

The Kingdom Of God as the Christian Image of Harmony

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When I began to get ready for this talk, I tried to find some previous works on the Christian understanding of harmony. First I looked it up in the most recently published *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992, 5 vols), but to my amazement there was no item entitled 'harmony'. Even though I kept looking for 'harmony' in four or five other encyclopedic dictionaries of the Bible, the only reference that I could find was a tiny item called "Harmony of the Gospels" which explains the interrelatedness of the three synoptic or the four Gospels. It began to dawn on me that 'harmony' is not an important theme in the Christian Scriptures. *The New Topical Concordance* (Lutterworth, 1974) quotes four verses in the Bible (Ps 133:1; Am 3:3; Rom 12:18; Eph 4:3) where the blessing, condition, and desirability of harmony are mentioned. Other Bible Concordances offer at the most eight or nine instances where the idea of harmony occurs, and ask us to refer to its synonyms such as agreement, compatibility, concord, and peace, among which last is probably most comparable to harmony in Christianity in its importance.

Then I took my search into theological dictionaries. *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (1968, 6 vols) does not have an item on 'harmony', nor do *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967, 14 vols) and *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (1994). Interestingly enough, the 1910 edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (15 vols) deals with 'harmony' (Greek and Latin harmonia) as a concord of sounds, "several tones of different pitch sounded as a chord" and gives a short history of how harmony was used in Church music (pp. 139-140). This treatment of the notion of harmony solely as a musical concept is repeated in the 13th edition (1926) and 14th edition (1929-73) of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, while *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1993) drops the item 'harmony' itself. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1967, 8 vols) does not mention harmony either.

This unintended search through most representative Western encyclopedias to get some initial information for a Christian understanding of harmony convinced me that harmony is neither a theme in Christian theology, nor a Western philosophical topic. Probably ‘harmony’ became the central theme in this colloquium because the Christians in East Asia try to dialogue with the Confucians and other East Asians at large. In other words, here we are trying to interpret Christian teaching from the perspective of East Asian traditions. I think this is only fair, for East Asian thought has been perceived from the Western viewpoint for several decades. If this cross-cultural exchange of perspectives proves to be fruitful, Christian theological reflection will continue to be challenged and enriched by the East Asian world view as much as it can challenge and enrich East Asian heritage. As far as the concept of harmony is concerned, East Asia has a lot more to offer than the Christian tradition. While in Christian theology harmony is regarded as a technical musical concept, the East Asian thought expanded its meaning for 2500 years from its original sense of musical concord to a notion of personal perfection (*Mencius* 5B:1; 6A:8), natural ordering of family and society according to the Tao (*Lao Tzu* 18 and 55), and participation in cosmic transformation (*I Ching* 52 and 60).

In Part 1, I will present basic elements of harmony shared by Confucianism and Christianity: first, the self-cultivation which brings about a personal level of harmony; second, social reality as relational and institutional harmony; third, an understanding of cosmic harmony between humanity and Heaven and Earth. I should add that among East Asian traditions, for the sake of comparative clarity I will concentrate on Confucianism and refer only occasionally to Taoism. In part II, I will bring out some differences between the two traditions and illustrate a few possible contributions the Christians can make to contemporary reconstructions of the image and practice of harmony in East Asia. In part III, I will try to interpret the central biblical image, the “Kingdom of God”, as the Christian image of harmony.

I. COMMON FOUNDATIONS FOR CONFUCIAN AND CHRISTIAN NOTIONS OF HARMONY

In the Analects of Confucius we find an interesting saying that even though harmony is something everyone values, insisting on harmony alone would not work to make a human society run harmoniously:

Yu Tzu (one of Confucius’ disciple) said, “Of the things brought about by ritual propriety it is harmony that is prized. Of the ways of the former

Kings this is most beautiful, and is followed alike in matters great and small, yet this will not always work; to aim always at harmony without regulating it by the rites simply because one knows only about harmony will not, in fact, work.” (1,12)

The above quotation juxtaposes harmony (*ho*) and ritual propriety (*li*) as mutually dependent. Chu Hsi, the 12th century synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism, wrote in a commentary on this verse that “the substance (*t’i*) of ritual propriety is concentration in reverence, while its function (*yung*) is valued as harmony.” “Concentration in reverence” or “abiding in reverence” is one of the two pillars of moral cultivation in the thought of Chu Hsi. Even though he gave sequential preference to knowledge because he taught that first we must know what is right in order to orient ourselves in the right direction, he gave a priority of importance to “abiding in reverence” over knowledge. One has to set his/her goal to become a sage; and abide in reverence as if one lives before the Lord on High both in solitude and active public affairs. He stated that if a person honestly abides in reverence all the time, he/she will perfect the heaven-endowed virtue and become a benevolent sage which is the final goal of Confucian study. Harmony according to Confucian tradition, therefore, is the ability one gains as a result of self-cultivation.

The old Han and T’ang commentary tradition on the same verse of the Analects adds the notion of rightness as the basis of harmony by saying that without discerning whether the content we try to keep is right or wrong, we cannot expect to maintain harmony, for harmony is the result of correct relationship. Since, justice or the right balancing of relationship is the prerequisite of harmony, social propriety helps to enact justice in concrete situations, for propriety directs us to follow the golden mean by cutting what is too long and strengthening what is too weak. Only through the effort of constant reshaping by this discerning balance, can we maintain harmony. Harmony in this social sense is a creative formation of various relationships. That is the reason why Confucius said that “the matured person is in harmony with others without accommodating, while the immature person is accommodating without being harmonious” (*Analects* 13,23). This short statement of Confucius was immediately understood by Confucius’ contemporaries because the difference between harmony (*ho*) and accommodation/agreement (*t’ung*) was well explained in the *Tsochuan Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals*.

In the year 522 B.C.E. when the ruler of the State Ch’i praised one of his flattering ministers, his advisor Yen Yin tried to teach his ruler how to discern the difference between true harmony and simple agreement.

Quoting the old poems from the *Book of Odes*, Yen Yin explains harmony by the analogies of food and music. In order to cook a delicious soup, we need to put different flavors, so that what is lacking will be supplemented. In music likewise we need the different sounds of various musical instruments to bring about a beautiful harmony. Harmony, therefore, is not adding to what one has already, but rather supplementing what one is lacking or balancing off what one has too much of in order to reach a perfect proportion, which is in touch with *Tao* (the way or principle of Heaven). Just as with one taste or one sound we cannot make a successful cooking or music performance, a harmonious society cannot be formed with one voice or perspective. An ability to deal with diverse opinions without sacrificing fairness comes only from personal maturity, i.e., perfection of virtues. That is the reason why Confucius said that only the virtuous person can be harmonious without agreeing all the time; and Tzu Kung, one of the most distinguished disciples of Confucius, commented that whenever Confucius moved people, there was a harmony (Analects, 19,25). Unless harmony is achieved within a person, he or she can not form and maintain a harmonious relationship with others.

This primary personal level of harmony based on virtue and justice is found in the Christian tradition as well. When the tax collector Zacchaeus declares that he will voluntarily repay fourfold what he has taken illegally and give to the poor the half of his property, he recovers a harmony not only with other people, but also in his own personhood. Jesus said to him that salvation, i.e., the Kingdom of God has come to him who is a son of Abraham (Lk 19:9). Harmony starts within oneself and expands to other people from those who are near to those further away. The formation of relationships has to be rooted in the justice of God, from whom the very universe derives a certain harmony, that is, a proportionate peace (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Divine Names*, 336).

Psalms 85, which is identified as a prayer for rain and prosperity (*The Anchor Bible*, 286), sings that “righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (v.11). Here peace and justice join together as partners in the blessed life. Actually in the Bible it is the notion of peace (*šālôm/eirene*) which takes the primary position as the original order of creation and the effect of righteousness: “Peace is both a restoration of the divine plan of creation and the harbinger of the completion of life to come” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary V*, 207). *Šālôm* denotes wholeness, health, completeness; greeting peace to one another is wishing prosperity to have physical and spiritual resources sufficient to one’s need.

Peace encompasses a relationship of equity which is not only a divine gift but takes effort, as the peace maker is highly praised (Matt 5:9). This

integral relationship between peace and justice was firmly established by the prophets of Israel, such as Amos. Amos lived at a time when the gap between the rich and the poor was widening and it was very strong in his contention that apparent peace and harmony not founded on justice, are only fakes and illusions which will be blown away in the day of divine judgment. Amos advocated the notion of social justice as the primary command of God and thereby offered the validity and power to challenge the existing order when it takes advantage of the poor.

The concept of justice as the foundation of harmony is not exactly same in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and East Asian tradition, while its functional importance is comparable. In the case of the former, justice is embodied in the law of God as the revealed corpus, while in the case of the latter, it is concretized in the ever changing interpersonal relationships according to the ritual propriety formulated by the sages. What safeguards justice from being identified with social convention, is in Christianity the sovereignty of God, while in Confucian tradition it is an orientation toward the interest of all people (*kung*, public as the principle of Heaven) against the egoism of individuals and groups. Justice, then, integrates two conflicting notions of socially regulated inequality in function and of basic human equality, encompassing the task of the hierarchical order while safeguarding the existence of everyone without privileging some at the expense of others (Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, 115). Whether the image of harmony is based on the egalitarian ideal of ancient Israel or the hierarchical integration of China, it is the notion/norm of justice which directs and unifies human existence.

Now we will focus on the second level of harmony which is social and institutional. This is the most commonly understood meaning of harmony, and we have abundant examples in both Confucian and Christian traditions, although Confucianism among world religions has probably concentrated most strongly on the relational aspect of human life. Confucius clearly stated that doing politics starts from forming right family relationships between the parents and the children, and among brothers and sisters (*Analects* 2:21). His famous definition of politics as “to govern is to correct” (12:17) actually points to all the interpersonal relationships. Every relationship entails a particular responsibility, which is mutual and reciprocal. The ability to be responsible has to be initially learned within family situations, so that Confucius emphasized virtues in kinship relations, such as filial piety and parental affection. The virtue of benevolence learned in the family, however, should not be limited to that, but expand in ever larger circles into the world.

I was delighted to find that Confucius was, in fact, very much concerned with the accumulation of wealth, which he conceived as a main cause harming social harmony. In his dialogue with Jan Ch'iu, one of his politically successful disciples, Confucius stated thus:

What I have heard is that the head of a state or a family worries not about underpopulation but about uneven distribution, not about poverty but about instability. For where there is even distribution there is no such thing as poverty, where there is harmony there is no such things as underpopulation, and where there is stability there is no such things as overturning. (*Analects* 16,1)

Here Confucius is pointing out that we should be afraid of unjust distribution of wealth and disharmony either of a family or a state. Ordinarily people are concerned with poverty and failure, but do not pay much attention to fairness and discontentment within. But what really allows human persons to be satisfied and live harmoniously is fair and just treatment in economic and social terms.

Confucians have been well aware of the strength of social harmony which enables humanity to form a community and develop cultural progress: "Heaven's favourable weather is less important than Earth's advantageous terrain, and Earth's advantageous terrain is less important than human unity" (*Mencius* 2B:1). Climate and natural resources can be cultivated for the benefit of people only when there is harmony among people. In a word in Confucian tradition, it is human beings who complete what Heaven and Earth have given birth to. One chapter of the *Book of Rites*, the *Doctrine of the Mean* which became one of the basic texts for the development of the Neo-Confucian thought, explains the connection between personal harmony and social harmony thus:

When the feelings of joy, anger, sorrow and happiness are not elicited, this is the state of equilibrium (*chung*). When these feelings become elicited and properly regulated, this is called harmony (*ho*). Equilibrium is the great basis of the world, harmony is the way whereby an order of all things is attained. (section 1)

Chung is what is given, a priori norm, while *ho* is a social concept, something to be achieved. When we concentrate on the oneness/principle in our heart, we can maintain harmony in our feelings, relationships, and social activities. Harmony at various levels has been so important in the Confucian tradition because they want to run a society or a state primarily by ritual propriety which is occasionally supplemented by institutional laws.

The Biblical notion of peace most frequently describes a social reality, a state of reconciliation and wholeness among a group living in peace. Psalm

133 saw the abundant blessings of life in harmonious community living: “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (v.1). St. Paul presents stronger directives how to preserve harmony among people: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them... Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:14, 17-18). Here St. Paul advises not only to keep peace among disciples of Christ (1Th 5:13), but to preserve harmony even with the persecutors by characteristically Christian behavior of forgiveness. The Christian notion of harmony, therefore, contains the dialectic of letting go and then being transformed by the experience of the divine forgiveness.

This expanded concept of Christian harmony is based on the faith that all humanity has received the same Spirit, forming a new kind of family: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... for through him we both have access in One Spirit to the Father”(Eph 2:13-18). The doctrine of creation that all things and all people are created by one God is strengthened by the fact that this God took the form of the human and shared the same life in order to heal and transform broken relationships. The Kingdom of God is the symbol of a new world where a perfect harmony which transcends kinship, race, social status prevails. In the sense that the grace of reconciliation is given already, the Kingdom has come, but in the sense that we are still waiting for the perfectly harmonious world where the leopard lies down peacefully with the kid (Is 11:6), the Kingdom is an eschatological image, manifesting the sense of completion.

Edward Farley, a professor of theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School, presents a Christian interpretation of social harmony thus:

The early Christian movement understood itself as a community, an ecclesia, in just these terms. Like all human communities, its actual life was rent by alienations. But the criteria which guided its criticism of these alienations were the universal criteria of agapic relations, not the specific criteria of worth and beauty which defined Roman or Greek culture, masters and slaves, or men and women. This is not to say these criteria were absent from the ecclesial community. Patriarchalism and other ethnocentric criteria abounded. At the same time, it is clear that the ecclesia refused to define communion in those terms. (*Good and Evil*, 246-7)

Compared to the Confucian tradition where the social notion of harmony has developed into a politically structured institution with ordered

hierarchy, the Christian tradition maintained the ideal of a universal church, a community of people of God drawn from all cultures and political boundaries. While social harmony is something concrete and always remolded in the case of the former, in the case of the latter, it is conceived on the level of spiritual heritage and has a tendency to remain as an ideal.

The third level of harmony is the cosmic one, i.e., the relationship between Heaven, Earth, and Human. Cheng Chung-ying, one of the leading Chinese philosophers at the University of Hawaii, has presented the Confucian understanding of harmony as 'transformation', drawing paradigms from the *Book of Changes*:

With an analysis and critique of the Heraclitean concept of strife and his implicit thesis of "disunity" of opposites, we may advance into the philosophy of the *I Ching* as a source for formulating and providing a comprehensive theory of harmony and strife, in which harmony is metaphysically founded and fundamentally illuminated and yet strife can be given a proper place and clearly explained. The very importance of the *I Ching* philosophy consists in its recognition of change and transformation (called *p'ien* and *hua*) as constitutive of as well as in its insight that change and transformation primarily take place because of unity instead of disunity of things. (*Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16,148)

He states that according to Confucian tradition, reality is harmonious and all disharmony or strife is seen as mere transition because yin and yang, two major principles of movement, are based on one unity, *Tao*. He asserts that this unity is not static, but creative as "the basis for producing and strengthening harmony as a system of integration of differences" (140).

When we talk about transformation (*hua*), it is the Taoists who first introduced the cosmic vision and constant movement of *Tao*. The cosmos is formed by the harmonious union of the yin and the yang (*Lao Tzu* 42); and life and death, success and failure, health and sickness are relativized and accepted as various aspects of transformation, the movement of *Tao* (*Chuang Tzu* 6). The *Tao* is depicted in *Chuang Tzu* as the Lord of transformation or the Great Potter upon whose skillful production humans have to trust completely.

The *Book of Changes*, in fact, synthesizes Taoist and Confucian thoughts and presents the harmony of the triad, placing the weight more on the role of humans as the moral subjects. It is in the concrete image of the sage that the way of human participation in the cosmic harmony is well depicted: the sage harmonizes the triad by perfecting his/her innate virtue; the heart of the sage embodies the heart of Heaven and thereby gives life to all things in the world; by enacting ritual propriety, the sage incarnates the life of Earth,

nurturing all people with compassion; by attaining interpenetrating knowledge of things, the sage completes the works of Heaven and Earth. In this Confucian ideal of cosmic harmony, the boundaries of the triad are not dissolved, nor completely united. Heaven, Earth, Human are interrelated and have a particular responsibility, as Hsün Tzu has envisioned: “Heaven has its time through which it bestows life; Earth has its riches through which it nourishes all living beings; Human has its political rule through which it brings about community.” It is a perfect harmonious communion on the cosmic level. One party should not try to take over the role of others, nor intrude into the areas of others. It is only when we humans do our best in our responsibility in social affairs, that we can participate in the transforming works of Heaven and Earth. Contemporary ecological effort has a lot to learn from the Confucian and Taoist vision of the harmonious triad. It is a vision that by respecting and preserving nature much as it is, people are most benefitted by it.

The image of cosmic harmony in Christianity has not been as strong as in the Confucian tradition. We can find some fragmentary visions in the prophets and apocalyptic writings. Probably it is brokenness of harmony which has been more focused on from the beginning of the Bible. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, the harmony between them was harmed as well as the harmony between the natural world and human world was distorted. Though it was very short, still it is important for us to remember the original harmony enjoyed by human beings with each other, nature, and God, as the beautiful scene of the garden before the fall portrayed in Genesis 2:8-24.

Among the prophets of Israel the Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) most clearly brought back the mythic understanding of nature of the Ancient Near East and used it in a poetic imagery for the restored Israel after the people have endured the judgment of God and the suffering of the exile:

Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. (Is 44: 21-23)

Harmony is restored between the people of Israel and God, and in this new redeemed state, heaven and earth and everything in it rejoice. In a word, the cosmic harmony is reinstated.

This prophetic vision of restored harmony is seen by the early Church as reenacted in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God with a wider perspective which overcomes not only the very distinction of the chosen people of Israel and the gentiles but the cosmic brokenness: "He(Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ... and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:15-20).

In our age the same vision is again restated, especially by the feminist theologians:

Feminist theology argues, alternatively, for a view of nature consonant with a view of a God who takes the whole of creation seriously, and a view of creation which does not see predatory hierarchy as the basis of order. Nature, in this view, is valuable according to its own concrete reality, which includes an interdependence with embodied humanity... Human intelligence and freedom are not barred from addressing nature, but measures for understanding and just use are lodged both in nature itself and in ethical requirements for relations among persons. (M.A. Farley, "Feminist Theology and Bioethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics*, 201)

The redeemed state should not be seen as a exclusive reconciliation between an individual sinner and God, but the whole of humanity, indeed the whole creation is included in an interdependent web of life. This Christian vision of interrelated relationship of God, Earth, and Human shares the basic tenets with the Confucian triad of Heaven, Earth, and Human. We human beings are dependent upon the life-giving force of Heaven and Earth, but at the same time we have a grand responsibility to complete the work and attain harmony within, with others, and with cosmic world.

II. CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONFUCIAN PRACTICE OF HARMONY

I have mentioned already that, theoretically speaking, harmony is the conceptual term of Confucian and East Asian tradition. While searching for a similar understanding in Christian tradition which is comparable to the Confucian scheme of self-cultivation, ordering of society, and transformation of the cosmos, I have focused up to now on the common elements. Human maturity, fair distribution of wealth and power, and responsible relationship with nature and humans appear to form the common foundations of harmony in both traditions. But when we look more carefully at the processes by which harmony has been enacted, immediately we can notice major differences between Confucian and Christian traditions.

Robert Neville, a Comparative theologian of Boston University, who

has been taking Chinese philosophy as the major counterpart to his Christian theology, has commented thus:

Perhaps the sharpest contrast between the Christian contract model and the Confucian consists in this. Whereas the Christian tends to see social roles or semiotic codes as external, and identifies the self only as a token in those roles, the Confucian identifies the person as much with the relevant codes as with the token activity within them. Thus, whereas it is conceivable on the contract model to see oneself as other than the social roles, as a self-definable individual, on the Confucian model the person simply cannot be individuated over against the socially located codes. Therefore, for the Confucian, much of any perception or action is joint with the actions and perceptions of others. A person is essentially and personally participatory with others according to coded structures. (*Behind the Masks of God*, 136)

Neville is arguing that Christians have a covenantal identity with a double layer: the ideal identity of the covenant with God and the material identity of actual life in social contractual relations. Because of this doubled identity, an individual has a stonger assertion and a power to challenge the social order which he or she thinks is contrary to the ideal. On the other hand the Confucian tries to develop codes, i.e., ritual propriety (*li*), fine and subtle enough to constitute the perfection and excellence of human life. Neville even states that “Attaining to codes, or having propriety, is an ontological matter for constituting the human” (135). He asserts that because of total identity with the coded ritual structure of the society, the Confucians have found it hard to envisage radical social change even when it was necessary, contrary to the idealism at its heart (140-1).

I think Neville’s critique is historically accurate as a whole, especially after Hsun Tzu identified propriety with the *Tao* which humans have to follow. However, when we look back to the Analects itself, Confucius carefully differentiated propriety from the *Tao* of benevolence. While *Tao* has permanent value, transcending time and space, propriety as an expression of the *Tao* of benevolence, can and should be changed in each period (2:23; 9:3). In spite of the fact that the Confucians have the basis for overcoming coded structures, since it has been a 2000 years Confucian practice, the Christians probably have something to offer in East Asian society to bring about impetus to form a flexible notion of harmony based on justice.

Even in the area of the notion of justice, the Confucian concept is more relational and situational while the Christian understanding of justice means following in concrete actions the revealed will of God which is concretized in the laws. Because of this difference, both sides can learn from each other to gain a holistic understanding of justice. Here I will just point out two possible areas where Christian stimulation may be beneficial for the

attainment of true harmony of East Asian society and spirituality: 1. women and family 2. concern for the poor and political equality.

1. Ideological oppression of women and sociological inequality of wife have been practiced both in Christian and Confucian traditions. The Christian understanding of family structure is based on the New Testament Codes of household ethic found in 1 Peter, where wives are exhorted to be submissive to their husband just as slaves are to be submissive to their masters. A similar, more complete code is found in Col 3:18-4:1 and in Eph 5:21-6:9, where six social classes are involved, and they are arranged in three pairs of relationships:

wives be subject to husband—————husbands love your wives
children obey parents—————fathers do not anger children
slaves obey masters—————masters treat slaves justly

These same pairs are found in Greek tradition, especially in Aristotle, and historical studies have shown that the Christians as a minority religious community were forced to follow this hierarchical Greek and Roman household ethic to avoid accusations and social tension (David L. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive*, 63).

1 Pet 3:8-12 is constituted with the exhortation not to return evil for evil stressing harmony in the household. In 1 Peter the harmony sought is primarily domestic harmony between husband, wife, and slaves, and the 'harmony' between husband and wife is especially emphasized. However, the absolute harmony typically demanded by a pagan master or husband was rejected by the newly converted Christians. Christianity brought a new understanding of personhood to wives and slaves by teaching that they had a right to choose their own God. At the same time doing good is stressed, for good conduct is an apologetic response to the slanders against Christians. By obeying their husbands, that is, by being virtuous women as that was understood in the Greek world, the wives addressed in 1 Peter hoped to lead their husbands to virtue and to God. "The goal of the wife's behavior as stated in 3:1 is missionary: the author of 1 Peter hoped that the wives' conduct would convert their husbands" (Balch, 105).

Even though the New Testament household code apparently exhorted wives to be submissive to their husbands and so continued the social inequality of women, the task of critical reconstruction is possible because a view of human relations characterized by equality and mutuality can be found at the core of Christian teaching. I think the same statement can be made concerning Confucianism because it has been taking the ideal of the sage as the goal which can be attained both by women and men regardless of their social, intellectual, emotional differences. In some periods this

universal call for sagehood was taken more seriously by various sectors of people, while in other periods its ideal was mainly concentrated on the rulers and at the most on the scholars. The methods of Confucian learning and cultivation of virtue contain a radically equalizing effect, and that is the reason why I think Confucian tradition can be profitted by the experience of Christian feminist theology:

What emerges in feminist theology (in relation to Christianity, but here a harbinger of systematic development in relation to other historical religions as well) is an analysis of what are judged to be oppressive patterns of relationship and ideologies which foster them. These patterns of oppression are identified not only in relations between men and women but in every human relation where the pattern is one of domination and subjugation on the basis of sex or race or class or any other aspect of persons which is used to deny full humanity to all. (Margaret Farley, 196)

The key to open up the inequal household Confucian codes is first to distinguish and separate between the reciprocal code of the “Five Relations” and the onesided code of the “Three Bonds.” The idea of the Five Relations is the natural development of the famous socio-ethical principle presented by Confucius: “Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son” (*Analects* 12:11). The Three Bonds of Tung Chungshu, however, distorted the fundamental mutuality and conceived the wife, the son, and the subject as the yin which is inferior and has to be always subjected: “the ruler is the norm (*kang*, literally a major cord in a net) for the subject, the father is the norm for the son, and the husband is the norm for the wife” (*Ch’un-ch’iu Fan-lu* 52). Superficially the three submissive relationships of the Confucian Three Bonds sound similar to the New Testament Codes of household, but while the latter is encouraged as a strategy to avoid social scandal and to convert the pagan husband, the former functioned as the ethical backbone of East Asian class societies. Because of its onesidedness and the oppression it has exercised on the inferior parties, it is imperative to throw the image of the Three Bonds away completely. Since it was a later historical development designed to meet the needs of the imperial ethos of China during the centralized Han period, we do not lose anything crucial in Confucian tradition if we eliminate the unbalanced notion of the Three Bonds which, after all, has been proven harmful for interpersonal harmony.

The contemporary challenge facing us is how to interpret the image of the Five Relations (affection between father and son, rightness between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and fidelity between friends) in a buyable way. Here I will deal only with a possible reconstruction of the image of “distinction

between husband and wife” in the Five Relations of *Mencius* 3A:4. In a traditional society distinction was conceived as the differentiation between men’s roles, ascribed to the public affairs, and women’s role inside the household. This kind of division of social roles between public and domestic has been recognized by the feminists as the primary cause which has perpetuated the cyclical pattern of inequality of men and women. Susan Moller Okin presented the four points: 1. power is of central importance in family life; 2. the domestic sphere is itself created by political decisions; 3. the family is undeniably political because it is the place where we become our gendered selves; 4. the division of labor within the gender structured family raises both practical and psychological barriers against women in all the other spheres of life (*Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 111). In order to restore equality of women, she appeals for minimization of social differentiation between the sexes (174). Shall we then, throw away the Confucian image of “distinction between the husband and the wife”?

The traditional image has such a unifying power and deepening effect on our personality that I prefer to save it unless it is helplessly inhuman by peeling off the historical layers which limited the activity and the development of the talents of women. The notion of ‘distinction’ (*pieh*) in Confucianism is closely connected with ritual propriety which regulates and maintains the right, harmonious relationship. Even though the relationship between parents and children has to be characterized by affection and closeness, Confucius did not show any partiality and instead maintained a proper distance from his son (*Analects* 16:13) by teaching him exactly the same things which he taught to his other disciples. Propriety presupposes respect for another person and so secures a lasting relationship. Confucius praised a minister of the State Ch’i, Yen P’ing-chung, who always maintained the same reverence toward his friends even after a long period of acquittance (*Analects* 5:16).

The fundamental respect or reverence toward another person does not exclude familiarity or comfortableness. Rather respect is an indispensable prerequisite and impetus for creative understanding and enduring love which deepens relationship. Once fundamental respect and trust have been built firmly between two persons, in this case, the husband and the wife, their differences as well as common elements will be appreciated and the concrete working structure of a household can be devised with flexibility as the need changes throughout their lives. In order to achieve a free atmosphere at the household level, of course, social consciousness in general and institutional legal system have to support this reconstruction. If a household and a society can recognize the distinction of men and women

as valid and valuable without exploiting that difference or feeling threatened by it, then we can say that a true harmony is achieved between sexes and in family life.

2. Just like the inequality of women, the challenge of poverty remains an as yet insoluble problem for both Confucian and Christian traditions. Both traditions possess the ideal of a society where distribution of wealth secures social stability and peace. However, it seems to me that the Christian tradition has developed a stronger concern for the poor because it has always tied the poor directly to God. From Genesis and Exodus to the Prophets, God is understood to listen to the cry of the poor and bring about the divine deliverance: “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them” (Isa 41:17). The poor (*‘anāwîm*) and the needy (*‘ebyônîm*) came to be used as technical terms in post-exilic Israel, signifying not only the economically destitute but the pious faithful who kept the covenant.

In the same vein the teaching of Jesus is understood in the New Testament as good news for the poor. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to confirm whether Jesus was the Messiah to come, Jesus replied not by yes or no, but by his actions: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, ... the poor have good news preached to them” (Lk 7:22). The first beatitude announced by Jesus was “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20). As far as we can gather, Jesus did not want to separate his mission from the poor and this ideal stayed with his followers throughout centuries. In this sense the poor become the central focus in Christian teaching, ministry, and vision of the Kingdom of God.

This primary concern for the poor is intrinsically tied up with the political equality enjoined within a transformed community, the people of God. In the New Testament, even though family values are validated with a relative value, new priorities and new forms of solidarity were established by the coming of the Kingdom: “This new covenant community is understood as the eschatological family of Jesus constituted, not on the basis of inheritance and blood ties, but on the basis of active obedience to the will of God” (Stephen C. Barton, 122-3). Because of this primary commitment to the Kingdom, the ordinary human values such as family, filial piety, loyalty, riches, long life, etc. are initially rejected. Only after all ordinary human affiliations are relativized, they are accepted back in a transformed way. Confucianism also has some of this kind of dialectics, but the obvious intensity of this tension is much greater in Christianity.

The Liberation Theology and Korean Minjung Theology in our age try to focus the primary option for the poor by identifying the poor with Jesus and analyzed the structural cause of poverty both economic and political. As Minjung Theology stimulated the rise of Minjung Buddhism in the 1980s Korean political environment, Christianity can be a spearhead for social movement. On the other hand, however, Minjung Theology has a lot to learn from Confucian tradition to overcome its intrinsically dualistic outlook and establish a holist structure of human liberation. The issue at stake in our age is not only material poverty, but poverty of culture, values, and identity as well. In this regard, Christian Churches in East Asia have a lot to learn from the Confucian vision of social harmony, while challenging some of its historical practices.

III. THE CHRISTIAN IMAGE OF HARMONY

The image of the Kingdom of God/Heaven stands at the very center of the message of the historical Jesus, but because its vocabulary is derived from a world of oriental monarchies, some say that it is in need of reinterpretation. Historically the Kingdom has been envisioned variously as the future state of the resurrected, the Church, the state of mystical ecstasy, the progressively redeemed society, the future transformation of this world, etc. (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992). All these interpretations, however, never exhaust the full meaning of the Kingdom of God, and it remains as an open-ended symbol possible of further interpretations. And I would like to try another hermeneutical reconstruction from the perspective of the Confucian understanding of harmony. I think it is worth trying because, as we have seen, there are some fundamental commonalities between two traditions in the conception of harmony as well as remarkable differences, from which both sides can learn and profit. At the same time I have to caution that however much we might learn from each other, the Christian image of harmony will remain as characteristically Christian, and the Confucian image will maintain its Confucian character.

Since I am focusing on the theme of harmony which is an integrated pattern of change, giving its components balanced importance, I will analyse how Jesus in the Gospels established harmony in his relationships with other human beings, the natural world, and God.

1. Unlike the later imperialistic missionary attitude of the Church, Jesus never forced people to receive him or his teaching or even his forgiveness. His attitude toward social sinners most clearly exhibits his harmonious and respectful approach to others. He waited until the tax collector Zacchaeus approached him first by climbing up the tree to see him passing by; he

allowed the notorious woman of Magdala to weep at his feet and defended her before a self-righteous Pharisee who despised her. Through the ordinary interpersonal contacts such as dining together or sensitive appreciation of gestures, Jesus healed brokenness and social alienation. It is crucial to observe that Jesus maintains a respect, thereby protects the freedom of the other person. Because of this reverence conversion was experienced as an integrating restoration to the person involved, thereby safeguarding a harmonious relationship. If I may use Neo-Confucian vocabulary, Jesus practiced reverence both in quietude and in movement which enables a person really to listen to what the other person is searching for.

Jesus maintained the same reverential attitude toward the righteous people of the society such as the respected scholar Nicodemus who initiated his visit with some reservations, the well to do women who supported his missionary journeys, and the friendly household of Martha and Mary. Each person chose what he or she was inclined to do and Jesus respected their calling, preserving interpersonal harmony. The Kingdom of God was incarnated in this harmonious community, centering around Jesus but including all people in every scene.

Gordon Kaufman's wider interpretation of Christ will apply even better in the case of the Kingdom: "To say God is incarnate in Christ, then, is not to say simply and directly that God is incarnate in Jesus; rather, God is incarnate in that larger, more complex human reality, surrounding and including and following upon the man Jesus: the new Christian community, with its spirit of love and freedom, of mutual sharing and forgiveness of one another. It is in this new order of interpersonal relationships that the incarnation of God is to be found" (*In Face of Mystery*, 383). Kaufman concludes that this new communal order has provided the defining paradigm for the reconciling community, in support of which heavy demands are laid upon Christian adherents (390). In other words, as they claim, the Christian Churches have a responsibility to live up to the social ideal of the Kingdom of God. According to the degree the Christians and their communities truly maintain a reverential attitude toward others, they will contribute to the formation of harmonious societies in East Asia.

Jesus' attitude toward the pharisees and the gentiles is interesting and much more complex. His criticism, which was sometimes harsh, of the hypocrisy of the priestly and scholarly class of his time was to peel off the artificial covering and come to the core of the matter. It is another way of respecting the truth and letting the people come to their sincere selves. Harmony cannot function when justice/rightness is not attained in human relationship. Jesus' concern for justice as the foundation of right harmony is

most vividly seen in his encounters with the pharisees. His attitude toward the gentiles such as the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:23), the Syrophenician woman who asked to heal her daughter (Mk 7:26), and the Greeks who approached Jesus almost at the end of his ministry (Jn 12:21), shows a mixture of reservation waiting for the divinely ordained time, openness filled with compassion, and surprise at the expansion of his mission. If we borrow a Confucian technical term, I would like to call it a kind of 'timely mean', a discerning mind weighing the total context of one's life situation, including human relationships, moral responsibilities, and one's mandate of Heaven. It is beautiful to see in the life of Jesus that he had a room of wonder before the mystery of God: "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32).

2. Jesus enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the natural world. He loved and saw the glory of God in the lilies of the field, the caring providence of God in the birds of skies, and the value of patient waiting for the growth of the wheat until the time of harvest. He freely and sensitively used the images of mustard seeds, leaven, a net, and a pearl of great price in his parables on the Kingdom of God. Some biblical scholars comment that Jesus used the metaphors which can be easily understood by women and men, so that both can get the meaning behind the stories. In Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God, there is no distortion or exploitation of nature by human beings; both the natural world and the human world are to manifest the glory of God. As he drew most of his parables from natural imagery, he was probably sure that the natural world is more in tune with its creator without hypocrisy. But it is we humans who have to watch for the coming of the Kingdom (Mt 25:1), and exert our energy and discernment (Mt 25:14), so that the Kingdom may dwell within our community (Lk 17:21). One can almost sense the same fragrance of Confucian cosmic harmony of Heaven, Earth, and Human in the image of the Kingdom of God.

3. The Kingdom of God is embodied not only in Jesus' relationship with other people and the natural world, but paramouly in his relationship with God. If I apply the Confucian perspective of the Mandate of Heaven to Jesus' understanding of his relationship with God, we can perceive both the active and the passive aspects of the Mandate. Actively Jesus had a strong sense of mission, that he was sent by God: "I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me" (Jn 8:26); "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father" (Jn 6:57). Because of this sense of mission, the norm of his life was doing the will of God (Mt 11:27).

Jesus drew the value of human work from God's creative maintenance of the cosmos: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (Jn 5:17). This intimate relationship between Jesus and God the Father also contains a passive aspect of unavoidable destiny. At the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mt 14:36). This sense of passive acceptance is portrayed in the Gospel of John in a more willing tone: "I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28); "The hour has come" (17:1). Throughout Jesus' active and passive relationship with God, it should be observed that he encompassed his disciples and the whole community, reaching out to all humanity. "My Father" becomes "Your Father" (Jn 20:17), and whoever does the will of the Father joins in the solidarity of new community (Mt 12:50).

The Kingdom of God is the completion of harmony between God and all creation including humanity. It is a 'harmony', not an 'identity' or 'absorbedness' as in the case of Indian tradition. In this regard, Confucianism and East Asian thought with its harmonious triad is much closer to the Christian vision of fulfillment. What the Christians are looking for as a final note is a loving community with creative harmony, which is called beatitude. The poor, the meek, those who hunger for justice and work for peace will inherit the Kingdom. Jesus taught his disciples to seek first the Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33). Whenever the contemporary Christians pray to God "Your Kingdom come!" (Mt 6:10), they are envisioning the community of just and integrated harmony, the East Asian image of the Kingdom of God.

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