

# 구약논단

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Lee Kyung Sook(Ewha Womans Uni.) An Old Testament Interpretation in an Era of Globalization from the perspective of Korean Feminist Theology ..... **25**  
한국구약학회 창립 50주년을 맞이하여, 그 동안 한국여성신학자들의 시각에서 구약성서를 해석하고 분석해온 역사를 더듬고 평가하고자 한다. 이로써 좀 더 개방적이며 수용적인 여성신학적 시각이 구약성서 해석에 촉매제 역할을 하고, 또한 한국 사회와 문화에 공헌하는 길을 찾고자 한다. 이를 위해 본고에서는 삼상 28장의 무당 이야기를 분석하여 한국기독교와 무교의 관계를 새롭게 조명해 보고자 한다.

Lee, Kyung Sook An Old Testament Interpretation in an Era of Globalization from the perspective of Korean Feminist Theology ..... **25**

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# An Old Testament Interpretation in an Era of Globalization

from the perspective of Korean Feminist Theology

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## 1. Introduction

On listening to the report on the passing away of Bup Jung, a Buddhist priest, my soul freshly trembled with deep awe. His life without possessions was beautiful in itself, however it was all the more beautiful for his relationship with the Korean Catholic Cardinal, Kim, Su Hwan, and people of all religious background had the great respect for him. After he left this world, people continue to be deeply moved and touched by his humility, true religiousness, and his complete self control throughout his life, as well his lifestyle that was at one with nature, without any trace of greed.

Such thoughts led me to remember an article in the Journal of Theological Thought.<sup>1)</sup> Prof. Koebelin, who was the dean of the faculty of Theology at

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1) Sung Jae Kim, "Reading Bible by doing experience of the Minjung," *The Theological Thought*, Vol.134 (Autumn 2006), p. 71-100.

the University of Hamburg, visited the Hanshin University in May 2005. The purpose of his visit to Korea was to find a justification for not abolishing his faculty, which had to be submitted to the executive committee of the University by August of that same year. However, he wanted to learn something for his project not from the Korean churches or the theological seminaries that had flourished, but from Korean Buddhism.<sup>2)</sup> It was as unexpected, as it was surprising. A theological seminary in Germany, where it could be said in many aspects that theology has its roots, was looking for a new way out of the crisis of being, not from Christianity itself, but Buddhism. Such an idea was incomprehensible to Korean Christians. However, on hearing the news about Bup Jung, the Buddhist priest, I thought of it. His teachings are probably what all religious people, as well as European Christians seek.

In Europe, it is easy, to get the impression that Christianity, in fact, is coming to an end. It seems that theology does not fit into modern life and people. In Europe, many people say that the era of theology is over, especially in the Northern hemisphere. But still others say that people need God in the 21st century as much as at any other time in history. The people in the Northern hemisphere are probably tired of believing in God in the traditional ways, or perhaps they think the God in the Bible does not fit their present living conditions. Human beings in this complicated world need new concepts of God. Therefore many Europeans are seeking a new type of God, in Buddhism or Hinduism or even in Shamanism. Can the European Christianity, in its crisis of being, find its breakthrough in Buddhism?

Moreover, is this the case only in European society? Can we affirm that it is not also the case of the Korean Church? In the search to answer these questions, The Korean Society of Old Testament Studies, on its fiftieth jubilee, would like to contribute some ideas and insights to the theology in the world today. In this conference, together, we examine ways in which the Korean Biblical Studies could go forward in this era of globalization.

The goal of religions in the era of globalization is to pay off the history of

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2) Sung Jae Kim, "Reading Bible," p. 72.

all conflict and leave it behind, then to co exist together as cosmopolitan citizens in full and peaceful lives. The direction of Korean Old Testament Studies also has to move into a world where there is neither victor nor defeater, but everyone is a victor because there is only "we", not "you" against "I". That is "Salim"; the "empowerment", "respect", and "communication" with others and also with the nature. To achieve this goal, how should we Koreans read and interpret the Old Testament that contains many exclusive and male centered messages, as well as war tainted and oppressive symbols?

On the Jubilee of The Korean Society of Old Testament Studies, I joyfully celebrate the various, active achievements of many Korean scholars until today. Now I want to trace back the studies of Korean Feminist Biblical theologians who strove for new and better ways of interpreting the Old Testament, because I believe that open direction and position of Korean Feminist Theology would give some positive impact to the future of Old Testament studies. I hope the perspective of Korean Feminist Theology, which is inclusive of Korean culture, the weak and the poor as its topics, would be helpful for the studies on the Old Testament in this era of globalization.

## 2. Korean Feminist Theology and the Biblical Interpretation

### 1) The History of Biblical Interpretation (1880-1979)

Now, I will just survey Korean church history briefly from the feminist perspective.

1880's: It is very unique in mission history that in Korea, the Bible was not brought in by the western missionaries, but by the hands of Koreans who desired social and cultural changes. At that time, Korea had a very strict feudal social order under the Chosun Dynasty(1396-1910), and the feudal structure began to collapse as the new wind of modernization came to Korea through the Japanese invasion, and interference of other foreign powers in the 1880's. The reason why Christianity so rapidly became popular among the

Korean women and the poor people of the lower class is that Christianity proclaims the equality of all humankind, especially the equality between highborn aristocratic class and the lower class, and between male and female. Many scholars say that because of Christianity, Koreans began to believe that before God, all human being, men and women, are equal. Men and women attended Christian worship, and sang hymns together at church. It is through the Christian baptism that the Korean women received their own names. Gender equality, women's education, abolition of polygamy, and the opportunity for women to remarry were offered by Christianity, and these are the precious gifts of Christianity to Korean women.<sup>3)</sup>

1910's: The period of early development of Korean Christianity coincided with the period of national duress caused by the Japanese colonial rule. Korean Christian women also had to respond to the reality of Japanese occupation. They had to participate in the reality of the national conflict and the anti Japanese independence movement that strove to overthrow the structure of the colonial domination. The Bible was not only regarded as the spiritual and religious book, but as the basic textbook for Koreans in the struggle against illiteracy, ignorance and the Japanese colonialism. No wonder that Korean Christians are very much proud of such momentous liberation experiences linked with the Bible and Christianity.

1930's: However, the situation has changed slowly since 1930. Around this time, the debate regarding the historic critical method has emerged. Korean Churches had begun to experience the conflicts between fundamentalism and liberalism. Some pastors of the Presbyterian Church did not accept the authorship of Moses on Pentateuch. In 1934, Rev. Chun Bae Kim appealed for the ordination for women and insisted that Paul's passages against women's

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3) The baptized woman, Sadie Kim (she had no name, therefore the pastor gave her the name of an American woman missionary "Sadie" when she was baptized), said, "The day I was baptized was the happiest day in my life. We, the Chosun women, had lived under the oppression of men. For years we did not have a life of our own. Without the Christian gospel, Korean women's status could not have improved like this." Cf. Duk Joo Lee, "An Understanding of early Korean Christian Women's History," *Ewha Journal of Feminist Theology* Vol. 2 (seoul: Ewha Institute for Women's Theological Studies: 1997), p. 26.

ordination were written 2,000 years ago and Korean Christians should not follow them word by word.<sup>4)</sup> Rev. Young Ju Kim wrote another article in 1935 stating that the book of Genesis had been based on the old Hebrew mythologies, and Moses was not the real author of the Pentateuch.<sup>5)</sup> Both of them were subjected to religious trials and subsequently had to withdraw their opinions and apologize to avoid expulsion from the Churches. In 1935, the Abingdon Bible Commentary was translated into Korean and it was also accused of being heretical and the 53 translators experienced many difficulties and hardships.<sup>6)</sup> These events signaled the beginning of the fragmentation in the Korean church.

1950's: In 1950, the Korean War broke out. During the Korean War(1950-53), Korean churches suffered severely because of the ideological conflicts between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union, and in turn, between the South and the North Korea. Many Christians from North Korea fled to South Korea seeking religious freedom. After the Korean War(1950-53), the epicenter of Korean Christians moved from Pyongyang to Seoul, which became the new center for all Korean Christians. Korean Christians became more conservative, fundamental, and puritanical, because of their experiences of religious oppression by the communist during the Korean War. After the Korean War, there was hot debate on the acceptance of historical criticism in the Presbyterian Church. The conservative, fundamental Christians, who had fled North Korea, did not wish to accept the historical criticism, however, the liberal theologians did. So in 1956 the Presbyterian Church of Korea was divided into two denominations: the PROK = Presbyterian Church of Republic of Korea, and the other, the PCK = Presbyterian Church of Korea. The one (PROK) accepted the historical critical method, while the other(PCK) rejected

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4) Chun Bae Kim "wrote an editorial in the Presbyterian Weekly in 1934 advocating better status for women in the church," Jung Min Suh/Ho Ik Huh(eds.), *The 30 years History of Korea Association of Christian Studies* (Korea Association of Christian Studies), (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2001), p. 43-44.

5) Young Ju Kim officially reported to the Assembly, stating that the Book of Genesis was not authored by Moses himself. Jung Min Suh/Ho Ik Huh, p. 42-43.

6) Jung Min Suh/Ho Ik Huh, p. 44-47.

it. This schism still exists, and the conservative group PCK became the major denomination, which then divided further into many other small groups. The Methodist Church in Korea did not debate the historical criticism, nor did they accept it fully.

1960's: In the 60's, South Korean society had industrialized, and the modern character of Christianity had contributed to the rapid growth of the Korean Church. However, on the other hand, the positive traditions present in Christianity, such as people's liberation and people's participation in social issues, increasingly disappeared within the rapidly growing churches. After having established their own power and financial basis, their actual contribution to people's liberation and social change was diminishing. The Korean churches came to be just like the other religions that paid little attention to the women and the weak. Christian women's role was the same as in any other religions and "woman" became the second sex in the churches. In the theological seminaries, there were quite few women lecturers. In 1961 the association of Korean Old Testament Studies was founded, however, until 1981, there was no female O.T. professor in Korea.

1970's: From the late 1970's, Asian Theology gained its own voice within the framework of the criticism of general Western theology. Asian Theology emerged from the concept that the methodology of Western theology was not relevant in the Asian context. Many theologians tried to read the Bible in the historical, socio political context of Korea, though the Bible was still seen as the absolute norm in conservative denominations. From the middle of 1970's, Minjung Theology started to emerge, and the Minjung theologians argued that interpreting biblical texts had to be undertaken in a concrete context, namely the real experiences of the people. During this period, Asian Biblical theologians had progressively discussed various issues in their own contexts. As a result, Asian Theology was visibly formed, as had the Korean Feminist Theology.

## 2) The Beginning of Korean Feminist Theology in 1980's

No one can deny that Mary Daly's book, 'Beyond God the Father', published in 1968, was the starting point of Feminist Theology. In 1975, the International Women's Year was declared by the United Nations, making women's self consciousness an international issue. In Korea, Kate Millett's 'Sexual Politics' was translated and published in 1976, and Letty M. Russell's 'Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology' in 1979. During the following years, the conflict between the global trend towards liberation movements and the military dictatorship in Korea, as well as the integration of feminist studies<sup>7)</sup> and theology, provided the background for the birth of Korean Feminist Theology. On 20, April 1980, Sun Kyung Park, Woo Jung Lee, Sun Ae Ju, Sang Jang, Hwa Sun Jo, Sang Lim Ahn, Suk Ja Jung, Ok La Kim and others launched "KAWT(Korean Association of Women Theologians)" that was the first established group of Korean women theologians.

KAWT has actively participated in every aspect of the Korean church and invited internationally renowned feminist theologians, including Phyllis Trible, Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, Rosemary Luether, Dorothee Soelle, Marie Theres Wacker, Cheryl Exum to speak. KAWT has also had strong connections with Asian feminist theologians, such as Kwok Pui Lan, and Hisako Kinukawa, Monica Melanchthon. KAWT has translated many books by Western Feminist theologians and dealt seriously with a wide range of issues the Korean church was faced with, such as allowing the ordination of women, the position of women pastors in a church, biblical interpretation, and Christian women's social and political activity. Such efforts by feminist theologians were embodied in the milestones for the Korean Church, such as the acceptance of the ordination of women by The Presbyterian Church of Korea in 1996, in theologizing the meaning of the Jubilee (in 1995) of the emancipation from Japanese colonization, and in creating the atmosphere in which the summit meeting between the South and North Korea became possible. In 2006, The Holiness Church allowed women to be ordained as its

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7) In 1977, the Korean Women's Institute was established to find resolutions for the problems experienced by Korean women, and also the classes in Women's Studies began at Ewha Women's University.

ministers. We can say that was also a fruit borne of Feminist Theology.

In 1985, the Korean Association of Feminist Theology(KAFT) was organized for academic research of Feminist Theology, and in 1987, joined the Korea Association of Christian Studies as a member. KAFT has published an academic journal under the title of "Feminist Theological Thought,"<sup>8)</sup> and in particular, the issue of 1995 with the topic, "The Bible and the Feminist Theology", contained many insightful articles. Here, I would like to recognize those whose writings on the Old Testament contributed to that journal. Among women theologians, around 10 scholars have Ph.D.'s in the Old Testament Studies and are teaching at universities. Their special interest and methodology are varied, even including biblical archaeology, but are nonetheless cooperative of each other's studies and they all participate diligently in both Associations of the Feminist Theology and the Old Testament Studies. In 2005, 6 women scholars co wrote an introductory textbook, "Women's Reading on Old Testament", which was very positively acknowledged. Another book written by Korean women Biblical theologians, will be published by the Sheffield Academy Press within this year, 2010.

In summary, the Korean Feminist Theology is a crucial theology that criticizes traditional theologies, and tries to break down oppressive and fossilized dogmas and traditions, an alternative theology that seeks the equalities between man and woman, the ordained and laypersons, and human and nature. The theology in its tradition, like a fortress, has been closed for a long time, opened only to those who have followed the Western centered dogma and the strict theological methodology. Now, the Feminist Theology wants to shake this fortress, to breathe a change through its cracks. It does not intend to crumble the wall, but rather, to liberate those who confine themselves in it, shut away from the abundant life outside.<sup>9)</sup> In this sense, the

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8) The topics are: "Korean Women's Experiences" in 1994; "Bible" in 1995; "The Church" in 1997; "Spirituality" in 1999; "Sex" in 2001; "People" in 2006; "Multi culture" in 2008; and "Mission" in 2010. All 8 volumes were related to feminist theology, and those topics were far more advanced and resourceful in their contents in comparison with any other Society of Studies.

9) Henry Wilson, "New Understanding of the Ministry," *Walk, My Sister, The Ordination of Women:*

Feminist Theology is on a par with Minjung Theology, Culture Theology, Ecological Theology, and Asian Theology.

Feminist Theology pursues the practice of what has been discussed, not the theory itself. The starting point of study is neither the Bible nor the dogma but women's experiences of life. Therefore, it focuses on every aspect of life in Korea, such as the unification of two Koreas, politics, society, economy, gender, environment, ecology, and poverty, that affects Korean women's life, though with its eyes of criticism, of course. In essence, the Feminist Theology is intrinsically inclusive and interdisciplinary. While the traditional theologies have emphasized superiority and uniqueness and refused any other religions with its exclusive attitude, the Feminist Theology is embracing of all. The traditional theologies acknowledge only the Bible as the Word of God, the revealed Word, but the Feminist Theology handles many other sources that relate to Women's life, that is, apocrypha, folk tales, legends, and historical stories. Traditional theologies' concern has been the God the Son and the Father in particular, but the Feminist concern has mainly been the Spirit.<sup>10)</sup>

### 3) Types of Biblical Interpretation

From the beginning, Korean Feminist Theology has aimed towards a new interpretation of the Bible because the Church had used the Bible as the tool for oppressing women for two thousands years. Traditionally, the Church has endowed the Bible with the unconditional authority by using the word "Canon" as a weapon. Thus, anyone who is interested in the issues of gender is also interested in the interpretation of the Bible. In which way one chooses to interpret the Bible defines whether one stands as a conservative or a progressive. Moreover, if one is a feminist theologian, the ways of interpretation pushes one to decide whether or not to remain inside

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*Reformed Perspectives* (WARC 1993; trans. by Sang Chang), (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 1995), p. 102; Kyung Sook Lee, "Feminist Theology, Seeking for the Biblical Interpretation of Liberation and New Alternative Worship Models, *The Theological Thoughts*, 111 (2000 Winter), p. 55.

10) Kyung Sook Lee "Feminist Theology, Seeking for the Biblical Interpretation," p. 55-56.

Christianity.

If it is the case that the Bible is the canon as the Word of God, the Feminist theology reminds that there are also many conflicts within the Bible; anti feminist verses against the liberation of women, and others that encourage it. According to Biblical theologians, the Bible has been written, and interpreted, by men. In other words, the Bible as a product of history, is a product of its patriarchal society and has been edited, distorted, and interpreted in keeping with patriarchy. This point has been revealed by the historical criticism of the Bible, in which the Bible is not a mythical archetype, but a collection of confessions of beliefs, expressed by people with a particular theological view, by a particular group, in a particular time, as Fiorenza succinctly described as “a historical prototype.”<sup>11)</sup> Then the first question for feminist biblical hermeneutics is, how such a historical prototype could be recognized as a canon.

By and large, there are three directions for “feminist theology and the Biblical interpretation”. In one direction, it seems that the Bible and feminism are completely incompatible, so that the Bible is rejected. In another, the essence of the Bible is seen as human equality and so it, in and of itself, is not oppressive of women. Those who stand for this direction remain loyal and defend the Bible. From this loyalist stance, the studies of rhetorical criticism and literary criticism tend to contend that, as for the Bible, its traditional interpretations, made by men only, are problematic and disclose a distorted truth. They argue that the recovering of the original message of human equality is essential. This second stance can be supported by Genesis stories, and the Song of Songs. It can be a very good way for lay women to open their eyes to women’s liberation without radical impact. However, so many other extreme anti women verses in the Bible do not allow for such mild interpretations. Therefore we are looking for a third way. As the content of the Bible is complicated and undeniably patriarchal, it can be said that the

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11) E. S. Fiorenza, “Emerging Issues in Feminist biblical Interpretation”, J. L. Weidman(ed.), *Christian Feminism*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 42-47.

Biblical theologians' hard work in finding a new way is crucially important to feminist theology. Most of the Korean feminist theologians choose the second or the third direction and strive to connect the Bible with their theology.

The third way, an effort to link the Bible with feminism, started with the notion that patriarchal cultures pervade the Bible. Great women leaders are concealed within the Bible, and they need to be rediscovered. If this is the case, it is necessary to "suspect" that male authors and interpreters would have covered up, reduced, or distorted the women figures in the Bible.<sup>12)</sup> Hidden female leaders like Miriam, Deborah, the wise woman of Abel, and Huldah, a prophetess, emerged from the Biblical studies in what is called a "revisionist model,"<sup>13)</sup> or a "model of discovering great woman figures,"<sup>14)</sup> in the sense that they revise the established view of biblical texts. From such perspectives, the issue of the Bible and women's liberation has been developed extensively with the support of historical criticism, social criticism, inter cultural criticism. Most Korean women Biblical theologians have considerably advanced the studies on the issue.

One example of those achievements is the realization that women in the Bible are normally portrayed either as poor and good, or as bad and deceiving, and very rarely is a morally neutral description of the character of a woman found in the biblical texts.<sup>15)</sup> Some pitiful women prayed devoutly for a son and had the son as a result, while other bad women deceived others by abusing their power and authority. However, their portrayals were very different from real fact, and it is evident that women are used as

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12) E. Sch. Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone, The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 15-18.

13) C. Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," A. Y. Collins(ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 101; Kyung Sook Lee, "Women's Liberation and the Biblical Hermeneutics," Sang Chang/Hung Ryul Soh(eds.), *Doing Theology and Loving*, Festschrift David Suh, (Seoul: Munhak & Jisung: 1996), P. 73-76.

14) M. Th. Wacker(Hrsg.), *Gefahrliche Erinnerungen, Theologiefeministisch*, (Duesseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1988), p. 22-23.

15) Kyung Sook Lee, "Women's Type in the Eyes of the Bible Writers," *Feminist Theology and Korean Church, Korea Journal of Christian Studies*, Vol. 14. (ed. Korea Association of Christian Studies), (The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1997), p. 77-108.

scapegoats as the cause of all suffering in the world. Both the “dedicated” / “sacrificing” holy woman, and the “vicious” / “seductive” evil woman are merely a sort of illusion created by men. Unfortunately, such descriptions of women in the Bible have invalidly affected the formation of female identity.

Another bold revelation by women Biblical theologians is that the content of the Bible is the product of patriarchal cultures and includes the vivid reality of the oppression of women. This revealing field of research is called the “liberationist model” or the “conflict model” because of the nature of the research. They try to liberate women through revealing real situations of women oppressed, exploited, and persecuted. How can such devastating story of oppression of women be accepted as a part of the canon or the Word of God? This question has been a huge hurdle for feminist theology. Fiorenza suggested a hermeneutical framework, “hermeneutics of remembrance”, in that the biblical stories invite us to “remember” and “reclaim” the miserable and degrading situations of women throughout history.<sup>16)</sup> Stories about oppression and conflict are also precious resources from God who calls and invites us.

On the other hand, some try to trace back the remnants of goddess worship still in the Bible. According to them, there are indications of coexistence of the male God Yahweh and the female goddesses Astarte, Asherah, and Anath in the Old Testament, and archaeological evidences support these indications. Thus it is argued that goddess worship was widespread in Israel but later turned into the religion of worshipping the male God Yahweh by the religious leaders.<sup>17)</sup> It is worthwhile to review the whole history of religions in Israel, and discussing the starting point of Monotheism. However, such an approach tends to overly romanticise the goddess worship itself, relating directly to the praise to women. It is not proven that the goddess worship

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16) E. S. Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone, The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, (Beacon Press: Boston, 1984), p. 15-22.

17) C. P. Christ, “Why Women need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections,” C. P. Christ/J. Plaskow(eds.), *Womanspirit: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 273-287; H. S. Cochois, *Inanna*, (Guetersloher Verlag, 1992); “Gomer oder die Macht der Astarte, Versuch einer feministischen Interpretation von Hos 1-4, *EvTh* 42, (1982), p. 37-65.

would be helpful in raising women's status.

The recently notable post colonialist biblical interpretation<sup>18)</sup> "draws the attention to the political situation in which the books of the Scripture were written." It focuses on "the connection of the biblical interpretation to the political power system of the time," suggesting "the stories in the Bible are not merely religious tales."<sup>19)</sup> In this approach to biblical interpretation, excavating the dominant political structures and finding release from it is what matters. The result of this interpretation is that the Bible itself is a product of Imperialism.

While Korean women theologians are looking for similarities between the Bible and the traditional Korean religions, they are also searching for liberating messages for women among the various sources of the traditional Korean religions. Chung Hyun Kyung claims that "the real memory of the people of God...cannot be confined within the Christian canons," arguing that the essences of Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity have all been mixed together in Korean mentality.<sup>20)</sup> It is said that for true liberation of Korean women, the liberating spirit of traditional Korean religions should be found. Comparing and cross checking with the liberating spirit of traditional religions like Shamanism and Buddhism, the liberating spirit in the Bible can be interpreted in light of "Sal Lim" (which means enlivening life, as well as housework). It will be a significant work for us to find a way to open our future from our past.

#### 4) Summary and the Tasks to be Achieved

Most Korean women Biblical theologians have tried to interpret the biblical

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18) R. S. Sugirtharajah, "From Orientalist to Post colonial: Notes on Reading Practiced", *Asia Journal of Theology* 10/1 (1996); N. K. Gottwald/R. A. Horsley(eds.), *Asian Biblical hermeneutics and Postcolonialism, The Bible & Liberation Series*, (Orbis: New York), p. 3-28.

19) Man Ja Choi, "Characteristics and Methodology of Asian Feminist Theology," *Journey to Survival and Liberation*, (The Christian Literature Society of Korea: 1999), p. 71.

20) cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, "'Han Pu ri' Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective, V. Fabella M. M./Sun Ai Park(eds.), *We dare to dream, Doing Theology as Asian Women* (AWRC and EATWOT), (Hongkong: AWRC, 1989), p. 135-146.

texts in the context of feminist theology with their own differing methodology. However, while it is true to say that they want to shake the gates of Korean theological studies, which has been closed like a fortress, they wish to breathe through it a breath of change, rather than to develop a novel and unique methodology. Through different methodology, they try to find biblical texts affirming women, and in them messages for women's liberation, in order to say that the Bible has the resources for the liberation of women. In general, Korean women theologians highlight the tradition of liberation in the Old Testament, and are skeptical of the possible need to relinquish the Bible. If not dealing and struggling with the biblical texts, whether it is in a manner of positivism or negativism, they cannot belong to the church and the community of faith at all. As Kang, Nam Sun pointed out, "if it is not within the agreed parameters of the standard, then it need not be in the name of Christian theology at all."<sup>21)</sup> It does not seem right for a Christian to do nothing but criticize the Bible as a product of Imperialism. Much as we cannot lightly renounce our being Koreans, so has the Bible been our religious heritage for over 100 200 years.<sup>22)</sup>

Along with the works, discussed above, the search for metaphors and symbols using female figures in the Scripture has had many good results.<sup>23)</sup> Those metaphors and symbols need to be analyzed more broadly because it is evident that there are many female symbols used alongside male ones, and given deeper theological meanings in the Scripture. At the same time, we have to trace how much androcentric interpreters have disregarded and/or overlooked these female metaphors and symbols, and to study how they can be used as a reference for women's liberation.

Now the urgent tasks for Korean women theologians will be to find and

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21) Nam Soon Kang, "Asian and Korean Feminist Theology", *Feminism and Christianity*, (The Christian Literature Society of Korea: 1998), p. 360.

22) Kyung Hee Kim, *Bible and the Feminist Theology*, *Feminist Theological Thought* Vol. 2, (ed. Man Ja Choe, Korea Association of the Feminist Theology), (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1995), p. 41-43.

23) Young Mee Lee, *Salvation theology of Isaiah*, (Seoul, 2005); Yani Yu, *God of Abraham, Rebekah and Jacob*, (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2009).

analyze the content of traditional religions, folk tales, and fables, and to revive them, not to confront, but to coexist with the Bible, not in competition but in cooperation. In the 1990's Lee, Wu Jung observed that the contents of folk tales and proverbs in traditional Korean cultures dominantly degrade women. Her achievement did not lead to a connection being made between the texts of the Old Testament to the stories, or to the development of a feminist insight. However, it was very helpful in realizing the oppressive reality of Korean women in daily life, in which male dominant and female degrading languages and practices pervade. Choi, Man Ja also tried to connect traditional Korean religions and cultures with the stories of the Bible within the framework of the "merging of the two stories", which is a concept of Seo, Nam Dong's.<sup>24)</sup> I think our task in the future would be to inherit the liberational spirits in our cultural heritages and to connect them with those in the Bible. As the goal, we should more deeply study Buddhism and Confucianism which oppressed Korean women, and also shamanism, which functions in part to console and empower women. In Korean shamanism, largely female shamans preside in "Han pu ri (ritual for resolving grievances, especially women's grievances in their lives)", and they were female priests. They were perhaps disregarded and excluded, because they were female priests. I am looking forward to reading the concrete biblical interpretations that result from studies in this direction.

It is not so simple, of course, because the exclusive claim of "only Yahweh" in the Old Testament is in definite contradiction with this above mentioned direction of studies. However, in reinterpreting our history, religion, and culture, we can see our history as a whole, with our pride of being Koreans, and above all, the insight, to read the Bible in a new way. In other words, we can see that the religious contexts in the Bible are more complicated than what we generally know. I expect that the biblical texts will provide the insight to correctly read our cultural traditions and vice versa. Both the

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24) Nam Dong Seo, "Mergence of the two Stories", *Minjung and Korean Theology*, (ed. KNCC), (Korea Theological Study Institute, 1982), p. 237-276.

Korean traditions and the Bible can be interpreted in light of feminism. Our task will be to make the traditional Korean religion and Christianity mirror each other. That work will make Korean Christians mature in faith and advance the whole liberation of women. That is also the way to recover the pride of being Koreans, to find liberational messages for women, and to march together, both men and women, on the way of liberation and life giving.

### 3. An Example of Feminist Theological Interpretation

The Story of the Female Shaman at Endor (I Sam. 28)

#### 1) Invitation to Shamanism

Expecting to be a biblical interpretation to enliven and embrace all social classes, I choose to reflect upon the story of the female shaman of Endor at I Sam. 28 as an example. Korean Christianity has completely shunned shamans who have been rejected as invalid beings for a long time in Korean society and placed at the bottom of the social strata. In the Bible, they are depicted as beings to be destroyed (Lev. 20,27; Deut. 18,10-11; Ezek. 14,10). I have been ignorant of them, and have had no contact at all, though I have felt some unknowable feeling of debt and pity for them. However, now I think I cannot stay away from them because shamanism has been at the base of Korean traditional religions and cultures, and been very characteristic of the Korean religious mind. Several years ago, I watched a documentary film of their lives and read books about their religious experiences,<sup>25)</sup> and realized that Christians' attitude towards them is very much one sided from the lack of

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25) Ok Sung Tscha, *Shamanism, The Religious Experience of Korean Women*, (Seo kwang Sa, 1997), p. 223-224. "I want to study Kut (Korean shamanist ritual) and teach my disciples the way to have dignity as shamans, and not to be disregarded. I am not going to avoid my destiny as a shaman, but to try, with my heart, to upgrade the status of shamans. We are priests, the same as Buddhist or Christian priests. But why are we disregarded? Even though we are possessed with spirits, we ourselves pray a lot and build our dignity to gain some respect from people. I try to make my clients comfortable and peaceful through Gut, and I am living as a shaman and dying as a shaman." (223) I think that nurturing shamans to be ones who do not harm but help anyone is right and helpful to society, and used to say so to my disciples." (224)

information. Why do Korean Christians treat them as sinners, with animosity? Who can blame them, they who literally consoled and empowered Minjung, the grass root people, in their life of suffering and trouble throughout our history, from late Shilla, through Koryu and Chosun, to the period of Japanese occupation? Were they not women priests sent by God for Minjung before Christianity came into Korea? The confessional statements of Minjung theologians, such as that "God had controlled Korean history even before the introduction of Christianity to Korea," could invoke the idea that female shamans consoled and encouraged those lower in social status, especially women, with God's compassionate will.

In that sense, the story of the shaman at Endor is a unique but precious source, because the story invites us, the Korean Christians, to think about shamanism and shamans. Also the story provides an opportunity to think about what the Israelites thought of the relationship of between the dead and the living, what the content of the religion in Israel was from the eyes of lay people, and what relationship the popular beliefs and the state religion had, and how the women priests were excluded.

## 2) From Co existence, Through Confrontation, to Abolition

Samuel had died and Saul had expelled the shamans and wizards from the land. As the Philistines assembled, Saul was afraid and he inquired of Yahweh, but Yahweh did not answer him, not by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. In his despair he seeks out a shaman, though he had formerly exterminated such from Israel, so far as was in his power. Informed of one, he visits the shaman at Endor, and she calls up the spirit of Samuel(=elohim).

But the spirit only denounces the punishment in store for Saul. Overcome by the sentence, Saul falls prostrate to the earth, but is roused and induced to break his fast by the woman whose guest he is. She said to Saul, "Eat, that you may have strength when you go one your way". Saul had refused, but the shaman and two of his servants urged him and Saul listened to their words. He ate and they rose and went away that night.

The story in I Sam. 28 has been rarely or never dealt with in Korean churches. Even when it is read, the text is normally used for explaining how serious the sins of King Saul or his mental disorders were. No one has been concerned about the woman in that story. However, I can daringly say that the woman is not a supporting actress, but the heroin, alongside Saul and Samuel. She was a great helper who fed and revived Saul.<sup>26)</sup> But the church has been silent about this woman, presumably because she is a woman and shaman. Korean Christianity has been strongly against shamanism, considering it as the kind of superstition premised on beings of gods and demons. Acceptance of these gods is considered to be in direct contradiction to the monotheism in Christian belief. In the Scripture, there are expressly bold denouncement of shamans (Lev. 20: 27; Deut. 18: 10-11; Ezek. 14: 10) and so shamans are undeniably very sinful sinners. In the eyes of Korean Christians, calling the soul of Samuel to this world is unspeakable and unacceptable. That story is treated as a lie or deception.<sup>27)</sup>

But in I Sam 28, the supernatural ability of the woman was taken for granted. The earlier stage of the story takes acts of calling such as hers and the existence of shamans for granted, however in the later stage Saul's going to the shaman is described as very sinful.<sup>28)</sup> This is revealing of the story's background, in which there was conflict between the popular folk religion and the state religion in Israel. Saul, who established the state religion and expelled shamans, goes to see the shaman. This is probably because of discrepancy in himself due to his desperation. In other words, in the time of Saul, the popular folk religion was pervasive, and after establishing the state,

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26) Hee Hak Lee thought that was not what the shaman did and removed it from the story. But I think there is no reason why we should remove this part from the whole story. Hee Hak Lee, "The Old Testamental Approach to Ancestor Worship," *The Old Testament and the Ancestor Worship*, (seoul: Preaching Academy, 2007), p. 92.

27) E. C. Rust, *Judges, Ruth, Samuel, The Layman's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5 (tr. Bong Pae Park), (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1966), p. 178; cf. H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Samuelbuecher* (ATD 10), (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), p. 179; F. Stolz, *Das erste und zweite Buch Samuel* (ZBK 9), (Zürich, 1981), p. 172.

28) F. Stolz, *Das erste und zweite Buch Samuel*, p. 172; Hee Hak Lee, "The Old Testamental Approach to Ancestor Worship," p. 83-93.

Saul prohibited its practices because he thought it was opposed to the state religion, the Yahweh religion. However, he himself depends on that folk religion when he is faced with a crisis. Later, when the prophets of 800-700 B.C. and Deuteronomists (around 580-550 B.C.) asked for the abolishment of shamans and the rituals for the dead, the popular religion came to be considered as a felony. While the demand of its abolition often appears in the books of prophets, and it in turn indicates that the practices of those religions were still operational among lay people.<sup>29)</sup>

According to many O.T. studies, ritual phenomena of popular religions in ancient Israel were as common as in any other ancient states around the Near East.<sup>30)</sup> The ritual for the dead functioned significantly as a kind of family religion during the pre exile period. The dead ancestors were like family gods and responsible for the well being and life of all the living members of the family.<sup>31)</sup> Originally, Yahweh was a god for the living, the heaven and the earth, but not for the dead and their world, sheol, at all. Before the time of exile, "Yahweh" religion as the public, and "worship of dead ancestors" as the popular folk religion coexisted and did not exclude each other (Dt 26: 14; Ps 88; 115: 17; Is 8: 19-20 etc.)<sup>32)</sup>

However, after Elijah and Elisha, the tradition of the nomadic period led by

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29) M. Th. Wacker, "Schamaninnen in der Welt der Bible?, *Schlangenbrut*," *Zeitschrift für feministisch und religiös interessierte Frauen*, Nr. 57, 15. Jg. (Stuttgart, 1997), p. 19.

30) H. Ringgren, "The Impact of Ancient Near East on Israelite Tradition", D. A. Knight(hrsg.), *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, (London, 1977), p. 31-47.

31) Hee Hak Lee, "Ancestor Worship in Ancient Israel", *The Old Testament and the Ancestor Worship*, (Seoul: Preaching Academy, 2007), p. 70; E. Zenger, "Das alttestamentliche Israel und seine Toten," K. Richter(Hrg.), *Der Umgang mit den Toten, Tod und Bestattung in der christlichen Gemeinde* (QD 123), (Freiburg, 1990), p. 144.

32) J. Tropper, *Nekromantie, Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und Alten Testament* (AOAT 223), (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1989), p. 346; W. G. Dever, "Folk Religion in Early Israel: Did Yahweh Have a Consort?" H. Shanks/J. Meinhardt(eds.), *Aspect of Monotheism: How God is One*, (Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington D. C.),= (tr. by Sung I. Kang), (Korea Theological Studies Institute, 2008), p. 33-75; A. Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism, The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism*. (Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007); B. Lang, "Die Jahwe allein Bewegung", *Der einzige Gott*, (Hrg. B. Lang), (Muenchen: Verlag Koesel, 1981); R. Albertz, "Das Raetel des israelitischen Monotheismus", *Gott und die Goetter, Welt und Umwelt der Bibel*, Nr. 11, (Katholisches Biblewerk: Stuttgart, 1999), 4-5.

Moses was focused on, and the relationship between Yahweh and Israel defined in terms of “chosen” and “covenant”, especially by the prophets of 8th century B.C. As a result, Israel’s faith was increasingly characterized as a monolatry, allowing only the worship to Yahweh. Finally, during the reformations of the kings Hezekiah(727-698 B.C.) and Josiah(639-608 B.C.), the popular religion had disappeared, and the Yahweh Jerusalem centered religion, the Deuteronimist theology, took its place.<sup>33)</sup> Along with that shift, the world of the dead came to belong to the domain of Yahweh and the rituals for the dead were severely berated and condemned by prophetic groups and Deuteronimists. The popular folk religions were harshly checked and censored by the public Yahweh religion. Eventually, though the prophetic religion<sup>34)</sup> emphasized justice and righteousness, sometimes against the state, its emphasis on the state rather than the families and/or private life, came to resemble the state religion. Naturally, the prophets were extremely opposed of the popular religions.

In the periods of the exile and post exile, when the Israelites lost their state and were captured and kept in Babylonia, the domain of Yahweh was cosmically expanded up to encompass the universe, beneath the earth, and the dead (Dt 32: 22; I Sam 2: 6; Ps 139: 7-9; Job 11: 7-8; 26: 6; 38: 17; Prov 15: 1; Amos 9: 2-3; Hos 13: 14). As the expectation that martyrs killed unjustly would be raised from the dead at the end of time increased in Hellenistic period, Yahweh’s domination in the world of the dead evidently became a clear fact. Ruling the dead by Yahweh made the claim of “the resurrection of the dead” possible.<sup>35)</sup> Yahweh’s involvement even in the world of the dead brought about a very important result in the history of religions, that is, the

33) P. K. McCarter, Jr., “Religious Reformation of the King Hiskiah and Josia,” H. Shanks/J. Meinhardt(eds.), *Aspects of Monotheism: How God is One*. (Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington D. C.) = (tr. by Sung I. Kang), (Korea Theological Studies Institute, 2008), p. 77-103.

34) R. Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels im Alttestamentlicher Zeit I* (ATD Erg. Bd. 8/1), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), p. 291-303.

35) P. Welten, “Die Vernichtung des Todes und Koenigsherrschaft Gottes: Eine traditionsgeschichte Studie zu Jesaja 25: 6-8; 24: 21-23 und Ex 24: 9-11,” *ThZ* 38 (1982), p. 129-146.

complete disappearance of the godly beings in all of popular religions.<sup>36)</sup> Therefore, popular religions relating to women were destroyed, and the roles of women priests and religious leaders were increasingly disappeared and later replaced with the role of “wisdom”.

### 3) A feminist consideration about shamanism

Regardless of whether shamanism is a religion or not, no one can deny the fact that shamanism itself, in fact, is deeply rooted in Korean culture.<sup>37)</sup> Recently Prof. Young Woo Han has claimed in his new book that the root of Korean cultural DNA is Dan Kun, who was the chief priest of shamanism. Nevertheless, while Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity have been respected as religions in Korean society, shamanism has been treated as superstition. In the late Shilla period, shamanism was pushed aside by Buddhism, in Chosun, by Confucianism, and after the introduction of Christianity, it was treated as a superstition, especially oppressed by the Japanese colonial regime that considered it as a foundation of Korean national culture. However, shamanism is a long standing cultural phenomenon of Korea, and the religion for the grassroots in social strata, remaining within popular belief. It can be said that shamanism is dominant in Korean thoughts and minds.<sup>38)</sup>

The world view of shamanism is basically pantheism. In all and every thing, there are spiritual beings that are related to actual living human beings. According to shamanism, all things are interrelated. Thus, if a neighbor suffers, then one cannot live a happy life either. Like souls abandoned, killed accidentally or at war, or raped and then abandoned by the husband, etc., if a soul of a dead one has “Han(unresolved grievance)”, it affects the commu-

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36) Hee Hak Lee, “The Ancestor Worship in Ancient Israel,” p. 72.

37) Young Woo Han, *An Intellectual History of Seonbi in Korea*, Korean Cultural DNA (Ewha Academy Series 1), (Ji Shik San Up Sa, 2010), p. 35-40.

38) Many scholars agree that all religions introduced to Korea have been influenced by shamanism, which changed its characteristics. Thus Korean Buddhism is shamanist Buddhism, Korean Confucianism is shamanist Confucianism and Korean Christianity is shamanist Christianity.

nity as a whole. So “Han pu ri(resolving grievance)” is very important in shamanism. For calling out to the soul of the dead one, shamans preside in a ritual called “Kut”. If the unresolved grievance of the soul of the dead remains unresolved, the soul becomes a ghost that harms the community as its revenge. Korean women have tried to resolve their “Han” through “Kut”, and largely powerless grassroots, Minjung, and women take “Han”. The “Han pu ri” rituals play the role of comforter, but they are basically indicators of injustice and expressions demanding justice for Minjung. From the view of the powerful, “Han pu ri Kut” may be not a necessary ritual. But the powerless and grieving women need so much consolation and comfort that they may become regular clients of “Kut”.

A shaman could be called a priest of shamanism. In Korea, shamans have functioned in many roles for the grassroots in need. They have been friends and counselors to help and encourage powerless people. It has been a religion for women, and provided refuge for women in need and trouble, though it has not led women into a resistance movement<sup>39)</sup> or to obtain true liberation. In that sense, shamanism is a religion for women who have been living hard lives in male centered Confucianism or Buddhist societies. Perhaps because it is a religion for women, it has been disregarded or persecuted.

In shamanism, creatures in the world are interconnected; therefore the practical peace and good deeds in daily life are required because anyone who does not, has to have “Han” or grievances. Their pursuit to live together peacefully matches well with an ethical demand for the multicultural times of the 21st Century. The unauthoritative, embracing, and inclusive shamanism has consoled the lowest in their sadness and hardship, and empowered them.<sup>40)</sup>

It cannot be right that Christianity has disregarded this fact and rejected shamanism as a superstition. Rather, Christians should ask themselves whether they are actively doing the role of shaman in the churches well. Shamanism does not require high minded ethics, such as self renunciation, or love for

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39) Jin Kim, Shamanistic Belief and Theology of ‘Han’, *The Theological Thought* 67 (The Korea Theological Study Institute, 1989 Winter), p. 984-1019.

40) cf. W. G. Dever, “Folk Religion in Early Israel,” p. 71-75.

one's enemy as in other high religions, but reveals a very modern, horizontal ethics of codependence, harmony, and consideration of other parts in matters. Such characters are feminine, and have been degraded and disregarded by authorities and vertical religions. However, the feminine ethics of shamanism, caring for families and private matters, is the exact modern ethics appropriate to the 21st Century, is it not?

On the other hand, what the deceased Samuel's spirit said was nothing but what Saul already knew. That is so suggestive that what shamans deliver to people may be not the celestial secret unknown to us. It is not right to exaggerate too much the ability and role of shamans. Generally, it is safe to say that their roles are comforters, counselors rather than "prophets" We can learn from shamanism that we have to live in justice for every one not to have any "Han". The fact that the shaman in 1Sam. 28 killed her cow to feed Saul to revive and return on his way, is really important. This caring and loving the weak and the poor is the basic ethic of shamanism. I think that Korean Christianity, focused only on the vertical relationship, can learn something from shamanism focused on the horizontal relationship.

What can be confirmed from the story of shaman of Endor is as follows: In Israel, there were popular folk religions, and the world of the dead did not belong to Yahweh's domain before the 8th Century B. C., but came to be increasingly assimilated into it; historically, Yahweh had grown from a god for tribes, through to a god for a state, to the God for the cosmos, deepening the conflict between the faith in Yahweh and the popular belief. We can also confirm that popular folk religions like shamanism are quite different from the publicly recognized religion; they are unauthoritative, and embracing; but such view is ethically very modern. Shamans are a kind of priests who are empathic to people experiencing desperation, and provide support. It is not fair to blame them for their roles as depicted above. However, it also has to be clear that if a shaman uses her/his supernatural abilities to make people addicted to her/him to do nothing for themselves, then they must be criticized by the prophets. In this context, the story of the shaman of Endor

in I Sam.28 is a very good source that reminds us to look back at the almost forgotten shamanism once more. Now it is the time to seriously discuss which way we should go, whether we only emphasize the exclusive attitude of the Israelites affiliated with the state in O. T., or understand the complexity of the multiple dimension of O. T. We should differentiate all the dimensions of the popular religions for only families and private matters in the time of peace, the prophetic religion proclaiming justice and righteousness, and the state religion that emerged from the crises of the state.

#### 4. Conclusion

We have looked through the history of feminist interpretation of the Old Testament, in search for a new direction of biblical interpretation, suited to the 21st Century. We have also considered how the Bible has influenced women's lives since Christianity first came into Korea in the 1880's and reviewed the achievements of Korean feminist theologians, according to the type of their methodology, and the degree of accepting the Bible as a source for women's liberation. Actually, most Korean women theologians view the Bible as the basis for women's liberation and do not refuse nor relinquish it. They defend the validity of the Bible and try to connect the Bible with feminism in various ways. Although the number of women biblical scholars is small, they are focusing their efforts to discover a new way to contribute to Biblical Studies and Feminism.

In order to overcome the exclusiveness of Korean church, the Korean Society of Old Testament Studies and the Korean Association of Feminist Theology should sincerely converse each other on a wide range of topics. Biblical Theology in an era of Globalization has to try to struggle with the problems of imperialism, neo-liberalism, sexism, environmental destruction, dualism, fundamentalism, and exclusivism, the matters that pervade Korean societies. In doing so, Biblical Theology, feminism, ecology, economics, and other religions should be scoured in an interdisciplinary manner. The identity of Biblical Theology is based not only in its academic contributions, but also in its

service to the society as well as to the church. Already, activities and roles of women have leaped forward in the secular societies. Surely, the Korean church cannot ignore this fact any more. I hope to see the day when the feminist spirit overflows within the Old Testament Studies.

I also expect that the Korean Society of the Old Testament would be more concerned about our traditional culture. Christianity has an aversion to shamanism but it is undeniable that shamanism is at the root of the Korean mind. Though shamanism, as a popular religion for families and private matters, has always been excluded by the public religion or religions, it, in fact, sustained the lives of our ancestors who experienced extreme suffering and hardship. Unless Korean history before the introduction of Christianity should be ignored, we must be more interested in our traditional religions and cultures. To do so, we have to learn and interpret our cultures along with the Bible, to be true to our identity, and discover a new way of interpreting the Bible. The cross examination of the Bible with our culture is essential to achieving our goal.

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Key words

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