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Colonialism, *Han* & the Transformative Spirit
By Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Ph.D.

Overview

Today, nations exhibit imperial behavior but not like the ancient agriculture driven landed empires or the 18-19th century merchantile empires. The land and trade divisions are not as clearly segregated as in the earlier ones, but Imperial nations do exist and do control other nations. Imperialism and colonialism has devastating effects on our world. It has nurtured self-worth through the accumulation of worldly goods for the purposes of serving their own interests and exploiting others for the sole purpose of self-gain. This is devastating not only to human beings but to the whole ecology of the planet. Consumerism drives trade, but consumer buying is now like an unchained beast with tooth and claw causing *han* for the exploited as well as the resources of the planet. Eco-theologians and feminist theologians examine the devastating effects to help ensure that we are seriously determined to preserve the planet. We will examine ways of rethinking and reimagining our errors and how we can work towards the right direction for a safer, sustainable planet. This book will examine ways of rethinking and reimagining our errors and how we can work towards the right direction for a safer, sustainable planet. We need to reimagine God as the Spirit who gives, sustains and empowers life to all.

Empire, Colonialism & Globalization

Today's nations can be characterized by imperialism, empire building, colonialism and consumerism. Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration and by economic, social or cultural dependence. An ancient example of empire in this sense is the overlaying of Greek culture on Egypt, followed by a similar overlay of Roman, Arabic, Ottoman, and British cultures. A modern example is the overlay of Soviet Russian political systems on the Baltic States, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The most durable imperial culture may be that of China, which lords over Tibet today, as it did during the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1378 CE) and the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 CE). Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing, maintaining, and enlarging an empire (Doyle 86:45).

Imperialism and colonialism has had devastating effects on our world, both on the poor and on the earth/nature, since its premise is to exploit land and

the aboriginal population and move on when resources have been exhausted, leaving the natives untrained and poorer when they were before. It has nurtured self-worth through the accumulation of worldly goods for the purposes of serving their own interests and exploiting others for the sole purpose of self-gain. This is devastating not only to human beings but to the whole ecology of the planet. Imperialism and colonialism has in many ways exploited others and the planet for selfish, easy, and immediate gains. This has caused a lot of strain on the earth and in communities of people who are suffering from exploitation. Economic colonialism has two faces. The first is the desire for markets, as when England needed buyers for its textiles and machinery. The second is consumerism, the desire for foreign products and cheap goods, such as Chinese tea, Indonesian spices, and Malayan rubber.

Consumerism and Overconsumption

The supremacy of the contemporary economic worldview has led some to state that greed has become a religion. *Consumerism* is the civic religion that many share, an obligation to

feed our national GDP thereby attaining a healthy growth rate. Other faith commitments are less important. Joerg Rieger says “After the collapse of consumerism, the *market* has become a world religion, the most successful religion of all time, winning more converts more quickly than any previous value system in human history” (Rieger 1998:7). The new religion is attracting far more people than anticipated. People are paying their tithes to this new religion by buying more than they can afford. They have become very good stewards of this new religion and blind to its consequences. They give of their time, money and energy into buying, hoarding, consuming, and buying more than before.

For many, our consumer culture, is not considered to be one possible way to live, but the only way to live. For more of the world’s people, consumerism is the unquestioned way to live (McFague 2001:83). We take too much from the earth without giving it back or replenishing it. Now, the earth does not have enough time to replenish itself. The biosphere needs time to repair itself from the damage that we do; damage, which leads to extinctions

can never be recovered. North Americans’ standard of living has skyrocketed during this past century. Sallie McFague states that for all the earth’s people to enjoy a Western middle-class lifestyle, four more planets the size of the earth would be necessary as the resource base. As we try to maintain our comfortable lifestyle, we take so much away from the earth without giving anything in return. We live in a consumer society, and we get so caught up in it that we cannot seem to pull ourselves out of this descending spiral of consumerism.

Most of us know firsthand the temptation to exploit the vulnerability of other people, of the animal world and of the land. We have been either the exploiter or the exploited. Often we are both. We have had to confront our exploitation of the inanimate inhabitants of the earth. The earth’s silence makes it vulnerable. The ground that feeds us lies quiet. We exploit nature’s silent vulnerability (Roop 1991: 41). If we continue to exploit the vulnerable, it will lead us to self-destruction. We need to be aware of the path we are taking and reexamine our personal and social lives.

Nature and *Han*

Consumerism drives trade, but it is now out of control. Too much taking raw materials without replacing with renewable resources is making the earth suffer as well as everything living on it. This kind of suffering is *han*. This outrage needs to be deconstructed and stopped if we are to take the preservation of the life on our planet seriously. Eco-theologians and feminist theologians publicize the devastating effects in their studies to help ensure that the preservation of the planet is understood and initiated. Ways of rethinking and reimagining our wrong actions and how we are to work towards the right direction for a safer and a greener planet will be examined within this paper.

When we have too much, we are sinning against others by keeping resources we do not need from those who need them to survive. Christians talk about sin and that we are sinners in need of redemption. We can concentrate on the vertical relationship too much, sometimes, at the expense of our horizontal relationship. As we neglect the horizontal relationship, it results in harmful acts against our neighbors and nature. An Asian concept which is

helpful to remind us of our horizontal relationship is the concept of *han*. Our relationship with others and with nature is extremely important. We cannot neglect the relationship as God commanded all of us that we need to love our God with all our heart, soul and mind and also love our neighbors as ourselves. One way to emphasize the horizontal relationship is to recognize the *han* we are causing other people as we act out of gluttony, greed, and lust, oblivious to the injustice it creates within our global economy. *Han* is a Korean term which is very difficult to translate. *Han* is the wrong deed committed against another person and the pain that ensues from it. It means unjust suffering and also being sinned against. We in the western society are sinning against others as we live a bountiful, but greedy life. When the rest of the world looks at us, they see themselves as victims of sin.

Transformative Power of the Spirit

Everything created is dependent upon the presence of God's Spirit: "when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust. When you send forth thy breath, they are created and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:29 f). God must continually secure God's

creation and preserve it from annihilation. Tradition expresses this by saying either that God preserves what God has created, or that at every moment the creator reiterates God's primal yes to God's creation. The first idea is the notion of the world's preservation (*conservation mundi*); the second the concept of continuous creation (*creation continua*). The God who through the indwelling Spirit suffers with creation is the firm hope of created being. This hope is our assurance that the beings God has created have not been forsaken by their creator (Moltmann, 1997: 118, 119). God is in our midst and God's presence in our daily lives should assure us of our need to preserve and be good stewards of all created things.

The life giving spirit *Ruach* (Hebrew for "spirit" or "breath") moves from physical life to life in its fullness including justice. The Old Testament shows the Spirit as the divine power that creates, sustains, and renews life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6; 104:29–30; Job 33:4, 34:14–15). The Spirit transforms personal and national life into a new people of God, changing a "heart of stone" into a "heart of flesh" and guaranteeing fidelity to the new

covenant (Ezek. 11:19–20, 36:26–28; Ps. 51:10–12; Isa. 59:21). The Spirit empowers the Messiah to inaugurate a reign of justice and peace and to create a community of liberated life (Isa. 11, 32, 61). The powerful Spirit of God is present in our lives to make changes of justice and goodness. This is essential to the well being of the oppressed and marginalized. Oftentimes, the rich and the powerful tend to think the Spirit is there to enrich their selfish lives and they fail to recognize the Spirit's power of condemning those who misuse power. The Spirit is not just any Spirit but a lifegiving Spirit of God.

God and God's Spirit is always within us. It is what has given us life and sustains us throughout our life. We are the holy temples of God and this knowledge should make all the difference in how we treat ourselves, others and nature. It is evidently clear that once we recognize that God is within us, we will treat ourselves, others and nature with respect, love and compassion. As we live in this growing society of multi-national corporations, imperialism, and colonialism, we need to take a deep breath and recognize these dangers and work towards justice and

peace. This is crucial to us as we try to live on this planet and to save it for the later generations.

It is this Spirit which will exorcise the *han*. *Han* needs to be released from the dominated poor and also from the subjugated earth. The poor and the earth are crying out and it is the Spirit which will release the *han* and renew the earth. The Spirit will restore the brokenness that has come on the human being and the earth.

We need to re-envision a world which will seek sustainability and not consumerism. We need to re-envision a society where the community makes the basic decisions concerning how to maintain the common good; current economic decisions are for corporate good, not for individual benefit. Furthermore, all forms of capital must be considered in the notion of the good life and first in the list is “nature’s capital.” The good life is not dependent only on human capital and its products, but more on nature’s capital. Does the good life mean treating ecology with reverence? Is it good for all of us and for the planet? Ecological models claim that community members abide by three rules. We take only our share, clean up after ourselves,

and keep the house in good repair for future occupants. (McFague 2001:122). We must resist the tendency to see nature as existing only for our use. We do not want to create a system in which a rock is valued only if people think it is pretty or if it contains a mineral we need (Roop 1991:23). A tree may be more valuable than the wealth which lies beneath it.

Conclusion

As we live in this postcolonial world bloated with consumption, we need to have a new perspective on our lives, our planet and our God. The road that we are taking is leading us to destruction. We are raping the earth, the soil and the water. We are causing tremendous *han* on the earth and on its inhabitants. Our selfish consumerism lifestyle creates *han* on the rest of those on our world who are hungry, naked, unsheltered, and sick. We need to recognize this terrible path that we are on, so that we can prevent ourselves from wasting the wealth of our planet, leaving a barren desert for our posterity

As we reflect theologically on this problem that we have created and find ourselves so deeply immersed in

selfishness, we need to rethink our understanding of God, creation and each other. Human beings need to learn to value each other, the planet and understand who God is as a creator. As Martin Buber says, being concerned with the self is the very nature of being without God. “The one is the spiritual form of natural detachment, the other the spiritual form of natural solidarity of

connection ” (Buber 1937: 944). God is of the Spirit who has breathed life into all of us. As God gives us life, we need to understand how present in us and in all of creation the Creator is. Our own recognition of God’s presence will help us to work towards restoration and reconciliation with each other and the earth. It is the Spirit of God who gives abundant life.

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Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Doctrinal Theology and Director of the MATS program at Moravian Theological Seminary. She is author of three books, *The Grace of Sophia* (Pilgrim Press, 2002), *Holy Spirit, Chi and the Other* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and *Colonialism, Han and the Transformative Spirit* (Palgrave Pivot, 2013). You can find her blogs at <http://gracejisunkim.wordpress.com/>.