

Apocryphal Women in Wonderland: Asceticism and Desire in the Apocryphal Acts

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Introduction

A British philosopher Jeremy Bentham suggested two types of people, moralists and religionist, whose motives of pursuing the principles of asceticism appear as “hope” and “fear” respectively.¹⁾ He states that the former type of person does so driven by the desire for the “honour and reputation at the hands of men” whereas the latter to shun the “future punishment at the hands of a splenetic and revengeful Deity.”²⁾ Regardless of what their motives of ascetic behaviours, they are eventually originated from the same thing that is called “pleasure.” They discard what they call vulgar things and pursue “the refined.” However, Bentham claims that such civilized virtues as “the honourable, the glorious, the reputable, the becoming, the *honestum*, the *decorum*” are “anything but pleasure.” That is, when one is ascetic by giving up the allegedly worldly things, especially sexual or material pleasure, he or she is not actually losing everything but gaining something else instead such as

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1) J. Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 18.

2) Ibid.

respect and honour from other people or security from the divine punishment, which are merely different forms of desire for pleasure. In this sense, asceticism is not the antonym but, ironically, synonym of desire.

This paper is to explore the dynamics between the asceticism and desire in the chastity stories of the Apocryphal Acts of Apostles, especially those of the *Acts of Andrew* (AA), the *Acts of Peter* (APt), the *Acts of John* (AJn), the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (APt), the *Acts of Thomas* (ATh), and the *Acts of Phillip* (APh). These Apocryphal Acts follow the same literary structure as Burrus exactly pointed out:³⁾ apostles' evangelistic acts direct some female characters to make vows to cut off the betrothal or nuptial relationship with their spouse, which enrages them to persecute the apostles and the women, and the apostles are executed or persecuted but the women not only get heavenly protection but rather win victory over the male persecutors.

The female characters choose an ascetic life of celibacy by giving up the security under the familial protection of their wealthy and powerful husband or fiancé. Every earthly good thing that promises them a life of pleasure is the forfeit of their unacceptable defiance against the masculine authority; they lose their face standing in court and being stripped off in public. However, they still sacrifice all of these benefits from feminine submission to masculinity, and they willingly carry their cross of hardships at the cost of embracing the gospel. They declare celibacy as a token of their royalty to the gospel, and in this sense the gospel appears at a glance a sort of motivation that drives the female characters to pursue such an ascetic life.

Their celibacy appears pious and holy, even to be praised as those of saints by being the pure bride of Christ, remaining virgin like an angel (cf. Matt. 22:30). The gospel that caused

3) Virginia Burrus, "Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts," *Semeia* 38 (1986), 101-117 [104].

them to make a vow seems to enhance the purity and sanctity of their motivation of such ascetic resolution. Furthermore, these women's vulnerable femininity standing alone without any gesture of defence against the relentless vultures of masculinity surrounding them in crowd, trying to tear and shred their fragile body increase the women's angelic purity unconsciously appealing the reader to imagine a white little lamb in front of a pack of wolves (Matt. 10:16; Luke 10:3).

However, the women's seemingly vulnerability is invincibility in fact, and the overt purity of their motivation is actually covert impurity of intent, if not conscious. Their dedication to the religious ascetic life superficially looks like kenosis of themselves by surrendering of all the rights to exert power, which otherwise would have allowed them to enjoy the flavour of pleasure. They become disarmed by choosing the ascetic mode of life, which portrays them so vulnerable and fragile. However, they are armour-clad with invincible power by wearing vulnerability, obtain masculinity by discarding femininity, and become powerful by being powerless (2 Cor. 12:10). I will illuminate this ironic dynamic between these opposite values of asceticism and desire in the chastity stories of the Apocryphal Acts through the lens of Tim Burton's film, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010).

1. Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*

Alice in Wonderland tells a story of a young lady's defiance against the social system that forces the female to conform to it. Alice's family lost a protector when Mr. Charles Kingsley died leaving Mrs. Kingsley and two daughters, Alice and Margaret, behind. Alice's mother tries to find her recourse to

her daughter's marriage of convenience with a young Lord Hamish, and Margaret does the same by marrying Mr. Lowell, a rich womanizer respectively. Mrs. Kingsley and Margaret, just like Naomi did when she laid a scheme and advised Ruth to seduce Boaz, found an convenient and conventional way to secure their desire by accepting the man's protection.

Mrs. Kingsley brings Alice to her engagement party, where everybody - even a painter who records the romantic moment of proposal is ready! - knows except for Alice that Hamish will make a formal proposal to her. Margaret smugly tells Alice that she "will be happy as she is with Lowell and her life will be perfect" if she marries Hamish. The Chattaway twin sisters jealously sneak around Alice tantalizing her with an open secret about the surprise Hamish prepared. An old spinster Aunt Imogene who has a delusion that a prince will come to marry her someday also pushes Alice to accept Lord Hamish's proposal. Everyone seems to believe it quite natural for Alice to snatch the fortune to be under the protection of the powerful husband as well as to save her "mother's burden."

At the climax of an awkward situation that Hamish kneels down before Alice and many people around are gazing at them, she runs away to the Wonderland, where she will learn and "exercise(*askese*)" to slough off her femininity and transform into a warrior of masculinity. The Wonderland is the place where Alice finds her true identity, which is achieved when she "becomes (like) a man."⁴⁾ Alice's adventure at the Wonderland is a fantasy, where she experiences the hesitation between the real and the unreal.⁵⁾ But when she returns to the engagement party court from the world of hesitation, which we may put

4) Cf. Gos. Thom. 114.

5) For the definition of fantasy in terms of hesitation, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique*, tr. by Lee Gi-Woo (Seoul: Korean Literature Co., 2005), 133.

it as from the unreal to the real, she bravely faces the real (but unreal, i.e. delusion in the eyes of Under/Wonderlanders who think it embarrassing for animals to “wander around entirely unclothed”) and becomes unrealistic - in the eyes of upper-landers (but realistic from Wonderlanders’ eyes). For the born-again Alice who has found her true identity, the upper-land is no more a fantasy, unlike Aunt Imogene’s world, because she is not hesitating anymore like the guests of the party and the hypocritical noble lords and ladies in the Wonderland are.

Coming back to the upper land after having “become (like) man” or become “[the right] Alice, at last!” in the words of Absolem the caterpillar mentor, Alice is not the blubbering girl but a warrior ready to fight against anyone or anything. She is now strong enough to retort on Lady Ascot who understands Alice merely as a baby machine that produces good-looking breed and a maid to serve Hamish a soft meal for his indigestion; she can dare to say to Lady Ascot who abhors white roses and rabbits that she does love them; she can refuse Hamish’s proposal even in such a helpless situation; she is powerful enough to rebuff Margaret’s advice and enlighten her saying that she can be wrong; she awakens Aunt Imogene from her illusion to face the reality; she is not a “burden” to her mother but an independent person who can make her own way by herself.

Alice’s transformation is completed while she was in the Wonderland, and the battle with the Jabberwocky was the climax of it. It was an unbearable task for her to fight and win the victory over the “old foe” monster, and she runs away from the denizens of Marmoreal just as she did from the guests of the party and goes to Absolem the mentor. He teaches Alice that nothing is accomplished with tears, and pushes her to transform like he does. Awakened with his help, Alice transforms herself by choosing armour and Vorpal sword to be the “right Alice” instead of stockings and corset, the self-tormenting

feminine weapons to destroy man's fortress.

Since she came down to the Wonderland she has been continuously asked a question, "Who are you?" and she now finds the answer through the adventure there. When she could answer the question, she is asked to prove whether she really knows it, viz. whether she is the "right Alice or wrong Alice." When she came back to the Marmoreal people as well as to the party guests of the upper land who are waiting for her answer, she is no more an undecided feeble-minded lady but the "champion" with dazzling silver armour, unpierceable shield and the legendary Vorpall sword. She found her true identity and gained power to stand firmly against any challenge, and it was when she discarded her femininity and selected masculinity. In this light, it is quite natural for her to declare that she will not marry Hamish but go out toward China and Hong Kong, the wonderland in the real world as a *businesswoman*.

2. Chastity Stories of the Apocryphal Acts

Alice in Wonderland obtains power by finding herself which appears as the Alice with armour, shield and the Vorpall sword not with stockings and corset, and it is examined through her fight against the monster Jabberwocky. When she successfully passes the test by cutting off the monster's head, she is proved to be the champion to whom the oppressors like the Red Queen, Stayn, and Lady Ascot surrender being ashamed. Transformation from a girl to a masculine warrior is how Alice gets power. Celibacy costs Alice power which offers the stable life under the protection of a noble husband, but pays her in return another power to stand against anyone or anything without fear and make her own way, not the way that others make for her or

direct her.

Women in the Apocryphal Acts of Apostles (hereafter apocryphal women) follow the same path that Alice treads. They were feeble and mild ladies who conform themselves to the conventional life style that has been taken for granted. They are however changed when they meet apostles and receive the gospel so that they make their mind to defy the *idée fixe* that the feminine power is obtained by the recourse to masculine protection. Maximilla (AA),⁶ Agrippina, Nicaria, Euphemia, Doris, and Xanthippe (APt),⁷ Nicanor (APh, Martyrdom), Mygdonia and Tertia (ATh), and Thecla (API) are the Apocryphal Alices who declare the war against the Apocryphal Jabberwocky.

These apocryphal women do not seem to have been modern-feminists who raise their voices against the conventional hierarchical male-female relationship that marriage system legitimises before they came to know apostles. However as soon as they listen to the apostles' preaching, they notify their parents,

6) The manuscript of *Act of Andrew*, Vatican MS (808) found by M. Bonnet dated by ca 11-12th century.

7) Robert F. Stoops ("Patronage in the Acts of Peter," *Semeia* 38 [1986], 91-100.) reads the APt in light of patron-client paradigm which makes him argue that "the APt does not reject the world as radically as some of the other apocryphal Acts" (98). He adopts Eubula's story to suggest this relationship where the faith after conversion appears as a response to Christ's patronage. However, he does not recount the later parts of the APt where Peter apparently negates the world maintaining the ascetic lifestyle. When Stoops states that "in the APt Peter carries out responsibilities to his wife and daughter" (99), it seems that he counts the Coptic *Acts of Peter* (BG 8502, 4) as the presumably lost third part of the APt (see Douglas M. Parrott, "The Act of Peter," J.M. Robinson ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library* (SF: Harper&Row, 1988), 528-531 [528]). Granted it is true, the author puts emphasis not on the positive view of the marriage system but on chastity by telling that the daughter's virginity is protected from Ptolemy's lust through Peter's prayer.

husbands or fiancés that they have no idea to continue the nuptial relationship with their spouses. Mygdonia refuses to have sexual intercourse with her husband after her conversion (ATh act 9); Maximilla spurns her husband Aegeates when she heard Andrews' preaching (AA, 14). The bride tells her father that she will not have any sexual relationship with her bridegroom (ATh, 13). Therefore, the townspeople were not wrongly informed when they say, for instance, that Philip "separated husbands and wives and preached chastity" (APh, 35).

The apostles do not seem to teach the women as such in order to set the women free from the tyrant husbands or the oppressive marriage system; it is rather because they believe the sexual relationship that follows the nuptial union is not suitable for the new spiritual life in Christ. For instance, the bride in the *Acts of Thomas* tells her father that she will not do the sexual intercourse with her earthly bridegroom which is "temporal, whereof the end is with lasciviousness and bitterness of soul" (ATh, 13). The antipathy to sexual matters, not the feminine rights to be equal to the male, is the main excuse of the ladies why they want to cut off their marriage relationship with their spouses. The women were taught as such from their apostles, and they just followed what they learned.

The apostles believe that sexual intercourse is to be abhorred as it is corruption and the sin itself. Andrew understands nuptial relationship is "a foul and polluted way of life" (AA, 5), and encourages Maximilla not to be overcome by her husband who pleads and threatens her to continue their marriage relationship. John the apostle says that God made him blind for two years so that he could not see women and accordingly keep his virginity; furthermore, he thankfully confesses that God even removed him of the mind to look at women (AJn, 113). Thomas understands the sin related to the sexual matters is the vilest thing in God's eyes (ATh, 58), and declares that he has forsaken

the spouse for God (ATh, 61). Paul also protests to the proconsul at the court that God sent him to separate people from “corruption and uncleanness” which he refers to the sexual desire (APl, 17).

The Apocryphal Acts therefore recommend remaining unmarried or behaving as if unmarried. The apocryphal Paul says that God is pleased with the bodies of virgins (APl, 6), and that those who keep themselves chaste are blessed. He encourages even those who have already married to be celibate “as though they had them [spouses] not” (APl, 5). When Andrew tells Maximilla that “rightly in thee do I behold Eve repenting, and in myself Adam returning” (AA, 5), he understands that the fall of human beings is due to sexual sins and that Maximilla’s celibacy is a God-pleasing holy work that recovers the distorted and fallen world.⁸⁾ Therefore for the apocryphal apostles and the female characters the nuptial union that is followed by sexual intercourse is to be shunned.

The Apocryphal Acts on the other hand caution the reader how terrible results are made when they do not listen to their warning to keep themselves away from the sexual desire. The *Acts of John* for instance tells a story of a young man who indulged himself into the sexual impulse (AJn, 48-54); the boy, despite his father’s warning, tried to continue a sexual relationship with his friend’s wife; enraged by the father’s admonition, he kicked him to death, and coming back to his senses he tried to take revenge by killing the friend, his wife and himself blaming them for the tragedy he caused; later on, with the help of John the young lad repents and castrates

8) For the discussion of Jewish and Christian understanding of the relationship between the fall of human beings and sexual relationship, see G. Anderson, “Celibacy or consummation in the garden: Reflections on early Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Garden of Eden,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82:2 (1989), 121-148.

himself. The author of *Acts of John* tells the reader how destructive is the sexual desire on the one hand, and highlights the necessity of ascetic life on the other in this anecdote.

The warning to those who do not keep themselves sexually pure is also found in the *Acts of Thomas*. The author tells a story of a man and woman who committed sexual sins and ended up murdering the girl (ATh, 51-54). Furthermore, having been raised up by the hands of Thomas, the girl tells a story of her visit to the Hades, where she saw lots of people who committed sexual sins were suffering terrible punishment (ATh, 55-56). The girl's story functions as a kind of testimony with strong warnings from the hell that tells how painful results do the sexual sins bring (cf. Luke 16:19-31). The Apocryphal Acts encourage people to be chaste in various ways like above.

Apocryphal Acts of Apostles understand that the chastity is never accomplished for free but costs lots of hardships just as Alice suffered because of the Red Queen, her knights, Stayn and Vandersnatch. When Nicanor declares the end of sexual relationship with her husband and rather asks him to live a "chaste and sober life" (APh, 119), he becomes quite upset that he assaults her violently (APh, 120-122). Andronicus persecuted his wife Drusiana when she tried to keep herself chaste after listening to the apostle's preaching (AJn, 82). The four concubines of Agrippa were vexed by him because they refused to lie with him (APt, 33). Thecla was dragged to the theatre being naked to be burned to death (APl, 21) and was cast onto the beast (APl, 29).

The responsibility for the cost of keeping chastity falls not only upon the apocryphal women but also the apostles. Agrippa and Albinus are upset with Peter accusing him of enticing their women to declare chastity, and they plot to remove the apostle (APt, 33-34). Thamyris, Thacla's fiancé, stirs up the townspeople to drag Paul to the court (APl, 15), and he is

sentenced to be scourged and expelled out of the city (APl, 21). Philip and Bartholomew suffer so greatly that they can hardly bear it and even to be stumbled and rebuked by Jesus (APh, 124-127, 131). Thomas nearly escapes from the king who tried to arrest him blaming for the embarrassing announcement of celibacy of the newlyweds (ATh, 16). Charisius and Misdaeus persecute the apostle on account of their wives' chastity matters (ATh, act 11). Aegeates plots to kill Andrew believing that his wife wants to cut off the nuptial relationship with him misled by this apostle (AA, 14).

However, the apocryphal women never surrender to the persecutors despite their threats to harm them and the apostles their spiritual mentors. The persecutors' persuasion and entreaty of the women to withdraw their resolution of chastity do not work either. The beasts nor the furious flame do not harm Thecla (APl, 22, 33-35); she is not ashamed as her naked body is shrouded by the light of fire (APl, 34). Nicanor's husband drags her by the hair and threatens to kill her, but she does not surrender and he is rather afraid of her as he was almost blind when watching her praying (APh, 120-124). Drusiana's chastity is protected even when she is lying dead (AJn, 71). The apocryphal women win the battle against their "old foe" the apocryphal Jabberwocky, and they are proved to be the heroines.

The victory of the apocryphal Alices is sealed by their persecutors' surrender. Charisius tries to get Mygdonia back in vain, and asks the king Misdaeus for help. The king sends his wife Tertia to persuade Mygdonia but Tertia is rather persuaded by Mygdonia to keep chastity, which makes the matter even worse in the eyes of Charisius and Misdaeus (ATh, acts 9-11). Furthermore, the king is embarrassed learning that not only Tertia but even his son Iuzanes and his wife Mnesara also convert and are baptised (ATh, act 13). The king's persecution

eventually ends up with his own conversion at the end of story (ATh, 169-170). Andronicus who once persecuted his wife Drusiana converts and rather keeps chastity himself too (AJn, 82). Callimachus once was full of sexual desire even enough to attempt necrophilia with the corpse of Drusiana repents and kneels down before the chaste Andronicus and Drusiana after being raised from the dead (AJn, 75-81). Ireus' wife Nerkela and his daughter Artemilla choose to live chaste following him after their conversion (APh, 49-63).

The victory of chastity over the sexual desire is approved by the multitude too. Listening to Andrew preaching on the cross people shout at the proconsul that his judgement was wrong, and he surrenders to them to release Andrew (AA, Martyrdom). However, Andrew decides to die and Aegeates is helpless as it is not Aegeates but Andrew who decides his destiny. Aegeates realising that he could not win the game commits suicide by throwing himself from a high place (AA, Martyrdom), and it is the moment that confirms the final victory of chastity over the sexual desire. Agrippa's persecution of Peter on account of his women's chastity also encounters the crowd's protest on behalf of Peter (APt, 36). Peter, just like Andrew did, decides to die being crucified after preaching on the cross (APt, 36-38), and Agrippa like Aegeates faces a miserable end (APt, 41). The same is to Aristachus who persecuted Philip because of the chastity of Ireus, Nerkela and Artemilla as the multitude accepts Philip (APh, 66-79). The apocryphal Jabberwocky's head is cut off, and the apocryphal Red Queen and Styran surrender to the apocryphal Alices.

3. Chastity and Desire – Enemy or Friend?

The Apocryphal Acts value chastity as a virtue whereas depreciate the sexual desire as examined above. Chastity the apocryphal women's disposition looks powerless and the sexual desire the persecutors' one is powerful. The women are vulnerable as to keep silent lowering the head (APl, 10), and all that they can do is just enduring the husband's violence without any resistance. They are feeble women who do not have any power to defend themselves while the persecutors are male, proconsuls and kings with power. However, the powerless endure and win the powerful and their weapon is chastity. The sexual desire of the powerful kneels down before the chastity of the powerless, and chastity is the armour, the shield and the Vorpall sword that the "right Alice" equipped with. Therefore, the relationship between chastity and sexual desire appears at a glance as an opposing rivalry to each other in the Apocryphal Acts.

The opposing rivalry relationship of chastity and sexual desire is also found in the New Testament as well though it maintains the opposite view of the Apocryphal Acts. The author of the first Timothy warns his addresses that the false teachers are encouraging people to be ascetic by being celibate and not eating some foods (1 Tim. 4:1-5. Cf. 3:2). The author of Colossians states that the extreme ascetic life style is the lesson of the false teachers which should be rejected (Col. 2:16-23). The author of Hebrews also admonishes that the marriage should be honoured as it is divine (Heb. 13:4. Cf. Mal. 2:15-16). There is no doubt that the canonical Christianity supports the ascetic life style and rejects the indulged one. But it seems obvious that it does not go beyond it until renouncing the marriage relationship as the Apocryphal Acts do.

However, there are still some traces of hesitation with regard

to the marriage system in the New Testament as well. The canonical Paul rather advises that the married Christians should not cut off the nuptial relationship with their spouses (1 Cor. 7:10-11)⁹⁾ following the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9), as well as to fulfil their sexual duty to each other (1 Cor. 7:2-5).¹⁰⁾ As for the reason that Paul accepts the nuptial system, he states that it is to avoid the strong temptation of sexual impulse (1 Cor. 7:5, 9) and for the full devotion to God (1 Cor. 7:32-35).¹¹⁾ The same is to the author of the first Timothy who advises the young widows to remarry because the marriage helps them avoid sexual temptation (1 Tim. 5:11). For this reason Annemarie S. Kidder contends that some New Testament authors including Paul understand the marriage system as a sort of necessary evil which is advised to avoid if possible.¹²⁾

9) For further discussion of Paul's stance toward marriage and celibacy, see Joon Ho Lee, "Paul's Teaching on Celibacy and Divorce (1 Corinthians 7:6-16)," *Korean Evangelical New Testament Studies* 9/2 (2010), 227-249; idem, "Sexual Relations of the Husband and the Wife in Marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)," *Korean Evangelical New Testament Studies* 8/4 (2009), 693-715.

10) David E. Garland ("The Christian's Posture Toward Marriage and Celibacy: 1 Corinthians 7," *Review & Expositor* 80 [1983], 351-362 [352]) poignantly points out that it was not merely an advice but a requirement.

11) Cf. B. Byrne ("Sinning Against One's Own Body: Paul's Understanding of the Sexual Relationship in 1 Corinthians 6:18," *CBQ* 45 [1983], 608-616.) contends that these two passages are not reflecting Paul's overall negative view on marriage but to be understood along with the preceding passage of fornication (6:12-20). However, he does not give any answer to Paul's advice on celibacy in the following chapter of his letter (7:25-40). David L. Balch ("1 Cor. 7:32-35 and Stoic Debates About Marriage, Anxiety and Distraction," *JBL* 102:3 [1983], 429-439.) maintains somehow neutral stance stating that Paul adopts Stoics' terms concerning marriage, anxiety and distraction to express his view on marriage and celibacy as both beneficial for some and not for some others.

12) Annemarie S. Kidder, *Women, Celibacy and the Church* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2003), 106.

However, the functionalism of the marriage is not all about the reason for Paul's reluctance to marriage. As Judith M. Gundry-Volf poignantly points out, it should be understood against the backdrop of the problems in the Corinthian Christian community. She argues that 1 Corinthians 7 that deals with the matter of celibacy and marriage should be understood in light of the Corinthian pneumatism.¹³⁾ She contends that sexual abstinence is often closely related to the communication with deities in the ancient world, and it is the same to the Corinthian community; the sexual abstinence is helpful for a person to have spiritual experience, and Paul agreeing with this idea advises Corinthians to maintain temporary celibacy for prayer (1 Cor. 7:5). However, the side effect of celibacy is the abuse of pneumatism for claiming the spiritual authority and power.¹⁴⁾ The possible danger of the celibate pneumatics of the Corinthian community forced Paul to restrict the celibacy, although the pneumatism, especially of prophecy was a more admirable talent (1 Cor. 14:1-5). Gundry-Volf's argument supports that chastity has often used as an excellent weapon to gain power.¹⁵⁾

13) Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Celibate Pneumatics and Social Power: On the Motivations for Sexual Asceticism in Corinth," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 48:3-4 (1994), 105-126.

14) Garland ("Marriage and Celibacy," 352) also understands Paul's view in light of some Corinthian Christian's belief that "sexual activity somehow sullied one's spiritual nature" (see Rev. 14:4).

15) Paul uses his celibacy for the claim of his authority to Corinthians although he might not have done as such on purpose. Paul discusses his apostolic authority in his first letter to Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:1-27). He is under suspicion whether he is to be accepted as an authoritative apostle (1 Cor. 9:1-2), and he answers those who criticise him that he abstains from the rights to enjoy food, wages and marriage that other "apostles, Lord's brothers and Peter" do. He argues that he voluntarily gave up these things (It has been debated whether Paul was ever married before. For further discussion of it, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First*

Another example of the chastity functioning as a way to power is Mary the mother of Jesus. The virginity of Mary is getting highlighted and strict as she gets more respect in early Christianity. The canonical gospels report that Mary was a virgin only when she was betrothed to Joseph, *virginitas ante partum* (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38), and Mark and Matthew tell that Jesus had brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55-56). This shows that Mary was not a virgin anymore after she gave birth to Jesus, and she appears as a normal female character that is even sometimes portrayed negatively (Mark 3:21-35).¹⁶⁾ However, the virginity of Mary began to draw some Church Fathers' attention such as Ignatius and Justin Martyr of the early second century. Their focus as Hunter argues was not on the virginity of Mary itself but on the humanity and divinity of Jesus respectively.¹⁷⁾

However, the reason of putting emphasis on virginity of Mary shifts from the Church Fathers' apologetic concerns to the glorification of Mary. As Hunter argues providing good example of the Odes of Solomon and the Ascension of Isaiah, the focus on the virginity of Mary is placed on her mysterious and divine childbirth, which leads to her sanctity.¹⁸⁾ The divine

Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 288) although he has a right to do them. His ascetic life is, explicitly, to gain people (1 Cor. 9:19-22) firstly and to receive the final prize by abstaining (ἐγκρατεύεται) like an athlete, secondly (1 Cor. 9:24-27). However, his purpose to behave as such is, implicitly, to claim his apostolic authority, which is to put it as "I gave up this; so I deserve that instead."

- 16) For the discussion of the question of sexual relationship between Joseph and Mary, see D. C. Allison, "Divorce, Celibacy and Joseph," *JSNT* 49 (1993), 3-10.
- 17) D. G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173-174.
- 18) *Odes of Solomon* 19.4-11; *Ascension of Isaiah*, 11.2-14. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 175-77.

sanctity of the Virgin Mary increases in the *Protevangelium of James*. It makes Mary an everlasting virgin, and her sanctity increases until Salome is cursed to have her hand fall off when she challenges Mary's virginity (*virginitas in partu*);¹⁹⁾ Joseph was a kind of guardian of young girl Mary and an old widower with children, and the author by so doing removes the possibility of any sexual relationship between Mary and Joseph even after the birth of Jesus (*virginitas post partum*). When the virginity of Mary was getting highlighted, it was not only for the sake of homoousios but also of the homage to the Mother of God.²⁰⁾

Chastity working as a weapon to gain power is found in early Church Fathers' writings as well. Augustine, for instance, believed that the female should be subservient to the male, whereas the male is often weaker than the female in the sexual matters; therefore, the male should be chaste in order to be the true head of woman.²¹⁾ In other words, for man to be chaste proves his superiority to the woman, and Elizabeth Abbott in this light explains that for Augustine the woman's chastity is more easily achieved than the man's one, and accordingly the woman's submission to the man is legitimised.²²⁾ This implies that to achieve chastity, especially for those who can hardly do

19) For more discussion of the *Protevangelium of James* with regard to glorification of Mary, see Jayhoon Yang, "Other Endings of Mark as Responses to Mark," (Ph.D. diss. The University of Sheffield, 2003), 95-96; Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 177-181. For the information of the *Protevangelium of James*, see H.R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary*, Apocrypha Novi Testament 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965).

20) J. K. Elliott ("The Relevance of the Christian Apocrypha," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57:1-2 [2003], 118-130 [121-122]) argues that Mary's *par excellence* virginity did not only increase the homage to her but also helped the church "extol virginity and chastity as virtues."

21) Augustine, Sermon 82: *On the Words of John 6:55*.

22) E. Abbott, *A History of Celibacy*, tr. by Lee Hee-Jae (Seoul: HaeNaem, 2006), 106.

it like the male, endows him or her with the qualification that he or she deserves honour and respect, which is a kind of power.

Cyprianus believed that celibacy elevates the person to the rank of the celestial being.²³⁾ But much earlier before him did Ignatius warn that celibacy could make him or her boastful,²⁴⁾ and this implies as Schaff correctly states that “celibacy was... boasted of as meritorious and allowed to nourish spiritual pride,”²⁵⁾ which signifies the role of chastity as a way of claiming privilege and exerting power. As Boniface Ramsey argues, providing Ambrose’s statement that praises virginity as much as martyrdom,²⁶⁾ that virginity was considered as the same to martyrdom²⁷⁾ which was the most highly praised as is often the same at the present time amongst religionists. Therefore, chastity is a way to gaining power and authority.

Chastity as a mean to gain power is also found in many cases in church history. The Synod of Gangra (4th century) where the Eustathians were criticised because of their extreme asceticism with regard to marriage, hairstyle, food, clothes and so on produced 20 canons to condemn their abuse of asceticism. The canons 13 and 17 tell about women wearing man’s clothes and having their hair cut to express their chastity pretending they are ascetic,²⁸⁾ and they are condemned as they are abusing their piety for their benefit;²⁹⁾ the canon 4 reflects that some

23) Cyprianus, “On the Dress of Virgins,” *Treaties* II.22.

24) Ignatius, “The Duties of Husbands and Wives,” *Epistle to Polycarp*, ch. 5.

25) P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, tr. by Lee Gil-Sang (Seoul: Christian Digest, 2004), 381-382.

26) “For virginity is not praiseworthy because it is found in martyrs, but because itself makes martyrs.” (“Concerning Virgins,” 1.3.10)

27) Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning To Read the Fathers*, tr. by Lee, Hoo-Jung and Sam-Ryol Hong (Seoul: CLSK, 1999), 186.

28) Cf. APl, 25. The canons 14-16 condemn those who abandon their family at the excuse of asceticism, which is recommended in the Apocryphal Acts on the contrary.

believed celibate could claim higher spiritual authority than the married;³⁰⁾ the canon 10 especially condemns the virgins who despise the married claiming their higher spiritual level. These prove that chastity can be used as a way of claiming and exerting power.³¹⁾

The opposite to this condemnation of the enthusiasts, although the cause and its effect are the same, happens in the middle age church history. The church lords had to make a deal with the secular lords to secure their power, and the clerical celibacy was their card to show. Charles A. Frazee for instance explains that the lay lords requested vassal royalty from the bishops of his territory giving them their lands in return.³²⁾ This caused the decrease of ecclesiastic autonomy as well as the problem of property inheritance to the children of the married clergies. The papacy strategy to solve these problems was the clerical celibacy and the restriction of the rights of the priest's children on the property.³³⁾ The church declared the clerical celibacy, and by so doing they could secure their freedom and autonomy from the interference of the secular lords and emperors, as well as silence the possible claim of the priest's children.³⁴⁾ It was a kind of business between the priest and

29) E.g., "If any woman from pretended asceticism shall cut off her hair, which God gave her as the reminder of her *subjection*, thus annulling as it were the ordinance of subjection, let her be anathema [my italics]." (Canon 17) This canon understands chastity as the female virgins' weapon to fight against the male's superiority to claim their own autonomy.

30) "If anyone shall maintain, concerning a married presbyter, that is not lawful to partake of the oblation when he offers it, let him be anathema."

31) "If any one of those who are living a virgin life for the Lord's sake shall treat arrogantly the married, let him be anathema."

32) Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church," *Church History* 57 (1988), 108-126 (118-19). He also surveys the background of the clerical celibacy in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world.

33) Frazee, "Origins of Clerical Celibacy," 119.

the lords, and it proves that chastity worked as the church's best bet in the game with the secular power.

The declaration of chastity of the apocryphal women is a way to the feminine autonomy as Corrington exactly points out.³⁵⁾ As Alice refused going under the masculine protection that marriage guarantees, the apocryphal Alices do the same. When these Alices declare to quit the business with their spouses in offering sex and receiving security in return, the male characters are upset because it is understood as the feminine revolt against the masculine authority,³⁶⁾ which had been legitimised in the name of convention. Chastity was an excellent weapon to achieve feminine independence and take the power back from their opponents who has coaxed power out of them. These Alices are no more wearing stockings and corset but armour, shield and the Vorpall sword, which is in other word chastity. Therefore, chastity is a nickname of desire.

Conclusion

Chastity and desire do not look becoming but rather conflicting with each other. However, these seemingly opposite values pursue the same goal which is “pleasure” in Bentham's word. The chastity stories of the Apocryphal Acts depict the battle between the chastity and desire, and declare the victory of chastity over the desire. The powerless female characters give up the security that the powerful male characters provide by

34) *Ibid.*, 122-126.

35) G. Corrington, “The “divine woman”: Propaganda and the power of celibacy in the New Testament Apocrypha: a reconsideration,” *Anglican Theological Review* 70:3 (1988), 207-220 [217].

36) See the canon 17 of the Synod of Gangra that I mentioned above.

selecting the ascetic life. However, chastity that superficially appears as “loss” is actually gaining; chastity is the way to obtaining feminine autonomy and power. Therefore, asceticism of which disposition is signified as abstinence and giving up is merely another mean of obtaining power.

The apocryphal women are the “right Alices” who fight for her autonomy and power. Alice in Wonderland refuses stockings and corset and wears armour and picks up shield and the Vorpall sword for this battle. She, like the apocryphal Alices, declares celibacy and it is her/their weapon to destroy the masculine oppression and achieve their independence. They had to endure hardships in order to get their power back from their opponents such as the Red Queen, Styan, and Jabberwocky for the Wonderland Alice and husbands and fiancés for the apocryphal Alices. Just as Alice turns out to be the “right Alice” the true heroine when she slays the “old foe” monster Jabberwocky, the apocryphal Alices achieve their autonomy and power when they finally have their male opponents kneel down before them, which appears either as their conversion or destruction.

The chastity stories of the Apocryphal Acts are the stories of transformation of the female characters. The face of transformation appears as choosing to be powerless, abstinent, giving up, ashamed and embracing hardships. But beneath this face lies the desire for power, honour and respect. Alice in Wonderland transforms herself just as her mentor caterpillar Absolem does, and this looks like dying. But it is the way to life, power and freedom, which appears true when Alice finds a monarch butterfly on her shoulder happily and freely flying when she is spreading her wings for China and Hong Kong.

<주제어>

정절, 외경 행진, 이상한 나라의 앨리스, 권력, 욕망

<Key words>

Chastity, Apocryphal Acts, Alice in Wonderland, Power, Desire

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<초록>

이상한 나라의 여성들

-외경 행전에 나타난 금욕과 욕망-

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이 논문은 외경 행전에 나타나는 정절에 대한 강조를 팀 버튼 감독의 ‘이상한 나라의 앨리스’ (2010)의 눈을 통해서 살펴본다. 안드레행전, 도마행전, 요한행전, 빌립행전, 베드로행전, 그리고 바울과 테클라 행전에서는 공통적으로 등장인물들이 복음을 받아들인 이후 혼인관계를 끊고 정절을 지킬 것을 요구하고 있다. 정절이라는 것은 겉으로는 성적인 쾌락과 안정된 삶, 남편의 안전한 보호막을 포기하는 금욕적 행위로 나타난다. 그러나 이 논문은 이것이 결국 또 다른 모습의 욕망을 추구하는 것에 지나지 않음을 주장한다. 팀 버튼 감독의 앨리스에게서도 이러한 모습을 찾아볼 수 있다. 그녀의 정절은 그녀로 하여금 많은 것들을 포기하고 희생하도록 요구하지만, 반면에 스스로 자유롭게 결정하고 행동할 수 있게 해줌으로써 자신의 꿈을 펼쳐나갈 수 있도록 하는 또 다른 모습의 권력을 허락한다. 이 논문은 고린도전서의 바울과 교부들과 교회사에 나타나는 몇 가지 사례를 들어서 정절이라는 것이 권력을 획득하는 좋은 방안이 됨을 주장하며, 이로써 금욕적 정절과 욕망은 결국 얼굴만 다를 뿐 결국 같은 것을 지향하는 동질적인 것임을 말한다.

<Abstract>

Apocryphal Women in Wonderland:

Asceticism and Desire in the Apocryphal Acts

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This paper is to explore the dynamics between the asceticism and desire in the Apocryphal Acts of Apostles through the lens of Tim Burton's film, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). It examines the chastity stories in the *Acts of Andrew*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of John*, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the *Acts of Thomas*, and the *Acts of Phillip*, and illuminates that these Apocryphal Acts maintain the same perspective that denies sexual pleasure and encourages ascetic life. This paper, however, argues that these values are not opposing each other, and that asceticism is an effective way of gaining power, and accordingly is another face of desire in fact. Tim Burton's Alice can be suggested as a good example of this paradox. This paper also provides some examples of this ironic dynamics between asceticism and desire in Pauline epistles, writings of Church Fathers and some stories in church history.