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Religious Conflicts, Pluralism, and Emptiness

– A Mādhyamika Buddhist View –

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〈요 약〉

The present study is concerned with the issues of Buddhist attitude toward religious pluralism from the Mādhyamika Buddhist perspective. This study focused on the following issues; (a) the relationship between religious conflict and exclusivism, (b) the general standpoint of Buddhism toward religious pluralism, (c) and the significance of the Mādhyamika view of ‘emptiness(*śūnyatā*)’ as harmonizing thought in an age of dialogue. Buddhism has consistently kept tolerant standpoint based on teaching of wisdom and compassion. The Buddha emphasized tolerance and peace to the people who were embroiled in conflicts between religion. The exclusive attitude, anger, jealousy, and hatred against other religions comes from ignorance that results from selfish avarice or a prejudiced view on truth. Buddhism accepts diversity as it is and by viewing it without clinging to the concept of ultimate reality. The doctrine of emptiness in Mādhyamika Buddhism might transcend the inclusive exclusivism and has a dynamic and harmonizing power to shatter closed doctrines and traditions. In this respect, ‘Boundless Emptiness’ is compatible with all other religions and could be the foundation of harmonization and reconciliation among all religions.

Key words: Religious Pluralism, Emptiness, Mādhyamika Buddhism, Dialogue, Harmonization

I . The Issue of Religious Conflicts and Exclusivism

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the ideas and principles of Buddhist attitude toward other religions and religious pluralism from the Mādhyamika Buddhist perspective. This study will focus on the following issues; (a) the relationship between religious conflict and exclusivism, (b) the general standpoint of Buddhism toward religious pluralism, (c) and the significance of the Mādhyamika view of emptiness as harmonizing thought in an age of dialogue.

The terminology of religious conflict has, for the most part, a socio-psychological connotation. Conflicts among religions can be defined as “a confrontational and antagonistic interaction, which result from a clash of religious sentiments and beliefs.” Once psychological confrontation appears in the form of social action, mutual distrust and hatred among religions can spiral down into specific religious conflicts, including religious wars. Then, what are the specific causes of religious conflict and confrontations? There are three main categories; doctrinal factors, social factors and political factors.

First, exclusive factors of doctrinal systems in specific religions foster and amplify religious conflicts. Religious exclusivism claims that only one religion has a monopoly on an Absolute Truth with which to reach the ultimate salvation. Every religion shows this exclusive standpoint without exception even though there are some differences in terms of intensity. The typical factors that give rise to exclusivism are such as fundamentalist interpretations of scriptures, dualistic structures within doctrinal systems, monotheism,¹⁾ and the idea of a “chosen people”.

Fundamentalism also provides the major cause of religious conflicts in that it never recognizes other religions and seeks the literal interpretations of scriptures. Literal translations reduce the diverse translations of scriptures according to times and places, thus making certain religions closed.²⁾ This is a common phenomenon for an orthodox religion that sticks to conventional tradition and standardization. This necessarily results in the distortion of the deepest meaning of the scriptures.

Ultimately literalism will lead to lose a loss of vitality for any religion by cutting off more mysterious religious experiences that cannot be found in the literally fixed

1) A typical declaration can be seen in *the Old Testament*, : “You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3-5)”

2) See Hee-sung Keel, Yong-pyo Kim and others, *Gyungeonn-euro bon segye-jonggyo (World Religions seen through Scriptures)* (Seoul: Jeontong-munwha-yeongyuhoe, 2001), pp.20-22.

scriptures. Thus, there appear religions that will not have dialogues with other religions and have no room for compromise.

Exclusive doctrines are found especially in Semitic religions such as Christianity,³⁾ and Islam. One may find such exclusivist trends in their scriptures and mission. Exclusivism also can be seen in ‘God’s chosen people’ in Judaism and ‘Veda Absolutism’ in Hinduism. This religious exclusivism leads to criticism of other traditions and finally to ethnocentrism, which emphasizes the superiority of one’s own religion.

Second, religious exclusivism of social factors arises from when religions try to make their community into an ‘interest group’ for their social group’s benefit in this religiously pluralistic society. Religious war comes mostly from this kind of mass egoism. Historically speaking, religious wars have been triggered by the selfish interest of certain religious groups.

In the past, religious communities were almost all monopolistic. However, in an age of market economy and capitalism, religion also cannot be an exception. Religions are subject to the market situation. They have to depend on the customer’s choice. They have to sell their religion like market goods.⁴⁾ Religions were guaranteed and guarded by governments in the past. However, currently, they have to compete with other religions to attract their believers. That is why religious exclusivism emphasizes the superiority of its own doctrine and even coerces other believers to convert. Sometimes they emphasize religious education that requires loyalty to the religious community and spreads prejudice against other religions for their own interest. As a result, many antagonistic feelings and conflicts have been triggered among religions.

Third, it is not too much to say that all the on-going internal, political strife and international feuds have a direct and indirect relation with religion.⁵⁾ All the current

3) Typical cases are Jesus-centered exclusivism, church-centered exclusivism and Bible-centered exclusivism., Jesus-centered exclusivism is seen in *the New Testament* : “No one can come to the Father, but by me (John 14:6)”. Church-centered exclusivism is well represented in the Catholic dogma, “Outside church, no salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*)”

4) Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, translated by Yang-gu Lee, *Jonggyo wa Sahoe* (Seoul: Jongro-seojuk, 1981), p.156.

5) A religious war is a war justified by religious differences. The typical one is the Crusade War (holy war) waged 8 times from 11th century till 13 century in the West. In the East, there have been conflicts between Islam and Hinduism, confrontations between Buddhism and Hinduism, conflicts between Buddhism and Confucianism and the Tibetan independence movement. In the American continent, there were the dissention between American Indian religion and Christianity, Quebec separatist feud. In the middle East, the endless strifes between Israel and Palestine is still going on and there were the Gulf War, the Bosnian War and etc. There have been countless

conflicts of religion are due to the results of exclusive religious outlooks of leaders, for socio-political and economic reasons. The inside of all religious conflicts show an uncompromising exclusivism.⁶⁾ Especially the faith of radical fundamentalists brings about extremism such as terror and violence in the false name of ‘The Just War Theory’⁷⁾ and ‘Religious Martyrdom’.

Recently the conflicts between religions are main variants of international politics. After the end of Cold War, religious conflicts are now liable to spark all around the world. We cannot grasp the trends within international politics without the a real understanding of the present status of religions, the authenticity problems within a specific religion and the close relationship between nations and religions.

Traditionally, in Korea, a co-existence practice under the basis of mutual understanding between different religions continued up until the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392). However, during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), there was a strong persecution against Buddhism and Christianity by reigning Confucianists. With the growing popularity of Christianity in Korea, the diversity of religions in the small country have made it

religious war throughout whole human history. More than half of the war history are related to religious conflicts.

- 6) For one example, Islamic fundamentalists regard their scripture as constitutional law. They want to construct a monolithic and dogmatic Islam country, regarding religious precepts and dogmas as social norms.
- 7) ‘The Just War Theory’ was suggested by St. Augustine (A.D. 306-337). The Just War tradition is first of all a set of criteria that act as an aid to determining whether or not resorting to arms is the morally preferable course. The Just War tradition addresses the morality of the use of force in two parts: when it is right to resort to armed force (the concern of *jus ad bellum*) and what is acceptable in using such force (the concern of *jus in bello*). In more recent years, a third category-*Jus post bellum*-has been added, which governs the justice of war termination and peace agreements, as well as the trying of war criminals. In modern language, these rules hold that to be just, a war must meet the following criteria before the use of force (*Jus ad bellum*): A contemporary view of just cause was expressed in 1993 when the US Catholic Conference said: “Force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic human rights of whole populations” Comparative justice: While there may be rights and wrongs on all sides of a conflict, to override the presumption against the use of force, the injustice suffered by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other; Legitimate authority: Only duly constituted public authorities may use deadly force or wage war; Right intention: Force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose-correcting a suffered wrong is considered a right intention, while material gain or maintaining economies is not. Probability of success: Arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success; Proportionality: The overall destruction expected from the use of force must be outweighed by the good to be achieved. Last resort: Force may be used only after all peaceful and viable alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted.

difficult to reconcile harmoniously the widely different traditions. In Korea, the conflicts between religions including Buddhism have been worsening.

The Catholics, on the other hand, declared ‘*Nostra Aetate* (Declaration to the Non-Christian)⁸⁾ and have tried to understand other religions. However, their inclusivism still clings to their dogma, claiming that salvation can only be sought ultimately through The Church and Jesus Christ. It is quite noteworthy that, among the Catholic and the liberal Protestant theologians, various kinds of inclusivism have come to the fore recently. This trend seems to be a kind of self-awakening from the traditional exclusivism, which has prevailed from the early period of Christianity. However, fundamentally speaking, dogmatism still supporting their exclusivism.

Fundamentalist exclusivism is still the mainstream within Korean Protestantism that they often trigger conflicts with traditional religions including Buddhism. Korean Protestants, strongly influenced by the radical conservative protestants of the United States, have provoked religious conflicts through antagonistic missionary activities aimed at defaming other religions. For examples, arson on Buddhist temples, the destruction of icons of other religions such as Buddhist images. However, it is quite fortunate that self-criticism on such activities has been raised even in the Christian circles.⁹⁾

II. Buddhist Standpoint toward Religious Pluralism

1. Tolerance Based on Wisdom

What is the basic attitude of Buddhism with regard to other religions? Buddhism

8) *Nostra Aetate* is the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council. With this Declaration, five big conversions were classified and adopted as policy in Catholic church: 1) conversion to freedom, 2) conversion to historicity, 3) conversion to internal reform, 4) conversion to this world, 5) conversion to dialogue. However, this Declaration is nothing more than an exclusive inclusivism.

9) The reason why Christianity has relatively exclusive character here in Korea is explained by Gyung-jae Kim as follows: First, Christians regarded traditional religions as an objects to overcome. Second, the Christian missionaries were conservative fundamentalist who believed ‘faultless Bible theory (The Bible should be interpreted literally as it is)’. Third, church growth theory was greatly influenced by the rapid industrialization of Korean economy after 1960s. Their competitiveness derived from market competition theory of capitalism has never allowed them to have dialogue and cooperation with other religions. *Sinhak-yeongu* (Studies on Theology) vol.42 (2002)

has consistently kept tolerant standpoint based on wisdom that derives from Right View from the early Buddhist period to the present. Right View is the view that complies with the Buddhist teaching of causality; to see things just as they are and to realize everything is interdependent in terms of cause and effect. This standpoint is one form of religious inclusivism. Fundamentally ‘religious inclusivism’ means that one religion still holds to their way of ultimate salvation and their superiority while they partially accept other religion’s paths to salvation and their truths. Sometimes they consider that their doctrines include other religions’ truths too. So, in a sense, it is still a kind of exclusivism in that religious inclusivists still insist on their superiority and ultimately stick to their theory of salvation.

However, Buddhist inclusivism is fundamentally different from that of Christianity. Buddhism tries to solve the matter of ‘different truth’ by de-constructing the concept of ‘Absolute Truth’ itself. On the other hand, Christian inclusivism still posits truth in the presence of ‘absoluteness of God’ even though they accept the presence of other religions. That is the reason why Christian inclusivism shows strong feeling of superiority in comparison to other religions. Buddhism opens a desirable way in that it teaches us to ‘let go’, even the teachings of the Buddha. In this respect, Buddhism can be said ‘inclusivism for pluralism’.

The Buddha’s philosophical viewpoint is a critical stand based on the theory of causality. Gautama Buddha interpreted theoretically the doctrine of other religions in terms of causality.¹⁰⁾ The Buddha taught wisdom that shows the true nature of the universe as it is. He especially emphasized tolerance and peace to the many people who were embroiled in conflicts between religions.

He drew from the diverse thought of Indian religions at that times as follows according to *the Brahmajāla-sūtta*:

10) One of the early Buddhist sutras, *the Fanwang jing* (梵網經 *Brahmajāla-sūtta*) explains sixty-two views on religious truth at the time of the Buddha. The way in which religions are judged by Buddhism is outlined by Ananda in *the Sandaka Sutta* (中部經典 1:515-8). The false religions are: 1) materialism, which asserts the reality of the material world alone and denies life after death; 2) any religious philosophy that recommends an immoral ethic; 3) any religion that denies free will and moral responsibility and asserts that persons are either miraculously saved or doomed; and 4) any religion which asserts the inevitability of eventual salvation or release for all. Even though they are not included the above four, the following religions are also unsatisfactory ones. Religions in this category include those based on: 1) the omniscience of the founder; 2) revelation or tradition; 3) logical and metaphysical speculation; 4) pragmatic skepticism or agnosticism. Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to the World Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985)

The Buddha was well versed in the merits and demerits of the 62 mistaken views. However, he didn't attach to those views. So he finally got emancipation and nirvana as he has no attachment. (DN 6, 52-53)

The reason why Buddhism does not show an exclusive dogma is that the Buddha especially taught that we should not hold an exclusive dogma. The Buddha himself declared that the Buddha was just a founder of the truth, not the Creator.¹¹⁾ This world exists according to causality and the universe is run by this rule. Accordingly, whether the Buddha come this world or not, the law of causality exist. Everybody can find truth and truth is open to everybody. Even though one is not Buddhist, he can find the truth and become Buddha. In Buddhism, solitary realizer(*pratyekabuddha*) is approved and revered.

The exclusive attitude, anger, jealousy, and hatred against other religions comes from ignorance that results from selfish avarice or a prejudiced view on truth. So the Buddha teaches that antagonism and hatred can be eliminated by endurance, realizing the truth of Dependent Origination. The spirit of tolerance and understanding have been respected throughout the whole history of Buddhism. So there has never a war or persecution that was caused in the name of Buddhism throughout the history since Buddhism was founded 2500 years ago.

2. Destruction of the Concept of the Absolute Truth

Buddhism teaches that the attachment to Dharma *i.e.*, truth and self-ego are two fundamental afflictions that should be discarded. If we think that there is substance in truth and attached to it, we might fall into conflicts with other religions because we will be attached to the dogma of our religion. As the *Diamond Sūtra* teaches that even we should not attach to the Dharma the Buddha preaches to us.

Subhuti, do not say that the Tathāgata conceives the idea: I must set forth a Teaching. For if anyone says that the Tathāgata sets forth a Teaching he really slanders Buddha and is unable to explain what I teach. As to any Truth-declaring system, Truth is undeclarable; so “an enunciation of Truth” is just the name given to it.¹²⁾

11) “Whether Tathāgata comes this world or not, ‘law of causality’ as true nature of Dharma already existed, Tathāgata found it, showed us it and taught it,” *Samyutta-nikāya* (II. 25)

12) *The Diamond Sutra* (金剛經), chapter 21: “Words cannot express Truth. That which Words Express

Buddhism criticizes the attachment to the everlasting absolute truth. The truth of sutras are nothing more than expedient means that show the way to truth. Ultimately any truth cannot be everlasting and absolute. The language we use to speak about truth is not true itself. However, it is true only when it is interpreted in a certain context.

Buddhism never attaches to any conceptual truth. Mādhyamaka philosophers such as Nāgārjuna and an eminent Goguryeo Monk, Seungnang taught that we I have to discard any truth and concepts of reality because non-attachment to truth is the real attitude toward truth. So Buddhists should not attach even to the doctrinal explanation of the Buddha. When it comes to religious dialogue and assertion of truth, the Buddhist attitude of a ‘standpoint without stand’ shows non-discrimination and non-attachment based on the Buddhist principle that all things arise through the process of dependent co-origination i.e. ‘emptiness’. This Buddhist standpoint shows all other assertions of Absolute Truth are relative.

Here some people may claim that it is a kind of doctrine and insistence even though Buddhists do not attach to any truth? However, the answer is ‘emptiness’ never allows any attachment. Because the theory of emptiness a process of negation about conceptual ideas of the everlasting truth and reality.

The Mādhyamika asserts that all doctrines contained in the scriptures are essentially *upāya*. If one attaches to a specific doctrine, it becomes lower truth. The truth has to be without self essence. It has no fixed nature, but they are śūnya and only effective means for enlightenment. In this regard, The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* quotes from the *Arthavargiya-sūtrā* following stanzas:

Everyone takes his stand on his own view and by his own constructions gives rise to disputes: “To know this to know the truth”, he holds, “and not to know this to be condemned.” Truly one who does not accept the view of another is devoid of wisdom. He that clings to his own construction is devoid of wisdom. To stand on one’s own view of truth and give rise to false constructions, if this is pure wisdom, then there is none who does not have it.¹³⁾

is not Truth’ (非說所說分), T.8, p.751c. 751c11. “須菩提。汝勿謂如來作是念。我當有所說法。莫作是念。何以故。若人言如來有所說法即爲謗佛。不能解我所說故。須菩提。說法者無法可說。是名說法。”

- 13) *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (大智度論, TCTL), T. 25, no.1509, pp. 60c-61a, The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* is a comprehensive encyclopedic work on the prajñāpāramitā literatures. Kumārajīva translated it into Chinese between 402 and 405, C.E. It exists only in Chinese translation, 100 chuan. Concerning the authorship of the TCTL, there are some doubt, but traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna. Hui-ying wrote sub-commentary on the TCTL in the 6th century, but it is available only in fragments in HTC, 74

The *śāstra* comments that common people take their stand on their points of view, on their own doctrines and on their own thoughts. Thus, there arise all the contentions and refutations.¹⁴⁾ Such conceptual fixations are the root of all dogmatic claims and counter claims. for these reasons, ultimately the Madhyamika wants to abandon all sorts of exclusivity in the name of doctrines. This position is called positionless position. Nāgārjuna suggests :

From clinging to things there arise disputes; but if there is no cling what dispute will there be? He who understands that all *dhṛtīs*, cling or non-cling, are in truth of the same nature, has already become free from all these. In the Dharma of the Buddha one abandons all passion, all wrong views, all pride of self ; one puts an end to all these and does not cling at any-thing.¹⁵⁾

In the Mādhyamika thought, the exclusive truth claim that one particular scripture and school only teach the authentic truth is considered as an egological fantasy. All passion, wrong views, and pride of superiority are the basis of exclusivism. With the egocentric attachment to doctrines, the goal of Buddhism cannot be reached. This egological malady will end when one does not cling to the exclusivism of ideology or religion. The doctrine of *śūnyatā* is taught precisely to remove such a malady. The absolute truth claims cannot stand in a Buddhist way of thinking. As noted, Seungrang's middle way of the scriptural word shows that even the Buddha's highest doctrines are denied if one is attached to them as something absolute.

The scriptural plurality in Buddhism is a natural result of the primacy of contexts. The doctrine of expedient means (*upāya*) allows such a pluralistic development of scripture. According to the context in which each scriptural word is taught, the truth of the word has to understood. In this respect, the Mādhyamika does not say that there is inferior or superior in Buddhist scriptures. Buddhist truths are contextual, and they all are contextual to the same degree.

and 87. Etienne Lamotte translated into French the first 18 chapters of the TCTL in the *La traite de la grande vertue de sagesse*, Vols.1-4, (Louvain: 1944-49). Venkata Ramanan translated TCTL into English partially as the *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Mahā-Prajñā pāramita- Śāstra* [abbreviatedas](Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1966).

14) TCTL, p. 61a.

15) TCTL, pp. 61a and 63c.

III. Buddhist Vision of Dialogue

The Buddhist outlook on the other religions is very complicated. The Buddhist orders still stick to an exclusive view of other religions while the Buddhist doctrines show an inclusive attitude. On the other hand, Buddhism shows a pluralistic standpoint in terms of religious experience. Traditionally, Koreans have put value on pluralism that accepts the co-existence of many religions. Korean religions are founded under the basis of the traditional ethnic faith and comprising the Confucian custom, Buddhist tradition and traditional social ethics. Accordingly, the character of Korean religion is structurally pluralistic.

It is quite a fortunate trend that the recent movement towards religious dialogue and the discussion of religious pluralism¹⁶⁾ are expanding not only among Buddhist orders but also other religions. Neung-hwa Lee considers that all religions derived from ‘One Round Circle’.

Tao has many forms. So it cannot be all the same. That is the reason why every religion explains their doctrines differently. However, they come from ‘One Round Circle’. Ordinary people don’t know that they derived from One Ultimate. So they differentiate one from the other.¹⁷⁾

With regard to ‘the oneness of all religion’, most modern philosophers of religious pluralism agree that if we take a deep look at the religion. Then, what is the relationship between the Buddhist standpoint of ‘emptiness’ and religious pluralism? Originally pluralism means that “although there are multitudes of phenomenon, all substance eventually returns to one reality” In Buddhist pluralism, truth does not come from one Ultimate Reality, it comes from the unity of truths that consists of all the myriad things.

Contemporary religious thinker Leonard Swidler observes the relative nature of

16) The term, religious pluralism began to be used at the end of 1960s. However, there is a standpoint that ‘religious pluralization’ was used to appease confrontation with other traditional religions when Christianity was first introduced in oriental society. As the terms such as ‘la Religion’ (the only religion) and ‘les religions’ (other religions) shows the Catholic’s attitude of exclusive inclusivism.

17) Neung-hwa Lee (李能和), *Baegyo-hoetong* (百教會通 *The reconciliation of One Hundred Religion*) (Seoul: Unjusa, 1992), p.6.

religious truth :

Whereas our Western notion of truth was largely absolute, static, and monologic or exclusive up to the past century, it has since become deabsolutized, dynamic and dialogic..... in a word, ‘relational(Already two millennia and more ago some Hindu and Buddhist thinkers held a non-absolutistic epistemology, but that fact had no significant impact on the West.)’..... All statements about reality, especially about the meaning of things, are to be understood as historical, intentional, perspectival, partial interpretive and dialogic.¹⁸⁾

For Buddhists, this view is not something new. all scriptural statements about *Dharma* are relative and interpretive (*neyārtha*). There is no absolute statement concerning truth in Buddhism. Since the scriptural truths are merely methodological (*mārga*), no truth is ultimately true. No truth is true by itself, but only in a specific context in which it is perceived, heard or understood.

In Buddhism, Ultimate Reality is always in the process of change because of impermanence. Everything changes at every moment. We can find truth in the constantly changing process of time and phenomena in terms of Dependent Origination. Buddhists accept diversity as it is and by viewing it without clinging to it, realize ultimate reality. That is the Buddhist understanding of religion in this pluralistic society. The Mādhyamika attitude toward the world religions might not be basically different from its attitudes toward other Buddhist schools. All religious truth claims are relative and contextual. There are different paths to salvation. The Mādhyamika stands for inclusivity. But its inclusivity is not metaphysical or theological; it does not elevate the uniqueness of a truth or its contexts to universal proportions. Pluralist John Hick¹⁹⁾ says,

18) Leonard Swidler, *After Absolute: The Dialogical future of Religious Reflection*(Minneapolis : Fortress, 1990), pp. 6-7, Swidler points out a new view of truth new to the West, i.e., deabsolutizing truth, in six epistemological dimensions as: (a) historicity of truth, (b) intentionality, (c) sociology of knowledge, (d) limit of language, (e) hermeneutics, and (f) dialogue. For details, see *ibid*, pp. 5-18.

19) One of the most renowned thinkers of religious pluralism, John Hick proposed a Copernican-revolution of the traditional religious thinking. As Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) found Copernican system (the heliocentric theory), John Hick emphasized that the center of man's faith is not any specific religion such as Christianity but it is Ultimate Reality. He denied the supremacy of Christianity and Christianity-centered religious faith. John Hick concludes that great faith comes from human being's different response to Ultimate realities. The difference of each religion derived from individual concept and consciousness that have been formed through various kinds of historical and cultural context of each person.

One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances.²⁰⁾

This view presupposes that there is one ultimate reality behind the world religions. It asserts that one ultimate reality, whether it is divine reality or not, manifests itself in various forms. There is a fundamental difference between such pluralism and the Mādhyamika view on religious pluralism. The Mādhyamika will not accept a fundamental unity of the world religions as well as Buddhist religion. In fact, as we have explored throughout the present study, such an absolute reality is metaphysical and must be deconstructed. John Hick's view does not cover all religions, especially Buddhism where there is no such notion of the divine reality or the absolute reality.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness as the dependent co-arising transcends the inclusive exclusivism and uses dynamic and harmonizing power to shatter closed doctrines and religious traditions. In this respect, 'Boundless Emptiness' that is emphasized in Mahayana Buddhism is compatible with all other religions and could be the real foundation of harmonization and reconciliation among all religions. The Mādhyamika Buddhist doctrine of emptiness offers a solution to the problems of conflicting truth claims. It also opens the boundless horizon for the dialogical discourse in religious pluralism.

Human civilization of the 21st century now directs toward 'from confrontation to reconciliation', 'from monologue to dialogue' and 'from hatred to love'. Future religions should seek an open and co-existing way, accommodating for other's pluralistic religious culture and learning from each other. In order to cure the current conflicts among religions in Korea, it is time necessary for us to have a Copernican revolution²¹⁾ and make creative changes in religious circles.

20) John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 18. He has changed the term 'one divine reality' to 'the Real' or 'reality' to consider nontheistic religions in 'On Grading Religions', *Religious Studies* 17(1981), p. 453.

21) John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p. 18.

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