

Reflections on Civilization, Modernity, and Religion in Light of the Fellowship of the Truth

Patrick LAUDE

Professor Patrick Laude joined Georgetown University in Washington DC in 1991. He has been teaching religious studies at Georgetown School of Foreign Service in Qatar since 2006 as a Professor and Senior Core Faculty. His fields of research are comparative mysticism and Western representations of Asian spiritual traditions. He has authored a dozen books including: *Shimmering Mirrors: Reality and Appearance in Contemplative Metaphysics East and West*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2017; *Pray Without Ceasing: The Way of the Invocation in World Religion*, Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006; and *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter and Spiritual Understanding*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.



JDTREA 2021,1(1): 39-60

Original Articles

Correspondence to

Patrick LAUDE

Georgetown University, USA

laudep@georgetown.edu

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5026-4707>



Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia Vol. 1. Issue.1 (September 2021): 39–60
2021 by the Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Korea

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2021.1.1.39>

Day of submission: 2021.06.15.

Completion of review: 2021.07.15.

Final decision for acceptance: 2021.08.31.

P-ISSN: 2799-3949

E-ISSN: 2799-4252

Abstract

This essay analyzes the meaning of “modern civilization” and the ways it relates to religion conceived as a “The Fellowship of Daesoon Truth (Daesoon Jinrihoe).” We take the expression "Fellowship of Truth" in the broadest sense as indicative of a human companionship with the true nature of the Real. We therefore understand the term to be practically equivalent with the concept of “religion” as connoting the ideas of bond, relationship, debt, and duty toward the Ultimate Reality, toward fellow human beings, and toward the cosmos in general. On this basis, our intent is to assess the nature and limits of the relationship between religion as a fellowship of the Truth and the tenets of modern civilization. Within this overarching perspective, the case of Daesoon Jinrihoe is particularly significant and fruitful for two sets of reasons. Firstly, this is so because Daesoon is typically branded a “new religious movement” open to modernity while it is also true that at least some of its representatives are wary of the negative implications of the modern world. Secondly, the significance of a study of Daesoon in light of the notion of religion as a “The Fellowship of the Truth” lies in that it asserts being rooted in tradition, which raises the question of its relationship with modernity.

Keywords: Modernity; Religion; Civilization; Individualism; Tradition;
Fellowship of the Truth; Ecology

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to analyze the meaning of “modern civilization,” its main features and principles, and the ways it relates to religion conceived as a “fellowship of the Truth.” This is a crucial and pressing matter as there cannot be a consistent and effective religious positioning in the contemporary world that does not strive to understand the principles and values of the latter. Moreover, in order to be fruitful, the inquiry into this relationship must be made within the framework of the fundamentals of both modernity and religious consciousness. The following pages are therefore focused, first of all, on a definitional analysis of both terms. We take the expression “Fellowship of Truth” in the broadest sense as indicative of a human companionship, and even kinship, with the true nature of the Real (Dobbs 1991, 444).¹

We therefore understand the term to be practically equivalent with the concept of “religion” as connoting the ideas of bond, relationship, debt, and duty toward the Ultimate Reality, toward fellow human beings, and toward the cosmos in general. The notion of fellowship obviously points to commonality and unity, and includes everyone and everything within the all-encompassing circle of existence and meaning. On this basis, our intent is to assess the nature and limits of the relationship between religion as a fellowship of the Truth and the tenets of modern civilization. Within this overarching perspective, the case of Daesoon Jinrihoe (The Fellowship of Daesoon Truth) is particularly significant and fruitful for two sets of reasons. Firstly, this is so because Daesoon (Olson and Wilson 1984, 214)² is typically branded a “new religious movement” open to modernity³ while it is also true that at least some of its representatives are wary of the negative implications of the modern world (Ko YW 2021). Secondly, the significance of a study of Daesoon in light of the notion of religion as a “Fellowship of the Truth” lies in that it asserts being rooted in the Far-Eastern traditions -although not being limited to them-, the perspective of which is undoubtedly religious in the most general sense of a metaphysics of Transcendence providing the foundation for a sense of universal and cosmic unity.

This essay will be divided into two parts. The first section is devoted to a thorough elucidation of the concept of “modern civilization.” This is a methodological imperative since the term “modernity” has accrued all kinds of denotations and connotations that must be closely and critically analyzed in order to do justice to its meaningful use in a historical and religious context. Thus, this section offers extensive definitional, historical and critical developments. Secondly, we will analyze some of the ways in which Daesoon Jinrihoe relates to modern civilization as understood through the substantial analyses unfolded in the first section. The case of Daesoon Jinrihoe is highly relevant and meaningful in so far as it provides, among contemporary religious movements, a particularly rich array of integration of modern ways and means of action and social

presence, as testified by the academic and medical contribution of its institutions within modern day Korea, while being grounded in a theology that builds upon the Far-Eastern traditional spiritual movements from the past, as demonstrated by its creative assimilation of the architectural and aesthetic Korean heritage. Our inquiry will lead us, in this second section, to meditate upon some of the challenges and opportunities that arise from this dual character of Daeseon Jinrihoe.

1.a. Is There a Modern Civilization?

First of all, it is necessary, methodologically, to examine the possible meanings of the words “modern civilization.” It must be admitted, in this regard, that the expression is something of a question. In point of fact, while one routinely refers to a Hindu civilization, a Christian civilization, a Greco-Roman civilization, one may justifiably wonder what is meant by modern civilization. A civilization is ordinarily identified with a particular area of geographical expansion, whether within a region of the globe or sometimes even across continents, and secondarily with a historical period during which it has flourished. Civilizations grow and reach a state of maturity and perfection. They can also die, as many civilizations from the past which utterly disappeared from human history. Whatever might be its geographical and historical extension what makes a civilization unique derives from a specific worldview, and from recognizable cultural productions deriving from it more or less directly. The Alhambra is a recognizable emblem of the Islamic civilization as the Forbidden City is one of the Chinese civilization. Indeed, the identity of civilizations has always been connected to a religious or an ethico-spiritual tradition; hence references to a Buddhist civilization, an Islamic civilization, a Confucian civilization, and so forth.

In this regard, the concept of “modern civilization” is one of a kind: it does not appear to entail specific or exclusive geographic or ethno-cultural areas, nor does it seem to be associated with a particular religion or spiritual ethics; in fact, it will be argued further on that one of its chief characteristics lies in its secular character. It may be defined in time, but not in space, since modernity, as a set of values and practices, while being arguably born in Europe, has by now reached virtually the entire world. In writing “modernity,” however, one must be careful to specify that this term is not necessarily synonymous with “modern civilization.” In other words, it could be argued that modernity may simply be one of the components of a given civilization, or perhaps merely a late accretion to it, without characterizing it exhaustively. Most of the Confucian world today, in China, Korea, Japan, for instance, has gone through a process of modernization; this means that many if not most of the cultural and social practices of these parts of world have “modernized” and that their economy and way of life has met or exceeded the standards of what we call today “development.” However,

it is fair to say that many people in East Asia would not consider that this modernization has necessarily amounted to losing their Confucian civilizational identity; as is shown, for instance, with Singapore's ideological distinction between "modernization" and "Westernization." (Zhang W.B. 1999). To the extent that modernization may be conceived as a primarily instrumental or functional process, some would argue that it does not essentially impact the moral and spiritual tenets of a particular civilization. Thus, in such a view, industrialization and democratization, while being part and parcel of the modern model, do not in and of themselves run contrary to Confucian tenets, or Hindu or Islamic principles. According to this way of seeing, there is a danger in mistakenly equating Westernization with modernization simply because the latter has its historical roots in Europe, and inasmuch as Europe and the West have been the standard bearers of specifically modern values and practices.

1.b. The Advent and Unfolding of Modernity

Notwithstanding this fact, it is undeniable that the origin of what is called modern civilization is to be found in Western Europe, and most specifically in post-medieval Europe. A number of historical stages may be outlined in this process: the 15-16th century Renaissance and Reformation, the 16th-17th century Scientific Revolution, the 18th century Enlightenment and the 19th century Industrial Revolution, together with the 19th and 20th century revolutions and socio-political upheavals that led to the gradual dominance of democratic principles and values.

First, moving away from the theocentric universe of meaning of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance was characterized by a shift toward humanism. The specific meaning of the term in the Renaissance connects it to a desire to return to the Antiquity conceived as a kind of antidote to the Middle Ages. More broadly conceived, however, the term humanism is difficult to define, and has had a long history of complex semantic transformation. However, it is reasonable to characterize it, with Stephen Law, as encompassing a belief in science and reason, a this-worldly focus free from religious commitments, an emphasis on social morality, and a faith in the moral autonomy of humans and the democratic institutions that are thought to foster it (Law 2011, 1-2). In parallel to this humanist move of focus on the human qua human, the Renaissance also highlighted a shift toward the individual as locus of the newly discovered sense of independence from God and His cosmos. Thus, the great historian of the Renaissance Jakob Burckhardt considered that the chief value of the Renaissance era was individualism (Black, 2001, 1),⁴ an individualism that what consonant with what Jules Michelet called "the discovery of the world and man." It was therefore, according to Michelet, "a rediscovery of his [man] own self. (Caferro 2011)" This does not mean, of course, that the world and man were not known before, but they were rarely if ever

envisioned irrespective of their metaphysical, theological and cosmic context. What was new with the Renaissance, therefore, was simply that the world was for the first time explored for its own sake, and not as a mere symbol of God's qualities. It also meant that the affirmation of human accomplishments grew increasingly independent from a sense of metaphysical dependence upon the order of the Biblical God. Geographical exploration and conquest were not simply instantiations of the human potential anymore, they became symbols of a new posture vis-à-vis the universe, and in a way also vis-à-vis God and other human beings. The Renaissance initiated a totally new perspective on the world and mankind, one that implied an indefinite exploration of the possible in the name of the unconstrained individual. With it, Europe arguably parted way with virtually the entire prior history of mankind, one that had been consistently predicated upon a sense of close and necessary interdependence between metaphysical realities and terrestrial experience. It is not exaggerated to say, therefore, that the Renaissance opened the way to an utterly new era in the history of mankind.

Needless to say, as it is always the case in times of major paradigm shift, not the whole of European Renaissance is reducible to such a radical severance from the past. The renewed focus on the pre-Christian heritage of Ancient, and particularly Greek, culture and thought involved, for instance, a revivification of Platonic philosophy and spirituality that reconnected with a sense of perennial wisdom. Such instances, illustrated by the works of Marsilio Ficino (1443-1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), were indicative of the depth of influence of the metaphysical and sapiential tradition and the complexities of a time when a resourcing into the Antiquity had more than one meaning and implication. Although it was in several ways quite antithetic to humanism in its emphasis on the fallen nature of mankind, the Reformation has also been credited, or indicted, for fostering a spirit of individualism in religious matters, as testified by its critical stance vis-à-vis the traditional and institutional aspects of the Church. In this connection also modern individualism began manifesting itself in the religious order in a way that ushered new specifically modern types of understanding religion.

Most often considered by historians to cover a period that runs from Nicolaus Copernicus' publication of *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* in 1543 to Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1687, the Scientific Revolution was undoubtedly another major step in the advent of modernity. Although some historians, like Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs (1991),⁵ have argued that the Scientific Revolution was not so much a revolution as a gradual and partial transformation that carried in its wake much of the previous metaphysical and epistemological paradigms of the past, most analysts consider this period to be marked by scientific breakthroughs that redefined science and paved the ground for the modern concept of science. Richard S. Westfall sees in the Scientific Revolution a new way of thinking about science and the world, one in which modernity is deeply steeped and without which one can

hardly understand its underpinnings and development. (Osler 2000, 3-4) Copernican heliocentrism and philosophical mechanism were undoubtedly the two most important breakthroughs in that regard. They redefined the status of the universe by supplanting traditional cosmology and the primacy of Divine causality. In his *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Alexandre Koyré (1957) has carefully described the ways in which the finite and God-centered world of Galilean cosmology, with its spherical fixity and its qualitative archetypes, was replaced by the infinite time and space that have since then and until recently characterized the modern scientific imagination. The Scientific Revolution was moreover crowned by the ideological project of the 18th century Enlightenment. The metaphor of Light was here primarily connected to the symbolism of reason as casting out the darkness of unexamined religious prejudices and political arbitrariness. In his *What is Enlightenment?* Immanuel Kant saw Enlightenment as a metaphor for the maturity of mankind breaking away from laziness and cowardice; the laziness of passive ignorance and indifference to the truth, and the cowardice keeping one from going beyond the sphere of one's comfort. He encapsulated the whole Enlightenment project in the Latin motto "*sapere aude!*", "dare to know!" (Kant 2009, 1) The passivity of pre-Enlightenment mankind had led human beings to rely on others without critical examination. This was the "curse" of tradition. As a response, the rational investigation of reality became a duty for all individuals inasmuch as every human being is endowed with reason. However, Kant recognized that only a few were ready to make the effort to actualize their rational abilities: so, the Enlightenment project needed be universal in its scope but elitist in its modalities of development. Besides human laziness it is the lack of freedom that had hampered human development. Freedom was therefore deemed to be the condition of the growth of human maturity: "The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men" (Kant 2009, 3). Thus, the philosophical and scientific dimensions of the Enlightenment met with political requirements. The ideal of the enlightened prince was introduced in this respect as the best guarantee of this freedom, curbing as it could "religious immaturity [which] is the most pernicious and dishonorable variety of all" (Kant 2009, 7).

The breakthroughs of the Scientific Revolution and their ideological contextualization within the context of the Enlightenment led to the full emergence, in the 19th century, of what could be called their practical translation, i.e., the Industrial Revolution. The latter contributed to alter the socio-economic structure of Europe in a radical way, with the appearance of the industrial proletariat and the 20th century gradual transformation of Western Europe from an agrarian society into an industrial one. The rural exodus experienced by many European societies had all kinds of socio-cultural consequences that were instrumental in promoting modernity. Needless to say, the 19th century was also the time of the emergence of democracy as an ideal and as a system of government.

The notions of liberty and equality that were championed by the French Revolution, and exported throughout Europe, left an indelible mark on the modern project. They became indeed, although not without tensions between their respective implications, the ideological foundations of modern societies. The advent of democracy as a political ideal, and further on a kind of political norm, has been part and parcel of what modernity is thought to entail.

Modernity, with its emphasis on rationality and experimental sciences, focus on socio-political progress toward civil equality and liberty, meant therefore a rupture from traditional representations of the world and socio-political practices. A new concept of the world emerged that marked a moving away from traditional cosmologies based on the principle of a divine and intelligible order of the universe, to a world of quantifiable and experientable physical reality. Observation and quantification were substituted to a prior apprehension of reality primarily founded on the intuition of symbolic qualities. In parallel to this cosmological upheaval, the socio-political revolutions of the modern era were also designed to break the molds of the hierarchical orders of the past. It must be added that one of the major consequences of the Industrial Revolution was the expansion of the colonial enterprise. That which was originally motivated, among other factors, for the exploitation of natural resources needed to fuel the European industrial impetus did not only, at a first stage, result in the subjection of many African and Asian countries, but also at a later stage to the modernization of those parts of the world – both in terms of industrialized development and the modification of mentalities –, particularly following their rise to political independence. This, among many other factors, accounts for the fact that what we call “modern civilization” is obviously not confined to Europe or North America. There are modern ways of being, creating and acting on all continents. Let us take the example of skyscrapers, which are architectural emblems of modernity: they are to be found everywhere in the world, in New York, Shanghai, Johannesburg and Dubai.

1.c. The Values of Modern Civilization

The concept of a modern civilization represents, therefore, a break from the ordinary understanding of the term civilization, and it may even suggest a new understanding of what the word itself means. Etymologically the adjective “modern” derives from the Latin expression *modo bodierno* which can be literally rendered as “according to today's way”. The term does not imply principles or values of any kind, but simply refers to circumstances of time. To say that a principle is modern signifies, in this etymological sense that it belongs to today's world. One difficulty with this, of course, is that today's world also includes remnants of civilizations that would not be characterized as modern, but rather as archaic or traditional. Who is to say that the ways of the indigenous

people of Borneo, for instance, are not “modern” in this later sense? And still very few people would count these cultural ways as modern in the ideological sense of the term, or even less so as “modernist.” Another obvious difficulty is that the past itself used to be “today.” It means that any period in human history could be characterized as “modern” inasmuch as it experiences reality in conformity with its current assumptions. However, some would object that such an understanding of the term makes it virtually meaningless. It does not allow us, most importantly, to understand the specificity of our modernity, and the impact of the various ideologies that have coalesced around it. Past eras might have been literally “modern” in their own time, but they most often did not conceive of themselves as fundamentally different from other historical periods, or if they did so, it was not on account of their time but in terms of their principles, values and practices. Thus, even when a radical chasm appeared between past and present, such as happened at the time of the appearances of Christianity and Islam, for instance, the difference was not thought in historical terms, but in religious or philosophical ones.

Modernity, therefore, may be characterized as a way to value the state of affairs, sensibilities and ways of thinking and living of the present inasmuch as the present is conceived as axiologically superior and morally preferable to the past. In other words, the modernist valuing of the present is based on a sense that it is fundamentally different from the past, and that the changes it involves are the very marks of its positive eminence. In this view, time is in truth a measure of progress. Indeed, the modern understanding of civilization is generally informed by progressivism that is by the view that the direction of human history is primarily ascending. To wit, in most modern representations the past is conceived as relatively unenlightened, and as constricting human possibilities. By contrast, modern civilization is conceived and felt as a catalyst for changes and for a full development of human potentialities. Now, obviously, the concept of any betterment presupposes, in any domain, a specific understanding of the good, and such an understanding, in its turn, entails a set of priorities in life. The good can be defined in very various ways depending on one’s philosophical vantage point: the good of a Marxist is likely to differ, for instance, from that of a Christian.

As a way to sum up the previous considerations on modernity, it is fruitful to mention, as a powerfully representative modern characterization of the progressive good, Auguste Comte’s notion of “positivism” (Lenzer 2009, 74).⁶ The 19th century French philosopher defined modernity as the “positive age” that follows the “theological” and “metaphysical” eras. Modern civilization, in that sense, is founded on the outgrowing of past beliefs in the transcendent, whether in religious or philosophical terms, and on an exclusive reliance on reason and experimental sciences as “positive” ones, that is as ways of knowledge that bring about progress for humans and society. Furthermore, the term “positive” entails verifiable knowledge and the rejection of what are conceived as mere

metaphysical hypotheses or beliefs. This is, for Comte, as it was for Kant, the attainment of philosophical maturity. Thus, in the wake of the Enlightenment and the 19th century faith in science and progress, a trust in rationality as the supreme tool of human knowledge became a definite marker of modernity. For thinkers of the Enlightenment reason was essential in debunking obscurantism and what they considered to be the unexamined and unchecked power of religious dogma and phenomena.

As we have seen, another major aspect of modern civilization has appeared in the quest for socio-political equality and liberty. As the belief in science, the faith in democratic values is based on a view of rationality as foundation of human progress. Each individual is an independent locus of reason, which he or she has a right – and in a sense a duty – to exercise. Society must not be founded on mere traditions and collective conventions; it must not seek the good of society at the expense of individuals. Each individual is endowed, as an instance of deliberative reason, with unalienable rights that place him or her at the center of the socio-political structures and values. Trust in reason is connected to individualism in so far as only rational deliberation can provide a philosophical foundation for the primacy of the individual, while the latter is, in return, a guarantee of the free exercise of the former.

2.a. Religion, Modernity and the Fellowship of the Truth

Having laid solid historical, philosophical and critical foundations for our inquiry into modern civilization we are now in a position to address the question of its relationship with the religious and ethical ideals of Daeseon Jinrihoe. How does religion relate to modern values, and what can we learn about this relationship through the principles and beliefs of Daeseon Jinrihoe? The first point to make in this respect, is that Daeseon Jinrihoe, like many new religious movements, does not appear to experience any sense of conflict with the ideological premises of the modern belief in experimental sciences. Some may wonder why it is so, or whether this should be counted as an intrinsic aspect of its identity. A first possible way to understand this position is by considering one of the main principles of Daeseon, *Boeun-sangsaeng*, a fundamental virtue that amounts to cultivating gratitude for the gifts of life. It may be that Daeseon Jinrihoe beliefs entail a religious celebration of “modern civilization” in the way of being grateful for the positive contributions of modern sciences and technology; the progress of medicine, for instance, could not but inspire a sense of thankfulness that is aligned with the fellowship of the Truth. Moreover, in this view of things, the technological applications of science would be means of providing enhanced service to mankind on the way to *Haewon-sangsaeng*, the rectification of the world for mutual beneficence. Thus, Sangje held that “the facilities of civilization invented by the Westerners [...] have been modeled after those in Heaven.” (*Reordering Works* 1: 35)⁷ Is this statement to be understood literally,

meaning that technological devices exist in a higher way in Heaven, or is it simply meant to refer to the principle that any technical device has a given intelligibility and a practical utility that have their source in the transcendent world, in the way nothing good cannot but be present in the Good? This would be akin, in a different philosophical context, to Plato's idea that all realities must have archetypes in the Realm of Divine Forms, since they are but reflections of higher realities (Cornford 1951, 82-83). At any rate Sangje's assertion would seem to suggest that no human invention is negative in itself, since its discovery is founded on a positive aspect of reality. The only question, pertaining to ethics, lies in knowing whether mankind makes a good or a bad use of it.

Besides this religious sense of gratitude for existence, there is another way in which Daesoon might be deemed to reveal affinities with some aspects of the modern ethos; i.e., the principle that all humans should be regarded with respect irrespective of their social standing. This is deeply grounded in the ideal of *Haewon-sangsaeng*. (Baker 2008, 88).⁸ This principle may be considered to echo the modern democratic ideal, if by democracy is meant a fair and just socio-political treatment of all. As we have seen earlier, democracy as a set of values -which is not always synonym with a specific political regime- has been an integrating part of modern ways of thinking. The fact that civil and social justice might not be the privilege of democratic institutions, as is shown by the cases of apostolic religions in their early phases, and that such modern institutions may even fall short of their own ideals, can undoubtedly serve to qualify the aforementioned connection. It remains nevertheless true that no other civilization has ever been as concerned with matters of socio-economic equality as the modern world. Traditional religions would certainly highlight the principle of justice and call for a charitable treatment of the poor and the oppressed, but they would also insist on the fact that social inequalities are part and parcel of the world below such as it is, and that only spiritual elevation or interiorization can free humans from evil, including socio-political evil. Furthermore, even though traditional civilizations recognized the principles of justice and the need for a fair treatment of all in social matters, they not uncommonly sacrificed the rights of individuals to collective, organic or transcendent imperatives. By contrast, modern individualism does not suffer in principle any such *de facto* tolerance of socio-political evil, even though it can hardly eliminate it from society in practice.

There is, finally, in Daesoon Jinrihoe, a millenarist view, that is the expectation of a redeeming future that, as a consequence of this view of history, places great emphasis on the present and on individuals as agents of realization of the Good to come. In this view, the present is the necessary starting point of a brighter future, and only the individual can carry out the spiritual and ethical changes needed for the fulfilment of *Haewon-sangsaeng*. Even though the ideal of the moral culmination of history lies ahead in the future as a collective and cosmic reality, its realization is contingent

upon an active focus on the present, and therefore requires a full engagement of one's individual responsibility. The seeds of the future are planted in the present, and the latter must therefore be recognized as pregnant with positive potentialities.

2.b. Traditional Roots of the Fellowship of Truth

While the three characteristics of Daesoon philosophy that have just been sketched may be deemed to reveal some zones of convergence with important aspects of modernity, this recognition should not prevent one from highlighting some significant differences in their respective context and meaning. In the sections that follow, we would like to suggest that the affinities between Daesoon Jinrihoe and “modern civilization” must not lead one to ignore some important questions, not to say challenges, tensions and contradictions, that a careful consideration of modernity cannot but reveal when confronted with religion as a “Fellowship of the Truth.”

Let us note, first of all, that Daesoon Jinrihoe asserts its being “rooted in tradition.”⁹ This means that it fosters principles and ways of being that are common to the traditional religions of the Far East.

This traditional heritage is quite visible in the ways in which Daesoon Jinrihoe has been keen to integrate the aesthetic values of the Korean traditions. Thus, for instance, the architecture of Daesoon religious edifices reflects the principles, forms and colors of the Korean norms as exemplified in Buddhist temples. Ceremonies are performed with strict ritual physical postures that are in consonance with East Asian devotional forms, and the celebrants wear the traditional *hanbok* rather than the Western suits originating from the European bourgeois culture of the 19th century. Moreover, the Daesoon view of the universe is parallel to the East Asian view of a hierarchy of degrees of reality, with Kang Jeungsan being the supreme God of the Ninth Heaven. The “ninth heaven” (九天, *jiǔtiān*) is indeed the highest heaven in traditional Chinese cosmology. This Heaven had also a very central position in traditional Korean eschatology, as it was thought to be the domain of Sangje, the Supreme God (Rhee HB 2007, 37).¹⁰ For our current purpose it is enough to stress, therefore, that Daesoon metaphysics and Daesoon cosmology postulate the existence of higher realms of being behind or beyond the physical domain investigated by experimental sciences, and therefore out of their epistemic reach.

Grounded in this metaphysical view of reality and the cosmos, Daesoon Jinrihoe envisions a spiritual goal that echoes the Daoist view of “the true state of ‘Self as Dao and Dao as Self,’” that is the perfection of enlightenment and the key to all knowledge. It is called *Dotong-jingyeong* (道通真境) (*Progress of the Order* 1: 41).¹¹ “Rooted in tradition” also means that Daesoon Jinrihoe strives to “rectify the disorder” of the world, since it aims at reestablishing norms of being that used to be prevalent before the world went awry by forgetting them. This is in consonance with the Buddhist view of Maitreya

Buddha, a future Buddha, who is actually identified by Daesoon with Kang Jeungsan. The latter Buddha's coming is understood as a restoration of the order and harmony that had been destroyed (*Prophetic Elucidations* 1: 79).¹²

Moreover, as a means of the aforementioned rectification of the world, Daesoon Jinrihoe provides a contemporary version of the values at work in the ethics of the Three Bonds and Five Relationships, which is parallel (or similar) to Confucian ethics. This appears very clearly in the two key-notions of *Haewon-sangsaeng* (*Reordering Works* 1: 3)¹³ and *Boeun-sangsaeng*, Grateful Reciprocation of Favors for Mutual Beneficence.¹⁴ The word *sangsaeng* is actually the positive counterpart of cosmic and human pathology, which is referred to as *Sanggeuk* (Baker 2008, 88).¹⁵ This term refers to human competition and strife that lead to conflict and oppression. By contrast the core reality of *Sangsaeng* lies in reciprocal relationship and interdependence, both so central also in Confucianism, which sees the self, in the words of Tu Wei Ming, as “far from being an isolated individuality, (being) experientially and practically a center of relationships” (Tu 1984, 243) Thus, fundamentals that have been incorporated and assimilated from Eastern traditional religions inform Daesoon Jinrihoe's perspective on reality: Divine transcendence and a cosmology founded on degrees of terrestrial and celestial reality, a spiritual goal of union with the Supreme, and beneficent reciprocity as a key to perfecting the world in harmony with mankind, the cosmos and the Divine realms.

2.c. Modernity and the Fellowship of the Truth: Challenges and Tensions

How do these traditional elements relate to modern civilization? The modern world that arose in the 19th century has been characterized first of all by a growing secularization of modes of thinking and being. It is distinguished secondarily, and in parallel, by a move from holistic to individualistic values. On the one hand, the God-centered universe was largely shattered, the traditional cosmological hierarchy of states of being, including hells and heavens, was deemed to be a superstitious remnant of an obsolete and unenlightened past. On the other hand, the utter dependence of the individual upon the cultural and social whole was called into question while its autonomy was stressed. In a way these two general developments may define the central tenets of modern civilization. If modern civilization can be characterized as secular and individualistic, then it is not exaggerated to suggest that the basic tenets of Daesoon Jinrihoe may be deemed to be in tension with modern civilization. We will briefly examine some of the aspects of this tension through a meditation on *Haewon-Sangsaeng* and *Boeun-sangsaeng*.

As we have highlighted earlier on, both terms involve the notion of *Sangsaeng*,

“reciprocal life-giving:” Life is defined in terms of giving and reciprocity in giving. In other words, giving is a human duty lived within a network of relationships. It is by giving that the self is perfected and participates in the whole. It can be argued that such an ethics differs from modern ethics based on individual rights. In her book entitled *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind* Simone Weil argued that the predicament of mankind and society should not be understood and resolved in terms of human rights, but in terms of human duties (Weil 2005, 18).¹⁶ Human duties are intrinsically relational, because they are necessarily oriented toward others – whether human others or society, nature, the cosmos –, they are “duties towards”, whereas rights remain self-centered – whether for individuals or groups – and may actually crystallize a sense of individualist affirmation and resentment. In a way, the accumulation of grievances is nothing else than the sedimentation of such individualistic claims. Thus, today's world tends to be one in which identities are increasingly experienced in terms of grievances, and exacerbated into states of frustration, depression or violence. Modernity is actually characterized, among other phenomena, by struggles for the resolution of historical and socio-political grievances which have to be settled through external legal and governmental means: class struggle, identity grievances, gender conflicts and many others.

How can modern mankind resolve this seemingly unending accumulation of grievances and resentment? According to Bae Kyu-han “*Haewon* is the resolution of the enmity and grievances that have accumulated in the realms of humanity and deities” (Bae 2018, 30). In Korean shamanism already, *Haewon-sangsaeng* has been a ritual response to Han, sorrowful rancor. It amounts to a spiritual treatment of the resentment and helplessness of grievance, one in which the individuals feel irredeemably left with their own misery and suffering. The *Minjung* theologian Younhak Hyun defines *Han* as a:

Feeling of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against one, a feeling of acute pain in one's guts and bowels, making the whole-body writhe and squirm, and an obstinate urge to take revenge and to right the wrong—all these combined (Kim and Ro 1984, 101).

This concept and all its emotional and moral implications are essential for reaching an understanding of Korean religion in general, and Daeseon Jinrihoe in particular.

Some may argue, along these lines, that the notions of reciprocal relationality and resolution of grievances are contrary to the individualism that characterizes modernity, at least in some of its concomitant features. On this point, the sociologist Louis Dumont's analyses can be useful. The originality and fruitfulness of Dumont's interpretation is that it defines individualism as a secularization of the Christian

“individual-outside-of-the world” (Dumont 1992, 27)¹⁷ For Dumont, to say that early Christians were centered on the love and worship of the God of Jesus-Christ, means that they were individuals “outside-of-the-world”: they did not belong to the Roman pagan world not only because they did not share its values and practices, but also because they were intrinsically independent from the world itself through their faith: “My Kingdom is not of this world.” (*John* 18:36). Christians' relationship with a transcendent God was the crux of their identity. Thus, they did not define themselves primarily as a member of a social whole, as did the Romans and other Ancient people. Dumont argues that this shift towards the individual in relation to transcendence has continued to provide a pattern for further individualistic values even after its religious foundations have collapsed. The modern individualistic concept of the self might be bereft of a sense of divine transcendence, but it rests on a higher value placed on the individual than on the socio-cultural whole. It is therefore a secularized version of the Christian perspective.

Now let us consider Daesoon Jinrihoe's principles in light of this distinction between individualism and holism. The first principle to invoke here is *Eumyang-hapdeok* (陰陽合德), or the harmony of *yin* and *yang*. As is well known, *yin* and *yang* are the two complementary cosmological principles which, in East Asian traditional thought, embrace and sustain the whole range of existence. These two principles lie at the foundation of all relations, which means that the whole range of cosmic and social realities is relational. Relationship, the essence of relative existence, is never one-sided, and never confined to the individual and its aspirations. It presupposes an ideal of mutual dependence in which the self cannot be realized simply in its own terms. This appears furthermore in the principle of *Boeun-sangsaeng* that entails not disregarding the favors offered to you and promoting the betterment of others. It means literally to repay with gratitude. This is depicted symbolically by the painting of a son who “hurries out on bare feet to welcome his father coming back from work in the forest.” This sense of gratitude for the gifts of nature and culture is to be found, in one way or another, in all religions. *Au contraire*, many religions understand ingratitude and lack of contentment as the causes of sins and suffering in so far as it amounts to a form of atheism in action, since it does not recognize the Giver in the gifts. By contrast, gratitude for the gifts of God is particularly emphasized, for instance, in the three Abrahamic traditions. In the Bible the Prophet David dances out of joy for the graces received from God, and more specifically in celebration of the Ark of God. (2 *Samuel* 6)¹⁸ In Islam, *shukr* or thanking God is considered one of the chief virtues, and indeed the deepest meaning of religion (Numani 1999, 369).¹⁹ Even God is thankful or appreciative, one of His Names is *ash-Shakur*, the Appreciative (Cragg 2009, 63).²⁰

Daesoon Jinrihoe makes *Boeun-sangsaeng* particularly central to its perspective because it is an ethical and spiritual key to the resolution of grievances. *Boeun-*

sangsaeng is connected to a sense of debt towards the Divine, and by extension towards fellow humans and the whole of creation. *Boeun* (報恩) begins with the smallest things and extends to the entire universe. It links all the degrees and realms of humanity and reality. It works as a powerful and necessary contribution to *Haewon-sangsaeng*, as it is the key to the harmonious transformation of the relationship between the Divine and the human, *Sinin-jobwa* (神人調化). The four Chinese characters that form *Sinin-jobwa* refer respectively to God, mankind, tuning and change. They indicate the need for a modification in the way mankind and the Divine relate. This suggests that it is by resolving the disorder of society and the world that mankind plays a central role as cosmic mediator (王) and reaches spiritual perfection, thereby actualizing a kind of universal Jubilee. This ideal of universal balance through just and appropriate interactions is ultimately grounded in the patterns of *yin-yang* cosmology: “Every affair in Heaven and Earth is accomplished amid *yin* and *yang*; the order of all things is achieved amid *yin* and *yang*. Heaven and Earth makes change happen through *yin* and *yang*; Gods and humans make creation happen through *yin* and *yang*” (*Progress of the Order 2*: 42). This is nothing else than the realization of the Fellowship of the Truth in its wider cosmic context.

We would like to conclude these considerations by a brief consideration of one of the domains in which this harmony with “the spirit beings of the universe” has been shattered, and in relation to which Daeseon Jinrihoe is presented with remarkable cultural and spiritual opportunities: the relationship with nature. Indeed it can be argued that the contemporary environmental crisis is an urgent invitation to consider the necessity of a restoration of the Fellowship of the Truth. Cosmic harmony and the treatment of nature are profoundly linked, and a serious meditation on the former can offer keys for the current ecological challenges. *Haewon-sangsaeng* is a universal principle that encompasses all beings, even beyond the confines of mankind, it must therefore be placed at the forefront of any serious reflection and plan of action in relation to the ecological crisis. In this inclusive sense, religion entails not only a fellowship of mankind and Heaven, and one of humans in relation to each other, but also one with the cosmos, including nature. Gratitude and respect for *Tian* (天) also means gratitude and respect for *Di* (地). On the one hand nature is one element in the chain of beings, on the other hand it is a fellow of mankind. Investigating the historical roots of the environmental crisis would lead one to unveil a forgetfulness of these two principles as mankind has moved away from a holistic experience of the world. As E.F. Schumacher put it in his *Small is Beautiful*: “Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side” (Schumacher 1999, 4). Thus, the urgency of the environmental crisis might be a pressing invitation to revisit the foundations of modern civilization in light of the “Fellowship of the Truth.”

Conflict of Interest

Patrick Laude has been on the Editorial Board of *JDTRIA* since July 2021 but had no role in the decision to publish this article. No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

- ¹ We take the words “the Real,” in the wake of theologians such as John Hick, to refer to the Ultimate and Transcendent Reality that sub-rates any other reality and is sub-rated by none: “Such terms as the Real, the Ultimate, Ultimate Reality are commonly used to refer to this supposed *ne plus ultra*. None of them will suit everybody’s linguistic taste. Accepting this I propose, arbitrarily, to speak of the Real, corresponding as it does in some degree to the Sanskrit *sat*, the Arabic *Al Haqq*, and the Chinese *zhen*.”
- ² In fact, the word *Daesoon* denotes the idea of circle and connotes the all-encompassing circles of co-dependence that bind the entire universe and are entirely “surveyed” and “visited” by the Divine Reality. This central idea echoes Shamanistic concepts, as we find its equivalent in primordial religions such as those of Native American Indians, and this should come as no surprise since Taoism, one of the traditional soils of Daesoon, is sometimes taken to belong to the Shamanistic family of tradition, given its emphasis on nature and transformation.
- ³ This is the case especially, but not exclusively, in terms of the integration of science and technology in the service component of the Daesoon ethics.
- ⁴ “The spirit of the age in Renaissance Italy was easy for Burckhardt to identify. Its distinguishing stamp was individualism, a quality which he proceeded to relate to the various aspects of Italian culture from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.”
- ⁵ Dobbs (1991) was primarily known for her study of Newton’s alchemical thought.
- ⁶ “The human understanding, slow in its advance, could not step at once from the theological into the positive philosophy. The two are so radically opposed that an intermediate system of conceptions has been necessary to render the transition possible. It is only in doing this that metaphysical conceptions have any utility whatever.”
- ⁷ “One day, Sangje said to Gyeong-Seok, “You have followed My words before, but I will follow yours when conducting today’s Reordering Works. Thus, think carefully and answer My questions as you are asked.” Sangje asked him, “Which one is right, between leaving the facilities of civilization invented by the Westerners as they are or getting rid of them?” Gyeong-Seok answered, “To be left just as they are will be good for the people.” Sangje said he was right, adding that “Their machines have been modeled after those in Heaven.” He asked him more questions and then decided on the Reordering Works.”
- ⁸ “*Haewon* means relieving the resentment human beings past and present have felt because they were treated unfairly. Particularly aggrieved are women and the poor, because, according to Daesun Jinrihoe, Confucianism and other hierarchical, patriarchal philosophies have forced them to subordinate their own wants and needs to the desires of their overlords. To alleviate such resentment, members of Daesun Jinrihoe are told to treat women and the poor of today with respect and to conduct appropriate rituals to relieve the resentment of the spirits of those mistreated in the past.”
- ⁹ <http://eng.daesoon.org/app/en/introduction/aboutus>. (Accessed June 9, 2020).
- ¹⁰ “Ancient Koreans believed that human spirits returned to the Ninth Heaven after death. In East Asia, including China, the belief that nine is a very important number for destiny originated in ancient Korean millenarian teaching. Ancient East Asians believed that there was 上帝 (*Sangje* in Korean, *Shangdi* in Chinese), or God. The Ancient Chosŏn Korean millenarian belief influenced Asian millenarism, including the later values of the Taiping and the Tonghak, to an important degree.”

- 11 “Sangje spoke [...]: I will send the line of Dao-unification (道通, *dotong*) to the great head. He will instruct people in the ways of Dao-unification. When it is the right time, all the gods of Dao-unification from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism shall gather enabling people to achieve unification with the Dao, according to their degree of individual cultivation.”
- 12 This Messianism even extends to Jesus-Christ's second coming: “One day, Sangje said to Gong-Wu, 'Believers in Eastern Learning are waiting for the resurrection of Choi Suwon (Choe Je-u). Believers in Buddhism are waiting for the coming of Maitreya. Believers in Christianity are waiting for the second advent of Christ. If a divinity comes into this world, everyone will follow him as their master.’”
- 13 “Sangje said [...]: To save all the people in the world, I will resolve the grievances and grudges accumulated from time immemorial by recalibrating the Degree Number of Heaven and Earth, harmonizing divine beings, and establishing the Later World's paradisiacal land of immortals which will be based on the principle of mutual beneficence (相生, *sangsaeng*).”
- 14 The third tenet of Daesoon doctrine is “the resolution of grievances for mutual beneficence” (解冤相生, *Haewon-sangsaeng*). Grievances were the principal problem of the Former World, and they extended to all three realms, as well as to divine beings (Baker 2016, 10; Kim David 2014, 2015). Through his Great Itineration, Sangje opened a road to resolve the grievances of the three realms, which had been accumulated for ages. However, in order to enter into a world free of conflict, humans shall now cooperate by cultivating and propagating the truth, and avoiding the creation of new grievances” (Introigne 2018, 36).
- 15 “The term “*sangsaeng*” is the opposite of the term “*sanggeuk*,” literally “mutual overcoming” *Sanggeuk* refers to the traditional belief that the universe is filled with conflict that constantly generates winners and losers, reflected in an ever-changing hierarchy. *Sangsaeng* is the way to put an end to such conflict and the inequality it produces.”
- 16 “The notion of obligations comes before that of rights, which is subordinate and relative to the former. A right is not effectual by itself, but only in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds, the effective exercise of a right springing not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation towards him. Recognition of an obligation makes it effectual. An obligation which goes unrecognized by anybody loses none of the full force of its existence. A right which goes unrecognized by anybody is not worth very much.”
- 17 “There is no doubt about the fundamental conception of man that flowed from the teachings of Christ: as Troeltsch said, man is an *individual-in-relation-to-God*. For our purposes this means that man is in essence an outworldly individual.”
- 18 “Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.”
- 19 “The performance of all forms of worship in Islam is *shukr* [thankfulness], doing a good turn to others and conducting oneself righteously is *shukr*, a rich person giving part of his wealth in the way of Allah is for his riches.”
- 20 “This strange interface of meaning between God and humanity belongs even more with Names like *Al-Shakur* and *Al-Shakir* from the root sh k r denoting gratitude, which is, surely, a human offering. Since there is no indebtedness in God to call for thankfulness, these Names can only mean that He is 'cognisant of human gratitude', that there is acceptance of *our* cognisance, and that, therefore, human atheism is somehow divine pain.”

References

- Bae, Kyu-han
2018 “Haewon-sangsaeng Thought for the Future of Humanity and World.” *The Journal of Daeseon Academy of Sciences* 30:1-57. <https://doi.org/10.25050/jdaos.2018.30.0.1> [Korean Language Text] 배규한, 「인간과 세계의 미래에 관한 해원상생사상 연구」, 『대순사상논총』 30, 2018.
- Baker, Don
2016 “Daeseon Sasang: A Quintessential Korean Philosophy.” In *Daeseon Jinrihoe: A New Religion Emerging from Traditional East Asian Philosophy*, edited by The Daeseon Academy of Sciences, 199–216. Yeosu: Daeseon Jinrihoe Press.
- 2008 *Korean Spirituality*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Black, Robert
2001 *Renaissance Thought*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Caferro, William
2011 *Contesting the Renaissance*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cornford, Francis
Macdonald
1951 *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides*, London: Routledge and K. Paul.
- Cragg, Kenneth
2009 *Troubled by Truth: Biographies in the Presence of Mystery*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Daeseon Institute for
Religion and Culture
(DIRC) 2020 *The Canonical Scripture*, Yeosu: Daeseon Jinrihoe Press. <http://dirc.kr/dictionary/app/dt/scripture/dic.php?idx=2#e>
- Daeseon Jinrihoe
2020 “About Us”, Daeseon Jinrihoe website. <http://eng.daeseon.org/app/en/introduction/aboutus>. (Accessed Jun 9, 2020)
- Dobbs, Betty Jo Teeter
1991 *The Janus Face of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dumont, Louis
1992 *Essays on Individualism - Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Hick, John
1997 *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* London: Palgrave-McMillan.
- Introvigne, Massimo
2018 “Daesoon Jinrihoe An Introduction”, *The Journal of CESNUR* 2(5): 56-48. <https://doi.org/10.26338/tjoc.2018.2.5.4>.
- Kant, Immanuel
2009 (1784) *An Answer to the Question What is Enlightenment?* translated by H.B. Nisbet, London: Penguin Books.
- Kim, David
2015 “Sangje and Samkye: The Cosmology of Daesoonjinrihoe in East Asian New Religions.” *The Journal of Daesoon Academy of Science* 25(1): 189-229. <https://doi.org/10.25050/jdaos.2015.25.1.189>.
- 2014 “Daesoonjinrihoe in Korean New Religious Movements.” *The Journal of Daesoon Academy of Sciences* 24(1): 145-208. <https://doi.org/10.25050/jdaos.2014.24.1.145>.
- Kim, Sang Yil and
Ro, Young-chan.
1984 *Hanism as Korean Mind: Interpretation of Han Philosophy*, Los Angeles: Eastern Academy of Human Sciences.
- Ko, Young Woon
2021 “Imagining a Daesoon Process Theology” <https://www.openhorizons.org/imagining-a-daesoon-process-theology.html> (Accessed March 28, 2021)
- Koyré, Alexandre
1957 *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Law, Stephen
2011 *Humanism: A Very Brief Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lenzer, Gertrud
2009. *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writing*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Numani, Shibli
Nadvī, S. Sulaimān
Rehman, R. Abdur
1999 *Worship in Islam*, Karachi: Darul Ishaat.
- Osler, Margaret J.
2000 *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Olson, James S. and
Wilson, Raymond
1984 *Native Americans in the Twentieth-Century*, Urbana:
University of Illinois Press.
- Rhee, Hong Beom
2007 *Asian Millenarianism*, Youngstown, NY; Cambria Press.
- Schumacher E.F.
1999 *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*,
Point Roberts, Wash: Hartley & Marks Publishers.
- Soloveitchik, Joseph B.
1964 "Confrontation." *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish
Thought* 6(2): 5-29.
- Tu, Wei-Ming
1984 *Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge*,
Singapore: Federal Publications.
- Weil, Simone
2005 *The Need for Roots - Prelude to a Declaration of Duties
Towards Mankind*, Milton: Taylor and Francis.
- Zhang, Wei-Bin
1999 *Confucianism and Modernisation: Industrialization
and Democratization in East Asia*, New York: Palgrave
MacMillan.