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Rupturing the Empire: Reading the poor widow as a postcolonial female subject (Mark 12:41-44)

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Zusammenfassung:

In diesem Beitrag wird die Perikope vom Opfer der armen Witwe (Markus 12,41-44) aus der Perspektive des postkolonialen weiblichen Subjekts im Allgemeinen, und heutiger koreanischer Frauen im Besonderen interpretiert. Die Frauen repräsentieren die postkolonialen weiblichen Subjekte, die sich den überkommenen tief verwurzelten Traditionen von Konfuzianismus, japanischem Kolonialismus, der historischen Dringlichkeit einer nationalen Wiedervereinigung und dem Neokolonialismus ausgesetzt sehen. Generell stellen Frauen in der markinischen Gemeinde die Subalternen dar. Sie sind auf doppelte Weise kolonialisiert, ähnlich wie heutige Frauen der Zwei-Drittel-Welt, die unter Neokolonialismus und Patriarchat leiden.

Die arme Witwe vor dem Opferstock wirft all ihr Geld weg, um zu zeigen, wie das imperiale System des Tempels arme Witwen zu Opfern macht und zeigt damit auf einen Riss im Gebäude des römischen Weltreichs. Das Handeln der armen Witwe offenbart zugleich ihre eigene Situation als Opfer des Imperialismus sowie die des instabilen kolonialen Systems selbst.

Mit einer Analyse der Themen "Imperium" und "Geschlecht" im Markus-Evangelium will dieser Beitrag den Text über die arme Witwe als subversives, hybrides und bedrohliches Subjekt in kolonialen/postkolonialen Situationen neu deuten. Sie kann so Vorbild für eine Ermächtigung heutiger Frauen in der postkolonialen Welt werden.

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Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them: "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are

contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mark 12:41-44, NRSV).

I. Introduction: Dialogical Imagination and Salim Interpretation

In this small portion of the Markan story, the poor widow who was invisible in the previous Markan story suddenly appears, throws out two coins and soon disappears. The sudden and disrupting presence of the poor widow raises curiosity about who she is, her purpose in coming to the temple, and what led her to take action as she did. We have a clue through Jesus’ applauding of the poor widow that the amount of her small offering is more than that of other rich people (12:43). Jesus’ interpretation of the poor widow’s offering might seem to be one of praise. However, it limits our imagination regarding other possible meanings related to her appearance and behavior that have the potential of leading us to deeper and new understandings of this passage for readers who can identify with the poor widow.

‘Dialogical Imagination’ and ‘*Salim* (meaning ‘making things alive’ in Korean) interpretation’ as examples of an Asian postcolonial feminist reading of the Bible enable us to read the scene of the poor widow as our current story and empower readers who themselves identify with the poor widow to live in this postcolonial world. Dialogical imagination is Kwok Pui-lan’s inventive term for Asian biblical hermeneutics. What Kwok explores in terms of ‘dialogue’ is talking with a partner that implies “mutuality,” “active listening,” and “openness.” Thus, she suggests that Asian Christians have to bring the heritages of their stories and Biblical stories into dialogue. Kwok also engages “imagination” in Asian biblical hermeneutics. She explicates the necessity of Asians’ imagination in bringing biblical stories into dialogue with Asians’ legends, myths, and stories passed down through oral tradition to make a connection between the Bible and our lives.¹

The Korean word, ‘*Salim*’ literally means ‘making things alive.’ Generally, it is used to refer to Korean women’s everyday household chores. However, ‘*Salim*’ includes additional meanings; it not only represents basic and essential things in human life but also the skillful art of “making things alive,” “mending broken things,” “feeding everybody,” “creating peace, health, and abundant living.” Chung Hyun Kyung, Korean feminist theologian, declares that Korean women, the “Salimists,” are doing this *Salim* type work for the family

and the society.² Using the concept of ‘*Salim*,’ I call Korean women’s biblical interpretation “*Salim hermeneutics*.” That is, *Salim hermeneutics* is a way in which ordinary Korean women may read the Bible for “making things alive,” restoring broken things, making peace, justice, and participating in a new creation of God.

In this study, I attempt to re-read the story of the poor widow’s offering from the poor widow’s perspective. After I review the historical and literary reading critically, I re-read it from the standpoint of the poor widow who is a (post)colonial subject,³ using the hermeneutics of ‘dialogical imagination’ and ‘*Salim* interpretation’ which allow the encounter of two different stories in terms of time and space so that the clash of the two stories produces challenging messages for current readers. I, then, explore how the story of the poor widow, as a (post)colonial subject, can be re-read by Korean women readers who can recreate it within a Korean context.

II. Historical and Literary Reading

The scene of the poor widow’s offering is sandwiched between Jesus’ attack on Jewish religious authority, the collaborators with the Roman Empire (12:38-40), and the subsequent story of the imperial institution symbolized by the ‘temple’ culture (13:1-2). Historical and literary readings have treated this small story as a segment, or transition, in order to highlight the story of Jesus’ self-denial and suffering in the following Passion Narrative. It also has been interpreted as Jesus’ teaching material for his disciples. Any attempt to consider this shocking scene from the perspective of the widow, herself, has not been fully explored in historical and literary interpretations by both male and feminist biblical scholars. The images of the poor widow in the historical/literary studies, today, can only be classified from three perspectives: the positive, the negative, and the ambiguous or multiple respectively.

1. The Poor Widow as an example to follow

Most historical-critical biblical scholars have used this poor widow as an effective model for illustrating the spirit of true offering, total commitment, self-offering, loyalty, generosity, humility etc. Influenced by Bultmann’s form critical analysis,⁴ Vincent Taylor insists that this narrative of the poor widow is a type of “pronouncement story” which exists to emphasize Jesus’ teaching on almsgiving.⁵ Robert Gundry insists that the main

point of this story is one of the relative values of various offerings. In other words, the amount of offering does not matter to God. Rather, the attitude behind it is more important.⁶ D.E. Nineham also views this narrative as a teaching parable for the lesson that the true gift is to give all that we have (v.44). Nineham further explains that in his view, the function of this narrative, on the one hand, is to present a summary of Mark's message about discipleship while, on the other hand, it is a superb transition to Jesus' passion narrative of Jesus giving his whole life for his people.⁷

As we can see, most historical-critical interpretations of this brief narrative have focused on providing a positive model to satisfy the priorities of the Markan theological ethics with themes of self giving, generosity, commitment, worthy treasures etc. Even though these interpretations praise the poor widow as exemplary, they are not concerned with the poor widow's situation and motivation. Rather, they subordinate her to their theological interests. In contrast to praising this poor widow as exemplary, there is an interesting view that laments the situation of the poor widow as a victim of the patriarchal and hierarchical system.

2. The Poor Widow as a victim of the corruption of religious authority

While the majority of scholars interpret the poor widow as a positive exemplary figure, contrasting the genuine piety between the rich scribes and the poor widow, there are, in fact, scholars who view the act of the poor widow as a symbol of the corruption of religious authority. C.S. Mann explains 12:41-44 as a continuation of 12:38-40 which suggests Jesus' attack on the scribes and their official establishment. The scribes led the poor widow to make offerings with all she had, even though she was poor. Thus, the story of the poor widow's offering is used as evidence to exhibit the oppression of the scribes toward the widows who were the weakest and the oppressed – socially, economically, and politically.

Addison G. Wright develops this negative view of the poor widow further, saying that Jesus' words describing the action of the widow are not words of praise but rather are 'lamenting.' Wright leads readers to imagine the real social and economic situation of the poor widow and challenges conventional meanings of this narrative including Jesus' comment on the widow's offering.⁸ For Wright, this narrative is a sad story of the poor widow who was misguided and exploited by the religious authorities and institutions. The

poor widow's offering is not an example to follow, but rather a situation to avoid. Jesus' last comment on what the widow was doing should be understood as Jesus' lament and the continuation of Jesus' attack on the scribes.

Since Wright's intriguing study, this negative view of the poor widow's action has been further explored. H.C. Waetjen also emphasizes the corruption of the temple system which had functioned as the control center of the "tributary mode of production," and insists that the poor widow's offering reflects this corruption.⁹ Ched Myers also understands the structure of this narrative as 'polarization,' that is, rich scribes vs. poor widows. However, Myer does not emphasize the contrast between the religious hypocrisy and the genuine piety. Rather, in his view, Mark charges the abuses of the poor in the narrative of the poor widow.¹⁰ Upon surveying the negative views of the poor widow's offering, these studies focus on the corrupted temple system and its religious authority, and use the widow's story to expose their wrongdoing and abuse. They do not explore the widow's motivation fully from her perspective, but treat her as a passive and invisible subject.

3. The Poor Widow as multiple figure

In recent studies, there is a tendency to look at the poor widow from multiple situations with multiple perspectives. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, in her essay, "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," insists that Mark presents characters as both positive and negative models for the readers to follow or to reject. Malbon avoids making the widow a heroine because the poor widow only functions as a flat character for the sake of showing the huge framework of the Markian story of "who Jesus is and what it means to be his follower."¹¹ Furthermore, Malbon opens more possibilities for different interpretations according to diverse contexts.

Geoffrey Smith understands that the passage of Mark 12:41-44 serves to expose the poor widow both as a positive example of piety and a negative victim of authority. Regarding its location, the poor widow's pericope is located looking back at the denunciation of the scribes and is also anticipating the prophetic discourse of the destruction of the temple. Moses' law provided designations for the widows who were unable to support themselves so that they would neither be destitute nor starving. In Deuteronomy 27:19, Yahweh promised to curse the man who engages in injustice toward the widow. In a word, the mistreatment of widows was a sin against God's will as the prophetic writings show.

Against this Old Testament backdrop, the fact that the widow in Mark 12:41-44 was impoverished and neglected is evidence of the Israelites' disobedience to the law and their corruption. Thus, Smith, on the one hand, still appreciates the poor widow's act as the model of true piety, while he views the narrative of the poor widow as the summarization of the Israelite' "chronic disregard of God's law and the sham religion of the nation's leaders," on the other hand.¹²

The multiple readings attempted by Malbon and Smith open the horizons for diverse interpretations. However, the possibilities of multiple interpretations are just limited within the written texts. Feminist hermeneutics should go further beyond the written text because the biblical text we have was finalized and selected by patriarchal and imperial preference. We can think of possibilities for interpreting the poor widow as a female subject in colonial/postcolonial contexts, utilizing dialogical imagination and *Salim* interpretation in reflecting Women's current situations.

III. Temple and Roman Empire

The temple theme in the latter part of Mark (11-16) has been distinctive in comparison with the other gospels.¹³ John Paul Heil classifies Chapters 11-16 in relation to the temple theme as follows: Jesus' teaching after he enters the temple (11:1-12:44), Jesus' teaching after he leaves the temple (13:1-37), and Jesus' death and resurrection in relation to the temple (14:1-16:8).¹⁴ Although Heil's analysis focuses on Jesus' 'teaching' setting, I agree with his point that each section can be grouped, centering on the temple theme which is important in the latter Markinian narrative.

Jesus marches on toward Jerusalem with a kingly image, even though it is not so splendid or glorious (11:1-11). As Jesus passes on the road, many people who are hanging around spread their cloaks and palm branches on the ground, shouting "Hosanna." This scene reflects Jewish people's longing for the Messiah who can save and give them national freedom from the Roman Empire. People surely seem to believe that Jesus must be the king of Jerusalem as a descendent of David ("Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David," 11:10). Frank J. Matera illustrates that the scene of Jesus' entry of Jerusalem is reminiscent of the royal enthronements of Solomon (I Kings 1:38-40) and Jehu (II Kings 9:13). In the former case, Solomon rides

David's mule to be anointed as the king, and people are shouting, "Long live the King." In the latter case, the crowds spread out their clothes and proclaim, "Jehu is king." Matera also adds the allusions of Zechariah 9:9 and Genesis 49:10-11. Both passages indicate the king riding on the donkey and Mark's use of those passages implies Jesus' royal image as the Messiah.¹⁵

Indeed, while Jesus' humble riding on a colt seems to be mimicking the promise of Davidic kingship, he is mocking the authority, probably that of the Herodian line and the Roman emperor at the same time. According to postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, the repetition and the mimicking of the colonizer of the colonized are always present in colonization, and even evoke interruption and subversion.¹⁶ Jesus' march to Jerusalem on a donkey is mimicking a royal ceremony of enthronement, however, not in a gorgeous or splendid way, but in a humble way so that Jesus demonstrates the real meaning of authority (cf. 9:35; 10:14-15, 45), mocking the Jewish and Roman kingship.

After he enters Jerusalem, Jesus immediately takes the initiative in the temple to disrupt the activities of selling and buying items involved in sacrificial worship. The temples in the cities of the Roman Empire were a symbol of the imperial cult, 'a kind of network' which reflected the political and economic relationship between Rome and its province. The imperial cult and festivals represented Rome's vehicles to colonize such provinces as Asia. The temple was the center of worship, culture, and commerce, and the temple cult was a kind of economic system, operating as bank and market place. The imperial priests provided imperial festivals in order to celebrate the accession of an emperor, or his successors, or in honor of other members of the emperor's family.¹⁷

We need to understand Jesus' temple act in the context of the Roman imperial cult. Just as Roman emperors exploited temples and temple cults in order to demonstrate their authority and power, Herod Antipas who was collaborating with Augustus must have used the Jerusalem temple to satisfy his imperial power and desire as a Jewish king. Jesus' action of overturning the tables of business is certainly disrupting the temple cult and rejecting the imperial authority.¹⁸

With regard to paying tax in the temple cult, we need to investigate what Jesus means in Mark 12:17, saying "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." This

scene ensues after Jesus' disruptive act in the temple following the signs of the withered fig tree, the argument concerning the authority of Jesus in the temple (11:12- 33), and the explanation of the parable of the Tenants (12:1-12). What Jesus says about "Caesar's" is a crucial background to understand the narrative of the widow's mite.

Coin in the ancient world was 'sovereignty and independence.' Thus, in the Maccabean period, the Jews issued their own coins as symbols of their liberty. Indeed, the image of Caesar on the coin was bothering the Jews, reminding them of their colonized situation.¹⁹ The coin that Jesus asks for was the denarius in which the image of Caesar was inscribed, minted by the emperor Tiberius.²⁰ It symbolized Roman imperial power and authority to submit the colonized under their rule.²¹ Thus, Jesus' statement, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's." (Mark 12:17) means "Let the things produced by the imperial rule be returned to the emperor." This is an important backdrop against which to understand the poor widow's act in the temple and which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

IV. The Poor Widow as the Other and the Hybrid subject in Third Space

In the ancient world, a widow is, in general, a woman who has lost her husband and has experienced a sudden life change from security to vulnerability so that most times someone needs to take care of her. Along with the orphans and the strangers, the widow has been a representative of the weakest and the poorest, and a parameter of the rise and fall of the community of God's justice in the Old Testament; taking care of widows was an important element of doing God's justice as evidence of obedience to God. (Deuteronomy 14:22-29; 16:9-12; 24:17-18, 19-22 and 26:12-15).²²

The Greek word for widow, χήρα, is related to the preposition, χωρίς, 'without' or 'apart from.' In New Testament terms, a widow is a person left without a husband or a source of support, one whose life is destitute and miserable. Χήρα also was the term to describe a celibate woman.²³ In the first century C.E., the status of the widow is changing although the widow's image inherited the Hebraic traditions which characterized them as the poor, desolate 'remnant of Israel.' The role of the widows in the temple was to pray and to wait for the accomplishment of God's promise.²⁴ In Jesus' ministry, "the widow's position and piety are no more to be lamented; she becomes exemplary. She is elevated to a position of spiritual prominence in the Christian order of things."²⁵

However, the widow in Jesus' era and the Markan period had to live as the Other. Her social and economic status was the most marginalized and powerless in the imperial system. She could not insist on her own rights; her only option was silence. Her destitution, loneliness, and vulnerability were not individual issues but the consequence of the interconnected circle of relationships between the self/the other, man/woman, heaven/earth, the oppressor/the oppressed. Her marginality as the Other "has no separate existence of its own. It is always relational, for it relates worlds that oppose one another." Her presence is like a "symbol, which does not exist by itself but exists only in relation to others."²⁶ The widow as the Other cannot be liberated without the liberation of the opposite subject:

You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not. The differences made between entities comprehended as absolute presences – hence the notions of pure origin and true self – are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought peculiar to the Occident (the "onto-theology" which characterizes Western metaphysics).²⁷

When we look at the widow, we see both myself and yourself in her exploitation and barrenness. Her liberation and salvation are also my liberation and your salvation. She is the very site of encountering you and me and transforming one another. In her, we discover the solution of my problem and your problem. The poor widow invites all others to a 'third space' which leads the self and the other to encounter and transform each other. The 'third space' is a term that Homi Bhabha explores in his postcolonial theory. That is, the third space is not a fixed real place but an engendering place of contact between the boundaries of the self/the other. In this contacting inbetweenness, the boundaries are blurred and the new being can be created in this third space. Homi Bhabha notes,

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.²⁸

This ‘in-between’ space is engendered from the contact between the worldly empire and God’s empire (Kingdom of God). The poor widow, who has been waiting and partly experiencing God’s kingdom which has already come through Jesus’ proclamation and ministry, lives in an in-between space which is ambivalent, flexible, and creative. Her life between the Roman empire and God’s empire is indeed ambiguous. She is still miserable in terms of economic and social status in the imperial system. However, her choice of another life in another space is authentic and exemplary, anticipating a new kingdom which will transcend the Roman empire. Her ambiguous identity within the in-between space is threatening to the Roman imperial system as well as to Jewish local elites who live with the support of the Roman empire.

The poor widow’s story is a climax of Jesus’ critique of the temple system and the last episode to occur in the temple before Jesus’ prediction of its destruction. After Jesus curses the scribes’ exploitation of the poor widows, he sits down opposite the place where the offerings were put into the temple treasury (12:41). Part of this temple treasury contributed the temple tax to the Roman empire. Does the poor widow’s action of throwing out all the money she had indicate just a generous and devoted offering to God? If we interpret the poor widow’s act as an exemplary offering or sign of her exploitation, we might lose the flow of the theme in the context of the destruction of the temple and Jesus’ journey toward Jerusalem in order to complete his mission, the dawning of God’s kingdom.²⁹

The poor widow is the one who recognizes the portent of the destruction of the temple which has been the symbol of power of both the Jewish rulers and the Roman empire in Jewish colonized society. She throws out all the money she had even though it was a small amount not because she wanted to be devoted totally to God, nor because she was misled by the scribes, offering the money in obedience to the scribes’ false teaching. The poor widow who has been waiting for the kingdom of God acknowledges the clashing of the two kingdoms.³⁰ In between those collapsing spaces, the poor widow throws out all that she obtained from the ruling imperial system and radically chooses to live on the side of the kingdom of God in front of Jesus, thinking that Jesus will know what she is doing.

V. Reading the Poor Widow's story from a Korean Feminist Postcolonial Perspective

This poor widow did not have any name according to all accounts. She simply represents as the 'widow' who was named as such on the basis of her male relationship, no longer having her husband. She was nameless, poor, and marginalized. She was the Other and the subaltern. We do not hear her voice in the text and she could not tell because she did not have any means to speak up for herself.³¹ Therefore, what she did was just to act out. Her identity was simply as a victim of patriarchal society and colonization under the Roman empire. She had lost her national and personal identity. She did not choose those miserable situations, but just inherited them. However, she had a prophetic keenness to recognize what was going on in this world regarding Jesus' mission. She was able to recognize the clash of two kingdoms and the dawning of the new era through Jesus. She was the one who prepared the way of the Lord (Mark 1:3), impelling and embarrassing Jesus to continue on his suffering journey. She showed herself to Jesus as the one who was prepared to enter the new kingdom of God, giving up everything which belonged to the worldly empire.

In the poor widow herself, we Korean women discover our female Christian forerunners, mothers, sisters, friends and even ourselves. The early Korean Christian women, who eagerly longed for the gospel in their national, social, and economic desperate situations, were usually the poor and the widow. Their economic and social life was miserable, and living without a husband was disgrace. The first baptized woman in Korea, Sam-Duk Chun said, "I couldn't see, although I had eyes. I couldn't hear, while I had ears, And I couldn't speak despite the fact that I had a mouth. However, I became an independent person after I knew Jesus Christ."³² This is a common experience of the first generation of Korean female Christians. Because they suffered under the androcentric patriarchal society and Japanese colonization, they could easily find the light of their salvation in the Christian gospel which gave them comfort and joy with a new self-identity. The Korean women were nameless in those days. They were named in relation to the closest male relative. When they were young, they were usually referred to as father's daughter or son's sister by other people. After marriage, a woman was called husband's wife. Once her husband died, she was known as a widow. After they became Christians, they received the name with their baptism. Kim, Circus who was baptized in 1899 in Pyongyang stated her "happiest moment" occurred when she received her name:

The day I was baptized was the happiest day in my life. We, Chosen women have lived under the men's oppressions without lives for several thousand years. Without the Christian gospel, Korean women's status could not improve even like this. The Korean women's liberation movement began the day when the gospel spread into Korea. Therefore, I confess that the day I was baptized was the happiest day in my life. Furthermore, I who lived without a name for fifty years have got my name, "Circus," with my baptism.³³

These women were known as the 'Bible women' (*Chondobuin*) who became the cornerstone of building Korean Christianity. The "Bible women" literally meant the women who carried the Bible and sold the Bible to disseminate the gospel. Although the foreign missionaries came to Korea to spread the gospel, they faced several obstacles such as their lack of knowledge of the Korean language, different customs, and culture. Especially, there was a Confucian law in Korea that men could not communicate with women so that women were excluded not only from society but also from receiving the gospel from male missionaries. Thus, male missionaries definitely needed the Bible women because they could not have direct contact with Korean women. Most of the Bible women were poor widows who were alienated in terms of their social and economic status. They could not fit in the patriarchal and Confucian society, and they could not help but be in silence. Encountering the gospel for them was a clashing moment to move on toward the opening space to be reborn.

The Bible women served several roles in building up Korean Christianity. While selling the Bible, they popularized it and could contact the Korean women indoors. They taught the Korean women how to read and to write because most were illiterate. They even preached wherever they met people. The Bible women preached, taught, and sold the Bible.³⁴ They also played the role of minister, visiting, taking care of people's problems, and comforting them. The Bible women were leaders, even though their positions started as helpers of missionaries. They led Bible studies in groups and founded associations within the churches. The missionaries realized that the Korean women, themselves, had the ability and authority to lead the churches.³⁵ Their activities included educating Korean women, establishing the church, reviving the churches, and spreading the gospel. Without their existence and service, the Korean churches would not have grown or developed. However, their names began to disappear again once the church started to be systematized by the

hegemony of male leaders. Recently, they are being re-discovered by Korean feminist scholars through their efforts of deconstructing and reconstructing the origin of the early Korean churches.

Between the two stories, the poor widow's offering in Mark and the Bible women in early Korean Christianity, we find a third space that emerges; that is, two stories are encountered through dialogical imagination, thus creating a new paradigm with which to interpret the biblical story and the reading context in interconnection. The poor widows in both Mark and early Korean Christianity were desolate, nameless, and hopeless beings in this world. However, they came to realize that the patriarchal and imperial world was not the whole world they inhabited, but there was another world into which they could bring about a setting which to live in. These women experienced this other world in the third space. This space is totally different from their oppressed world, thus making these women subversive in this world. In the third space, these women explored ways to interrupt this world, and in so doing, bring forth a possibility to create the new world in God's kingdom.

The poor widow in the Gospel of Mark threw out everything which belonged to the Roman emperor and expected to live in the coming kingdom of God with Jesus' mission. Her boldness, resistance, and wise choice of life were inherited by the poor widows in the early Korean churches, making them work as the Bible women, not to submit themselves to the oppressing world of their day but to create a new space to continue not only to live for their liberation and freedom but also as models for today's women in similar situations. This is also an example of *Salim* interpretation which discovers a biblical story and interprets it with a dialogical imagination so as to encourage readers to challenge the fixed reality which might oppress the Others, and to reform it to serve people in fluidity for making them feel alive.

VI. Conclusion

Postcolonial feminist biblical interpretation enables the Two-Thirds World women to deconstruct androcentric, imperial, and western dominated interpretations, and to read the Bible in their own way and from their own perspective. I find the 'dialogical imagination' to be a solid method for ordinary Asian women to read the Bible, and suggest 'Salim interpretation' as a postcolonial biblical hermeneutics for Korean women specifically.

Dialogical imagination bridges the gap of time and space between the biblical story and our story and invites readers into the ‘third space’ engendered by the encounter of two stories. In this third space, readers as the postcolonial female subjects, produce ‘*Salim* interpretation’ which enlivens all things. *Salim* hermeneutics summons the colonizer/the colonized, the powerful/the powerless, the oppressor/the oppressed, man/woman, and human/nature all together and makes them look into each other to find solutions of mutual healing and salvation.

In order to explore Asian postcolonial feminist hermeneutics, I chose the story of the poor widow in Mark which has been ignored or misread by male, imperial, and western biblical interpreters and re-read it from the position of the postcolonial female subject, using dialogical imagination and *Salim* interpretation. The poor widow as the Other and hybrid subject under Roman colonialism recognizes the clash of two kingdoms (the worldly empire and the kingdom of God), and shows her faith and signs to Jesus by throwing away her every tie to the Roman empire, reminding Jesus of his messianic role to bring in the kingdom of God. The poor widow’s story in the Gospel of Mark also invokes the stories of Two-Thirds World women in their past and current history by dialogical imagination, and produces liberating and encouraging messages within the clashing third space of two stories for the readers as postcolonial subjects. Postcolonial readers of the Bible can personally perform their new story created by this third space in which all things can be inclusive and mutual salvation might be realized.

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¹ Kwok's dialogical imagination builds a bridge beyond the difference of time and space between biblical stories and our lives and creates a new horizon to read the Bible from an

Asian perspective. Dialogical imagination also incorporates cultural, religious, and historical reality so that it allows readers to discern God's sign for today. Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 12-16; "Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation" *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 77-99

² Chung Hyun Kyung, in her "Salimist Manifesto," defines Salimist as a "Korean eco-feminist or anyone who wants to share the vision of a Korean eco-feminist." Hyun Kyung describes the Salimist as a magician who changes things with her touch, inclusivist or embracist, recycler, peace activist, etc. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Salimist Manifesto," *Goddess-spell According to Hyun Kyung* (Pa-Ju: Yolimwon, 2001), 236-140.

³ The poor widow was a historically colonized subject by the Roman empire in the first century. However, I have categorized her as a postcolonial subject as well, because when I deal with the term, 'postcolonial,' I use it as a continuing term for the colonial phenomenon. Further, as a result of dialogical imagination, she can be projected as a postcolonial subject for women of the Two-Thirds worlds who currently live in the postcolonial period. "Post-Colonialism /Postcolonialism" *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 186-188.

⁴ Bultmann explains that the story of the poor widow's offering is added later during the era of Jesus' saying. In other words, the poor widow's story is inserted to highlight Jesus' words about almsgiving. Rudolf K. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, translated by John Marsh. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 32, 56.

⁵ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 496.

⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 728-730

⁷ D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, Pelican New Testament Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), 334-335.

⁸ Addison G. Wright, "The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament? – A Matter of Context," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 256-265.

⁹ Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Social-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 183-196.

¹⁰ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 320-323.

¹¹ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers,” *In the Company of Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 166-188.

¹² Geoffrey Smith, “A Closer Look at the Widow’s offering: Mark:12:41-44,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 Mr (1997): 27-36.

¹³ On the temple theme in Mark, see Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula: Scholar Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1977); John R. Donahue, *Are you Christ?* (Missoula: Scholar Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1973).

¹⁴ John Paul Heil, “The Narrative Strategy and Pragmatics of the Temple Theme in Mark,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997): 76-100.

¹⁵ Frank J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 66 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 70-74

¹⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of the Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 107.

¹⁷ S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 235.

¹⁸ Hans Dieter Betz explains that the conflict between business and worship described in Mark 11:15-18 can be paralleled in other sources in antiquity and Jesus’ act was a critique of the increasing commercialism influenced by the Roman temple cult that undercut the very purpose of the sanctuary. Betz views that the motive of Jesus’ temple act is not a ‘priestly concern for the ritual purity of the temple’ but the judgment of Herod’s appropriation of the temple cult for his political purpose to strengthen his kingship by using commercialism. Hans Dieter Betz, “Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18): A Comparative Religion Approach,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116/3 (1997): 455-472.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 308, I Maccabees 15:6.

²⁰ H. St J. Hart, “The coin of ‘Render unto Caesar...’ (A note on some aspects of Mark 12:13-17; Matthew 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26) *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* ed. Ernst Bammel and C.F.D. Moule, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 243; William R. Herzog II, “Disassembling, A Weapon of the Weak,” *Journal of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion* (1994): 339-360; Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 36, 43.

²¹ Fernando Belo notes that the coin marks “the uncleanness inflicted on the country by the occupying power” and it mirrors the economic and political exploitation under the flag,

“the Pax Romana.” Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), 187.

²² Widows, strangers, and orphans can be classified as a ‘social subgroup’ which includes a category of socially weak persons of underclass in ancient Israel. Harold V. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 23.

²³ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 9-10; Gustav Staehlin, “chera,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 9:440

²⁴ Anna in Luke 2:36-37 is the paradigm of celibate widows in the early church. *Ibid.*, 218-35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁶ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 47.

²⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 90.

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 7.

²⁹ Stephen D. Moore views the scene of the poor widow’s mites as “the site of apocalypse in Mark,” because her act is an “epiphanic extravagance” that comes from her recognition of the coming kingdom of God. Moore suggests the poor widow’s mite is not about “Jesus’ self-divesting investment” but the “expenditure” without any reward, which is beyond reciprocity. Stephen D. Moore, “Mark and Empire,” *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* edited by Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 147-148.

³⁰ Marion Grau explains the poor widow as the “selfless” and “endless” giver who is emptying herself out of her lack. However, Her emptiness out of her lack soon becomes her “abundance in the divine *oikos*.” Marion Grau, *Of Divine Economy* (New York: T&T Clark International A Continuum Imprint, 2004), 98.

³¹ Here I am attributing to Mark the perspectives of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak emphasizes the limitations of linguistic and philosophical representation, and exposes how the radical western intellectual can silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience. G. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory A Reader edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66-111.

³² Pyung-Uk Chang, *The History of Korean Methodist Women* (Seoul: Sung-Kwang Moonwha-Sa, 1979), 194.

³³ Kim, Circus, *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1927), 72

³⁴ *Bible Society Record* (October, 1990), 24

³⁵ K. Wambold, “Women’s class,” *Korean Mission Field* (1913), 53.

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