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Bae, Hyunju. "Dancing Around Life: An Asian Woman's Perspective." *Ecumenical Review*, 56 (2004): 390-403.

This article is Hyunju Bae's attempt to introduce *a hermeneutics of compassion in detachment* acknowledging that the Bible is misused to oppress the weak but at the same time used for the liberation of the oppressed as in the time of imperialism in Asia. This creative interpretation is possible, when Asian biblical scholars take both their Asian cultural and religious heritage (Text A) and the Bible (Text B) seriously to decolonize themselves. She defines this hermeneutical process as "dancing around life" because in so doing, interpreters listen to the tune of life not only through reason but also through heart and body. To explain this, Hyunju Bae refers to the story of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Traditionally, interpreters understood this story speaking of her humility or great faith and used it in negative ways to legitimate anti-Judaism and ethnocentrism/cultural imperialism: Christians, the Gentiles, need to replace the Jews and the "primitiveness of the heathens." However, Hyunju Bae argues from Mark 7:28, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" that first this story is a story of creative disobedience and courage rather than humility. By breaking the boundary of passive feminine receptivity, she fights against the rejection of Jesus, which means the absence of God. Second, it is a story of wisdom using clever euphemisms and even testing Jesus to find out his integrity, where he stands in the issue of life as a charismatic healer. She is asking Jesus to break from the past conception of the Gentile woman to "create a new reality of life." Third, it is a story of action for life and human dignity showing the boldness of a mother to take a risk of rejection and humiliation for her daughter. In order to explain this, Hyunju Bae introduces a story of Cho Wha Soon who started helping low-class female laborers, experienced the limit of middle class church traditions, and later realized the need of doing theology, as Bae puts it with the "hermeneutics of feet." Like the Syrophenician woman who stood for her daughter, Cho was the mother of women laborers in Korea seeking justice. In the story of Syrophenician woman, Jesus is depicted as "the open-minded listener" accepting her criticism of his prejudice and being transformed by it. Therefore, Hyunju Bae concludes that Christians are called to have mutual patience, ability to detach themselves from their

prejudice, and willingness to be changed for the sake of life and human dignity in this pluralistic world.

Reflection: The article is composed of basically two parts: Asian feminist biblical interpretation where Hyunju Bae introduces her way of hermeneutics which is called “Dancing around life” and her interpretation of the story of the Syrophoenician woman as an example. In other words, the point of this article is not just giving a new interpretation of a biblical story but giving a new interpretive process which will allow people to read the Bible differently and apply it to their lives: How does the Bible talk about human life?

There are two points worth mentioning in Hyunju Bae’s article. First, the goal of biblical interpretation is to bring change to human life, not just to find a new meaning of the story and be satisfied with it. Her interpretation of the story of the Syrophoenician woman is intriguing, because she even puts Jesus to the test by the Syrophoenician woman regarding his prejudice as a Jew toward Gentiles. However, the point of Hyunju Bae’s creative interpretation is to reveal the dignity of her daughter’s life and of woman laborers in Korea. In other words, her article itself raises and answers a question concerning the purpose of biblical interpretation: why do we interpret the Bible? That is to bring positive change in lives of human beings.

Second, the future of biblical interpretation is at stake on the dialogue between different voices. The story of the Syrophoenician woman shows that even Jesus was preoccupied by cultural norms or prejudices of his time and that it was only possible through a dialogue with a woman who was in a different context from his. This story shows that even one’s reading of the Bible should be in constant dialogue with different voices, because otherwise, s/he can be captured by her/his own prejudice and never hear the voice of God speaking through the scripture and through people. Therefore, lively discussion on the stories of Bible and their interpretation need to be encouraged among church members rather than imposing the pastor’s interpretation as a norm. If pastors can act facilitators in those discussion groups giving guidelines for biblical interpretation, the congregation’s understanding of the Bible will be broadened, and the Bible will speak to its readers as a revelatory text.

