CHAPTER III

SELFOBJECT AND FRIENDSHIP

This chapter will focus on the first major challenge of Korean spiritual and psychological development, the challenge of narcissism and the formation of the self, though three major challenges are inseparable. In the introduction to this dissertation, I explained the widespread presence of narcissistic needs or immature narcissism among young Korean Christians during the 1990s and 2000s. The emergence of narcissism is a product of the rapid social change and radical cultural shift in interpersonal relationships and family interactions in Korean society.

Many contemporary Korean Christians are mostly well-educated, well-trained people who function quite well in their social lives and careers. At the same time, however, many of them struggle with spiritual hunger, psychological emptiness, and existential loneliness along with the mixed emotions of self-esteem and shame, weak sense of identity and self-awareness, and the lack of joy and happiness. They live in particular social and cultural contexts and moods such as dysfunctional family, anxiety, tension, severe competition, survival mentality, and despair about the future. There are difficulties in the formation process of the self and identity in Korean culture and society where multiple religious teachings and diverse traditional and Western cultural values and ideals coexist, which is connected to the postmodern problem of the lack of firm foundation.

The self, universally and the Korean self, particularly, evolves from interpersonal relationship in family, relative, neighbor, and community as the Korean word, *inn-gahn*, literally

means human-between. It is same in the Western culture as the English proverb says, "it takes a village to raise a child." In the contemporary Korean society, it is becoming harder to experience sufficient empathic responses from parents or significant others during the early childhood. It is the result of changes in family structure from traditional extended to nuclear family, and the difficulty of experiencing adequate care from parents partially due to parents' mutual commitments for both work and family, which has become more common in the contemporary Korean society. Many people are not able to have cohesive self structure that is a prerequisite for life-long process of growth and identity formation. They are often intensely attached to others, continuously seek love and admiration from others, and feel little or no empathy for others' emotions due to lack of intimate interactions with their parents in early childhood.

The challenge of narcissism is a serious issue in the Korean church and society partly due to the possibility of intergenerational transmission of narcissism from parents to their children through insufficient exchange of empathy and care. Narcissistic parents often show dual attitude of causing their children to feel wanted while they are emotionally remote or detached. Usually, they have harmfully merged themselves to their children and they regard their children as their own extension, while not providing enough empathy. They are mostly obsessed with the success and security of their children, give direct advices, directions, or even commands on many crucial matters of children's lives. These overprotective parents do not give space for their children to grow in self and identity according to their own pace. Children go through the tough process of reading and predicting their parents' minds and taking care of parents' emotions. Korean people have a culture-specific pattern of behavior, *noon-chi*, which is young people being sensitive in figuring out others' perceptions, emotions, and needs. As a result, people gradually form *jeong-*

han in their minds and hearts, which is a mixed emotion of affection and hatred, as well as related emotions of emptiness, loneliness, longing, worthlessness, and resignation.

Children need to experience empathy from their parents who need to provide both separating and connecting moments with their children in healthy ways. Throughout their lifetime, contemporary Korean children often experience imbalances in power dynamics and relational boundaries with their parents, significant others, and teachers due to hierarchical order in interpersonal relationships in Korean culture and society. There are many cases of fused or merged relationship, while there are also instances of emotional distance, disconnection, or disengagement at the opposite extreme.

In the Korean culture, children and young people often experience abuse of power and power inequality from those higher in social hierarchy, because the culture does not view abusive attitudes as seriously problematic. It is because of the combination of hierarchical Korean culture, which sees hierarchical order as natural, and the influence of both Christianity and Confucianism. Several religious traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Confucianism share the value of a hierarchical order rather than mutual interconnectedness.

In these social and cultural contexts, dealing with the challenge of narcissism and the formation of the strong self is the foundation for strong religious and cultural identity formation, and strong identity is the foundation for facilitating the embodiment of religious beliefs and religious practices. FDT provides the developmental stages of faith focused on cognitions, and expands its theory later by adding the importance of emotions and early childhood formation of the self. Fowler includes brief references to psychoanalytic theories in explaining early stages of FDT, but it does not offer a clear and more compelling explanation about the intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics between parents and infants for strengthening process of self structure.

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FDT focuses on the structure of faith and cognitive development, but Kohut's self psychology explains the emotional growth of the nature, quality, and pattern of interpersonal interactions between self and primary caregiver. Psychoanalytic theorists such as Rizzuto, Streib, and McDargh agree that even infants' cognitive development is impossible without emotional and supportive presence and participation of primary caregivers. Rizzuto emphasizes that it is necessary to understand psychic enzymes that facilitate faith development throughout the stages of faith.

In this chapter, I argue that Kohut's psychology of the self makes notable contributions in understanding and explaining Korean spiritual and psychological development in five major ways, while there are limitations, too. First, Kohut's unique model of intersubjective relationship, self-*selfobject* relationship, helps change the fixed metaphor or image of human-divine and human-human relationships in Korean mind. Second, self psychology explains a concrete process of strengthening the self in relation to the flow of certain psychic enzyme such as empathy and *jeong* through its unique notion of the process of *transmuting internalization*. Third, self psychology, along with McFague's new model of God as Friend, helps to realize Koreans' excessive idealization and adherence to Western ideal of autonomy, independence, freedom, and individual rights, and to recognize the value of mutual, equal interactions in divine-human and human-human relationships for contemporary Korean spiritual and psychological development. Fourth, Kohut's exploration of shame, metaphors of hunger and thirst, and his exploration on a separate developmental process of mature narcissism can explain the motivation, energy, and possibility of psychological and spiritual development. Fifth, Kohut's implicit understanding of religion and spirituality, and his metaphors, concepts, and theories provide a rough sketch that can explain the concrete process of spiritual and psychological development in interpersonal

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interactions and community. These five major contributions are mutually interconnected and inseparable, and will be explained in detail throughout this chapter.

The Self-*Selfobject* Relationship

The first major contribution of the self psychology for Korean spiritual and psychological development is to facilitate the paradigm shift of images or metaphors of divine-human and human-human relationship through its innovative model of the self-*selfobject* relationship. It also reminds us that spiritual and psychological development is not a self-cultivation or self-transformation without the relationships and interactions in isolated setting. It needs family members, significant others, and community. Koreans have two opposite images of interpersonal relationships, hierarchical and horizontal. The Korean cultural value of *jeong*, empathic care and love, represents mutual, equal interactions between family members or friends. The Korean word, *woo-jeong*, literally means friend and *jeong*, which means *jeong* between friends. In Korea, friends are close people who share *jeong*, love, and even sacrifice, but Koreans tend to befriend those who are in the same age in most cases. The Korean language has honorific form of speech, thus only friends in same age can speak each other in very informal form of speech. If a friend is older, she or he usually speaks in honorific forms.

On the other hand, however, Koreans have the image of divine-human, and human-human relationship, which is vertical, detached relationship between persons who are in different social order and status. For example, people have the image or metaphor of parent-child, teacher-student, pastor-parishioner, and God-human relationships as vertical and hierarchical. People usually do not share *jeong*, as they would between friends, *woo-jeong*, in these relationships. The Confucian understanding of the divine or ultimate, beyond human beings and nature, has

influenced the Korean concept of God. In Korean Christian mind, God the Father is the most familiar image, metaphor, or model of God among the three Persons of God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Most Christians do not imagine of God as the Mother.

Kohut's self-*selfobject* relationship helps Korean Christians change their paradigm of divine-human relationship from hierarchical, vertical, detached relationship in subject-object dichotomy with a strict father image to horizontal, mutual, interconnected relationship in self-*selfobject* relationship with a more empathic mother or friend image. The new model is the intimate, horizontal relationship originally between psychotherapist and a client. But, it can be a model of ideal, mutual relationship in parent-child, teacher-student, pastor-parishioner, and God-human relationship, which have been understood by Koreans as hierarchical order.

Contemporary psychoanalysis stresses the necessity of constructing a strong, cohesive self structure prior to further psychological and spiritual development, through a dialectic and dynamic formation process which occurs in human relationships from earliest childhood. Contemporary psychoanalytic object relations theorists believe that human motivation for growth is the hunger and desire for intimate, deeper relationships. With this fundamental belief, they share two basic ideas. First, the dynamic relationships of the internalized self and object representations inside the individual's personality are crucial in the formation process of the self structure. Second, it is necessary for human beings to depend on object relations during early childhood for personality development, but children gradually become independent as they grow.

While heavily relying on theories of previous psychoanalysts, Kohut is distinguished from other psychoanalytic thinkers by his different viewpoints from these two conventional ideas of object relations theorists. The idea of the internalized self and object representations often implies that internalization is "virtually a process of swallowing the object whole" and the

"psychologically miniature version" lives inside the personality as a result.[1] On the contrary, Kohut emphasizes that what is internalized is not the miniature version of external relationships but complex "patterns of relatedness" in an interpersonal relationship.[2]

Another distinctive understanding of Kohut is his rejection of the idea of increased independence of the self by claiming that "a move from dependence (symbiosis) to independence (autonomy) is an impossibility and that the developmental moves of normal psychological life must be seen in the changing nature of the relationships between the self and its *selfobject*."[3] Even those who have already accomplished higher levels of psychological development, human beings cannot exist without the continuous presence and support of a *selfobject* matrix.

In his clinical practice during the 1950s and 1960s, Kohut notices a different kind of interpersonal interactions in treating narcissistic patients who are very mature and talented people struggling with problems of self-esteem, emptiness, absence of values to idealize. Kohut reasons that his patients do not have a strong, cohesive self structure, and their self-esteem is very unstable. A key experience of these narcissistic clients is the sense of the "fragmentation of the self."[4] There is a "non-cohesive self" and "a lack of firmness of self-experience and self-definition" among these patients.[5] The "nascent infantile self" is weak and does not have a durable structure, requires the participation of significant others in order to provide a sense of constancy, cohesion, and resilience.[6] They often feel emptiness, depression, and hypochondria as a result. They lack joy and enthusiasm while sensing boredom and deadness.

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[1] James W. Jones, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis & Religion: Transference and Transcendence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 17.

[2] Ibid., 17.

[3] Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52.

[4] Don S. Browning, *Religious Thought and Modern Psychologies: A Critical Analysis in The Theology of Culture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 208.

[5] Ibid., 208.

[6] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 353.

Kohut understands that a major reason of the narcissistic pathology is repetitious failure of parents' empathic response to the needs of their child's self in early childhood, during the pre-Oedipal stage before the age of three. For Kohut, traumatic events are not the causes of later problems, rather "the history of the parents' whole relationship with the child" is a main cause.[7] Kohut says that the mother's joyful and empathic response to the child's activity and presence support "the growth of the self experience as a physical and mental unit which has cohesiveness in space and continuity in time."[8]

In carefully observing the patterns of interactions between these patients and himself as a therapist, Kohut realizes that his patients relate to him in an inappropriate, distorted way. They regard him as if "he were a part of their self" and as if they "invested in themselves 'through' him."[9] Kohut claims that the relationship between his patients and himself is not a self-object relationship but a self-*selfobject* relationship. Kohut defines the self as "the core of our personality," which we acquire through the interplay of surrounding persons and ourselves in early childhood, and *selfobject* as "objects which we experience as a part of our life."[10]

In developing a specific term, *selfobject*, Kohut goes beyond a subject-object dichotomy and dualism that have been a paradigm throughout the history of psychoanalysis. Because of this striking, essential difference between Kohut and the classic psychoanalytic position, Kohut faces strong, often angry, responses from his colleagues. However, as a clinician, Kohut firmly believes his theory, because it is derived from his direct experiences and observations in clinical settings. Freud's psychoanalytic perspective orients us to understand self as "being co-extensive

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[7] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (Madison, CT: International University Press, 1971), 80.

[8] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 214.

[9] Chris R. Schlauch, "The Intersecting-Overlapping Self," 30.

[10] Heinz Kohut and Ernest S. Wolf. "The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 59 (1978): 414.

with the body" and leads us to construe persons "as essentially and ultimately separate from one another."[11] From this perspective, every person is separated from others and free-standing. The problem with this understanding is that therapists may miss many important points in their clinical works, while they are trying to filter all data through the subject-object dichotomy. On the contrary, Kohut notices in his clinical work that "the borders between self and not-self are remarkably permeable and fluid" and a self "crosses interpersonal borders to include other persons."[12]

In his works, Kohut changes the root metaphor of a person from an isolated, autonomous, free-standing person sharply separated from others to a mutually interdependent person with others. Traditional and popular terms, self and object, are complemented by a new term, *selfobject*, which is a combination of characteristics and functions of both self and object. In other words, *selfobject* is an "object which we experience as part of our self."[13] As a result, people often feel that they can control a *selfobject* like they control their bodies.

From the perspective of classic psychoanalysis, ideal and healthy interactions between persons are "spatially represented by drawing distinct, separate circles, with empty space in between," and psychological growth is represented "in terms of shift from overlapping circles toward separate circles."[14] In sharp contrast, a *selfobject* model can be explained as "a Venn diagram of overlapping circles," and psychological development is "the nature of the inherent overlap," rather than movement toward separate circles.[15] Schlauch suggests that the root

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[11] Schlauch, "The Intersecting-Overlapping Self," 33.
[12] Ibid., 33.
[13] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 215.
[14] Schlauch, "The Intersecting-Overlapping Self," 37.
[15] Ibid., 37.

metaphor of Kohut's *selfobject* model is "intersecting-overlapping self," which implies intimacy, mutuality, and interdependence.
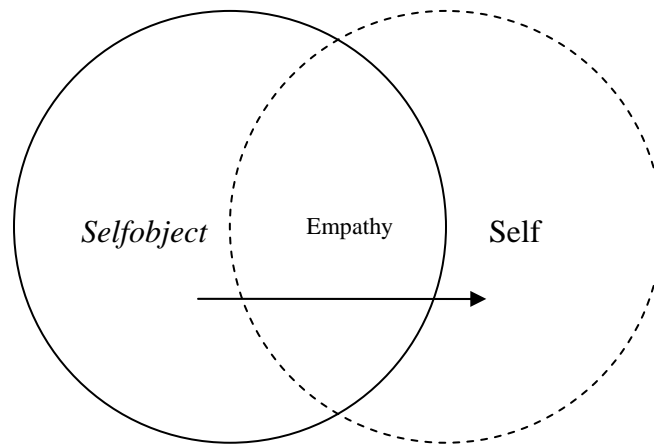

Figure 3. Kohut's Self-*Selfobject* Relationship
The Process of *Transmuting Internalization*
Motivation: Hunger & Desire for Growth & Intimate, Deeper Relationships

The root metaphor of self psychology, "intersecting-overlapping" self describes well the relationship between the client and the therapist in a psychotherapy setting. When transference occurs, the client experiences the therapist as an extension or a part of oneself. Thus, the therapist functions not as a separate object but as a *selfobject* for the patient. In this intersubjective relationship, the client internally experiences the situation as if there is only one self in the room, though there are two persons and selves.

In explaining the concrete process of strengthening self for Korean Christians, self psychology's foundational contribution is its radical change of the model of human relationships from subject-object dichotomy to self-*selfobject* interdependence. The self-*selfobject* interactions, with the help of visual image of two circles placed horizontally with intersecting-overlap area between them, can change the fixed, unconscious model of human-human, human-divine

relationships in Korean mind as hierarchical, over-the-top relationships according to social

hierarchy such as old-young, parent-child, teacher-student, and pastor-parishioner. In this

metaphor, the abuse of power or power inequality is accepted as natural and taken for granted. If

the fixed model of hierarchical relationship is changed, it is easier to understand psychological

development of the self in early childhood and spiritual development throughout the lifetime can

be understood as an interdependent dynamic process in human-human and human-divine

relationships. In addition, this new metaphor also helps to realize that the self-*selfobject*

relationship is not to increase independence, autonomy, and finally separation but to change the

nature, quality, and pattern of relationship between the self and *selfobject* throughout the lifetime.

The Process of *Transmuting Internalization*

The second major contribution of self psychology for Korean spiritual and psychological

development is its notion of *transmuting internalization*, which explains the process of the flow

of certain psychic enzyme such as empathy and *jeong* between *selfobject* and self in order to

strengthen the self structure without destroying the original program or characteristics of the self.

The flow process is originally between the psychotherapist and the client in the therapy setting,

but the self-*selfobject* relationship and the process of *transmuting internalization* can be extended

to other intimate relationships such as parent-infant, teacher-child, and divine-human

relationships. Kohut's two concepts provide sound psychological explanation on intrapsychic

and interpersonal dynamics, which is supportive for spiritual and psychological development.

Kohut's notion of the process of *transmuting internalization* that occurs between the self

and *selfobject* is a crucial idea that penetrates Kohut's works. It is a particular and necessary

intrapsychic process through which a certain psychic enzyme, as a source of power for change

and growth, can be slowly and gradually transferred into the weak self structure. It is the area

that FDT cannot explain clearly, though later version of FDT briefly mentions the importance of

earliest interactions in infant-parent relationship.

In developing this notion, Kohut credits Freud's article, "Mourning and Melancholia"

(1917), as a precursor of his idea.[16] In his article, Freud provides a fascinating explanation of the

gradual working-through process of mourning in which the cathexes are gradually being

withdrawn from the object imago. Kohut applies Freud's original idea to his theory of self-

selfobject relationship in which the healthy functions of the *selfobject* are gradually, piece by

piece, integrated into the self in order to strengthen the self structure. *Selfobject* functions are

gradually transformed or transmuted into the self structure, while the self maintains its unique

characteristics as originally programmed.[17]

In Kohut's notion of *transmuting internalization*, two fundamental values are grounded:

optimism about human nature, and pseudo-religious soteriology for healing a fragmented self

structure. First, Kohut's perspective is basically optimistic because he assumes that human

beings share an innate human ability and motivation for growth and a "healthy biological

apparatus" that can utilize surrounding sources for survival.[18] He asserts that "the psychic

apparatus must be ready" for the formation process of self structure.[19] In another place, he points

out that the self has "maturation-directed needs" in order to facilitate the process of *transmuting*

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[16] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 50.
[17] Ibid., 165.
[18] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 77.
[19] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 49.

internalization for building self structure.[20] Kohut calls the preparation stage as "basic intuneness" between the self and *selfobject*.[21]

Second, Kohut's self psychology also includes pseudo-religious soteriology for healing. He explains the active roles of therapists as those of "prophet, savior, and redeemer" whose supported existence makes it possible for the patients to experience a gradual integration of the therapist's healthy functions and to build up a new self structure.[22] Kohut's language is quite religious, and his theory is implicitly related to the Jewish and Christian doctrine of the process of salvation. He was both Jewish and Christian.

Browning claims that modern psychologies contain implicit deep metaphors, which are equivalent of "the metaphors of ultimacy" in world religions.[23] These metaphors provide psychologies "images of the fundamental possibilities of life," which convey "a set of basic beliefs about what can be expected from life and hoped for in life."[24] Browning points out that Kohut has metaphors of interpersonal and intergenerational harmony and redemption, which are foundational metaphors of Judaism and Christianity.[25]

The metaphor of redemption in self psychology points to a "resource at the depth of life from which energies flow that will revitalize, recreate, and restore broken lives to former states of wholeness."[26] Self psychology implicitly assumes the wholeness of the infant at the moment of birth or creation, while also acknowledging the brokenness of the self, which should be restored to the former, original state of wholeness or completeness. For this restoring, strengthening process of the self, the patient need therapist's help, support, and sharing of his or

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[20] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?,* 71.
[21] Ibid., 70.
[22] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 165.
[23] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 203.
[24] Ibid., 204.
[25] Ibid., 209.
[26] Ibid., 236.

her healthy psychic functions. This resource can be delivered through the process of *transmuting internalization*. Thus, the patient experience redemption through the work of the therapists who play the roles of savior, redeemer, and prophet. Browning says that self psychology can provide "positive sources available in the organism to guide life in the beginning, and these same forces through therapy and other interventions can be unleashed to restore life when it is broken."

However, these metaphors of harmony and redemption in self psychology miss the important metaphors "analogous to those of God as governor," which is metaphors "that point to those deep resources and demands stemming from the depth of life that make moral claims and provide moral supports to the life of moral seriousness."[27] Browning further claims that modern psychologies have quasi-religious metaphors, but they are "noticeably devoid of both metaphors of moral seriousness and metaphors of grace."[28]

Kohut explains that the prerequisite for the beginning of the formation process of *transmuting internalization* is "basic intuneness" between self and *selfobject*. It is a process of basic trust and friendship. The self must be prepared to accept the presence and role of *selfobject* and to begin the process. Kohut assumes that the self has a relatively strong motivation and will to actively participate in the long healing process.

In the process of building basic intuneness, the failure of *selfobject* response is necessary so that the self can experience frustration and disappointment with the quality and ability of the idealized *selfobject*. Kohut names this process "optimal frustration."[29] In the therapeutic relationship between a therapist (*selfobject*) and a patient (self), the therapist's understanding and explanation is frustrating to the patient because the therapist does not behave in accordance with

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[27] Ibid., 209.
[28] Ibid., 209.
[29] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 50.

the patient's needs and expectations, though the therapist's understanding and recognition of the

client may be quite correct.[30] It is named "optimal frustration" because the degree of frustration

is not traumatic and the communication of the therapist to the patient follows the patient's needs

and expectations.[31]

After the "basic intuneness" is established between self and *selfobject* and "optimal

frustration" is experienced by the self, the gradual, self-formation process of *transmuting*

internalization begins. But, this process can begin only when the patient experiences that enough

empathy from the therapist is available so that the patient can breathe sufficient air for

development and growth. Thus, empathy is a necessary condition for the process of *transmuting*

internalization and of the formation of self structure.

Kohut defines empathy as "the mode by which one gathers psychological data about

other people and . . . imagines their inner experience even though it is not open to direct

observation."[32] For him, the foundational work for our capacity to gain access to another's inner

emotions is grounded in our early childhood when the behaviour and feelings of our mothers are

transmitted into our self structure.[33] When a child does not have sufficient and emphatic

responses from the primary caregiver, the child grows up with a deficiency in that he or she

cannot recognize emotion, in self or others. Empathy experienced in early childhood prepares us

to recognize our own and others' basic inner feelings.

Kohut has changed his understanding of empathy as he has developed his psychology of

the self. In his early works, empathy is defined as a device for information-gathering. Later,

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[30] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?,* 103.
[31] Ibid., 103.
[32] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship Between Mode of Observation and Theory (1959)," in *The Search For the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978*, vol. 1, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International University Press, 1978c), 450.
[33] Ibid., 451.

Kohut expands the meaning of empathy to "a powerful emotional bond between people" and "a real saving power (i.e. like oxygen)" that includes both cognitive and emotional aspects.[34] Kohut's later definition of empathy is almost identical to the meaning of *jeong* and friendship. Thus, the hope for healing and salvation is in "re-established empathic closeness to responsive self-objects."[35] Without empathy, people cannot survive even a moment of their lives.

With the work of empathy in self-*selfobject* relationships, a gradual, dialectic, and dynamic process of *transmuting internalization* begins: "little by little, as a result of innumerable processes of microinternalization, the anxiety-assuaging, delay-tolerating, and other realistic aspects of the analyst's image become part of the analysand's psychological equipment."[36] The process is like the ingestion of foreign protein or psychic enzyme throughout one's life in order to maintain one's body.[37] As a result of the process, there is a gradual shift from the self "relying for its nutrition on archaic modes of contact in the narcissistic sphere" to the self's "ability to be sustained most of the time by the empathic resonance that emanates from the *selfobject* of adult life."[38]

In explaining the process of *transmuting internalization* and of the formation of the self structure, Kohut addresses two crucial points. First, the therapeutic process of *transmuting internalization* does not have an ability to create a totally new self structure. Second, the process does not grant the self absolute freedom and independence from self-*selfobject* relationships. The process of *transmuting internalization* is not creation *ex nihilo*. "The basic program of the

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[34] Peter J. Gorday, "The Self Psychology of Heinz Kohut: What's It All About Theologically?" *Pastoral Psychology* 48, no. 6 (2000): 458-459.

[35] Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International University Press, 1977), 281.

[36] Ibid., 32.

[37] Kohut and Wolf, "The Disorders of the Self," 416.

[38] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 70.

personality" that was laid down in early childhood cannot be changed.[39] Rather, the process

gradually fills the deficiency of the self and strengthens the existing structure. Even after the self

structure becomes stronger, the increased strength does not allow the self to be completely free

from self-*selfobject* relationships. Kohut claims that "the need for, and the experience of,

imagoes used for the creation and sustenance of the self undergoes a lifelong maturation,

development, and change."[40]

It is an ongoing, life-long process of formation and transformation. Kohut's emphasis on

the ongoing process of development and maturation is a fascinating idea and a potential source

for understanding Korean spiritual and psychological development. Kohut believes that for those

who have already achieved a healthy self structure, there is always a next step in a *selfobject*

matrix.

Self-*Selfobject* Relationship and Friendship

The third major contribution of self psychology, with the help of McFague's model of

God, is realizing Korean Christians' excessive idealization and adherence to Western ideal of

freedom, independence, and individual rights, and emphasizing the value of mutual, equal

interactions in divine-human and human-human relationships for contemporary Korean spiritual

and psychological development. In the process of Westernization, secularization, and

globalization, young contemporary Koreans have a crucial misunderstanding that Western

culture generally and American culture specifically is the culture in which people live in the

condition of complete freedom, independence, or separation without struggling with the issues of

relational boundaries and power dynamics. However, people in American culture are also

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[39] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?,* 100.
[40] Ibid., 193.

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longing for mutual interactions, friendship, and community, while there is a tendency of valuing individual rights and independence.

Kohut's innovative new model of self-*selfobject* relationship is supported and further embellished by a pioneering work of a theologian, Sallie McFague, who goes way beyond the traditional model of God and of the divine-human relationships. Sallie McFague is one of the earliest female and feminist theologians in the U.S. She had her theological education at Yale during the 1950s and 1960s. She taught at Vanderbilt University Divinity School for thirty years from 1970 to 2000, and was Dean of the Divinity School from 1975 to 1980. Initially, she had an academic interest in literary, developed new models for God as Friend, and later developed and focused on the ecological model of God. In her later work, she views the world as the body of God, and provides ethical implications of the ecological model for Christians and faith communities.

McFague sees understanding and explaining God beyond human language, and the best way we can explain God is through metaphors. She entered into Biblical theology and studied Jesus' parables and the metaphor and theology in them, and realized that the kingdom or rule of God is the root metaphor for Christianity. She argues that God as Father is not a root metaphor of Christianity, thus it is possible to change the metaphor of God without jeopardizing the essence of Christian theology and teaching. Indeed, she believes that paradigm shift in the metaphor of God is needed to better grasp the genuine meaning of God and the quality of the God-human and human-human relationship in contemporary world.

When metaphors endure over time, they become models. Models should be continually re-evaluated and revised. McFague claims that the traditional model of God as Father, which has lasted for a long time without question in Christianity, became an idol. McFague says:

Among the criteria advanced for theological models are two of special significance of the issues of idolatry and irrelevance. The first is the necessity for many complementary models to intimate the richness and complexity of the divine-human relationship. If this criterion is not accepted, idolatry results. The second is the ability of the major models of a tradition to cope with anomalies. If this criterion cannot be met, irrelevance occurs. The issues of idolatry and irrelevance come together in the image of God as father, for more than any other dominant model in Christianity, this one has been both absolutized by some and, in recent times, found meaningless by others. The feminist critique of God as father centers on the *dominance* of this one model to the exclusion of others, and on the *failure* of this model to deal with the anomaly presented by those whose experience is not included in this model.[41]

McFague, in her *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987), stresses the importance of proposing and explaining new models or metaphors of God for understanding intimate, dynamic relationship between God and human beings for contemporary Christians, which can be the foundation for contemporary people's ongoing spiritual and psychological development. McFague explains that traditional images of God such as father, king, and master need to be complemented by other aspects of God such as friend, mother, and lover, though she does not intend to suppress or abolish the traditional images. The traditional images of God are the images that contemporary Korean Christians still have.

According to McFague, there is a deficiency in the traditional metaphors of God in explaining closeness, relatedness, intimacy, and mutuality, for which many people in the contemporary society have been longing. Dominant metaphors, on the contrary, imply "a sense of distance" and separation between God and human beings or subject and object by stressing the transcendence, domination, and omnipotence of God.[42] From the traditional images of God, it is impossible to explain the dynamic relationship between God and human beings.

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[41] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 145.

[42] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 85.

Despite strong influences of dominant models of God in Western societies, McFague affirms that "God is present in and to the world as the kind of other, the kind of Thou, is much closer to a mother, lover, or friend than to a king or lord." These three models, however, are long-forgotten metaphors in the Judeo-Christian tradition.[43] McFague also firmly believes that all three models of God suggest "forms of fundamental intimacy, mutuality, and relatedness" that might be "a rich resource for expressing how in our time life can be supported and fulfilled rather than destroyed."[44]

Among these three models, the metaphor of God as Friend especially highlights the sustaining, immanent presence of God. God as Friend indicates God's faithful companioning like a best friend in difficult moments in our lives. McFague explains the major characteristics of friendship in the following ways[45]: First, friendship is "the most free" and "the strongest" among human relationship. Friendship is formed though "free choice in a reciprocal relationship" and freedom is "at the center of its power and mystery." Second, in a mature friendship, friends share some "common interests" and "common visions or projects" such as the covenant between God and Israel. Third, friendship is "the most inclusive" relationship among others. Although people often think that friendship is between two equal persons, a person can be friends "with anyone across the barriers of gender, race, class, nationality, age, [and] creed." Thus, mutual, equal interactions between God and human beings are possible for continuous spiritual growth. Fourth, mutuality, especially "mutual responsibility" and "mutual interdependence," is essential for friendship. Fifth, friendship between God and human beings has a vision for salvation, which is a

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[43] Ibid., 83-84.
[44] Ibid., 85.
[45] Ibid., 159-175.

co-operation between God's work and human responsibility. Salvation requires human beings' long-term commitment.

Thus, McFague asserts, friendship asks for "the most response from us, is the most adult, the most egalitarian, and the most demanding."[46] And, the essence of friendship is "neither dependence nor independence but interdependence."[47] Here we hear the echoes of Kohut's metaphor of the self-*selfobject* relationship, which can be described as an intersecting-overlapping self. Just as McFague shifts the metaphor of God from king, father, and master to friend, Kohut also changes the root metaphor of a person from an isolated, autonomous, free-standing person sharply separated from others to a mutually interdependent person with others. The traditional and popular terms, self and object, are complemented by a new term, *selfobject*, which is a combination of characteristics and functions of both self and object. *Selfobject* is an "object which we experience as part of our self."[48]
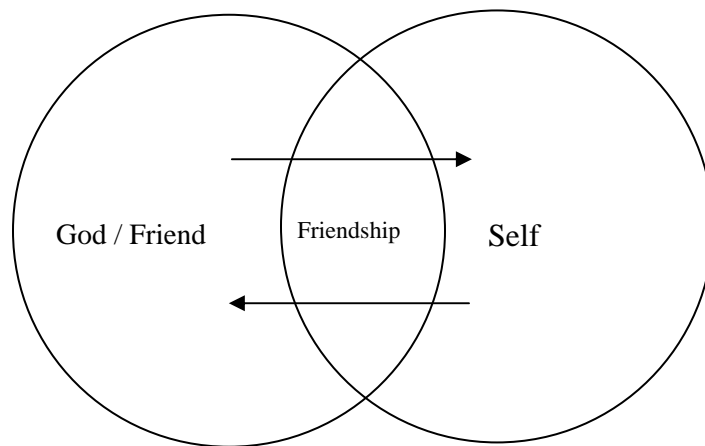

Figure 4. McFague's Model of Divine-Human Dynamics
Motivation: Hunger and Desire for Intimate, Mutual, Interdependent Relationship

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[46] Ibid., 179.
[47] Ibid., 179.
[48] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 215.

Kohut's expanded notion of empathy as a psychological bond and psychological nutriment can provide a good explanation of the person and the relationship with God and others. The concept of *selfobject* describes well the relationship between a person (self) and God (*selfobject*).[49] In this relationship, a person can experience and engage God not only as an Object or a Subject, who is separated from a person, but also as a *Selfobject*, who is a separate entity but intersecting-overlapping with the person. Thus, a person can receive God's attributes, which is originally external to oneself, into the inside of oneself through the process of "transmuting internalization." The concept of *selfobject* also explains the ultimate interdependence of a person with others that are essential for growth and survival of the self. Growth and well-being occur "not within an isolated individual but in the in-between" persons, in the intersecting-overlapping area.[50]

Self psychological understanding of empathy and self-*selfobject* relationship has an implicit theological statement: human beings should act empathically and love others because they received "capacity and responsibility to act empathically" by being created in God's image.[51] Human beings have the image of God because God shares attributes of God with human beings through *transmuting internalization* in intersecting-overlapping self-*selfobject* relationships. God provides empathy and love for human beings and exhibits an example of

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[49] Chris R. Schlauch, *Faithful Companioning: HowPastoral Counseling Heals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 66.

[50] Ibid., 72.

[51] Chris R. Schlauch, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 44, no.1 (1990): 16.

"how we are to relate to others and to God."[52] Thus, human beings have a life-long responsibility and commitment to love God and others.

Interestingly, Kohut's expanded meaning of empathy and *selfobject* share key points with McFague's understanding of friendship as mutual responsibility and interdependence. Similarly, the implicit ethical statement of Kohut's theory is that: "persons are to act empathically."[53] One's empathic love for others is necessary for others' survival and well-being, and one also cannot survive without others' empathic love. McFague's understanding that friends share common interests, visions, or projects in a mature relationship has a parallel message in the implicit theological statement in Kohut's empathy: human beings should act empathically and love others because of their inherited capacity and responsibility. God and human beings share a common vision, that is, to love others as God loves human beings.

The role of empathy for survival, well-being, and growth of human beings echoes friendship's vision for salvation. McFague understands that friendship between God and human beings has a vision for salvation, which is a co-operative work between God's initial work and human responsibility. Human beings, who have God's attributes, should reflect God's love (like a mirror) for human beings to others. McFague's understanding of friendship as "the most free" and "the strongest" among human relationship is same as Kohut's expanded understanding of empathy as "a powerful psychological bond" and "psychological nutriment" between individuals. In addition, Kohut's concept of *selfobject* in a broad sense, family members, relatives, friends, political and religious leaders, and god, is similar to McFague's understanding of friendship, which is "the most inclusive" relationship "with anyone across the barriers of gender, race, class,

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[52] Ibid., 17.
[53] Ibid., 16.

nationality, age, [and] creed." Thus, Kohut's self-*selfobject* model and McFague's metaphor of God as Friend have related messages.

Kohut has a positive understanding of human fulfillment because he assumes that there will be no problems and struggles if a person has a cohesive, firm, and healthy self, by focusing on the problems of early child development.[54] Although Kohut's theory provides "the developmental precursors to the adult self," according to Browning, he leads us to have an attitude to "reduce all adolescent, young adult, and adult problems to early childhood problems" without considering socio-cultural aspects as crucial causes of the formation of mental problems.[55]

As a psychoanalytically-trained clinician whose primary interest is in the early, pre-Oedipal stage of self-formation, Kohut has little interest in later parts of self-development, and in "the problems left over after a generally high degree of self-cohesion has been accomplished."[56] Browning interprets that Kohut's theory does not "carry the concept of the self, in any major way, into an encounter with cultural objects, ideologies, faiths, and figures."[57] Thus, Kohut's theory would have difficulty addressing enlightenment or the conversion experiences of famous religious figures as adults by their encounter with religious messages.[58] In addition, Kohut's psychology of the self is also not as comprehensive as Erik Erikson's concept of identity and does not include both "the self in its archaic formations" and "the self in its sociological self-definitions," though Kohut's understanding of the self implies a relational, social self.[59]

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[54] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 219.
[55] Ibid., 219.
[56] Ibid., 218-219.
[57] Ibid., 214.
[58] Ibid., 214.
[59] Ibid., 212.

Like Kohut, McFague also has a positive understanding of human beings, though in a different way. McFague's understanding of friendship may automatically assume that persons have a cohesive, healthy self structure to make friendships and fulfill one's responsibility in human relationships. In her explanation of friendship, McFague points out that friendship asks for "the most response from us, is the most adult, the most egalitarian, and the most demanding."[60]

It seems that McFague's concept of friendship cannot be applied in many cases: How can a person without a strong self structure build friendships with God and others, which are "the most free" relationships? How can a person with an unhealthy self share a common vision or project with God and others? How can a person with a fragmented self cooperatively work with God for salvation of oneself and others? How can an immature person accomplish a mature responsibility?

However, there is no sharp boundary between psychology and theology, though it seems that each discipline works at opposite sides of the spectrum. As Kohut's metaphor of the self-*selfobject* relationship describes, there is an intersecting-overlapping area between theology and psychology. We have noticed that McFague's metaphor of God as Friend has psychological implication for further mental health and spiritual development through mutual interdependence, support, and responsibility.

Browning is a strong advocate for this position. He affirms that there is "an ethic of generative mutuality and care" in Kohut's psychology.[61] According to Browning, Kohut presents ideas of generativity and moral obligation as crucial indicators of mental health. Healthy human beings naturally have a motivation of providing care for their children. But, it is not simply an

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[60] McFague, *Models of God*, 179.
[61] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 206.

ethic of generativity but "an ethic of generative *mutuality*" because there is the "interlocking needs of the cycle of the generations."[62]

It is important to note that Kohut's psychology is "a theory of healthy morality" because Kohut thinks that it is not only "morally good for us to work on behalf of the younger generation" but also "good to do this in such a way as to be fed by our own innermost tendency to do so."[63] In this sense, Kohut's theory is moving from a psychological theory toward an ethical and quasi-religious realm. For this reason, Browning labels Kohut's psychology, along with Erikson's, "the culture of care," which includes both love of oneself and love for the other.[64] Schlauch supports Browning's position by mentioning that "love of others can proceed only from a self who has internalized the love of others in a firm capacity of love of self."[65] This message is the same as Christianity's teaching: "love your neighbors as yourself." Thus, Kohut's psychology implicitly includes ethical and religious statements and helps us understand the psychological infrastructure of Christian love.

These religious and ethical statements are similar to the message of Christianity. McFague points out that the metaphor of God as Friend was widespread among early Christian mystics who enjoyed the nearness and presence of God through meditative exercises such as prayers.[66] The mystics shared common visions, interests, and projects with God through lifelong commitment, responsibility, and work as Kohut's metaphor of the self-*selfobject* relationship, intersecting-overlapping, describes. Through lifelong self-*selfobject* relationship between them and God, they pursued not only spiritual but also maybe psychological human development and

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[62] Ibid., 228.
[63] Ibid., 229.
[64] Ibid., 6.
[65] Schlauch, *Faithful Companioning*, 74.
[66] McFague, *Models of God*, 160.

fulfillment. In other words, the mystics pursued a more mature and higher level of human fulfillment. In McFague's metaphor of God as Friend, there is a quasi-psychological theory of human development and fulfillment.

Kohut's concept of *selfobjects* and McFague's metaphor of God as Friend expand a therapeutic, healing environment from a limited, exclusive relationship between two persons (therapist and client or two close friends) to wider, inclusive relationships between a person and many surrounding *selfobjects* (or friends). Thus, there is a vision for a supportive community for the well-being and survival of human beings. Kohut sees that there are many possible *selfobjects* that exist and function to mirror persons' basic needs and values, such as God, friends, clergy, family, relatives, members of a community, etc.[67]

Both Kohut and McFague have an implicit vision for both lifelong psychological human development and spiritual growth in "a *selfobject* matrix."[68] Human beings have *selfobject* needs throughout their lives. For both of them, psychological development is not a movement from "overlapping circles toward separate circles."[69] Rather, human development, whether psychological or spiritual, is the transformation of "quality" and "nature of the inherent overlap."[70]

Both the metaphors of God as Friend and self-*selfobject* relationship imply the nearness and presence of *Selfobject* (God) in human lives. Through lifelong relationship between God and human beings, we can pursue both spiritual and psychological development. Personal religious maturation, through self-*selfobject* relationship with God and transmuting internalization of it, involves "increasing empathy for others" and becoming "more meaningful *selfobjects* with and

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[67] Schlauch, "The Intersecting-Overlapping Self," 39.
[68] Ibid., 39.
[69] Ibid., 37.
[70] Ibid., 38.

for others."[71] Thus, there is also a vision for both personal growth and social change through empathy for others.

Dynamics of Narcissism and Shame

The fourth major contribution is that Kohut's self psychology provides an in-depth exploration on the relationship between narcissism and shame, and the metaphors of hunger, thirst, and longing of narcissistic people, which explain the motivation, energy, and possibility of psychological and spiritual development. As a concrete example, Kohut provides a separate developmental-stage-like process of mature and healthier narcissism for those who have already developed a cohesive self structure: creativity, empathy, transience, humor, and wisdom. Narcissistic people's experiences of hunger, thirst, loneliness, and shame can facilitate their inner desire and longing for psychological health and spiritual growth through the process of *transmuting internalization* in the self-*selfobject* relationship between God and human beings.

In exploring narcissism, Kohut focused on the emotion and dynamics of shame. It is deeply rooted in pre-Oedipal period, before the age of three. The axis of narcissistic personality is not the emotion of guilt but the emotion of shame. In *The Restoration of the Self* (1977), Kohut explains the dynamics of narcissism in early childhood. Infants regard themselves as the center of the world, and every person and everything around them as extensions of themselves. At one moment, however, infants suddenly and repeatedly discover the reality that the world around them does not always exist only for them and they are not the center of the world. With this realization, infants experience narcissistic injury and activate defensive mechanism called

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[71] Ibid., 39.

splitting, which eventually cause the emergence of two different parts of the self: the grandiose self and the depleted self.

The grandiose self experiences exaggerated feeling of one's own greatness and importance, while the depleted self experiences the bitter, painful emotions of humiliation, shame, and worthlessness. The grandiose self is a defense against "the deflating experience of discovering that one is not the center of reality, while the depleted self is "an exaggerated response to narcissistic injury" and "an overreaction to the blow that one has sustained to what was perfectly healthy narcissism."[72] Kohut calls these defensive responses secondary narcissism. Even those who have acquired healthy self structure in early years cannot avoid secondary narcissism. It is much more severe for those who have not acquired healthy self structure in early childhood.

Kohut and Earnest S. Wolf, in their article "The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline," use the metaphor of hunger in describing the painful experience of a narcissistic person. These people suffer from inner emptiness and depletion. They experience intense hunger and thirst for mirroring, idealizing, and twinship relationships. They have a thirst for a *selfobject* who empathically responds to them with confirmation and admiration (mirroring). They are in search of people whom they can respect and admire for their power, intelligence, beauty, and prestige (idealizing). These people are also hungry for a supportive relationship with a *selfobject* who can confirm the existence, appearance, performance, values, and opinions of the self (twinship).[73] Given the metaphor of hunger and thirst in narcissistic personality, as Capps

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[72] Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 28.
[73] Ibid., 32.

points out, it is not surprising that "one of the more prominent pathologies of our times is the eating disorder."[74]

Kohut uses several terms such as the tragic self and the depleted self in describing the painful emotions and the conditions of the self. Kohut calls narcissistic personality the tragic self because the self does not really feel the emotion of guilt but a deep, painful, enduring emotion of shame.[75] Kohut also names narcissistic personality the depleted self when he emphasizes the long-term impact of the emotion of shaming in a person's life. He explains that the depletion of the self is a milder form of pathology than the fragmentation of the self. The patients who experience the depletion of the self are described as "subtly experienced, yet pervasive feelings of emptiness and depression."[76] They seem to have dulled or not fully real emotions. They also looked as if they live and work without passion and zest.

There is a consensus among theorists and clinicians that the dynamics of shame is at the center of narcissism. Shame is a heavy, complex, and painful human emotion. It is "a dead weight of not-good-enoughness" we feel about ourselves.[77] Shame is a killer of our joy and happiness. Shame has diverse forms and styles such as healthy shame, unhealthy shame, individual shame, and social shame just as narcissism has both immature and mature forms. Shame has both positive and negative aspects. Unhealthy shame destroys joy, creative powers, and passion, while healthy shame reminds us that our emotion of inferiority is "a sure sign of our superiority" and "our feeling of unworthiness testify to our great worth."[78]

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[74] Ibid., 33.
[75] Kohut, *Restoration*, 224-225.
[76] Kohut, *Analysis*, 16.
[77] Lewis B. Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 3-4.
[78] Ibid., 31.

Shame has an individual dimension. Shame is a painful experience of a self-deficiency when human beings fail to live up to one's own ideals, expectations, and values.[79] The most common and worst experience of the painful emotion of shame is not being humiliated by others in public, but "disappointing or betraying ourselves."[80] Shame also leads us to a life of isolation from others with the deep emotion of loneliness and emptiness. Shame is closely related to depression – the experiences of hopelessness and loss.

Shame also has a social dimension, especially in relation to the culture that highly values the honor of a family or a group such as Korean and Japanese cultures. Social shame is the shame when we experience pain of being rejected, refused, despised, or disgraced by our own people – by members of a family, local community, and a faith community.[81] Social shame is not experiencing grace from our own people. It is the shame we feel when we are not respected as a human being. When we are rejected by a person close to us, the emotion of shame becomes deeper and more severe.

This type of shame is often experienced by parents who are not proud of their own children. When a child is shameful or behaves shamefully in light of the social norms and rules of a family or a community, the parents "take the child's shame on themselves" and then they "inject their child with a double dosage of shame."[82] Some parents often let the child feel unwanted and unloved, while other parents do not show any joy in raising the child or in taking responsibility for the child. Similar dynamics happens in faith communities, which are supposed to be places where participants experience grace and courage; yet members often experience judgment, discouragement, and shame in interpersonal dynamics in a faith community.

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[79] Capps, *Depleted Self*, 72.
[80] Ibid., 76.
[81] Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, 53.
[82] Ibid., 57.

In the complex, deeper emotion of shame, there is also a spiritual dimension. Spiritual shame is a healthy shame that is useful for continuous spiritual growth. In the hymns, prayers, and teachings of religions such as Christianity, there is a language of shame. Many expressions make people feel overwhelmed, unworthy, empty, or disgusted. Human beings often experience spiritual shame by feeling smallness, weakness, and dependence in contrast to God's Divinity – God's vastness and infinity.

We also experience spiritual shame when we experience God's Humanity – God's grace, love, care, friendship, and companionship manifested in the sacrificial life of Jesus – in comparison to egoism and selfishness of our own lives. Spiritual shame is "a painful feeling of unacceptability" in contrast to God's attributes.[83] Spiritual shame is also "the price" we must pay "for experiencing the friendship of the Human God."[84] In experiencing God's Divinity and Humanity, people often feel dissatisfaction about the gap between who they are and who they mean to be. However, "the very pain is the onset of healing" for "grace overcomes the contrast and makes [people] feel worthy than if [they] had never felt the shame."[85]

Fowler, Lewis B. Smedes, and Donald Capps claim the necessity of Divine grace in relation to the emotion of shame and narcissism, which is the certain psychic enzyme or foreign protein that can be transmitted into the self structure. Kohut does not explicitly claim that God's grace is the certain psychic enzyme that can be transmuted into self structure through the self-*selfobject* interactions between God and human beings. Fowler asserts "to embrace our pain and woundedness is prerequisite to genuine acceptance of grace and the transformation of healing."[86]

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[83] Ibid., 51.
[84] Ibid., 50.
[85] Ibid., 51.
[86] Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 90.

Grace, "the grace of God and the grace medicated through the love and acceptance of humans" is the "antidote to and the healing power of shame."[87]

Smedes also points out that "the healing of our shame begins best with a spiritual experience of grace."[88] The shame-producing mechanism in contemporary society is the huge impact of "secular culture," "graceless religion," and "unaccepting parents."[89] The only solution is grace for two reasons. First, grace begins a healing process because it helps people "to be accepted without regard to whether we are acceptable."[90] Second, grace is a free gift even in today's consumerist society. There is no payment for grace. It is the gift of "being accepted before we become acceptable."[91] With grace, people can experience joy, which is the ultimate alternative to the emotion of shame.

Donald Capps sees the best possible solution for healing is through a dynamic, intimate, and supportive relationship in a genuine community of faith. It is the experience of acceptance and grace in a faith community. In the community, participants live "bonding in love."[92] In the genuine community, "the unbalanced, asymmetrical relationship based on the bond of shame" where "one individual's inner self is judged to be inherently inferior to that of the other" is completely replaced by "relationships based on the bond of love, where each inner self is beautiful to the eyes of the other."[93] The hunger of the depleted self is the hunger for "loving and being loved – mutual mirroring of selves."[94] Narcissistic repair is "a lifelong project" through

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[87] Ibid., 90.
[88] Smedes, *Shame and Grace,* 105.
[89] Ibid., 107.
[90] Ibid., 107-108.
[91] Ibid., 108.
[92] Capps, *Depleted Self*, 165.
[93] Ibid., 165.
[94] Ibid., 168.

interpersonal dynamics in a genuine community in order to "restore self-esteem that was experienced in the early months of infancy."[95]

Kohut himself develops a separate developmental line of mature, healthy narcissism for those who have already achieved a relatively healthy self structure. Kohut's separate developmental stages are particularly appealing in explaining continuous psychological and even spiritual development. In part II of his article, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," Kohut provides detailed explanation on a developmental-stage-like model of human growth, the transformation of narcissism. In using Kohut's own terms that reflects his own time, the five stages are: 1) "man's creativity" (creativity), 2) "his ability to be empathic" (empathy), 3) "his capacity to contemplate his own impermanence" (tolerance or transience), 4) "his sense of humor" (humor), and 5) "his wisdom" (wisdom).[96]

First, Kohut believes that human beings have an innate motivation and will to participate in the process of growth, driven by ideals and ambitions: "our ideals are our internal leaders; we love them and are longing to reach them . . . [and] we are driven by our ambitions, we do not love them."[97] Thus, we behave and live according to the direction of ideals and ambitions, especially in our youth. Our desire for acclaim and fame lead us to prepare ourselves with education and training, and to actively participate in creative activities and career building processes.

Kohut examines the direct relationship between narcissism and creativity. The narcissism of creative people, especially narcissistic energies, actively participates in their creative activities, which drive them towards acclaim and fame. Thus, creative activities themselves are

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[95] Ibid., 25.
[96] Heinz Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978*, vol. 1, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International University Press, Inc., 1978): 446.
[97] Ibid., 437-438.

transformations of narcissism. Kohut points out that people with unusually high level of creativity show two characteristics. First, their personality is mostly childlike showing simplicity and freshness in their thinking and behavior. Second, creative people are usually "less psychologically separated from his [their] surroundings than the noncreative one."[98] Human beings often feel "indistinctness of internal and external" in relation to "surrounding air, which, as we take it in and expel it, we experience as part of our selves, although we hardly perceive it as long as if forms a part of our external surroundings."[99] Likewise, creative people invest their surroundings that are important for their works with narcissistic energy and love and experience the moment of union with them. Creative scientists and artists often attached or even addicted to their creative works, and try to shape and control it with forces. However, their interactions with the surroundings are not between subject and object.

Second, Kohut explores an ability to be empathic as the transformation of narcissism. Kohut originally defines empathy as a tool that psychoanalysts use for reading clients' thoughts and emotions. Empathy is "the mode by which one gathers psychological data about other people" and "imagines their inner experience" when they share their feelings and thoughts. Basic human ability to access others' mind is laid in earliest childhood through internalizing emotions and behaviors of the mother into the self, which is called primary empathy. The primary empathy of children with their mothers is the precursor of the ability to be empathic in adulthood. However, the original empathy is "increasingly overlayered by nonempathic forms of cognition" which are "attuned to objects that are essentially dissimilar to the self, and its free operation is

[98] Ibid., 447.
[99] Ibid., 448.

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therefore impeded."[100] Thus, recovering the ability to be empathic laid in earliest childhood is a way of transforming the narcissism.

The next two stages of the transformation of narcissism are the recognition and acceptance of human finiteness with humor. Transience and humor have much in common. Kohut points out that our ability to accept impermanence and to behave in accordance with fearful discovery is our greatest psychological accomplishment.[101] He labels this rare gift "a cosmic narcissism" that "has transcended the bounds of the individual" and explains that those who have attained this higher level of narcissism do not show "resignation and hopelessness" but "a quiet pride."[102] Thus, he believes that people who have acquired cosmic narcissism can face their coming death without extreme fear or denial, which is made possible by the sense of humor. Kohut quotes from Freud's essay on humor: humor "has something liberating about it," "has something of grandeur," and is a "triumph of narcissism" and "the victorious assertion of . . . invulnerability."[103]

Highest step in Kohut's stages of narcissistic transformation is that of wisdom; at this stage a person integrates all previous stages of mature narcissism within the self and attains a firm attitude toward life, death, and the world. He talks about the progression "from information through knowledge to wisdom," in which information and knowledge belong to cognition while wisdom "goes beyond the cognitive sphere" though it includes cognition.[104] He defines wisdom as follows: "an amalgamation of the higher processes of cognition with the psychological attitude that accompanies the renouncement of these narcissistic demands" and "an attitude that

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[100] Ibid., 452.
[101] Ibid., 454.
[102] Ibid., 455.
[103] Ibid., 456.
[104] Ibid., 458.

is formed through the integration of the cognitive function with humor, acceptance of transience, and a firmly cathected system of values."[105] The attainment of wisdom usually happens during the later stages of life.

Kohut claims that all of these mature forms of narcissism "have to be linked together to form a new psychological constellation which goes beyond the several emotional and cognitive attributes of which it is made up."[106] Thus, for Kohut, there is another realm that exists outside of the realm of human emotion and cognition. It seems that he talks about religious and spiritual dimensions, though he does not make explicit religious claims. He obviously does not want to admit that he wants to talk about something that moves beyond psychological language. Kohut's idea of continuous growth toward wisdom is not strange to teachings and visions of various religious traditions. His language is psychological, but despite his intensions, the core of his idea is inevitably theological.

Kohut's Implicit Understanding of Religion and Spirituality

Fifth major contribution of Kohut's self psychology is Kohut's metaphors, concepts, and theories that reflect implicit quasi-theological assumptions, which provides a rough sketch for explaining the concrete process of spiritual and psychological development in interpersonal interactions and community.

Kohut's attitude toward religion is quite interesting. He is very careful in addressing religious issues in his works and often uses implicit religious message and language when necessary. In some places, however, he directly reveals his understanding of religion. In his speech at the reception after receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Chicago,

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[105] Ibid., 458.
[106] Ibid., 458.

Kohut delivered to a group of young psychoanalysts a sermon-like reflection on his life and the issue of religion. The title of the speech is "The Future of Psychoanalysis," and Kohut uses an analogy of father and son in describing the relationship between traditional psychoanalysis and his psychology of the self.[107]

In the beginning of the speech, he describes the sad moment of observing Freud's escape from Vienna, which becomes the "germinal point" for his journey toward "professional and scientific future," and his idealization of Freud as a symbolic father and a *selfobject* throughout his life.[108] In his illustration, Kohut employs the analogy of father and son and his notion of the process of *transmuting internalization*. After the death of their father, sons may turn totally away from their father's ideals and values driven by rebellious desire or may integrate the father's goals and teachings into their insight and move toward unexplored regions by their ancestors.

Just as the patient receives the therapist's healthy functions through the process of *transmuting internalization*, the new generations of psychoanalysts need to integrate the predecessors' guiding ideals and values while maintaining their uniqueness. After the analogy, Kohut claims that "if the analyst of the future, or if this or that analyst now, does not share Freud's emphasis on the unmasking of . . . religious values, I see no reason why he should feel either disloyal to Freud or unfaithful to the scientific tenets of psychoanalysts" and "values, like people, are subject to developmental changes."[109] This is Kohut's message for the future direction of psychoanalysis and guiding ideals and values of himself throughout his career in exploring previously uncharted region of religion and spirituality.

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[107] Kohut, "The Future of Psychoanalysis," in *The Search fort the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1953-1978,* vol. 2, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International University Press, 1978b): 663-684.
[108] Ibid., 666.
[109] Ibid., 672.

Kohut does not publicly claim his identity as a Jew and spiritual affinity to the Christian tradition in spite of his interests in and insights on religion. However, close friends and students have noticed his cultural identity as a Jew, his spirit as a Christian, and his deeper religious understanding, which is melted into his key notions and theories of self psychology.[110] Kohut actually attended the Unitarian Church near his home, became a friend of the pastor, and even spoke at the gatherings once in a while.[111] He was also interested in the application of his psychology of the self to the practice of pastoral counseling.

Kohut values religion in terms of its functional and pragmatic aspects in many cases. Kohut claims that the unique function of religion is "to shore up, to hold together, sustain, to make harmonious, to strengthen, man's self"[112] and claims that religion fulfills fundamental needs of the self. Charles B. Strozier points out that Kohut highly values the role of religion in developmental processes in light of his core ideals of self-*selfobject* relationship, empathy, and *transmuting internalization* through which the self experiences 1) idealizing: God and the imago of perfection – "there must be something idealizable, something that nears perfection or that is perfect, something that one wants to live up to, something that lifts one up;" 2) mirroring: God's grace – "there is something given to you, some innate perception of your right to be here and to assert yourself, and that somebody will smile at you and will respond to you and will be in tune with your worthwhileness;" and 3) twinship transferences: Church as a community of same-minded believers.[113]

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[110] Charles B. Strozier, *Heinz Kohut: The Making of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 330.

[111] Ibid., 327.

[112] Ibid., 328. Strozier puts direct quotation marks on this sentence, but strangely he does not indicate exact book title and page number from which he cites it.

[113] Ibid., 329-333.

Kohut's concept of self-*selfobject* relationship, as well as his expanded understanding of empathy can contribute to spirituality and the practice of pastoral counseling by providing a good explanation of a person and his or her relationship with God and others. The concept of *selfobject* describes well the relationship between a person (self) and God (*selfobject*). In this relationship, a person can experience and engage God not only as an Object or a Subject, who is totally separated from a person, but also as a *Selfobject*, who is a separate entity but intersecting-overlapping with the person.

In this intimate relationship, a person can receive God's attributes, which is originally external to oneself, into the inside of oneself though the process of *transmuting internalization*. The concept of *selfobject* also explains the ultimate interdependence of a person with others because *selfobjects* provide a psychological bond and psychological nutriment that are essential for growth and survival of the self.

Kohut stresses that idealizing is a central aspect of religion and of human needs. Idealization is a fundamental human desire to be allowed to merge with a powerful *selfobject* and to acquire safety from the *selfobject*. Kohut explains that "the relationship of the true believer to his God in which the figure of the perfect and omnipotent God, with whom the powerless and humble believer wants to merge, corresponds to the ancient omnipotent self-object, the idealized parent image."[114] Kohut's words sound like Freud but without the negative cast.

If idealizing is a prerequisite for a healing process, mirroring initiates the therapeutic process in which God's grace ("empathy," "protein," or "enzyme") is integrated into the self through the process of transmuting internalization. In explaining the importance of mirroring, Kohut often quotes a line from Eugene O'Neil's *Great God Brown*: "Man is broken. He lives by

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[114] Kohut, *Analysis*, 106.

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meaning. The grace of God is glue."[115] What Kohut implies in explaining mirroring transference

is the availability of God's grace for human beings to meet our needs, to heal our wounds as

mothers protects and secures their children, and to help us go through the formation process of

the self structure. The example of a traditional benediction shows the importance of mirroring in

religion: "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be

gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you

peace."[116]

Kohut claims that religion also fulfills twinship needs by providing a community of

believers through which each participant is understood, supported, and encouraged by others for

further growth. Kohut notices the importance of communal aspect of religion and the role of

ritual in the continuous process of growth throughout lifetime.[117] Interdependence among

members of a faith community is made possible by the shared human ability of empathy. After

the self reestablishes empathic closeness to *selfobjects* and becomes able to love others the

formerly wounded self can become a powerful *selfobject* for others in a faith community.

Kohut's understanding of twinship needs and empathy is consistent with St. Augustine's

understanding of love: "we are able to love . . . only when we have first known love . . . have

experienced being loved and then remembered-in-understanding what this love is."[118]

In his implicit psychological soteriology, Kohut makes three important claims: 1) all

these three realms are equally indispensable, but there is a developmental-stage-like sequence

among idealizing, mirroring, and twinship; 2) healthy *selfobject* function (God's grace)

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[115] Strozier, *Heinz Kohut*, 170.
[116] Arnold Goldberg, *Advances in Self Psychology* (New York: International Universities Press, 1980), 423.
[117] Strozier, *Heinz Kohut*, 171.
[118] Gorday, "The Self Psychology of Heinz Kohut," 456.

transmitted to the self structure through the process of *transmuting internalization* is a necessary power for stimulating psychological and spiritual growth; and 3) the self is a holistic one and always exists in union with others.

In these claims, Kohut seems to imply the importance of human motivation and active participation in the process of salvation, though the self cannot be healed without the saving power from the outside, which is God's transforming grace. Kohut hints at the desire and participation of human beings in the healing process. He implies human beings' obligation for others after we experience healing through God's grace. After human beings experience the fulfillment of mirroring needs through the process of transmuting internalization, human beings must be *selfobjects* for others. For this reason, Browning refers to Kohut's self psychology as "an ethic of equal regard or mutuality."[119]

Contributions and Limitations for Korean Spiritual and Psychological Development

Self psychology's main contribution to the Korean spiritual and psychological development is dealing effectively with the first major challenge, the challenge of narcissism, which negatively affects two interconnected, inseparable challenges, the challenges of identity formation and of the unity of religious beliefs and practices. If people do not have cohesive self structure, it is difficult to form firm religious and cultural identity, which eventually causes the problems in the embodiment of religious beliefs in their daily lives. Thus, self psychology's major contribution is providing the crucial insights, ideas, and explanations in solving the most difficult and foundational problem that is a huge roadblock for Korean spiritual and psychological development.

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[119] Browning, *Religious Thought*, 206.

The widespread presence of narcissistic needs or immature narcissism among young Korean Christians led to individual, communal, social, and cultural hunger and thirst for spiritual and psychological growth in order to fill emptiness, loneliness, and depression in the self and to deal with identity confusion. Finding a good resource to guide spiritual and psychological growth was hard. Nevertheless, FDT has been used as a credible resource for contemporary Korean Christians for several reasons, such as similar social contexts, FDT's affinity to Korean culture and religions on cognitive and moral developmental stages, and recent theological emphasis on human potential and sanctification process.

However, FDT has not been effective for Korean Christians and faith communities because it focuses on faith development, which is different from spiritual and psychological development. Faith development focuses on cognitive and moral growth, especially structural features of faith in people knowing, valuing, construing, and interpreting diverse challenges in their daily lives. Spiritual and psychological development is more comprehensive and complex than faith development, and focus on cognition, emotion, interpersonal interactions in community, and embodiment of religious beliefs. FDT in its later revisions emphasizes the importance of emotions and early childhood, faith community, and divine grace, while still maintaining its definition of faith as cognitive structure and faith development as cognitive and moral growth.

Self psychology is more effective than FDT because it focuses on both cognition and emotion in dealing with narcissism, which is the most foundational problem in Korean spiritual and psychological development. Self psychology aptly explains concrete intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, and the process of strengthening the self structure through the process of *transmuting internalization* of certain psychic enzyme or foreign protein in the self-*selfobject*

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matrix. Self psychology explains both cognitive and emotional growth in the quality, nature, and the pattern of interpersonal interactions between the self and various *selfobjects*. Self psychology understands that even cognitive and moral development that FDT focuses is not possible without the emotional presence and function of *selfobjects*.

In relation to FDT, self psychology has notable strengths in explaining spiritual and psychological development. It provides more focus on the concrete process of strengthening the self structure through the process of *transmuting internalization* of both cognition and emotion in the self-*selfobject* relationship. The self-*selfobject* model of interpersonal interaction is consistent with a contemporary paradigm shift in theology on the models of God from omnipotent, perfect, and detached images of God to more intimate, mutual metaphors of God such as Friend and Mother.

Self psychology's intersubjective, mutual, intimate model of the self-*selfobject* helps Korean Christians change fixed metaphor or image of divine-human and human-human relationships, which is crucial in spiritual and psychological development in relation to narcissism. Influenced by the Confucian concept of the divine, the sky, Korean Christians have emphasized God as Father and King, and had an image of hierarchical, vertical, detached relationship in which there is no overlapping-intersecting area and no concrete interactions. In this hierarchical metaphor, spiritual and psychological development is understood as self-cultivation or self-transformation through individual discipline.

In addition, self psychology, with the help of McFague's newer model of God as Friend, helps Korean Christians realize their excessive idealization and adherence to Western value of independent, freedom, and autonomy on the one hand. On the other hand, it also helps Korean Christians realize the value of mutual, equal interactions not only in human-human relationships

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but also in divine-human interactions with grace and love for continuous spiritual and psychological development.

In relation to the self-*selfobject* model and the model of God as Friend, the process of *transmuting internalization* overcomes FDT's relative absence of emotional dimension and how change actually occurs within one's own psyche and spirit. The innumerable process of *transmuting internalization* between the self and *selfobject* not only communicates intellectual insights (cognitive understanding) but also conveys emotional support and healthy functions of *selfobject*. For Korean Christians, this concrete process of internalizing a certain psychic enzyme or saving power such as empathy, grace, and *jeong* explains in what ways they can experience not only strengthening of the self but also growing spiritually. There is a clear difference of emphasis between FDT and self psychology.

Similarly, its idea of mirroring provides a space for transforming work of God's grace in the spiritual development, and overcomes FDT's lack of attention to human need for affirmation. Mirroring initiates the healing process in which God's grace ("protein" or "enzyme") is integrated into the self through the process of *transmuting internalization*. Self psychology emphasizes that internalizing process cannot create a totally new structure but gradually fills the deficiency of the self and strengthens the existing weak structure. Its idea of original program of each individual accepts the nature of human beings as a creature. There is a limitation of psychological healing and a need for religious/spiritual realms in human development. However, Kohut does not expand his key notions into a coherent theory of religion or provide in-depth exploration of religious experiences and phenomena.

Self psychology offers more attention on the necessity of ongoing, lifelong psychological and spiritual maturation through the dynamic interactions in the *selfobject* matrix and in

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community. The maturation process is not for increasing independence of the self but for changing quality and nature of self-*selfobject* relationship (intersubjectivity or interdependence). This point also helps Korean Christians realize the importance of mutual interdependence for their spiritual and psychological growth, rather than having a fantasy or ideal for complete independence and freedom as an indication of psychological maturity. Accomplishing better quality of interdependent interactions is the indicator of psychological health.

Its understanding of the transformation of narcissism in a separate developmental line of mature narcissism provides a clue in pursuing a life-long spiritual and psychological journey. Self psychology's developmental-stage-like model of human growth in five steps – creativity, empathy, transience, humor, and wisdom – offers an understanding of the psychological foundation or infrastructure for spiritual growth. Though Kohut does not use it, all of these mature forms of narcissism work together in moving beyond cognitive and emotional dimensions toward spiritual dimension. It helps Korean Christians recognize the limitation of FDT with a focus on cognitive and moral development, and Confucian ideal of becoming a sage and acquiring self-knowledge as a way of self-cultivation and self-transformation. It also helps Korean Christians understand that psychological development, transformation of narcissism, is also interconnected, inseparable with the spiritual development.

In addition, its insight of twinning helps us recognize our responsibility for others and overcome individual spiritual elitism of contemporary spiritual movement. We realize how human relationships with others, other groups, and God are designed for the service of happiness and well-being of human beings. Spiritual growth always occurs in a community of faith in which individual selves serve as *selfobjects* for others. Kohut's concept of *selfobjects* expands a therapeutic, healing environment from a limited, exclusive relationship between two persons to

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wider, inclusive relationship between a person and many surrounding *selfobjects*. There is an implicit vision for a supportive community for the well-being and survival of human beings. Self psychology sees that there are many possible *selfobjects* that exist and function to mirror persons' basic needs and values such as God, friends, clergy, family, relatives, members of a faith community, etc. Again, Korean Christians can realize the importance of community and the cultural value of *jeong* in interpersonal interactions, which can be a foundation and matrix for spiritual and psychological development.

Self psychology's limitations for Korean spiritual and psychological development are closely related to the second and third challenges: the challenge of religious and cultural identity formation and the challenge of the unity of religious beliefs and practices. Self psychology is helpful in dealing with the first major challenge, the challenge of narcissism, and strengthening the self structure, which is the foundation for further, later stages of spiritual and psychological development. However, it has little to say about particular religious and cultural identity formation and the embodiment of religious ideals, values, and beliefs.

Self psychology has a focus on early development of the self; it has a tendency to reduce the problems of adolescents, young adults, and adults to early childhood problems. It is not interested in investigating the capacity of growing adults for integrating diverse ideals, values, ideologies, and commitments. It does not discuss the later stages of the formation of the self. Self psychology uses a smaller concept, the self, than the wider, more comprehensive concept, identity, which has psychosocial, cultural, and religious factors in the formation process. Self psychology does not address the concrete formation process of religious and cultural identity through dynamic interactions among members of groups or communities.

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Self psychology focuses on the archaic formations of the self, thus does not emphasize the importance and impact of the self's encounter with cultural and religious faiths, figures, ideologies, and symbols in later stages of the formation. This is a crucial point for the religious and cultural identity formation for Korean spiritual and psychological development, but Kohut misses this aspect. Kohut knows about the reality that the self encounters these particular cultural and religious products, but thinks that earliest formation of the self has a strong, enduring influence than the later experiences. There is little space for cultural and religious figures and ideologies in later stages such as the Reformer, Martin Luther's encounter with the Christian theological concept of justification by faith that Erikson believes happened.[120]

Another problem of self psychology is its positivism and lack of balanced theological understanding about human nature and growth. Kohut lacks the recognition of the dark side of psychological and spiritual development; he often sees only the bright, positive side of spiritual and psychological life. He seems to have an ideal assumption that children naturally receive necessary emotional and cognitive strength when they grow up in ideal interpersonal environments. He also gives an impression that if the self is cohesive, there will be no struggles and temptations to anxiety, guilt, and sin. However, children and adults who have already achieved a relatively healthy self structure, also have struggles related to theological, cultural, and psychological themes such as wrongdoing, sin, evil, punishment, shame, guilt, and death.

Kohut's self psychology, despite its effectiveness and contributions for a model of spiritual and psychological development, must be embellished by more sophisticated understandings in anthropology and theology. In the following two chapters, Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory and the concept of *habitus* along with Korean cultural value of *jeong*, and John

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[120] Browning and Cooper, *Religious Thought*, 189.

Wesley's developmental theology and the concept of sanctification will complement and correct the limitations of Fowler's FDT and Kohut's self psychology.