 本覺 means the universal knowledge that we already realized, and 始覺 means the concrete and specific knowledge that each of us has to discern. (See, The Discourse on The
execution in Jesus’ cross, and obtained it through the way of the cross. In this sense, for Yu, Jesus was the savior (救主) and the teacher to follow.

Yu insists that we have to cultivate our divine seed and be born again by carrying our own cross and going our own way as Jesus did. This means that the cross of Jesus requires us to have Tao of the cross and the practical spirituality of self-negation. This kind of salvation, of course, is very different from the idea of the atonement redemption which is the traditional idea of Christianity because for Yu, faith is not to believe in Jesus himself, but to follow and practice the belief of Jesus. In other words, Jesus’ cross was originally the way of self-redemption for himself, but his self-redemption plays the role of the atonement-redemption for us by asking us to go the same way of self-redemption. Like this, God’s salvation is given to us as the not-two (不二的) form without any difference between one’s own power (自力) and outside help (他力). When we are reborn as the Eol-Na our salvation naturally gives birth to the universal salvation.

Yu’s pluralistic theology and spirituality, which Lee defines as “new transcendence,” can be suited to today’s spirituality that seeks and emphasizes the immanent transcendence within our daily life. Especially, the fact that Yu believes that there is the divine nature given by God within us, and through the divine nature we can experience the spiritual union with God provides an important clue for Korean Christianity to be in harmony with the self-disciplinary spirituality for the self-perfection.

Awakening of Faith in Mahayana [大乘起信論]


117 Ibid., 185.
or the self-transcendence of other religious traditions of Korea such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.
Yu’s ontological understanding of God

Jung-bae Lee states that he found a new trial to understand Jesus Christ who is assimilated into Korean traditional context within Yu Yǒng-mo’s understanding of Christianity. According to Lee, Yu explained Jesus Christ in his own way based on the Korean and the East Asian traditions which are embodied within himself unlike the Western theological framework. Some scholars evaluate Yu’s understanding of Christ as non-Christian and non-biblical understanding. However, Lee thinks that it is unnecessary to reject or deny Christianity expressed by Yu within the Korean traditional ways if we remember that original Christianity as a religion was formed under the strong influence of the Greek philosophy and finally formulated as a Western philosophy and religion.¹

As we recognize that Yu stresses on Jesus’ Eol to realize true self within human being through the life of the Confucian thought – “Father and son maintain a close relationship” (父子有親) – instead of the Western Christology based on the doctrine of atonement, and as we realize that Yu understands Jesus as the foundation of both human essence and existence instead of positioning him on the throne of God, we have to conclude that we cannot understand Yu’s concept of Christ without the pre-knowledge of the East Asian traditions such as Buddhism or Confucianism. Furthermore, Yu understood religious terms such as the cross, resurrection, and God as mere concepts, and as such he introduced the East Asian religious meaning by breaking out of such concepts

¹ Jung-bae Lee, ᄇופضرورة-🎏шение-Haneunim and Deolopneun-Ingan, 31.
and directly encountering the reality which is the ontological foundation of the above mentioned concepts.

Many Korean Christians misunderstand that the ontological analysis or study of the ultimate reality is an area that solely or primarily belongs to the Western theological tradition. Moreover, they define the main characteristics of Korean Christian understanding of God as spiritual and experiential. However, as we have seen in the previous chapters, all three major East Asian religions, all of which have been the religious foundations of Korea for a long time, have an ontological or cosmological understanding of the ultimate reality, for examples, T’ai-chi and Wu-chi, absolute nothingness, and Tao as the principle of the cosmos. If it is true that Korean traditional religious thoughts have defined the ultimate reality ontologically as the One transcending all relativities in the world, we may say that Yu’s theological understanding of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim is an orthodox view of the ultimate reality from the East Asian religious perspective even though it can also be regarded as an unorthodox concept of God from the Korean conservative Christian viewpoint.

**Yu’s spirituality: beyond the philosophical theology**

Yu’s definition of the ultimate reality as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, as we have discussed, seems to have a good correlation with Tillich’s understanding as the ground of being, Neville’s understanding as the ontological creative act or nothingness, and Hick’s understanding as the Real. Yet, Yu does not stop there, and he moves on to the next step, which is based on the East Asian spirituality. The particularities of the East Asian spirituality can be defined as the high valuation of human ability to spiritually cultivate
human body and spirit to reach the ultimate reality. Yu also shows a similar approach in developing his understanding of the ultimate reality in relation to the existential human context.

As we have already observed, on the one hand, Yu’s theological understanding of the ultimate reality was formed and developed based on his own spiritual experiences, for examples, his experience of spiritual union with God; but on the other hand, Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim as his theological reflection on the ultimate reality had great effect on his spirituality, and led him to seek spiritual union with the divine reality by concentrating on the human inside, that is, true self (the Eol-Na). Yu’s spiritual approach to define the ultimate reality and human experience of the ultimate reality is very unique in that this approach is the very East Asian way to reach the absolute or the One in the inside instead of the outside of human being.

Ōpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim, which cannot be understood by human reason and cannot be recognized by human sense, and the divine seed as human true self (the Eol-Na), which can be realized and cultivated by human ability, seem to contradict each other. This contradiction can be overcome only when we understand and accept Yu’s spirituality which is based on the East Asian spirituality. As I discussed in the above chapters, the East Asian religious traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have the ontological and cosmological understanding of the ultimate reality, but at the same time, they have a spiritual goal to find the truth and enter into the absolute level by practical self-disciplines and ethical life.

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2 It means to be identified with the principle of the heaven (天理) in Confucianism; to enter into Nirvana (涅槃) in Buddhism; and to be identified with nature (物我一體) in Taoism.
For Yu, union with God means to find Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim which is already given to human being as the divine seed, and furthermore cultivate or develop it. In this sense, Yu’s ontological but at the same time, very existential understanding of the ultimate reality naturally leads him to ascetic life and self-disciplines which are based on the East Asian spiritual training in order to reveal the inherited divine nature (the Eol-Na) by killing the bodily desires (characteristics of Jai-Na). In other words, Yu does not leave the ultimate reality in the area where not to be said, but rather tries to find a way to experience that transcendent God.

While Yu seems to assert that Jesus is Christ in the sense that he is the most perfect existential example of embodied divinity, he does not agree with any ontological difference between Jesus and the East Asian sages, furthermore, Jesus and us. For these reasons, if we have to analyze and define Yu’s thought, especially his understanding of God, from the Western perspective, it is necessary to divide his thought into the philosophical theological part and the spiritual part even though Yu himself does not clearly distinguish the two parts.

**Yu’s theological understanding of God and his spirituality**

Elizabeth A. Dreyer emphasizes in “Spirituality as a Resource for Theology: The Holy Spirit in Augustine” that theology cannot exist without aprior spirituality – the spiritual experience of God. But she also indicates that the theological language and thought are intrinsic to and is the ground of Christian spirituality.³ She says as follows:

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God’s self-gift, our experience of it, and both our poetic and systematic expressions through which we speak and think about this experience are not separate entities, but different aspects of the same reality.4

Yu’s philosophy (theology and spirituality) sought for the combination of the East and West religious thoughts; pursued the agreement of body, heart, mind, and soul; and gave us a strict warning to leave fetishism and enjoy freedom of emptiness (Bintanghan-dae).5 Yu’s thoughts are not all powerful in all spheres of religious or spiritual contexts, but rather they are just a synthesis of his Christian spirituality based on his personal spiritual experience and his East Asian understanding of the ultimate reality.

Yu’s religious pluralism

Yu’s theology and spirituality, that is, the understanding of God as the transcendent One who cannot be reached by the created beings and the belief that human beings can experience God and finally be united with God not by the absolute revelation from the outside of human beings, but by realizing the divine nature and cultivating it within human self, naturally label Yu’s thought of religious pluralism. Some Korean theologians try to defend Yu’s theology against naming him as a religious pluralist. Jeong-sook Oh asserts that Buddhism or Taoism does not provide Yu with the religious pluralistic sight, but rather, the East Asian religious traditions became another prospect to enable Yu to understand Christianity from the Korean traditional perspective.6 However,

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4 Ibid.


6 Oh, Korean Christianity of Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo, 65.
in my understanding of Yu’s thought, his theology and spirituality are surely religiously pluralistic; but Yu’s religious pluralism was not formed by the influence of the Western pluralism, rather it was the result of his creative combination between the ontological understanding of the ultimate reality which is the East Asian religious tradition and the East Asian practical and subjective spirituality.

In his Christology, which is the essential issue of religious pluralism discussion in Christianity, Yu adds specialness and uniqueness to Jesus Christ more than other East Asian sages because he believes that Jesus fulfilled filial piety by practicing Bu-Ja-Yu-Chin (父子有親) in the relationship with God the Father. According to Yu, Lao-tzu was infatuated by the Tao that exceedingly emphasized Mu-a-bul-sa (無我不私, absence of ego and negation of personal affairs); Buddha exceedingly preached Buddhist teachings (說法 7); and the original meaning of Confucius’ Geuk-gi-bok-re (克己復禮, beating greed and observing human good manners) was corrupted. However, Jesus Christ called God as the Father and recognized God as his true master, and therefore, Yu confessed that he had to return to only Jesus Christ. 8

When Yu says that Jesus Christ is the only teacher for him to spiritually return to, he does not seem to devaluate East Asian religious thoughts, but rather he only wants to stress on the absoluteness of the spiritual meaning that Jesus Christ gave him. It is Yu’s existential and spiritual confession. For Yu, to recognize Jesus Christ as the teacher and to believe him is different because Yu has a different understanding of having faith

7 It means to explain the meanings of Buddhist doctrines.

8 Yŏng-mo Yu, Jai-Sori (제소리), 347-348. (I cite at second-hand from Jeong-bae Lee, Upsi kyesinŭn hananim dŏl ŏpnŭn ingan, 82.)
For Yu, Jesus Christ, who called God the Father; had the not-two (不二的) relationship with God; and finally became Eol-Na, shows the true relationship between God and human being. This is the real reason why Yu defines Jesus as the teacher. Therefore, we can conclude that Yu’s Christology can provide Jesus Christ with the absoluteness and uniqueness from the stance of his existential spirituality, but it never define Jesus Christ as the absolute standard to criticize or evaluate other religions because Yu’s ontological understanding of God as Ŭpshi-gyeshin-Haneunim transcends all specific and concrete religious contexts including Christianity. Jeong-bae Lee also points out that these two conflicting aspects make Yu’s Eol-Christology to be very East Asian pluralistic.10

Lee asserts that Yu’s East Asian understanding of Jesus deconstructs the Western religious pluralism’s frame itself. Yu’s Christology orders us to walk the way of the cross or the self-redemption (自贖) instead of relying on Christ’s atonement redemption (代贖) as Jesus did. This is based on the East Asian idea that thought and life cannot be separated.11 In Yu’s East Asian indigenous understanding of Christianity, Jesus’ atonement redemption is understood to show the possibility of all human beings’ self-redemption. According to Young-ho Park, Yu hates to criticize or assault other religions. Yu encourages us to respect other religious beliefs. For that reason, after he stopped going to church, Yu did not criticize churches or Christianity.12

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9 Jeong-bae Lee, *Upsi kyesinün hananim dół ópnün ingan*, 82.

10 Ibid., 83.

11 Ibid., 175.

12 Young-ho Park, “Jesus and Buddha are one in Tasŏk’s Thought,” from Yang-mo Jeong,
regularly attend church, he did not leave Jesus Christ and did not convert to other religions. He went on a visit to a Buddhist monk and learned the Avatamska Sutra (華嚴經) in order to know the Buddhist scriptures. After he was well-read in the thoughts of both East and West, Yu could realize the greatness of Jesus.\textsuperscript{13} However, his understanding of Jesus was far different from the traditional Christian doctrines. Yu’s sympathetic attitude toward other religions is deeply based on his unique understanding of the Christ.

Seok-heon Ham, Yu’s disciple, also supports the soteriology that emphasizes on human’s independent ability. For Ham, to believe in God is not an activity that occurs only within human reason. Ham like Yu also insists that all men have the divine seed to be sons of God. The very event that Jesus became the son of God shows that we all are sons of God. We have to find the seed of the Son which sleeps inside of us.\textsuperscript{14} Ham’s Christology is extremely different from the traditional Christian view that sees the relationship between God and human as mutual oppositive. Ham criticizes the powerless faith that only depends on the slogan of religious belief “sola fides!” and expects Christ to do everything for us. The popular belief that even though I cannot know and cannot do anything to be saved, I can be saved by the grace of the cross interrupts human

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\textit{A Day as The Whole Life}, 164-165.

\textsuperscript{13} Young-ho Park, \textit{Jesus and Christianity in Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo’s thought}, 140.

spontaneity and makes human unripe. Therefore, for Ham, becoming oneness of God and me means to place “me” in the right place where Christ works.\textsuperscript{15}

As Yu, Ham defines the atonement and salvation as accomplishing spiritual union with Christ or God based on the East Asian traditional thought which is different from the traditional Christology. For Ham, the way of salvation is also the way of cultivation of human independence. This human independence cultivation can be accomplished within only human \textit{maeum} (heart and mind).\textsuperscript{16} When our \textit{maeum} becomes identical with the \textit{maeum} of the cosmos and history, the spirit of God, the great personality to reach the salvation will be born. For Ham, Jesus is Christ because He showed us the possibility of the great personality and how we can accomplish it.

Lee addresses that the Scriptures, traditions, reason, and experience are generally called as the four components of Christian theology. Scriptures and traditions are objective conditions, and human reason and experience are subjective conditions. Lee analyzes that while Catholic theology relatively emphasizes the Bible and Church traditions, Protestant theology puts stress on reason and experience.\textsuperscript{17} However, in the context of Korean conservative Protestantism, the Scriptures and traditions have enormous authority over human reason and experience. Especially, Church traditions, which are represented by doctrines and the sacraments, play the role of the absolute standard in interpreting the meaning of the Scriptures and evaluate or judge believers’ spiritual experiences. Even though in practice conservative Korean Protestant churches

\textsuperscript{15} Kyung-mi Park, “Ham’s Understanding of Jesus in Relation to The Doctrine of Atonement (贖罪論),” 233.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 240.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 207.
emphasize the importance of personal experience of the Holy Spirit or spiritual encounter with God, they have extremely strict and narrow criteria in accepting personal spiritual experiences as true Christian spirituality and receiving them into Church communities’ spirituality and theology.

In my personal opinion, it is extremely sensitive for me as an ordained pastor within one of the conservative Korean Reformed Christian denominations to evaluate Yu’s pluralistic theology and spirituality. Yu believed that all religions, or at least the four religions – Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism have the truth of the ultimate reality based on his ontological and spiritual understanding of God, and in this sense, it is doubtless that Yu’s theology and spirituality are pluralistic. And as I mentioned in the above, religious pluralism has been strongly rejected by the conservative Korean Reformed churches.

Jeong-sook Oh also warns about several dangers which Yu’s theology and spirituality may cause. Firstly, Yu’s East Asian understanding of Christianity has high risk to be misunderstood as a type of legalism insisting to be saved by righteous deeds because in reality, Yu proposes ascetic and spiritual practices as Tao of the cross or the way to follow Jesus. Even though his spiritual practices and disciplines can be seen as the practice-oriented and concrete ways to emphasize living faith through our whole body and not just thought, if the training and practices of body is too much stressed Yu’s theology has some risk to be seen as a Christian legalism.  

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18 Oh, *Korean Christianity of Tasŏk Yu Yong-mo*, 323-324.
Secondly, according to Oh, Yu’s East Asian understanding of Christianity can be misunderstood as neglecting or ignoring Church’s traditions and cultures.\(^\text{19}\) Yu’s spirituality which focuses on personal training and discipline rather than traditions and teachings of the Church community is prone to move toward the direction of individualistic faith. As if he exhibits such individualistic faith, his spirituality is built based on his own spiritual experience instead of Church’s traditions.

Thirdly, Yu’s East Asian understanding of Christianity has a possibility to overlook the distance between the ultimate reality and human being.\(^\text{20}\) In spite of his ontological understanding of God, Yu’s spirituality has the East Asian anthropocentric characteristic which believes our own ability to save ourselves. Oh concludes that despite these dangers that Yu’s theology and spirituality may cause, Yu’s East Asian understanding of Christianity can be an example to play an important role of naturalizing the Western Christianity into the Korean spiritual context. She asserts that Yu’s Koreanized Christianity is unique and superb, and as such, Korean Christians must listen to Yu’s voice and open their Maeum (mind and heart) towards Yu’s theology and spirituality.\(^\text{21}\)

However, the fact that Yu regards his spiritual experience of union with God through Jesus Christ as an important aspect of faith shows that there is spiritual and experiential faith with which the conservative Korean Reformed Christianity may agree in Yu’s theology and spirituality.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 324.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., 325.

\(^\text{21}\) Ibid., 326.
Even though he insists on such radical theological and spiritual theories to define himself as unorthodox, in the position of today’s Korean Christianity to find peaceful conversation and coexistence with Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism which are not only religions, but also have played important cultural and ethical roles in Korean context, (if it is necessary) Yu’s theology and spirituality provide Korean Christianity a better chance to do that than other Western theologians’ pluralistic theories because Yu’s theology and spirituality are formed and developed within Korean religious, ethical, and cultural context.

Yu’s theology cannot be separated from his spirituality and in his spirituality, his theology can be named as spiritual theology. Young-ho Park also defines Yu’s faith as spiritual faith in contrast to doctrinal faith. Yu criticizes religious people for not realizing Eol-Na which penetrates his concept of the ultimate reality and spirituality. Men of Jai-Na who do not realize Eol-Na merely participate in religious activities in which they pray their fortune by borrowing the power of God without any will to serve God and love neighbors. They like to divide into groups or parties and fight against one another by following the brutal nature of Jai-Na. For that reason, Yu points out that religious people are hostile and aggressive to other religions. For example, the reason why Yahweh chose only the Israelites and was hostile to other nations is because Judaism was not the religion of Eol-Na, but the religion of Jai-Na.

This spiritual theology of Yu was naturally categorized as religious pluralism and was rejected by the Korean conservative and evangelical Reformed Christianity. However,

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23 Ibid., 172.
Yu’s spiritual theology that tries to practice loving God and the world based on spiritual experience of God seems to provide a spiritual guidance or insight to contemporary Korean Christians who lose sight of direction in the context of secularization.

Furthermore, even though Yu’s ontological theology and pluralistic spirituality are seldom accepted by most Korean denominational Christians in the practical fields of faith, his theology and spirituality can contribute to the religious study, philosophical theology, comparative religious study, and the academic field of spirituality in theoretical or academic fields.
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