

Integrating Different Values:

- Beyond the Dichotomy between Literality and Orality in the Reformed Spirit

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## I. Introduction

Throughout history, a hierarchical dualism has manifested itself as a dichotomy between literality and orality or narrativity, which reflects the dichotomy between word and image, maleness and femaleness, and reason and emotion to a certain degree. The Reformed Tradition, too, has underscored the written word of God literally and weakened the oral image, creating an imbalance between literality and orality and word and image, among other dualities. In order to find and integrate different values, this article initially explores the idea of Barth's threefold meaning of the Word of God. Secondly, it deals with the issue of Jesus's hermeneutics regarding John 7. This article then explains thirdly dichotomy using examples of Korean culture and customs. The aim is to overcome the one-sided hierarchical domination and rediscover the other side of value dialectically; we show that both values can be integrated to understand the Word of God.

## II. The threefold meaning of the Word of God

Karl Barth defines his theme about the word of God as a touchstone of volume one of his *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>1</sup> Proclamation of the word of God makes the Church fulfill its duty as the Church. The message of God can be delivered to us as the proclaimed, written and revealed word of God. The revealed word of God is recognized through proclamation, which is based on the Bible. God's written word is revealed to us through proclamation. Hence, in order to understand the proclaimed word of God, we need to know the written word of God. The proclaimed word makes God's word God's word. The proclaimed word is consigned as the basis of proclamation in the church. The word of God is the object of the proclamation. However it is different from any other objects. Because it is not merely given, but promised for the proclamation. The word of God itself is the touchstone of this event. This is a miracle event in which human words are transformed into the word of God. The proclamation itself as such is not the Word of God. However, the word of God is the proclaimed word. The words of a human being remain as the words of a human being. God's word through proclamation is already the spoken word. If the proclamation implies a succession of apostolic witness, it could be the true spoken word of God.

This apostolic word encountered by human beings is canon. Canon is the written word. As written text, canon has the highest value. Oral tradition remains dependent within the church tradition; it even implies its own meaning. "Whatever such spiritual-oral tradition there may be in the Church, obviously it cannot possess the character of an authority irremovably confronting the Church, because it lacks the written form. In the unwritten tradition the Church is not addressed, but is engaged in a dialogue with herself."<sup>2</sup> The spiritual-oral tradition has its

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, translated by G.T. Thomson, (Edinburgh:T.&T. Clark, 1969), 117.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 117-118.

own value. However, it is not comparable to the written form. “Self-defense against possible violence to the text must be left here as everywhere to the text itself, which in practice has so far always succeeded, as a merely spiritual-oral tradition simply cannot, in asserting its own life against encroachments by individuals or whole areas and schools in the Church, and in victoriously achieving it in ever fresh applications, and so in creating recognition of itself as the norm.”<sup>3</sup>

All real prophetic and apostolic succession can be understood as an event which refers to the event of Jesus through expectation and memory. “In this event the Bible is the Word of God, i.e., in this word the human word of prophets and apostles represents the Word of God Himself...”<sup>4</sup> To confess that the Bible is God’s word does not signify human beings as capturing the Bible, but as the Bible capturing human beings. “This very fact of the language of God Himself becoming an event in the human word of the Bible is, however, God’s business and not ours.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Bible is God’s word, not the words of human beings.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the Bible is not as such the revealed word of God. It becomes the concrete means. Through this means, the church remembers the events of Jesus. Through this recollection of grace “the Bible speaks to us of the promise, that prophets and apostles tell us what they have to say to us, that their word is imposed upon us, and that the Church from time to time becomes what she is because she is faced with the Bible, is God’s decision and not ours - that is grace and not our work.”<sup>7</sup>

The word of God is encountered by humans in three forms: The Word of God is firstly The Word, secondly God’s Act, and thirdly God’s Mystery. Proclamation refers to the word, the written text refers to the act and the word of revelation refers to mysterion.<sup>8</sup> The Word of God means “God speaks.”<sup>9</sup> The unity of the threefold form and the threefold form in unity are analogia entis to the trinity of God.<sup>10</sup> In order to recognize the word of God both literally and orally, words and images are combined and different values are integrated.

First, it means that this word occurs as an event of incarnation. However, this word of God occurs as a spiritual event. Secondly, it has character of personification. Personification does not refer to something out of literality. The word of God is the act of God. This mysterion of God’s word is related to the secularity of this world, as it should be spoken to the world. It is related to the revealed and unrevealed word. The word of God remains in spirituality. Human beings cannot understand the word of God. This is a precondition to accept the Word of God as the Word of God. Barth expressed the knowability of the Word of God, which could be founded in God’s Word itself. With the concept of analogia fidei, Barth explained the relationship between God’s revelation as the language of

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 122-123.

<sup>5</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 123.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 123.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 123.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 141-212.

<sup>9</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>10</sup>To speak with Bruce McCormack it is a “unity-in-differentiation.” Bruce McCormack, “The Being of Scripture is in Becoming,” in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, eds. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 59.

God and the knowability of human beings as acts of believing. A human being has not taken faith unto himself and herself. A human being has not personally created his faith himself or herself; the Word of God has created it. A human being has not reached faith; rather faith has reached a human being through the Word. Faith has been gifted to human beings by the Word.<sup>11</sup>

My argument here is that Barth's threefold Word of God—incarnate, written, spoken—overcomes the possible destructive dichotomy between the literal and the spoken, including words and images, by grounding both of them in the Word Incarnate, namely, Jesus Christ, or God as a human being. Word in each case still requires the Spirit to complement the Word and give it life.

Given this background, it is important to examine the possibility of rediscovering disregarded value in the reformed tradition in order to understand the Word of God in our contemporary context. The development of Christianity, based on Hebraism, is very much affected by alphabets, literacy, written cultures and therefore hearing.<sup>12</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation with its hostility against images and statues is difficult to deny.<sup>13</sup> The reformers wanted to hear God's word without any distraction by seeing.<sup>14</sup> Reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century had not encouraged visual images and depictions to understand God's word and to use in the church. However, visual depictions were an important individual pious practice. It has didactic purpose and commemoratively assists Jesus's events. Reformation accentuates providence as the arena of our interaction with God, which includes the whole self and engages the whole of creation. If images encourage one to contemplate the word of God and to become awake with sensual awareness, images should not be disregarded in a reformed church, as iconophobia in the reformed tradition is in our context no longer appropriate.

### III. Law of Moses and hermeneutics of Jesus: John 7.53—8.11

The Teaching of Jesus consists of not only hearing but also of seeing images and understanding parables. Therefore, it is closer to the right brain than the left. Jesus's events were based on words. We cannot deal with the Word without particular words, but the words by themselves have to be gathered into a focused meaning, hence the

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Karl Barth, *ibid.*, 280.

<sup>12</sup>Patriarchal religion which is based on the text disregards other religions which are based on oral tradition and flexibility.

<sup>13</sup>Questions about images after reformation required differentiated observations. It is not easy to say that the written word replaced the image. Cf. Martin Wangsgaard Jürgenson, "The Arts and Lutheran Church Decoration," Peter Opitz (ed.), *The Myth of the Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2013), 356ff.

<sup>14</sup>Conflict against pictures of reformation was not only related to the prohibition of images according to the Ten Commandments, internalized piety, an opponent of reformation, but also involved a fight against rich people on behalf of the poor. The crucial point was the distribution of wealth. To summarize, it was not merely theological thought but also social reform to support a reduction of poverty and a redistribution of material goods. According to Luther and Erasmus, images and pictures could be used in the church for educational purposes. Zwingli did not agree with this intention, and he was not completely against the use of pictures. For Zurich, reformers were important to make faith more vivid. Therefore, pictures and motifs of images were not completely forbidden. It depends on how these materials were used and for which purposes. Cf. Christine Christ-von Wedel, "Bilderverbot und Bibelillustrationen im reformierten Zürich," Peter Opitz (ed.), *ibid.*, 315-316.

Word. The person of Jesus Christ is the one who focuses the words of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Spirit is still essential to make both the Word and words come alive to us. It later became literate language.

The passage of John 7.53—8.11 brings out the conflict of Jesus with the Scribes and Pharisees.<sup>15</sup> The Scribes and Pharisees were committed to the law as it was written. In contrast, Jesus functioned to a certain extent as a lawbreaker<sup>16</sup>; not only in his redefinitions of religious matters, but also in regard to the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire. In the community where John's gospel erupted, there must have been heated debate between Pharisaic scholars and the followers of Jesus. The Pharisaic scholars emphasized written regulations and the traditional authorities of office. The followers of Jesus, however, were drawn to the charismatic authority rooted in the powers of direct speech.<sup>17</sup> As shown in John 8:7, Jesus brought to bear his word, coupled with grace and truth (John 1:17), to openly oppose written scripture and the thick-headedness of the Scribes. His word, actively taking the side of the most vulnerable, proved superior to their commentary.

The text does not show whether Jesus ever wrote down his thoughts. The text does indicate that through his actions Jesus sets aside the limitations of scripture. He demonstrates the superiority of the spoken word of love to the power of written legislation. Through speech he fulfills the true spirit of the law. We can say that it was the Word Incarnate that was the subject of the action.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>I appreciate this insight of Merwyn Johnson. This expression should be understood relatively, as it is not easy to generalize certain tendencies. The Pharisees and Scribes in the New Testament also belong to the orality side of Scripture, while the Sadducees regarded the Law only as Scripture (Pentateuch). The former wanted the Law to be supplemented by the oral tradition as represented by the prophets. Furthermore, all the rules and regulations practiced by the Pharisees/Scribes vis-à-vis Jesus are in the category of orality. They were not written down.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Meehyun Chung, "Das Geschrei vom Stummen hören: Macht der Schrift und Sprachmächtigkeit," in *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research*, 2012, 151-172.

<sup>17</sup>Udo Schnelle, *Einführung in das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2007), 511-515.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Jean K. Kim, "Adultery or Hybridity?" In Musa W. Dube (et. al.), *John and Post-colonialism. Travel, Space and Power*, (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 122. In her article about John 7.53-8.11, Jean K. Kim draws attention to the adulterer: who he might have been and how his presence could be situated in the story. Addressing the problem of woman as object, she also specifically mentions the denial of the woman's powers of articulation. Why are they absent? Kim also pointed to the colonizing domination of the Roman Empire as a potential factor. She interpreted this biblical incident through the Korean context of Yun Kum-I, who was murdered very brutally by a US soldier. Due to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), an unjust agreement between Korean government and the US Military, the murderer was not punished under Korean law.

There is special phrase used to describe an adulterous woman in Korea, while there is no such concept of wrongdoing for the man equally involved. These concepts have their origins in foreign invasions of Korea, especially the Japanese invasions of 1592-1598 and the Chinese invasions of 1636-1637. Women were often doubly victimized. They were first raped and taken as captive slaves to a foreign land. But when they somehow, through great effort, managed to survive and return home, or to pay sufficient ransom for their release, their return was not welcomed. Their own families were shamed due to the lost purity of their bodies. These unjust concepts and pejorative phrases were again applied during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to those Korean women who served as 'comfort women' for the Japanese soldiers or worked as prostitutes serving the US military bases or, as sometimes happened, married US soldiers. Because the 'purity' of blood was so idealized, mixed marriages were treated as wrong, bad for society, and culturally abhorrent.

Jean K. Kim draws out the possibility that the male adulterer in John's story may have been a Roman soldier protected by a colonialist agreement. The sexual purity of women always goes hand in hand with the honor of men. The policy, during war, invasion and colonization, of foreign soldiers raping females is meant not only as a violation of the victimized women, but also as an act of humiliation for the men who can't protect them. "...men who are unable to protect their women tend to feel shame at

In the story in John, a woman is accused of being an adulteress, although her partner in the act is not mentioned. Compare this to Leviticus 20.10, where both the adulterer and the adulterous are mentioned, but in John's story there is not a single word about the male; only the adulteress is mentioned. Nor is the woman given a chance to recount what happened or to share her side of the story. As is usual in the bible, the woman is either victimized, objectified, or both. "The power to speak is directly related to the power to act; so far this is commonplace. The linguistic powerlessness of some categories of subjects incongruent to their physical objectification."<sup>19</sup>

It is thus that in patriarchal societies, the sacrifice and innocence of the women is soon forgotten, while the lost honor of the men remains important.<sup>20</sup> In the story of adultery as John tells it, Jesus uses the power of direct speech to clarify the true nature of law, how it is meant to support and guide life among us all, and not to become an instrument of death and oppression. Indeed, Jesus showed the power of the spoken word. Jesus reinterprets this law toward life and breaks custom in order to transform culture. Jesus does not set himself over against the law as a description of God's righteous presence or the covenant in God's name. Jesus affirms the Law in order to save life. Indeed Jesus came to fulfill it, not set it aside (Mt. 5, 17). To the extent that the law *describes* God's presence and activity with us, the law points to God and our place in God's covenant. However, written law is not merely work per se. Like the Reformed Tradition—explicitly Calvin's third use of the law and Barth's command of God—it should be used as guidance for life and ethical practices.<sup>21</sup>

#### IV. The split between the literal and the oral in religion and culture in Korea<sup>22</sup>

This section considers the ideological dichotomy with regard to cultural and religious aspects in Korea. The rise in literacy promoted the rapid enlargement of Western culture's left hemisphere, wealth and knowledge, the

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not being real men, and thus the sexual invasion of their women by foreign men becomes an assault on male and national honor..." Jean K. Kim, loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 243.

<sup>20</sup>These attitudes, prejudices and social perceptions were obstacles to the public discussion and understanding of critical historical events. The voices of the comfort women were silenced for a long time and were only heard in 1992 through the efforts of a dedicated women's group. Since then, every Wednesday, there have been peaceful weekly demonstrations in front of the Japanese Embassy on this issue. It is through such perseverance and commitment that difficult information has entered the public sphere, leading in 2014 to recognition of the problem by a US Senator in the American Senate. Cf. <https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/home/home.nx>

<sup>21</sup> I appreciate Merwyn Johnson for the improvement of expression regarding law and orality. The third use of the law delineates who God is, where God is, and what God is doing. That is far more than "a guide to Christian life." The law only becomes problematic when it takes on a life of its own, i.e., when it becomes a means or instrument of revelation/salvation/wisdom that does not depend upon God. What Jesus does is replace it with himself (God with us) and so redirect our attention to the lawgiver whenever we contemplate the Law. The law *after Christ* still retains a remarkable role for us in the Reformed tradition, but no longer as a demand-requirement.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Meehyun Chung, *ibid.*, 155-161.

power of the authoritarian church, as well as hunter-killer values.<sup>23</sup> The male-oriented ethos and logic of left-brain values was emphasized strongly, while the right-brain values of love, kindness, equality, respect for nature, nurturing, protecting the weak and compassion for others were reduced.<sup>24</sup>

The point in this section is to illustrate certain religious and cultural dichotomies in Korea. To define and to generalize the difference between femininity and masculinity is not easy. Even to describe their characteristics carries certain limitations and dangers of prejudice. In spite of these boundaries, we can note certain specific characteristics, as follows: The oral or spoken word is generally related more to femininity, while masculinity is related more to the literal or written word. The elites possess power to control with these written texts. While the oral is related to flexibility, the literal is related to rigidity. Even when literacy contributed to a democracy of knowledge, the literal remains as the power of dominance against culture, economy, and not least of all, religion.<sup>25</sup> The power of writing is simultaneously related to political, cultural, economic power in general. The gap between literacy and orality remains in certain degrees, as always. It is as if the male body functions as a symbolic support of literacy, while the female body symbolizes the carriers of the oral. This gender-related order describes the two cultural forms of the literal and the oral.

The dichotomy and confrontation between male- and female-oriented languages and their cultures can be illuminated in the Korean context.

#### 1. First example: Shamanism and Confucianism

“Ownership” of literacy and the associated scientific authority are connected. The cultural shift from spoken word to the written pushed women increasingly to the periphery, while men took over the power of writing as well as the creation of the definitions of the norms of society, culture and religion.

This section on shamanism and Confucianism is focused on the contrast between oral and written transmission, which is evident in the two religions.<sup>26</sup> Shamanism is an ancient religion that has deeply affected Korean culture and religiosity. Confucianism prevailed for more than 500 years as a political philosophy and ideology in Korea after its canonization in Chinese antiquity. Both religions have an impact on Korean language, culture, tradition and society.

More than shamanism, Confucianism is characterized as related to literacy.<sup>27</sup> It belongs to strict forms of

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<sup>23</sup> Leonard Shlain describes the essential expression of the left brain as masculine energy which is connected to written culture. According to him, every society that has acquired alphabetic literacy became violently self-destructive a short time afterward. Cf. Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet versus the Goddess. The Conflict between Word and Image* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 377.

<sup>24</sup> L. Shlain, *ibid.*, 322.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Christina von Braun, “Gender, Geschlecht und Geschichte,” in Christina von Braun / Inge Stephan (Hg.), *Genderstudien: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2000), 10-51, here 17-19.

<sup>26</sup> More about Confucianism and shamanism in Korea, cf. Meehyun Chung, *Reis und Wasser: Eine feministische Theologie in Korea* (Berlin: Verlag Frank & Timme, 2012). Buddhism also plays a strong role in Korean culture. To delve into this and/or a comparison with Buddhism exceeds the range of this article. It could be a subject for further research.

<sup>27</sup> There is some commonality between Confucianism and shamanism, as both of them are cosmic religions. Conversion from these cosmic religions to a metacosmic religion is easier than it is the other way around. cf. Aloysius Pieris, *Feuer und Wasser: Frau, Gesellschaft, Spiritualität in Buddhismus und Christentum* (Basel: Herder, 1994), 17. Regarding Confucian ancestor worship and shamanism. cf. Lee Nam-Beck, *Protestantismus und Ahnenverehrung in Korea: Entwurf einer Theologie der Erinnerung* (Münster: LIT, 2001), 23-34, 199.

religion and philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Despite the existence of traditional writing systems, shamanism is usually preserved by oral tradition and is designed to be flexible over time. The problem of gender stereotypes in patriarchal societies is more evident in Confucianism than in shamanism.

“While the details of the Confucian ancestral worship are defined in ritual books, in shamanism, there are many religious activities of women without legislation. It is rather an oral improvisational performance.”<sup>29</sup> These two written and oral traditions actually are also associated with masculinity and femininity by the power of men through Confucianism and women in their long journey through history with shamanism. A sexually embossed difference is also evident in the participation characteristics in ceremonies and their contents: In Confucianism women may only prepare the ritual food, while they themselves are excluded from the ritual. In contrast, the women in shamanism are active both as shamans as well as participants in the ritual.<sup>30</sup> ” This reflects a significant formal difference between the dialogue-designed rituals between shamans and lay participants in shamanism, and the more monologue-designed rituals in Confucianism, read in certain specified forms and following the processes of traditional written rules. The strict preserved order of Confucianism does not allow for flexibility, while shamanism includes more spiritual freedom of reflection.

## 2. Second example: Chinese Writing and Korean language

Chinese character is a logographic script which implies certain icons and images. In that sense Chinese character is rather right-brain oriented because it is related to specific graphemes. However compared to Korean writing, Chinese writing as written character was recognized more as a left-brain function. Despite centuries of the dominance of Chinese culture in Korea, people (*Minjung*, ordinary people) could use their language and develop their own culture, even if it was always despised and oppressed.<sup>31</sup> While the higher layer in society was familiar with Chinese characters, the social underclass and women of all classes as well were more connected to their own language: This language with the Korean alphabet *Han-gul* is “*Eun-Mun*”(言文), literally.<sup>32</sup> Translated into “oral

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<sup>28</sup>There are three social duties in the Confucian-oriented social order: loyalty, children’s filial duty, and rites through ancestor worship and respect in front of other people. Like other practical duties of society, it is important to have inter- and intra-human relationships. Five classical books and four classical books of great teachers were canonized as norms. Ironically, the standard of Confucius, “*Lunyu*” (論語), was not written by him but was collected through his disciples.

<sup>29</sup>Martina Deuchler, “Konfuzianismus und Schamanismus: Männerreligion und Frauenreligion in Korea,” in Hans-Jürg Braun/ Karl H. Henking (Hg.), *Homo religiosus* (CVB Buch+Druck: Zürich 1990), 89-105, here 98.

<sup>30</sup>In contrast to institutional religions, including Christianity, for women practicing shamanism, it is easier to become a priest. Nevertheless, the role of the shaman could and should be critically evaluated in Korea. Physically, it is noted that females were the majority leading shamanistic rituals. However, the content of the shamanistic ritual was not helpful for women’s liberation. Though it is not proper simply to offer a critique from current feminist viewpoint, there are certain aspects of shamanism which rather supported the maintaining of the Korean patriarchal system and to fix the female domain within this structure. For instance, the preference for sons and fertility as the women’s role are major issues of shamanistic rituals. This helps to adjust to the dominant culture and structure rather leading to a transformation of society.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Winfried Glüer (Hg.), *Byungmu Ahn, Draußen vor dem Tor. Kirche und Minjung in Korea: Theologische Beiträge und Reflexionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986), 10.

<sup>32</sup>Korean “oral traditions” and the Korean alphabet, which is written but counted as “oral” is two different things. Korean culture embraces oral tradition in terms of songs, stories and myths so on. With the Korean alphabet it is written the way it sounds, i.e.,



writing,” and was created by King Sejong (1397-1450) against the following background: “With Chinese writing we cannot express our thoughts. The uneducated multitudes therefore have no way to express what they want to say. Regretting this, I have had an alphabet of 28 letters created that is easy to learn and use.”<sup>33</sup>

The founder of the Korean liberation theology, *Minjung* theologian Byungmu Ahn<sup>34</sup>, emphasizes the importance of the written Korean language, but also underlines its subordinated position in Korean society: “*Eun-Mun* is created in contrast to the use of Chinese characters as an alphabet. This has made it possible for the *Minjung* to lay down experiences and words from real life in writing. But the gentry despised the alphabet and only used Chinese writing. *Han-gul* or *Eun-Mun* was called the Korean alphabet and described as the writing of the *Minjung*. So it was pressed from the outset with the stamp of contempt.”<sup>35</sup>

The two writing styles also helped to establish social structures with a few exceptions of women from the higher social class. Women of the higher social classes and men and women from the low social class belonged to the class of *Eun-Mun*, while men from the higher social class belonged to the *Han-Mun* class (using Chinese characters).<sup>36</sup> In the traditional social *Minjung* movement, this “oral writing” is used considerably because it is possible through it to express informally, quickly and unobtrusively the voice from below. In contrast to scholars who dominated the Chinese script and conformed to Chinese culture, the *Minjung* layer has therefore retained more of its own Korean cultural identity.<sup>37</sup>

Byungmu Ahn emphasizes the importance of “oral writing” for the Church's life and draws a parallel with the language of Jesus: “Real language can arise therefore only when you design life accordingly. If the Church really wants to make the language of *Minjung* its own, there is no other way for her than to live with the *Minjung*, their experiences, to share their suffering, in short, to identify with the *Minjung*. Without a common experience there can never be a common language [...]. We need to return to the language of Jesus. His language, especially the parables, is typical language of *Minjung*. The language of Jesus was just the oral writing, which allowed direct access to the common people. It was living-related, concrete and meaningful. Jesus's language was word for word of the *Minjung*, *Eun-Mun* language. Children, women, the elderly, the illiterate, all marginalized people could also be included as those who could understand it. The more immediate the language is associated with life, the more original.”<sup>38</sup> Byungmu Ahn emphasizes the life-related characteristics of the language of Jesus as it is directly reflected in the

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phonetically. Moreover the language has become an “oral” language in comparison with Chinese character which is written language.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>34</sup>Within *Minjung* theology, there are differences between written theology and theological-oriented movements. Thus, the literality of *Minjung* theology does not always have the same meaning. The text according to the meanings and norms has a performative effect. Theology is written generally by males, while movements and diaconal works are produced by females. About the *Minjung* diaconal work and movement, see <http://www.kordiakonia.or.kr/> (09. April 2012).

<sup>35</sup>Byungmu Ahn, *Draußen vor dem Tor*, 87.

<sup>36</sup>The missionaries in 19<sup>th</sup> century in Korea noticed this gap of society in terms of language and character they were focused on Korean oral writing in order to reach majority of ordinary people. Since women were excluded from the educational system at that time where is Chinese writing was taught women were forced just to use oral tradition. After the Korean translated Bible is introduced and distributed to women it contributed a lot for their capability of reading Korean alphabet.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Byungmu Ahn, *ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>38</sup>Byungmu Ahn, *ibid.*

Minjung language. “If one is connected to the real life, the form of expression remains simple [...]. Looking at the language of Minjung in this context, it is a language which is closely related to real life. The oral narrative is therefore actually referring to Minjung in this regard.”<sup>39</sup> Jesus also is actively involved in the everyday discourses of law and justice in a manner which substantiates the restoration of the justice of God as a present and formative perspective. Jesus’s Word speaks to people’s hearts, not only to their brains. Through real exegetical interpretation and real proclamation of the Word of God each context will be illuminated. The Word of God speaks into the heart. The danger of their fossilization could be dispelled.<sup>40</sup>

## V. Closing remarks

The rise of alphabetic literacy and the written word brought about a suppression of females and the oral tradition in many different ways. In many places of our contemporary world, the situation has changed. Along with recovering oral language, the value of images has increased as well. Therefore, in the twenty-first century, the importance of images, logos, icons, and storytelling is rising. Re-exploring of the value of narrativity does not merely imply a focus on orality. It means finding a method of integration and reciprocity between various values.<sup>41</sup>

Everyone needs a different approach to understand God’s Word. Diverse methods and mediums can be used to support this understanding, according to the age, sex, culture and physical condition of the individual. The Word of God contains substantially the three forms of proclamation, written text and revelation, implying dialectical dynamics between the literal and oral and the word and image. The Reformation was not a once-for-all event. To be a Reformed church means to continue to reform, i.e., with non-stop reformation. The message of a reformed church was delivered by preaching, not by images. Image could not replace the Word of God per se. However, images could help to understand God’s word and to keep faith more alive, without falling to idolatry or personal cultism. Therefore, to understand the incarnated Word of God is important to reevaluate the value of seeing as well, as even the Reformation was a non-visual event which created a word-based form of religion.

This article aims to revisit the lost value of the reformed tradition because the strength of the reformation is in its sharing of information and decentralizing Christianity. The translatability of the Christian canon makes

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<sup>39</sup>ByungmuAhn. *ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>40</sup>There is a similar tendency to observe in Judaism. Eunhy Kim mentioned in his article “Was the Proclamation of the Canon a Medicine or a Poison? A Comparison Between Ruling Christianity and Minjung (the Oppressed) Judaism,” in: *International Journal of Contextual Theology in East Asia by Korea Association of Contextual Theologians*, 13(2010): 61-86. He investigated how Jewish tradition through oral tradition survived and overcome difficult harsh circumstance. “Minjung Judaism had to endure through political and religious oppression and persecution from the Roman Empire as well as from the ruling Christianity [...] It was to continue the intellectual tradition, and within a reality where one was to continuously encounter diverse thoughts and philosophies. These people, on the one hand, passed down the basic consciousness about the Torah, while on the other, accepted new ideas, and philosophies. This opened up a liberal approach to the Torah and Jewish texts, and allowed for dynamism and vitality in contemporary circumstances. Even while being physically constrained, the Minjung Jewish people could endure the pain through an intellectual, mental and spiritual freedom.” Eunhy Kim, *ibid.*, 75. Due to this new interpretation of Minjung Judaism they succeed in spite of persecution and social exclusion.

<sup>41</sup>The recognition of other values still important. Narrative implies story-telling, images, bodily sensuality, body language, and visual materials could be used as medium of wisdom and bible message.

Christianity possible as a mainline religion. The translatability also helps with the decentralization and polycentrism of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> The Reformed spirit recognizes locality, not just center-oriented ideas. It does not intend to generalize or unify everything monotonously. Therefore, the low values of orality and narrativity should be reinvestigated and strengthened. A process of conceptualizing for a metaphysical dimension is necessary. However, this does not imply narrativity over conceptuality, but narrativity with conceptuality in order to recognize the different values of both processes.

To be reformed means to keep examining this critical reflection of whether the proclamation of the church is suitable for the Word of God. The Bible has authority because it is the Word of God. Even the Word of God has special authority as written word; it should be proclaimed, interpreted and integrated as revealed and spoken language with help of the Holy Spirit.

It cannot be generalized that the literal cuts off imagination (the ability to draw images), while the oral is never wooden. There are positives and negatives to be drawn for both the oral (spoken) and the literal (written). The literal, including words, and the oral, including images, could be complementary at their best. As Paul distinguishes between the letter that—by itself—kills and the Spirit, which gives life—but not by itself (II Cor. 3:5), the Reformed Tradition could deal with this issue in terms of the Word and Spirit constantly interacting with each other—never one without the other. “The Word of God becomes knowable by making itself knowable...The possibility of knowing the Word of God is God’s miracle on and in us, just as much as are the Word itself and the utterance of it.”<sup>43</sup>In the light of the Word of God, the split between literality and orality is unnecessary.

I have imagined a dialogue between literality and orality regarding reformed tradition for mutual correction and growth. Presbyterian doctrine including catechisms in general is often employed as a synonym for literality in Korea while Pentecostalism is regarded as orality. Orality however is not merely a monopoly of the Pentecostal Church. It is also related to the Reformed tradition in origin, if it is defined as proclamation of Word of God and reinterpretation of written Word of God. A renewed focus on positive values and common ground could provide impetus toward mutual improvement and development in reciprocity.

## Abstract

The article that follows is an attempt to seek a balance between literality and orality (word and image) in order to reflect on the Word of God efficiently in our contemporary world. The essay begins by introducing Karl Barth’s concept of the threefold form of the Word of God. This essay then focuses on Jesus’s hermeneutic of law of Moses in John 7. The article also explains this issue using examples of ideological dichotomy from Korean culture and customs. The goal is to overcome the one-sided hierarchical domination and to reinvestigate the other side of

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<sup>42</sup>Cf, LaminSanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989).

<sup>43</sup>Karl Barth, *ibid*, 282.

values dialectically. Both values can be integrated for a better understanding of the Word of God with a reformed spirit. The literal, including words, and the oral, including images, can be complementary at their best. The Reformed Tradition could deal with this issue in terms of Word and Spirit constantly interacting with each other—never one without the other.

#### Keywords

Literal, oral, reformed, Barth, Korea, integrating