

# *A Global Understanding of the Spirit*

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We are living in a global world. People of various ethnicities, religions and cultures are coming together to live as neighbors side by side. As we enter this world of globalization and inter-reliance, it is clear that we must be able to dialogue and communicate with others so that there can be harmony and peace in the world. In this global world, many travel or emigrate to other countries. Cultures are constantly meeting one another. Some who emigrate to the West experience racism and being treated as inferior, different, and as the Other.

Therefore, as various cultures and religions sometimes collide, and sometimes transform and merge with one another, it is important to understand the Other and seek to find common ground through dialogue, understanding and embracing of the Other. One such common place to stand among different religions and cultures lies in understanding the Spirit. For some time, many have imagined that Christianity and the West dominated the definitions and understanding of the Spirit. But would it not be better to allow “the East” to help define the Spirit. The Spirit is present in many cultures and religions. As such it is important to ask whether there is one Spirit or many.

There was a time, and even in some today when Christianity suggests that it has the “true Spirit” and that other Spirits found in the world are lesser or evil. This paper compares a given thread of the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit, and brings it into a dialogical encounter with the Asian understanding of Chi. We look to see how each understands Spirit as breath. I also explore some other definitions of Spirits found in other world traditions to examine if different cultures are all talking about the same spirit. Hopefully, this will contribute positively to the vision of interreligious dialogue that will in turn help us move towards world peace, tolerance and embracing the Other. This paper attempts to move towards articulating a more

inclusive Christian pneumatology, one that can speak more easily to a larger global community.

### Holy Spirit

Certain traditional Christian notions of the Holy Spirit are built upon and rooted in the Jewish concept of *ruach*. *Ruach*, found throughout the Old Testament, suggests itself as the presence of God in the world. It is difficult to translate the Hebrew word *ruach* into English because the Hebrew term does not participate in a language that carries dualistic connotations and concept such as the Greek *pneuma*, the Latin *spiritus*, and the German *Geist*. In the Western languages, there is a tendency to see this as antithetical to matter and body.

Rather than this dualism, *ruach* better can be perceived of as a storm or force in body and soul, a divine energetic force or presence. Furthermore, Yahweh's *ruach* has two sides, transcendent and immanent. On the immanent side, the *ruach* corresponds to the power of life or power to live in all the living. *Ruach* can be found in everything. As the immanent efficacy, the Holy Spirit is the power of life in all the living. God's Spirit also refers to God's Space, in which all living beings grow and unfold (Ps 31:8; Job 36:16).<sup>1</sup> God's Spirit is often associated with the lifegiving force that penetrates and gives life to all living things. As both the Spirit of life and space, the Holy Spirit is ubiquitous and interpenetrates all things.<sup>2</sup>

The Spirit can be understood as having many facets, one of which is breath. *Ruach* means "moving air" and it probably arose from the particular experience of the Hebrew people living in or near the desert. Such a natural desert phenomenon as wind blown sand was for them a fascinating and simultaneously terrifying reality that immediately affected their lives. The Hebrew people lived in fear of and at times in awe of the mighty blast of the *ruach*. They believed that the desert wind has a divine and supernatural power; it became a metaphor for God. The anthropomorphic interpretation of *ruach* as the personal Spirit of God which is added in the Old Testament is a relatively

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1. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 42, 43.

2. Koo D. Yun, "Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions," p. 165-177, in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation* edited by Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen & Kim Kyoung-Jae (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 173.

new idea in ancient Near Eastern Literature. Israel developed her own peculiar theism based on the pre-Israelite concept of the divine wind under the influence of the monotheism of the covenant faith. Israel's description of Yahweh's unique power and Spirit, demonstrated at the Red Sea, was formulated in tandem with broader ancient Near Eastern concepts.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Old Testament, life-sustaining breath is a direct result of the divine. It is the creative power of Yahweh who graciously bestowed life into God's creation (Job 27:3; 33:4; Ps 104:29, 30; Zech 12:1). "This breath is essence of life" (Gen 6:17, Job 12:10, Isaiah 38:16; 42:5; Ezek 37:5-14; Malachi 2:15-16) and therefore to "possess this breath is life, but the departure of this breath is death" (Ps 146:4; Eccl 12:7).<sup>4</sup> Breath is the vital element in a living being, as it stands for life, dynamism and basic activity of a person. Therefore, the spirit of God, *ruach* denotes the most important characteristic of the deity and plays a vital role in God's plan for the cosmos. In the Genesis 2 account of the creation story, God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath (*ruach*) of life and the man became a living being.<sup>5</sup> When the divine spirit disappears from the living creature, that which is left is dust: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). Thus life and death depend on the divine breath; if God gathers back his spirit, the person dies. Job 34:14: "If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath." If God sends forth his spirit anew, they reawaken to life; "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:30).<sup>6</sup> Thus in the Hebrew tradition, breath and life have often been associated with the Spirit who is divine.

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3. Eun Hee Shin, *The Life-Giving Spirit: Toward a Christian Panentheistic Pneumatology for the Korean Multi-Religious Context*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000), 29.

4. Jumsik Ahn, "Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Chi: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Deerfield: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002), 91.

5. Paul Kalluveetil, "Towards the New Age of the Spirit: The Old Testament Vision of Society as a Spirit-Energized Movement" in *Journal of Dharma* XXIII.3 (1998):360, 369.

6. Admiel Kosman, "Breath, Kiss and Speech as the Source of the Animation of Life: Ancient Foundations of Rabbinic Homilies on the Giving of the Torah as the Kiss of God" in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, edited by A.I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, G.G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 104.

In the New Testament, the role of the Spirit becomes more distinct, more Christological and ecclesial. The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus in his salvific work from his conception through his ministry to the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 1:20, Luke 4:1, 18; Matthew 12:28; Acts 10:38; Romans 8:11). The Spirit bears witness to Jesus by proclaiming his divine sonship (Luke 3:22, John 1:33), testifying to his coming in the flesh (1 John 4:2), enlightening individuals to recognize his soteriological significance (Luke 1:67-68; 2:26, 30) and his lordship (1 Corinthians 12:3), and inspiring people to believe in him and his gospel of salvation (Eph 1:13-14).<sup>7</sup> The one who breathed into Adam the breath of life now raises the second Adam to new life by the transformation of his body to a new form of bodily life. The Spirit is the Lord and giver of life, and this means both the everyday life of the mortal and the transformed life of the one whose mortality has put on immortality.<sup>8</sup> The wind of the Spirit blows in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles and the Spirit's presence is linked with new birth and new life, with the wind of heaven, and with speaking, preaching and witness-bearing.<sup>9</sup>

The Spirit is God's eschatological presence and power as the Spirit guides the church, the body of Christ, and the eschatological community of those born again through faith in Christ.<sup>10</sup> The Spirit effects this adoption of God's children by liberating, transforming, reconciling, empowering and assuring. The Spirit that "gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6) liberates us from the power of sin, death and the law (Romans 8:2) by justifying and sanctifying us and enabling us to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13).<sup>11</sup> The breath of life evokes the fragrance of life. Like perfume, God's Spirit is mysteriously present, discerning, interceding, counseling, and healing. This same Spirit aids our perception, sharpens our self-awareness, and reminds us of others who need gifts of love and offerings of service. This Spirit is not bound by the walls of the institutions we call the church, either visible

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7. Anselm Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 116.

8. Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 118.

9. Rebecca Button Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 17.

10. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 116.

11. *Ibid.*, 99.

or invisible. The Spirit is the very presence, the real presence of God, God-with-us, living Word, Lord and Giver of Life.<sup>12</sup> As we examine Paul's comment that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17), we see that his conviction was grounded in the early experience of the Hebrew people, providing a solid foundation on which to lay subsequent considerations. The continuity with regard to the saga of the Spirit runs from beginning to end.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the question is whether the Spirit that Christianity describes exists in people of other faiths. Moltmann particularly points out that Yahweh's *ruach* is present in everything. If Yahweh's Spirit is present everywhere than couldn't this be the same Spirit which is named differently in other cultures. This understanding of the Spirit is very similar to the Taoistic understanding of Chi that is the power of life interpenetrating all entities including both animate and inanimate objects. There appears to be a continuity between the Holy Spirit (the primordial Chi) and human spirit (substantial chi)<sup>14</sup> and people of different cultures and backgrounds are articulating the Spirit in different languages. This fact is hopeful for positive interfaith dialogue and relations. Christianity alone cannot define or represent the sole theological grasp of Spirit. For this reason it is important for Christianity to search out the understanding of the Spirit that exists in other religions and different cultural traditions. A similar understanding of the Spirit as breath and life-giver can be found in the Asian concept of Chi.

## Chi

Along with the Christian understanding of *Rauch* and *Pneuma* as spirit, there is also Chi as spirit in various Asian traditions. Chi can be found in Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism<sup>15</sup> and has similar characteristics as the Holy Spirit. Within Asian tradition, it is understood that the universe originates in Chi which is both the source of the universe and the driving force of endless changes. In the beginning, there existed Chi without form, and it was called the Great Void. Because

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12. Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit*, 125.

13. Morris A. Inch, *The Saga of the Spirit: A Biblical, Systematic, and Historical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 32.

14. Yun, "Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions," 165.

15. Bede Bidlack, "Qi in the Christian Tradition" in *Dialogue and Alliance* 17(1) 2003:51. (p. 51-59).

of the void of Chi, there is neither non-existence nor emptiness in the Buddhist sense. All things in the universe are based and formed on one and the same Chi, which some equate with the Tao. This Chi then begins to contract and consolidate, because of the interaction between yin and yang, that from which heaven and earth emerged.<sup>16</sup> As life-force, Chi interpenetrates not only the living being but also all natural objects. The formless, unsubstantial Chi penetrates into all existing entities and sustains the structure of the universe.<sup>17</sup> Out of the ever present force of the life which has always been existent and will exist forevermore. It is an important force which gives life. In this way, it is quite similar to Ruach which also gives force.

Chi is the substance of which all existing phenomena are constituted, including all the phases of matter, energy, mind (*xin*), and even the various forms of spirit (*shen*). The term is used in both a general sense, referring to the primordial stuff of which all things are composed, and a more specific sense. It is convenient, although oversimplified, to think of Chi as a fundamental vapor that can condense into solid matter and disperse into finer and finer forms. It is much like the *aer* of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Anaximenes, who claimed that it (like Chi) was the fundamental substance or nature (*physis*) of all things.<sup>18</sup>

Chi means that which differentiates life from death, animate from inanimate. To live is to have Chi in every part of your body and to die is to be a body without Chi. For health to be maintained, there must be a balance of Chi, neither too much nor too little. The origins of Chi are three. There is “original Chi,” that portion of Chi transmitted from your parents to you. This Chi is unique, as it is yours from the moment of conception. But it is finite, and over time is used up little by little. The second source of Chi is “nutritional Chi” meaning Chi extracted from the food you eat. It is constantly being utilized and replenished.

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16. Paul S. Chung, “The Mystery of God and Tao in Jewish-Christian-Taoist Context” p. 243-266 in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation* edited by Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, and Kim Kyoung-Jae (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 261.

17. Yun, “Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions,” 173.

18. Joseph A. Adler, “Varieties of Spiritual Experience: Shenin Neo-Confucian Discourse” p. 120-148, *In Confucian Spirituality Volume Two*, edited by Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 122.

The third is “air Chi,” the Chi extracted from the air you breathe and it too is used and replenished. The function of Chi will help us understand human relationships as human pathology can be seen in terms of balances and imbalances. A balanced state corresponds to health and any excess or deficiency of balance corresponds to illness. When the body is in a state of equilibrium, internally and with respect to the external environment, then it possesses a “positive vitality,” a form of Chi that protects the body and defends it from pathogenic factors.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, to live a long a healthy life, it is important to understand and pay attention to our Chi. It is also important to keep it in balance so that the body will remain healthy.

Chi is the Chinese word for “life energy.” Chi is the animating power that flows through all living things. A living being is filled with it. A dead person has no more—the warmth, and the life energy goes away. A healthy person has more Chi than one who is ill. Health implies that Chi in our bodies is clear, rather than polluted and turbid, and flowing smoothly, like a stream, not blocked or stagnant. It is also the life energy one senses in nature. The Earth itself is moving, transforming, breathing, and alive with Chi. Modern scientists speak the same language as ancient poets when they call the Earth Gaia, a living being. When we appreciate the beauty of animals, fish, birds, flowers, trees, mountains, the deep ocean, and floating clouds, we are sensing their chi and feeling an intuitive unity with them. Human beings are part of nature and share Chi with the rest of the earth.<sup>20</sup> Chi is part of this world and the healing comes from within. Chi is associated with breath, health and life. It is what keeps human beings alive and this can be compared to the breath that YHWH gives to human beings during creation. Life, breath and wellness originates with God. This can be recognized in the Hebrew and Christian tradition as well as in the Asian tradition. To sustain and keep one’s life-energy is very important for people’s health and survival. We need to be able to keep the Chi so that we can have the divine within us and also live a healthy life. Let us turn to other understandings of the Spirit around the globe to see if there are also similarities between them and Ruach and Chi.

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19. David Eisenberg with Thomas Lee Wright, *Encounters with Qi: Exploring Chinese Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 43,44.

20. Kenneth S. Cohen, *The Way of Qigong: The Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 3.

## Spirit around the Globe

The world is becoming more and more globalized as we live in a world which is more multireligious, multilingual and multi-cultural. In this context, it is important to recognize the differences between people and the similarities among cultures and religions. This world is filled by the Spirit and the spirit needs to be recognized by people of various cultures. Besides Ruach, pneuma and Chi, there are other terminologies in various cultures that also capture this idea of Spirit/Breath and God. As we examine the religions found in different parts of the world, we do not find many spirits; but find various names for the Spirit.

This notion of the Spirit giving life to creatures is not exclusively a Christian belief and understanding but is found in many other cultures around the globe. Associating Spirit with breath is common and is found in many parts of the world. The breath of life was interpreted by the ancients as the act of breathing which indicates life. Genesis 2:7 gives the following account of God creating man: "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the earth, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The connection between human life and the breath of God, as viewed in the Bible, may have roots tracing back to the cradles of civilization in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Many inscriptions from ancient Babylon attest to the deity being the source of the spirit that gives life to humankind. This spirit of life is exhaled from the deity's mouth into other creatures in order to give them life. An ancient Sumerian-Akkadian hymn addresses the god Marduk with the words: "Your speech is a sweet breath, the life of the lands."<sup>21</sup> Thus perhaps the Christian tradition finds its roots in Egypt.

Similar expressions of the Spirit are also found in Akkadian literature: "May your sweet breath waft hither," or "Always seek the sweet breath of the gods." Perhaps it comes from the El-Amarna letters, in a phrase actually addressed to the king: "(Who can live) when breath does not issue forth from the mouth of the king, his lord?"<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, similar views are found in ancient Egypt in praise of Isis coming with her tremendous powers including that of speech, which

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21. Admiel Kosman, "Breath, Kiss and Speech as the Source of the Animation of Life: Ancient Foundations of Rabbinic Homilies on the Giving of the Torah as the Kiss of God" in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, edited by A.I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, G.G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 100.

22. *Ibid.*, 101.



is perceived as the life-giving breath of the deity of humankind. A more striking illustration is provided by the words one of the Egyptian king's addresses to the god Amon: "Your color is light, your breath is life...your body is a breath of spirit for every nostril, we breathe through you in order to live."<sup>23</sup> This common notion of the deity giving breath and life may have been a common understanding in various religious traditions surrounding the cultural forerunners of the Abrahamic Invisible life energy is a universal concept and is most commonly associated with breath, heat, air, and/or sunlight.

The Breath of God (*Ruach Ha Kodesh* in Hebrew, *Spiritus Sancti* in Latin) is synonymous with the power of Spirit. A similar idea is expressed in the holy scripture of Islam, the *Qur'an* (Koran). The words *nafas*, meaning Allah's own breath, and *ruh*, meaning Allah's own soul, "are used to mean the human breath and human soul-confirming the fact that we are originally from Allah, of Allah, for Allah, and in the end will return to Allah." Shaykh Hakim Moinuddin Chishti says that breath is not the same as air or oxygen. Rather it is a divine energy that regulates human emotions and the equilibrium of the body. Both the quantity and quality of breath have a definite and direct effect upon human health.<sup>24</sup> This connection of Spirit, breath and Allah provide more evidence of a global understanding of the Spirit.

In Greek, the vital breath is called *pneuma*, a word first used by the philosopher Anaximenes (ca. 545 B.C.). Anaximenes said that life begins with the breath. All things come from it and dissolve into it at death. The soul is breath and is that which controls and holds together and prevents the disintegration or decomposition of human beings. As air or wind, it encloses and maintains the world. Vital breath creates a unity between microcosm and macrocosm. The life-principle and motive force of humanity is, traditionally, *pneuma* or the breath-soul, therefore the life-principle of the outside world is *pneuma*.<sup>25</sup>

For the people in Africa, the word is different, but the concept is the same. Among the Kung San, the indigenous people of Africa's Kalahari Desert, life energy is *num*. The *num* is stored in the lower abdomen and at the base of the spine and can be made to boil through ecstatic dance. The "num enters every part of your body, right to the

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23. Ibid., 101.

24. Cohen, *The Way of Qigong*, 23.

25. Ibid., 24.

tip of your feet and even your hair.”<sup>26</sup> Num makes the spine tingle and the mind empty, without thoughts. The Healer or healers “see people properly, just as they are.”<sup>27</sup> Like modern physicians, the Kung believe that people carry illness within the body. Like Chi, when disease flares up, it can sometimes be cured by accumulating num, increasing the inner reserve of healing power.<sup>28</sup> This reinforces the notion of the healing within occurs as people aim to understand how the divine resides within us. It is very important for people to make the connection and understand that the healing power can come from within us through the deity.

In Tantrism, a practice of using the body for spiritual transformation found in Buddhism and Hinduism, “the body, the earth, nature, etc., are associated with the divine feminine, with *sakti*, and the aim is to unite it, or bring it into harmony with consciousness, with *shiva*, the male principle.”<sup>29</sup> *Sakti* is the power or energy of God, the divine feminine. The equivalent of Chi in yoga is the Sanskrit term *prana* which means “life energy” or “breath.” *Sakti* would be the source of *prana*. Within Taoism, Chi will not be called divine per se, because divine implies a certain otherness in the universe. Taoists only acknowledge Tao, which is at once the universe and at the same time what composes the universe, Chi.<sup>30</sup>

In India, the life energy, *prana*, is described as flowing through thousands of subtle-energy veins, the *nadis*. One of the goals of Yoga is to accumulate more prana through breath control exercises (*pranayama*) and physical postures (*asana*). The student is also taught to conserve prana, not to waste either his inborn, genetic store or that acquired through meditation. Some yogis believe that we are given a certain number of breaths at birth. If we learn to breathe more slowly, we use up our endowment at a slower pace and thus live longer.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, some fifty or sixty thousand years ago, long before the

26. Richard Katz, *Boiling Energy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 42.

27. *Ibid.*, 42.

28. Cohen, *The Way of Qigong*, 24.

29. Wayne Teasdale, *Toward a Christian Vedanta: The Encounter of Hinduism and Christianity According to Bede Griffiths* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1987), 147.

30. Bede Bidlack, “Qi in the Christian Tradition” in *Dialogue and Alliance* 17(1) 2003:53 (p. 51-59).

31. Cohen, *The Way of Qigong*, 26.

Chinese spoke of Chi, Australian Aborigines were cultivating life energy as a key to healing and spiritual power. People who had this energy could communicate telepathically across vast distances and in this manner, they formed the “aboriginal telephone line.” The Aborigines concentrated on an energy center four inches below the navel, where they said the cord of the great Rainbow Serpent (kundalini) lay coiled. Through the same center the Aborigines drew body heat from the ‘rainbow fires’ that helped them endure cold.<sup>32</sup>

In the Lakota (Sioux) language, the word for soul, *waniya*, is derived from the word for breath, *ni*. In 1896, the Lakota holy man, Long Knife (George Sword), described to others that “a man’s *ni* is his life. It is the same as his breath. It gives him his strength. All that is inside a man’s body it keeps clean. If it is weak it cannot clean the inside of the body. If it goes away from a man he is dead....”<sup>33</sup> The Lakota sweat lodge healing rite is called *inipi* because it purifies the *ni*. “*Inipi* causes a man’s *ni* to put out of his body all that makes him tired, or all that causes disease, or all that causes him to think wrong.”<sup>34</sup> *Inipi* is a purifying process which gets rid of the unnecessary *ni* to make the person stronger and healthier. This is similar to Chi and how it gives life and health.

The Japanese also have a similar term and call this energy Ki. This Ki is part of other words such as Reiki and Aikido which readily deal with this energy. Very often this energy is connected in the external world with wind and internally with breath. In Hawaii, the word for breath is *ha*. Many visitors to Hawaii are presented with a flowery wreath and the greeting Aloha which is translated, “meeting face to face (alo) of the breath of life (ha).”<sup>35</sup> This is the same kind of breath which is captured by the Chinese word Chi. Furthermore, in Hawaii, the most powerful healers are known as *Kahuna Ha*, “Masters of the Breath.” The sacred healing breath, *ha*, can be absorbed at power places in nature (*heiau*), through dance (such as the hula), and deep breathing exercises. Some Kahunas learn to store healing energy

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32. *Ibid.*, 25.

33. James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 83.

34. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

35. Robert Cook, “Alternative and Complementary Theologies: the Case of Cosmic Energy with special reference to Chi” in *Studies in World Christianity*, p.175-189 (2000):6: 176.

in the heart. Then, when the healing energy is projected through laying on of hands, the *ha* is colored by the healer's love and positive thoughts. In traditional Hawaiian counseling and mediation, all parties in a conflict first calm their minds by breathing deeply. This helps them to be less reactive and to find a better solution. The *ha* can also be transferred from a healer to a patient by blowing directly on the patient's body. When a Kahuna Ha is near death, he/she may transfer lineage and power by breathing the *ha* onto a student or family member. The Hawaiian word Aloha, often used as a respectful, heartfelt greeting, also means "love." Love is the meeting face-to-face (*alo*) of the breath of life (*ha*).<sup>36</sup> Many cultures who have words to express the similar ideas of breath, life, vital energy which is expressed by the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit and the Chinese understanding of Chi. So is it one Spirit or many?

### One Spirit or Many?

Christians want a pneumatology that includes both transcendental and immanent dimensions of the Holy Spirit. God is not merely the "Wholly Other" but also the "God with us and in us." At the beginning of the third millennium, Christians long to see, touch and feel the presence of the Divine Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit!<sup>37</sup> As Christians seek this, they come into dialogue with other religions which may have experienced this in a similar fashion. Chi and other global understandings of the Spirit also express this divine within us. Chi, prana, *ha* are all versions of the life giving Spirit and the essential element for all life to exist. If human beings can recognize this and accept this, we can all live in more harmony and peace with one another.

Chi will be a crucial element in how one does theology. It is found in all parts of the world by various ethnic groups and may be the binding element that will keep us from destroying ourselves, each other and the planet. It is a spirit that bonds and pulls humanity closer with all other living creatures. It will sustain us and keep us aware of our interconnectedness and inter-reliance. We need to turn to Chi and invite it into our bodies and our lives so that we can be more aware of the Spirit.

Chi, prana, Holy Spirit and other terms for the Spirit are all salvific in that they can save us within ourselves and in relation to others. Chi

36. Cohen, *The Way of Qigong*, 26.

37. Yun, "Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions," 177.

embraces life and makes it whole. It will heal and bring life to what is broken. Therefore, it is essential that humanity recognize this spirit and affirm it in their lives. Chi has an emancipatory element as it frees us from the bonds of oppression which prevent us from celebrating life. When humanity neglects or ignores the force of Chi, problems of animosity and oppression can begin.

When Asian contextual theology encounters the Chi of Taoism and its spirituality, it expands the dimension of the Spirit toward the cosmic-natural process of living organisms for the multi-religious mystical experience of human life. Although the Spirit in Christianity is not equated with an immanent and impersonal force, Jesus does say, “the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going” (John 3:8).

It is important to recognize the similarities between the Holy Spirit and other manifestations of the Spirit in our world. With this acceptance, it is then crucial to accept and welcome the Other who have different forms of expressing the same phenonoma. In particular, the racialized immigrants who come to the West, come here to begin a new life with many hopes and dreams. It is important not to make them the Other and have power and authority over them, but rather to embrace and empower each other. The power of Chi can help build bridges that have been torn down by ignorance and dominance. The destructive powers of separation can be overcome through Chi. Chi dwells in all things and within us. It has the power to make a positive difference in this world. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that Chi is crucial for our livelihood and to realize that Chi is the Spirit in all things. This Spirit is the same Spirit of God. If God dwells within us, it makes a difference in how we live, treat others and nature.

There is much to learn from the East and from one another. The East cannot be easily dismissed and ignored as their concept of Chi adds richness and new dimension to the Christian concept of God. In Christianity, there needs to be a stronger awareness of the Spirit within us. It is this Spirit that gives us life and maintains our life. In the West, we are so concerned with the physical being and the physical body, that the Spirit does not come into the forefront. It is important to recognize the importance of the Spirit within our daily lives. In doing so, we may recognize the commonalities that exist between us and the Others. We will then be in a position to welcome and embrace

one another. This is important as we live in this global village where everything is becoming closer and more interconnected.

### **Conclusion**

As Christian theology works toward a pneumatology, it is important to expand its concepts beyond the Western notions of the Spirit and embrace a global understanding of the Spirit. This will enable us to open up our previously conceived notions of the Spirit and work towards a more inclusive and holistic understanding. A global understanding of the Spirit will work towards eliminating injustice and racism within society, open doors for interreligious dialogue, and make the world a better place for all those who inhabit it.

The global understanding of the Spirit as energy will renew us and bring us closer to the divine. Ultimately, this Spirit is from God and we need to recognize its power and dimension. It will be the liberating element in our lives and the way to empowerment. All people need to recognize the strong powerful element of the Spirit and share this Spirit with others. This spirit is the energy which is inside the fundamental building blocks of all living things. It is essentially what gives life and acknowledging this enables us to be aware of the Spirit within us. As people recognize the commonality of the Spirit with other religions, it will renew their hope in humanity and aid them in living with Others who are different culturally, ethnically and religiously.

What we need is life, wholeness and undivided life. Is this not the essence of the gospel: God, the eternal, infinite God is so close to us that God loves us.<sup>38</sup> Isn't this the task of Chi? Chi is the giver and sustainer of life, much the same way that the spirit is. The Spirit is found in major world religions and it is important to acknowledge this and learn from the other religious traditions and understanding of the Spirit. In order to expand our knowledge of the Spirit, we have to liberate the Spirit from a solely Christian perspective. We need to acknowledge the Spirit which is found in other religious and faith traditions and compare it to the Christian idea of the Spirit. Only in this way is the spirit life-giving as it dismantles sexism, racism, prejudice and Christian privilege.

As we see the various concepts of the Spirit around the world, we are challenged to embrace people who are different. Perhaps the dif-

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38. Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, 21.

ferences between us are not as great as we first thought. There is common ground and we need to build upon this common ground. What does this mean for a global pneumatology? It implies a very inclusive understanding of the Spirit. The Spirit is found in different contexts and implies that the Spirit is present and embraced in various parts of the world. This means that there is one spirit with many names. This has great implications for a pneumatology that transcends culture, tradition and religion. It can be a binding pneumatology which breaks down barriers of racism, prejudice and otherness. If the West can recognize the similarities rather than emphasize the differences, we can work towards a better world for all.



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