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The Holy Spirit and Paul's Spirituality

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Introduction

The face of Christianity is changing. It is said that the center of gravity of Christianity has been shifting towards the southern hemisphere. For instance, in Africa, the number of Christians increased from ten million in 1900 to 360 million in 2000. How about Asia? Is the radical expansion of Christianity also the case in Asia? Of all the world's large continents, Asia is the least Christian in terms of the proportion of the number of Christians to the total population. While Latin America is estimated to be 92% Christians, and Africa, 50% Christian, Asia is only 8 percent.² However, this statistics based on proportion is misleading, because Asia is the most populous continent in the world. Nearly 60 percent of humankind lives in Asia. Furthermore, Asia is a supercontinent, which is usually divided into subcontinents, such as North, South, Southeast, East, Central, and West Asia. Anything which passes for true in one region can turn out to be false in another region. Therefore, it is natural to assume that the present situation of Christianity in Asia differs in each region and in each country. The current state of Christianity in Thailand or Malaysia is different from that in the Philippines or Korea. Apart from the numerical statistics and the regional/national differences, however, it is frequently argued that Asian Christians,

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² According to David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Northern America is reported as being 84% Christian; Europe, including Russia, 76%. Quoted from Samuel Hugh Moffett, "Has Christianity

together with other Christians in the south, have a common call to play a significant role in shaping and guiding “the next Christendom” in the third millennium.

We live in the world characterized by globalized reign of hegemonic powers. It seems that their impact is being felt in almost every area of life even in villages and towns far from their metropolitan centers. The power of such one-sided domination has turned out to be the power to destroy, which is not accountable to the well-being of the entire humankind and nature. It is reported that “for the first time in the history of creation, the life-support systems of the planet Earth are being destroyed by human activities. Throughout history humans have caused locally significant damage to the environment, but never before have human members and actions combined to threaten the integrity of the entire planet.”³ When we recognize that such an unprecedented crisis is mostly the outcome of the misuse and abuse of power, the importance of the legitimate use of power for justice, peace, and integrity of creation catches our attention. Power is a dense topic to discuss. It is neutral in itself, although it is always exposed to the tragic chances of distortion. Power can be degenerated into coercion, aggression, and violence, that is, the power to destroy. In contrast, power can be also channeled into liberating people and building human communities as the power to empower. As the power of the powerful has done much damage to the earth and people, time is ripe for the power of the powerless, or the power of the weak, to appear on the scene.

The understanding of the kairotic nature of the contemporary times leads us to visit the theme of the Holy Spirit and spirituality, because the Christians are those who acknowledge the liberating and enabling power of the Spirit. Despite their different theological focuses, both liberation theologies in the south and pentecostal/charismatic churches around the world, especially among the poor, heavily draw on the Spirit, because they pay attention to the Spirit’s transformative and healing power, whether social or individual. The Spirit is considered to empower the disempowered. However, there are many instances in which the experience of the Spirit remains only in the realm of subjective mystical event, not being utilized for the struggle for total transformation of the world. In some cases, empowerment,

Failed in Asia?” in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 25/2 (2005), 200.

³ Gerald O. Barney, quoted from “Power Analysis: A Neglected Agenda in Christian Ethics,” by Larry L. Rasmussen, *The Annual Society of Christian Ethics* (1990), 9.

allegedly performed by the Spirit, even degenerates into the power to dominate, which uncritically perpetuates the oppressive rule of hegemonic powers. In the fold of the churches, it is puzzling to find that some Spirit-filled religious Christians lack the theological discernment to judge the signs of the times, while some other rational Christians confess to have never experienced the power of the Spirit. The power of the Spirit is what we Asian Christians aspire to embody in order to live in freedom and work as the subjects who try to transform the world, but a more comprehensive understanding of the Spirit should guide our daily life and practice.

Considering this state of affairs, I would like to focus on Paul in light of his relation with the power of the Spirit. Since traditional Western biblical scholarship tended to be predominantly concerned with Paul the theologian, whose overriding interest lies in doctrinal and conceptual ideas, the manifestation of the power of the Spirit in the life of this apostle was inclined to slip its attention. Therefore, the first moment of my own reading strategy, i.e. deconstructive reconstruction, is in order. We need to restore the portrait of the historical Paul who experienced the dynamic power of the Spirit, while communicating with popular religiosity. Then, after exploring briefly Paul's theology of cross which is considered a cornerstone of his spirituality, we will invite an Asian feminist Christian perspective to converse with Paul both sympathetically and critically.

Paul, the Charismatic Theologian, and the Holy Spirit

Although it is in most cases not a surprise for ordinary Christians in Asia that Paul the apostle performed the miracle, it is so for many academic biblical scholars in the West. One of the remarkable phenomena of Christianity in the south is to maintain as its lively reality what is deemed pre-modern religiosity by Western modernism. It covers a wide spectrum of mysticism, belief in prophecy, faith-healing, exorcism, and dream vision. Western Christianity, under a spell of modernism, regarded the so-called pre-modern religiosity as superstitious and tended to trade in it for abstract theologizing in academia and dualistically spiritualizing piety in church. The most favorite image of Paul which the Western, especially Protestant, tradition champions, is Paul the scholar. A number of portraits of Paul, drawn in the 16th and 17th centuries, picture him sitting at a desk, either

with a pen in his right hand, or engaging in a theological debate. Doubled with depoliticizing individualism, this focus on intellectual theology in Paul has formed what a leading Swedish New Testament scholar, Krister Stendahl, called the “introspective conscience of the West.” It is also dubbed a “Western plague.” Until recently, apart from the school of history-of-religions, few scholars recognized the importance of miracle, mysticism, prophecy, and other religious experiences in understanding Paul. Of course, Paul was a theologian and theological thinker. But he was not an academic theologian insulated in academia, but a missionary and activist theologian who deeply engaged in people’s everyday life.

Early Christianity was a Spirit-filled movement. The prophets in the Old Testament anticipated the “pouring out” of the Spirit to quench the thirst of the people of God who felt as if living in a parched land (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Eze. 39:29; Joel 2:28). Luke quotes from Joel, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out (*ekcheo*) my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). The acceptance of the Spirit felt as if it came from an upended pitcher lavishly. “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). When Paul affirms that “in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all ‘made to drink of’ one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13), a similar imagery of “being irrigated, watered, or drenched” (*epotisthemen*) with the Spirit is evoked. The early Christians sensed as if the drought of the Spirit had ended, because they experienced the abundant power of the Spirit operating in and among themselves. It was not like a drizzle, but like the monsoon rains. The Spirit is experienced as a liberating and freeing power. According to Paul, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). The phenomenon that the early Christians made an intense cry, calling the God “*Abba!* Father!” in their prayer, seems to have something to do with their experience of such extraordinary and liberating power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6).

Paul was typically a Spirit-filled charismatic. However, the traditional historical-critical scholarship was not critical enough to do justice to the textual evidence in support of Paul

the charismatic. This neglect was espoused by the scholarly maxim that asserts the theological differences between Luke and Paul. A mere cursory reading of Acts gives an impression that the author is writing in the world which has a great interest in popular religiosity such as miracle and magic. It begins with Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, continues to speak all the triumphant miracles performed by the apostles and Paul, and ends with Paul's miraculous deed at Malta prior to his final days in Rome. The dominance of the interest in magic and miracle in Acts used to be channeled to enhance a bifurcating dichotomy between a Lukan Paul and the historical Paul, between a theology of glory of Luke and a theology of cross of Paul. Paul's "power" has been interpreted only in terms of its paradoxical nature, or as the power of proclamation. Paul's interaction with popular religiosity and his pneumatic practice have not received much attention.

A number of references to Paul's pneumatic activity appear throughout his letters. First, the Thessalonian congregation was reminded of their first moment of dynamic encounter with the gospel. "Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5). Second, the Galatians witnessed the manifestation of the Spirit and the performance of miracle in Paul's initial missionary activity (Gal. 3:5). Third, Paul declares to the Corinthian believers that his speech and proclamation were done "with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4). Fourth, Paul worked in Corinth with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works, and this was considered "the signs of true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12). Finally, Paul points out in a summary report that his missionary activity was performed "by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:18).

A review of Paul's pneumatology helps us to go beyond a number of binary dualism which is operating in both theological discipline and conventional thinking. First, the neo-orthodox dichotomy between religion and revelation operates in the traditional historical-critical biblical interpretation, and it attempts to separate the proclamation of the "Word of God," the linguistic performance, from the world of popular religiosity. For Paul, however, proclamation did not take place in a barren delivery of conceptual information, but it went hand in hand with miracle, one of great concerns of popular religiosity. As miracle signifies a transforming and healing power, "the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on

power" (1 Cor. 4:20). Second, Paul says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1 Cor. 14:18). As a man who experiences a range of pneumatic manifestations such as glossolalia, apocalyptic vision, and heavenly travel, however, Paul underlines the importance of reason and discernment. "I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15). "Do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults" (1 Cor. 14:20). Actually the Spirit has a thinking faculty, thus an intellectual function, because the Spirit examines or searches everything (1 Cor. 2:10). "The thought (*phronēma*) of the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). Finally, as far as Paul is concerned, the Spirit does not stop with the empowerment of the individual here and now. The gift of the Spirit is named as first installment (*arrabōn*) and first fruits (*aparchē*), which points to the future horizon of hope. The full inheritance awaits the final resurrection in the future (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:5). Furthermore, the destiny of the children of God is closely related to that of creation which waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-22). The individual's pneumatic existence is a prelude to the realization of the cosmic liberation which the divine politics aims at. In sum, Paul was a charismatic theologian who deeply involved in the contemporary popular religiosity and in the life of reason at the same time. According to him, an individual can intensely experience a liberating power of the Spirit. Yet the Spirit is not for an individualistic appropriation, because the Spirit puts in gear the process of salvation for all, which will culminate in eschaton when the entire creation will be able to enjoy the freedom.

Paul's Spirituality and *Theologia Crucis*

The discussion of the Spirit calls for the issue of spirituality. The term "spirituality" refers to one's ultimate values and meaning which arise from what is "holy," or of ultimate importance, and give fundamental orientation to one's life. As we see in Paul, spirituality cannot be abstracted from social, political, and economic relations, and manifests itself in a range of concrete contexts. There is a tendency which emphasizes religious experiential currents in Paul's texts at the cost of their political connotations, or vice versa. The politics/religion division is itself a sibling refraction of the secular/religion dichotomy which is itself a binary offspring of Western modernism. Such a modern framework is not appropriate to interpret people and culture in the pre-modern or ancient societies such as

the first century Mediterranean world. We need to approach Paul with a both/and logic, not an either/or approach. The so-called *theologia crucis* is, for Paul, both a theology intertwined with political criticism and a cornerstone for his spirituality.

When Paul asserts that he “decided to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2; cf. 11:26), its political connotation would have been clearly grasped by his audience living in a Roman colony, who still remembered the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C. at the hand of the Romans. The horror of crucifixion as the most cruel imperial punishment was well-known in the ancient world. Nevertheless, Paul theologizes this political scandal. He staunchly states that the instrument of punishment and violence of the Roman empire is transformed into and defined as the locus of both salvation and judgment in the realm of divine politics (1 Cor. 1:18, 23-25). This subversive logic is often explained in terms of paradox, irony, or parody. The story of a legally executed criminal gives birth to the story of redemption of the world. The symbol of Roman violence and cruelty which exterminates the dissidents is qualitatively transformed into the dawn of God’s “war of liberation” (J. L. Martyn). The sovereign of the cosmos emerges as *the* most powerful dissident to Roman status quo in the proclamation of the good news. The crucified and resurrected Christ will destroy “every ruler and authority and power” in the eschaton (1 Cor. 15:24). The final goal of this divine war is that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

The theology of the cross is also adopted to explain Paul’s own life gripped by the great vision of the divine politics, because both Christ and Paul are characterized by the paradoxical power in weakness. First of all, Paul was a miracle worker, a charismatic leader filled with the Spirit, yet he couldn’t heal himself. Scholars have identified “a thorn in the flesh,” or “a messenger of Satan” with a variety of illness such as eye trouble, epilepsy, malaria, physical disability, and so on (2 Cor. 12:7). Whatever it is, it seems that Paul suffered greatly from a troubling illness, which he couldn’t overcome. After three times Paul appealed to the Lord that it would leave him, the Lord answered: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:8-9). This divine reply became a turning point in which Paul came to accept himself the way he was. A paradoxical sense of satisfaction with life in trouble is vibrantly generated. “Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for

whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). This moment ushers in the assent to, even the love of, his own destiny (*Amor Fati*), without which there is no love of the world (*Amor Mundi*).

It is not only illness but also Paul's manual labor that caused trouble and conflict especially in Corinth. Paul's style of apostleship was regarded as a source of shame for those Corinthians who were socialized in the established cultural values of Hellenistic-Roman society. Therefore they sought to shame him by accusing him for the lack of proper culture (2 Cor. 10-13). Against this charge, Paul aptly evokes the theology of the cross with a view to justify his own apostolic paradigm marked by power in weakness. Christ "was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4). The cross of Christ is outright weakness, bordering on abysmal abjection, yet it makes a prelude to the power of God within the eschatological horizon. Likewise, Paul's weakness also represents a new model of leadership in weakness, that is, power in weakness. Paul requests a kind of epistemological transformation, because something honorable comes out of what appears shameful.

Although his life was full of afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger (2 Cor. 4, 6, 11), Paul presents himself not only as a powerful charismatic, but also as a spiritual guide with the power of interpretation. On the basis of the divine answer to his prayer in vision, Paul came to break a horizon in which even weakness turns power because of its paradoxical potential for the operation of divine power in it. As a spiritual guide with the power of interpretation, Paul attempted to present the theology of the cross as the guideline of the community life. They should understand that the life-giving Spirit also bears the mark of the cross. Suffering and persecution characterize the Christian life in the present evil age. God "has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well" (Phil. 1:29). The paradoxical experience of power in weakness appeared when the Holy Spirit inspired the Thessalonian Christians to receive the word "with joy" despite persecution (1 Thess. 1:6). Paul lived in a vivid sense of the contrast between the treasure and the clay jars which contain it. He was aware that the extraordinary power operating in early Christians' lives "belongs to God" and does not come from them (2 Cor. 4:7). This humble recognition made Paul even more

bold to declare that “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

An Asian Feminist Evaluation of Paul’s Spirituality

As we have observed, Paul’s *theologia crucis* is far from sado-masochist mentality which takes pleasure in suffering and pain itself. Paul’s theology of the cross refers to a paradoxical experience of power in weakness, and I attempted to emphasize its nuanced portrait. It opens up to a path of self-love, or the acceptance of one’s own destiny, which in turn forms a basis of the love of the world. Without *Amor Fati*, there is no *Amor Mundi*! The theology of the cross is about the voluntary acceptance of suffering as a means of resistance to “powers and principalities,” not about the imposition of suffering to those already disempowered. However, the theology of the cross has been misused and abused to support the dehumanizing system which glorifies the suffering of “the others.” Many women experienced the danger of the theology of the cross, which imposes the one-sided sacrifice of women. For instance, battered women are often advised in the church that they should continue to carry their own cross to bring salvation to the battering husband. What a bad theology! Therefore, it is an imperative to exercise discernment in relying on the theology of the cross. We need to ask whether we use it to enhance life or stifle it, whether it is for humanization and empowerment or for dehumanization and disempowerment. Given this complexity, I acknowledge the value of Paul’s theology of the cross for the Asian feminist Christians’ spirituality with some reservations.

We also take note of the problems inherent in 1 Corinthians, where Paul’s theology of the cross looms large. It is here that Paul explicitly shows his will to restrict women’s freedom, even when it could mean their disempowerment. Recently, there was a significant scholarly attempt to give voice to the Corinthian women prophets, by reconstructing their theology and self-understanding through Paul’s rhetoric.⁴ Whether we agree to the details of such reconstruction or not, Paul’s contradictions and ambivalence towards women are clear in 1

⁴ Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric*

Corinthians. Here, he acknowledged women's activity itself of prophesying and praying, but required them to wear a veil. Furthermore, this control of costume was supported by his employment of a theology of subordination. "Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:2). "Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man" (1 Cor. 11:8). Paul corrects himself right away, by saying that "'Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God" (1 Cor. 11:11-12). It is as if he suddenly realized the problems and contradictions contained in his own remark. Unfortunately, however, this theology of subordination that Paul mentioned briefly has become the ground for women's oppression for two thousand years.

Paul's contradictions can be grasped in his application of the shame code to women. "For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:35). The command to ask the husbands at home signifies the strengthening of the typical private/public dualism espoused by patriarchy, which assigns the place of women and feminine gender to private realm. One might argue that Paul was aware of the reputation of church in the society, because women's "shameful behavior could have caused damage to it. However, Paul asserted elsewhere that he would not care about the cultural expectation. "Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I will not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). His manual labor was taken as a shameful act by the contemporaries. When it came down to his own act, Paul tried to overcome the cultural honor/shame code with recourse to the theology of the cross. But he did not venture to apply the same to the claim of his fellow Christian women, who wanted to overcome the cultural honor/shame code as the means to express their own power of freedom which they had gained in Christian faith. One cannot help but acknowledge that Paul did not apply the theology of the cross on a fully egalitarian basis. Besides, the most puzzling feature of 1 Corinthians is found in the list of witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, which completely elides the witness of Jesus' women disciples (1 Cor. 15).

The recognition of Paul's contradictions and ambiguities brings home the danger of the

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

reading practice for simple imitation, or the “politics of identification” (Schüssler Fiorenza), which often arises from Christian enthusiasm for Paul the great apostle. The problem inherent in this model is that it lacks critical sincerity and discernment, not giving enough attention to the questionable and perplexing aspects of biblical language. The slave-owners believed that slavery is divinely sanctioned because the Bible takes it for granted. The readers with “unreflecting zeal” who identify themselves with the great heroes in the Bible often fall victim to inheriting the questionable language world that the very model employed, and thus perpetuate it by blindly transposing it into the contemporary world. For instance, those who take the patriarchal language in the Bible for granted and identify themselves with the author of the text perpetuate the dehumanizing system of androcentrism and sexism by uncritically reproducing such relationships of domination and reinscribing them in our contemporary cultural, social, and conceptual habits. The reading practice for simple imitation or the “politics of identification” triggers a chicken-and-egg problem, in which the readers discern neither the problem of the text nor the problem of their own context, because both legitimate each other. Therefore I prefer the “politics of identification”, a reading strategy which I call “the hermeneutics of compassion in detachment.” It acknowledges the dual potential of the biblical texts, and preserves the spaces for both sympathetic resonance and critical evaluation.

Conclusion: An Unfinished Coda

As the center of gravity moves towards the south, the importance of pneumatology is recognized in theological circles. Our concern with the Spirit is not confined to the theoretical domain, though. It coincides with our question of how to empower the powerless so that they could become agents and subjects of transformation of life and the world. With this urgent task as its background, this lecture attempted to reconstruct Paul, the pneumatic theologian, and understand his spirituality in terms of the theology of cross which breaks a space for the unthinkable within human capacity, that is, the paradoxical power in weakness. I hope that such a reconstruction of Paul could provide some inspiration for Asian Christians today, who, on the one hand live in the pre-modern/traditional, modern, and post-modern cultures at the same time, and on the other hand want to resist against the empire’s destructive powers. However, my Asian feminist

Christian perspective warns of a danger inherent in the politics of identification, because of the contradictions and ambiguities in Paul in regards to women and gender. We might say it this way. Yes, Paul surely wants to be in the service of life and peace. But Paul, or anyone who wants to identify himself or herself with him, needs to engage in open and critical dialogues with other friends who live in different socio-cultural locations and offer different viewpoints, so to speak, in order to continue the reflection on the self and the world and render his or her vision and practice more complete, whole, and more accountable. This kind of conversation will continue. It should be never-ending for the vital future of faith community.

For me, Paul the apostle and his letters are among the greatest sources of inspiration when I undertake a journey of faith in the empire. The ecumenical churches envision alternative globalization. Without alternative community, however, alternative globalization cannot be anchored. Without alternative spirituality, in turn, alternative community cannot be built. Therefore, alternative globalization, alternative community, and alternative spirituality are not different entities, but are inseparably intertwined. Paul's radical vision of the divine politics encompasses these three dimensions and thus offers a timely inspiration. What to do with this inspiration, how to revise, update, and complement his vision, and how to come up with the alternative vision proper to our own time, depend on us.

In the contemporary world, the powerful are obsessed with the desire to accumulate unlimited power. Indifference to growing poverty, institutional violence, and human suffering goes with it. In this globalized culture, we take note of an increasing sense of powerlessness and defeatism among people in general. Without a comprehensive critical perspective, the powerless blindly fill themselves with the same kind of desire the powerful harbor. Therefore a new kind of desire is necessary – a fresh kind of desire, which desires the fullness of life for all. The Christians, whose life is guided by the biblical vision of the divine politics and empowered by the Holy Spirit, are invited to work as the midwives who help people go through the birth pangs for a new desire. This new desire is powerful. Paul said that the greatest spiritual gift is love. May our love of power be transformed into the power of love so that our new desire, our yearning for the new heaven, the new earth, and the new humanity, may continue to be alive and aflame!