

## **Homiletical Insights from Paul Tillich and Wonhyo: Focusing on Their Understanding of God and Ultimate Reality (Part II)**

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### **The false dichotomy between subject and object**

As humans can make God an object, they can make other humans their objects which they deal with or even use while they themselves are subjects in their relational schemes. Definitely, it is dehumanizing others. From a larger societal perspective, a systematic order can continue and deepen the process of massive dehumanization in order to maintain itself. As mentioned above Tillich emphasizes that the dichotomy of subject and object is applied to our understanding of God, which is bound to cause a serious misunderstanding about God. Through his explanation about God who is the ground of being, we can reason that the relationship among each being that participates in God cannot be recognized through the dichotomic frame.

If we wish to answer the question of the fulfilment of other persons ... we must seek the point at which the destiny of others becomes our own destiny ... It is the participation of their being in our being...Neither can be separated from the other. The destiny of the individual cannot be separated from the destiny of the whole in which it participates.<sup>1</sup>

For Tillich, participation is a crucial idea by which we can overcome the problem of objectification of human beings, and be led to form communities. In order that participation may be actualized, Tillich understands that individualization is an essential procedure. Without establishing the secure place of one's self who can use one's freedom with discernment, participation and communities cannot happen.<sup>2</sup> He wishes to stipulate the place of the human self with appropriate caution and prudence so that anyone may not subordinate and objectify God and other human beings. Nevertheless, Wonhyo's understanding regarding the issues related to the human self is more radical than Tillich's. Where Tillich sees an appropriate place for self and its rightful individualization, Wonhyo sees the formation and movement of the tenacious power of delusion, which still vigorously works in order to blind one from original truths of being with diverse, deliberate illusions.

Wonhyo stresses that all things are of One Mind, but ignorance makes humans unable to realize this fundamental truth. Wonhyo does not clarify the origin of fatal ignorance. He remarks that ignorance appears suddenly or without specific beginning.<sup>3</sup>

Ignorance misleads us to be certain that the distinction of subject and object reflects empirically or ontologically undoubtful reality. The illusive paradigm of subject-object leads to "discriminating mind" (分別心) According to Wonhyo's view, Peter Kikon Suh points out that the discriminating mind strengthens the misguided split between subject and object, and

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<sup>1</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 270.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* ((New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Peter kikon Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley* (Ph. D. diss, Northwestern University, 1999), 67.

consigns the truth that “the objects are inseparable from the consciousness of the perceiving”<sup>4</sup> to oblivion. In Buddhism, the idea that there is an independent epistemological subject, who is a real self, is a delusion created by ignorance and a discriminating mind that solidify each other. This understanding about the human self may seem to be ambiguous or unintelligible, but actually, the orthodox Christian view about the human self, in its most radical point, contains a possibility of meaningful conversation with Wonhyo’s and the overall Buddhistic point of view. In giving her explanation to Martin Luther’s *Theology of the Cross*, Mary M. Solberg points out:

Humans’ constitutional proclivity for misnaming is rooted in the brokenness the Christian tradition associates with the Fall, an estrangement from God whose completeness is such that humans are not even aware of the extent of its impact. From the human point of view, it is as if the framework for the reality within which humans live and move has fractured. At the most fundamental level – the sense a person has of who he or she is – this fractured framework produces an entirely distorted self portrait. Relationship with others are equally distorted.<sup>5</sup>

“The framework for the reality within which humans live and move has fractured” means that we do not know exactly how far away we have been removed from the original conditions in which we were meant to think and live. It may be possible that the ruptured framework causes, to an enormous extent, constant epistemological problems of making us falsely recognize what is illusionary and variable as real and stable. Even though the Christian and Buddhistic perspective about the human self cannot be identical, Wonhyo’s and Buddhistic understanding about self may work as a catalyst which spurs the dissolution of crucial ideas and learning that need to melt more thoroughly into the marrow of our Christian theological point of view.

The epistemological delusion from a mind moves toward every side and the collective mass of delusion is widely formed. “Because of the continuity (of deluded thoughts), the mind, superimposing its deluded thoughts on the world of objects and holding fast to the discriminations of liking and disliking, develops attachments (to what it likes)”<sup>6</sup> The deluded thoughts become concretized and the discriminating mind continue to make categories and boundaries among diverse objects, since the subject and object have been distinguished. Not realizing that one’s illusions are in the process of becoming more elaborate and systematic, one decides who or what can be accepted and cherished, and who or what needs to be excluded and even detested “Because they are poorer than I, or richer than I, or more handsome than I, or uglier than I, the eyes of those [who have objectified me] may turn into swords and arrows, and smug with pleasure.” They have not realized that “all differentiations are no other than the differentiations of one’s mind itself.” Inhumanity based on deluded thought and feeling inevitably leads to diverse kinds of individual and societal conflicts and suffering. Persistent delusion and fixed attachment, which may be aggravated as time goes on, causes various evil *Karmas*, the loss of original freedom and resultant pain and suffering.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the door to enlightenment is always wide open to anyone. The intricate system of deluded thoughts can collapse, because the wisdom of true

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<sup>4</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 68.

<sup>5</sup> Mary M. Solberg. *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 74-75.

<sup>6</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 69 quoting Wonhyo's Commentaries. 1-756; Hakeda's English version, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 69-70.

thusness can awaken us at any moment.<sup>8</sup> The moment of realization may be described as apocalyptic. Wonhyo states. “When the (deluded) mind comes into being, then various conceptions come to be; and when the (deluded) mind ceases to be, then various conceptions (of objective things) cease to be.”<sup>9</sup>

Wonhyo subdivides the process of reaching enlightenment into four stages: non-enlightenment, enlightenment in appearance, approximate enlightenment, and final enlightenment. In the final stage of enlightenment, “one can be aware of the arising of deluded [objective] thoughts, and can be free from the grasp of deluded thought, and comes to have an insight into the original nature of the world of true thusness which is beyond all thoughts.”<sup>10</sup> At last one encounters one's own original self that is beyond all the objectified discriminations. It is “the true self of no self.” The true selfless self enters the original status of being in which “both subject and object disappear and only one reality of undifferentiated absolute freedom remains.”<sup>11</sup>

Tillich understands that “Sin is a state of things in which the holy and the secular are separated, struggling with each other and trying to conquer each other. It is the state in which God is not ‘all in all,’ the state in which God is ‘in addition to’ all other beings.”<sup>12</sup> Even though they are not identical and homogenous, the freedom which comes through enlightenment reminds us of the depth of the reconciliation which has begun to be actualized and will be completed in God's new creation. God who is nearer to us than ourselves will be all in all. For this reason, it would not be an exaggeration to say that when the ground of being is all in all, the dichotomic distinction will be no more, the way of looking at the world within the limitation of the central emphasis of “I” will be no more. Finally we will truly know what is true freedom and reconciliation, liberated from numerous kinds of differentiation and resultant alienation.

### **Homiletical implications from the studies of Tillich and Wonhyo**

In spite of the pious language such as God's calling or holy ministry of life and death that are frequently related to preaching and preachers, it is hard to deny the possibility that preachers may become “a centered self to whom every relation involves an object.”<sup>13</sup> regarding preaching ministry. It means that preachers may objectify the Word of God, listeners, and preachers themselves.<sup>14</sup> When the misguided objectification captivates preachers' mind irresistibly, they may not move willingly toward God's reconciliation in which no one is degenerated into an object of a certain purpose or a necessity. The deluded objectification works as a perennial root of the matters that the message of the Cross denies and nullifies, such as “power, fame, wealth, acceptance by many, or some other aspect of

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<sup>8</sup> Wonhyo explains: “When ignorance is overcome and the ever changing stream of deluded (objective) thoughts disappears, the original nature of the mind ... as the wisdom of Suchness[thusness] remains undestroyed.” Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 65 quoting Wonhyo's Commentaries. 1-753; Hakeda's English version. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 71 quoting Wonhyo's Commentaries. 1-759; Hakeda's English version, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 218.

<sup>13</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 271.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Lin Hudson indicates, “The preacher needs to release the word of proclamation so that it may become residency within the life of the community ... How often do ministers measure their self-esteem by the praises of the congregation in response to their performance of proclamation and ministry!” Mary Lin Hudson, “Preaching the Gospel for Liberation,” in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 119.

self-glorification.”<sup>15</sup> The warning from Wonhyo and Buddhism regarding the danger of being caught up by deluded thoughts and desire need to be seriously considered by the teachers of preaching. The students of preaching need far more learning about themselves, coming through the ground of being than a maxim such as “Be yourself as preachers.”

In his article “Why I Am Not Persuasive,” Richard Lischer clarifies that he is neither “anti-rhetoric” nor “indifferent toward the beauties of language.”<sup>16</sup> Lischer encourages preachers to “tailor [their] diction in love for those who will hear.”<sup>17</sup> However, in revealing his reluctance regarding establishing persuasion as an essential paradigm and purpose of preaching, Lischer introduces several examples of preachers whose preaching was renewed through the ontological and existential awakening and liberation that they experienced

One pastor discovered the poor in his parish, and something happened to his preaching; another devoted herself to prayer as never before and began to speak with power; one discovered the goodness of his congregation as his wife lay dying, and suddenly in the midst of unspeakable sorrow he became a free man in the pulpit.<sup>18</sup>

In the passage above, Lischer shows the examples of preachers who stood above the false and mechanic dichotomy between “I” and something that is not “I,” and who have been empowered to overcome the habitual objectification of a certain group of social class, congregation, preachers themselves and God; through the prayer that leads the preacher to encounter vulnerably “God who is nearer to us than ourselves,” and the sorrow that was very unsettling to the extent that the previously established structure of beings suddenly loses its maintenance power.

One day, Wonhyo visited a hermit in order to receive a deeper learning about true thusness, the absolute calmness. To his surprise, Wonhyo found the hermit crying over a dead fawn, and doubted the emotional hermit was the right one to give him significant teachings about true thusness. Wonhyo asked for an explanation about his strong emotion over the dead fawn. The hermit said: after a hunter killed the fawn’s mother, he took care of the fawn. He wanted to feed the fawn by getting some milk in town. He pretended that he had a son who was starving, but many people refused to help him. When he could get milk at last, he rushed to where the fawn was, but he saw the fawn had already died of hunger. The hermit described: “My mind and the fawn’s mind are the same. It was very hungry. I was hungry. The fawn wanted milk. I wanted milk. Now it is dead. The fawn’s mind is my mind. That’s why I am weeping. I want milk.” Through the hermit’s utmost compassion, who did not distinguish himself from the fawn, Wonhyo realized that the enlightened voluntarily and actively take on the pain embedded in all beings.<sup>19</sup> *Bodhisattva*, which means the enlightened do not remain in the status of self-satisfaction. Their selfless self moves toward the world, heals the broken and harmonizes the conflicted by pouring out the compassion of One Mind which encompasses, embraces and works through everything in the cosmos. The hermit gave a warning to Wonhyo: “For twenty years you’ve kept company with kings and princes and monks. It’s not good for a monk to live in heaven all the time. He must also visit hell and save the people there...”<sup>20</sup> When Buddhism was established in Korea after it was introduced, it took the form of a state religion, which supported and justified national agendas, and the

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<sup>15</sup> André Resner Jr., *Preacher and the Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 168.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Lischer, “Why I Am Not Persuasive,” *Homiletic* 24, no. 2, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, rev. ed. (150 West Broadway: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 72.

<sup>18</sup> Lischer, “Why I Am Not Persuasive,” 16.

<sup>19</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> Suh, *Two Soteriologies: Wonhyo and John Wesley*, 21.

order centering the royal families and the aristocratic. After being enlightened, Wonhyo was headed toward the commoners and lower-class people. Through the fellowship with the people whom he met on streets and in towns, he let the spirit of One Mind flow to them, which is eventually for everyone. He ate, danced and sang with them with no hindrance at all. One of his songs said, “The whole world is just like that. How about you?”<sup>21</sup>

Wonhyo’s question “How about you?” has been given to Christian preachers also. The question leads us to ponder anew what kind of God we are led not only to believe in and preach on, but to live and die with and within. It is the Christian God who is “poor, degraded, without roof or bread,” but “nourishes body and soul” of all, and “takes up the cross for Christians and pagans, both, and in forgiving both is slain.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Young Sup Ko, “The Unification Theory of Wonhyo,” in *Ten Korean Thinkers: Wonhyo* (Seoul, Korea: Yemoon-Seowon, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 3d ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM Press LTD, 1976), 348-349.