

An Intertextual and Intercultural Reading of Romans 8:18-25 and Zhong Yong 22 for the Care for Our Common Home¹

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Abstract

The ecological crisis today's global community is facing can be hardly overcome unless there is the proper dialogue and collaboration among civilizations. This paper focuses on the two crucial texts of the two great religious and cultural traditions, i.e., the Romans of the New Testament and the Confucian classic Zhong Yong. An authentically intercultural interpretation of the two texts requires a fully elaborated intertextual understanding of each text in its living tradition as 'Wirkungsgeschichte' (history of effects). The particular text of Romans 8:18-25 will be interpreted in light of the Exodus story of the Old Testament while the specific portion of Zhong Yong 22 will be highlighted in terms of the broad perspective of Confucian sage learning. The intercultural reading of the two texts for the care for our common home will prove that not the clash but the dialogue of civilizations will enhance the survival and liberation of both the human and the globe.

Introduction:

As an Asian person I was reminded of the Western Inscription of Zhang Zai when I read *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home*. (2015)² The Encyclical begins with the following impressive paragraph: " 'Laudato Si', mi' Signore' - 'Praise be to you, my Lord'. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. 'Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs'."³ Despite there was no communication between St. Francis who was born in the 11th century Europe and Zhang Zai in the

¹ This paper is the revised version of my presentation at the Beijing Forum 2015. I am most grateful for Prof. Zhang Zi Gang at Beijing University to invite me to be part of the important academic forum.

² Encyclical Letter *LAUDATO SI'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclical.

³ *ibid.*, 3.

10th century China, it is mysterious as well as wonderful to feel their commensurate spirit albeit their religious cultural differences. Zhang Zai wrote: "Heaven (*qian*) is my father, and earth (*kun*) is my mother; I, as a small, finite being, occupy a central position between them. Therefore, what fills heaven and earth is my body (*ti*), and what commands heaven and earth is my nature (*xing*). All men are my brothers, and all things are my companions."⁴

Right after quoting St. Francis Pope Francis powerfully describes the present ecological crisis we are facing: "This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (*Rom 8:22*)."⁵ It is significant to notice that Pope refers to the text of Romans 8:22 in order to call for a vision of an 'integral ecology' which takes into account every aspect of the global ecological crisis.⁶

The prophetic principle that penetrates the whole body of the Encyclical is derived from a critique of the excessive anthropocentrism of modernity which has given rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the universe.⁷ In this regard the 'anthropocosmic insight' of Confucianism which seeks "harmony with nature and mutuality with Heaven" can be a good dialogue partner for the contemporary Christian theology.⁸ 'Confucian humanism' that integrates "ecological and religious dimensions into human self-understanding" can provide a healthy corrective for an inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology as "a Promethean vision of mastery over the world" at the cost of "the sense of responsible stewardship".⁹ The remarkable vision of Confucian humanism has a broad ethical potential for human flourishing as "the well-being of not only the human community but of 'Heaven, Earth and the myriad things' (*tianti wanwu*)".¹⁰

⁴ Siu-chi Huang, *Essentials of Neo-Confucianism: Eight Major Philosophers of the Song and Ming Periods* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 69.

⁵ *LAUDATO SI'*, 3.

⁶ *ibid.*, 103.

⁷ *ibid.*, 87.

⁸ Wei-Ming Tu, "Confucian Humanism as a Spiritual Resources for Global Ethics," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Volume 16/ Number1, 8-1-2009, 7.

⁹ *LAUDATO SI'*, 87.

¹⁰ Wei-Ming Tu, 8-1-2009, 7.

This paper will concentrate on the two most classical texts of the two great religious traditions, i.e., Romans 8: 18-25 from Christianity and Zhong Yong 22 from Confucianism. The present writer has lived in the 'Wirkungsgeschichte' (history of effects) of both Christianity and Confucianism. Interreligious dialogue for the present writer is also 'intrareligious' dialogue in the sense that Confucianism is not the faith of other people but my own heritage as an East Asian Christian. Thus, for the present writer this attempt for an intercultural interpretation of the two texts has been long undergirded by the habits of heart reading the two texts 'intertextually'. This meaning of intertextuality is different from a Western theologian's use of the term. For the latter intertextuality is limited by the boundary of the Judao-Christian tradition. However, for the present writer it goes beyond it to incorporate the intercultural interpretation of the two texts as intrareligious dialogue.

In the first section an intertextual reading of Romans 8: 18-25 will be dealt with. The recent scholarship on Romans has emphasized "an intertextual conversation between Paul and the voice of [Old Testament] Scripture".¹¹ The echoes of the Old Testament in Romans 8 are related to the allusions of a New Exodus. Paul tried to teach the Roman church "to think within the biblical narrative, to see themselves as actors within the ongoing scriptural drama".¹² The intertextual interpretation of Romans can provide a helpful corrective for the typical Protestant readings which have focused exclusively on justification. This is related to the so-called New Perspective on Paul which attempts to amplify the theme of God's faithfulness to Israel.

The second section will critically discuss on the hermeneutical limitation of intertextual reading which is not concerned with the post-colonial context of doing theology in Asia. The intertextual interpretation, e.g. of Richard Hays's, remains "an innate and intentional intrabiblical intertextuality" between Romans and the Old Testament.¹³ Appropriating Auerbach's 'figural interpretation', Hays argues that "the discernment of a figural correspondence within Scripture 'is necessarily retrospective rather than prospective ... an intertextuality of reception rather than production' "¹⁴ To understand the Old Testament not as prediction but as prefiguration for Christ can be hardly related to an intercultural reading of Romans and Zhong Yong. Not figural interpretation but 'pneumatic interpretation' will

¹¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 35.

¹² N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Parts I and II* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 15.

¹³ Review of Richard B. Hays's *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Baylor University Press, 2014), by Edward W. Klink III, Amazon.com., 2.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

serve us to engage our imagination to be open to the prospective power of serendipitous creativity in reading Romans along with Zhong Yong.

In the last section a pneumatic, intercultural reading of Romans and Zhongyong will be introduced as a hermeneutic of reading forwards. Appropriating Paul Ricoeur's metaphors of archeology and teleology,¹⁵ the semiotic energy of groaning creatures who cannot get the most out of their Heaven-endowed natures will be transformed by the eschatological symbol of New Creation which will consummate the entire journey of sanctification through 'sage learning.'¹⁶ The theanthropic horizon of Christian sanctification and the anthropocosmic horizon of Confucian sage learning will be merged into a theanthropocosmic vision for the care for our common home.

1. Intertextual Reading of Romans 8:18-25

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." (Romans 8:18-25)

In "Intertextual Echo in Romans" Richard Hays delves into the profound world of Paul's understanding of the Old Testament.¹⁷ The very first sentence of Romans is the following: "The gospel of God was promised beforehand through his prophets in holy texts." (Rom. 1:1) The holy texts (en graphais hagiiais) means the Old Testament. Out of 89 Old Testament quotations in the Pauline letters 51 times occur in Romans. Besides Paul's explicit use of the Old Testament his allusive and

¹⁵ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

¹⁶ For understanding of Confucian sage learning in relation to Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection, see Jong Chun Park. "Christian Perfection and Confucian Sage Learning: An Interreligious Dialogue in the Crisis of Life," Ed. by M. Douglas Meeks, *Wesleyan Perspective on the New Creation* (Abingdon Press, 2004), 119-148.

¹⁷ Hays, *Echoes*, 34-83.

indirect use indicates the converging of the letter's theme with the voice of the Old Testament as 'powerful ancestral presence.'¹⁸ Paul's use of the Old Testament quotations centers at "a common focus: the problem of God's saving righteousness in relation to Israel."¹⁹

One of the crucial texts demonstrating continuity as well as discontinuity between the gospel and the law is Rom. 3:21 that "now, apart from Law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." The Reformation theme of justification by faith has so obsessed generations of Protestant readers that "they have set Law and Gospel in simplistic antithesis, ... , they have failed to see that Paul's argument is primarily an argument about theodicy, not about soteriology."²⁰ Contrary to the Protestant exegesis from Luther onward, a new interpretation of the expression the righteousness of God was attempted by Ernst Kaesemann. Kaesemann contended that the righteousness of God in Romans does not refer to " 'an alien' righteousness that individuals receive as a gift by believing in Jesus Christ."²¹ It rather means God's own righteousness "which encounters humanity as a 'salvation-creating power' which 'reaches out for the world' and establishes God's rightful claim to sovereignty over his creation."²² Subsequently E. P. Sanders identified the primary context of the term "in hymns and prayers, whose vocabulary is heavily influenced by the OT Psalms."²³

According to Hays, the driving question in Rom. 3:21 is not "How can I find a gracious God?" which is question concerning "how individuals can find acceptance with God."²⁴ But it is "How can we trust in this allegedly gracious God if he abandons his promises to Israel?," i.e., "Is God unjust?" which is the question of theodicy.²⁵ Answering the question, "God has put forward Jesus Christ as an 'indication of his righteousness' 'in order that God might himself be righteous even in justifying the person who lives through the faithfulness of Jesus.(Romans 3:25-26)"²⁶ Thus, Rom. 3:21 asserts that

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 34.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 53.

²¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 50.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*, 51.

²⁴ Hays, *Echoes*, 52-53.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*, 53.

“Scripture (the Law and the Prophets) bears witness to the gospel in such a way that the continuity of God’s grace is upheld.”²⁷ In other words, “the God whose righteousness is shown forth in Jesus Christ is Israel’s God, the God of Abraham, who paradoxically affirms his unwavering faithfulness to his covenant with Israel precisely by electing to embrace Gentiles among his people.”²⁸

It is significant to note that Rom. 3:22 is translated by Hays as well as by N. T. Wright as follows: “even the righteousness of God through the faithfulness (pistis) of Jesus Christ unto all them that believe for there is no distinction.” Paul’s pastoral concern, especially in the early chapters of Romans, is of course to formulate “theological answers to doubts about God’s righteousness.”²⁹ However, we should not miss the point that the revelation of the righteousness of God was made possible only through the faithfulness of Jesus who obeyed God even unto the death of the cross. And Paul was longing to share his gospel with the faithful in Rome in order that he could accomplish his apostleship “unto obedience of faith among all the nations.”(Rom. 1:5)

In Rom. 8:18–38 Paul’s pastoral task also entails “interpreting the suffering that the faithful community encounters” as they were exposed to ridicule and oppression grown out of the fallen state of rebellion and sin in their contemporary age.³⁰ Paul quotes Ps 44:22 in Rom. 8:36: "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." This is Paul's reading the Psalm "as a prophetic prefiguration of the experience of the Christian church."³¹ Paul's point is "that Scripture prophesies suffering as the lot of those (i.e., himself and his readers) who live in the eschatological interval between Christ's resurrection and the ultimate redemption of the world."³² According to the preceding verses of Ps 44:22, namely, verses 17-21, "the suffering of Israel cannot be construed as a punishment for unfaithfulness or idolatry; on the contrary, God's people suffer precisely because of their faithfulness to him."³³ Thus, the suffering of the faithful for the sake of God has the quality of vicarious suffering. This is "what is required of the eschatological people of God: God's elect must suffer and groan along with - and even on behalf of - the unredeemed

²⁷ *ibid.*, 57.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*, 58.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, 60.

creation(cf. Rom. 8:18-25)³⁴ It is striking to notice that Paul found in the Old Testament words "that give utterance to the inarticulate cry of the heart of all those – including Christian believers – who ache and groan along with the whole unredeemed creation.(Rom.8:23, cf Ps 43:26 LXX)"³⁵

Paul's use of "sheep to be slaughtered" reminds us of another important intertextual echo in the Old Testament: namely, "Isaiah's moving account of the fate of the servant of the Lord: He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.(Isa. 53:7)"³⁶ Paul hints and whispers this to "those have ears to hear will hear and understand that the people of God, reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered, are suffering with Christ (Rom. 8:17: *sympaschomen*) and thus living out the vocation prophesied for them according to the Scriptures."³⁷ In other words, their chastisement makes others whole and their stripes heals the groaning creation.

The crucial doctrinal aspect of Romans 8 lies in the role of the Holy Spirit which consists of "three categories: (1) the Spirit gives life, (2) the Spirit leads God's children, and (3) the Spirit groans and intercedes us."³⁸ According to the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, Christians believe in "the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, ... , who spoke through the prophets." This is only the first part of the actions of the Spirit mentioned in Romans 8. Intertextual reading of Romans 8 can expand the scope of the creed because "Paul's language evokes rich resonances of Israel's Scripture."³⁹

Rom. 8:14-15 describes the Spirit's leading role of the children of God out of slavery and into freedom: "All who are led by the Spirit of God, you see, are God's children. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery, did you, to go back again into a state of fear? No: you received the spirit of sonship, in whom we call out 'Abba, Father!'"⁴⁰ This echoes "passages in the Old Testament which speak of the children of Israel travelling through the wilderness towards the promised land."⁴¹ God led the people

³⁴ *ibid.*, 62.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 59.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 62-63.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 63.

³⁸ Richard B. Hays, "Spirit, Church, Resurrection: The Third Article of the Creed as Hermeneutical Lens for Reading Romans," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5.1 (2011), 45.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1, Chapters 1-8* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 143.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 145.

of Israel by going with them in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. God gives Christians His living Spirit as His own personal presence instead of the pillars of cloud and fire. As Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt, "Christians will often be tempted to give up the struggle and go back to the place of slavery."⁴² Though Israelites fell into rebellion and idolatry, God remained faithful as He declared: "Israel is my son, my firstborn; let my people go so that they can serve me!"(Exodus 4:22) This same God's Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are also the children of God: "Here, Paul offers a much fuller account of the Spirit's action than we find in the creed: the Spirit acts to provide guidance, secure adoption, and offer assurance of belonging to God's family."⁴³

Rom. 8:18-25 is like the place in the mountain from which one can look down on the entire range of the mountain: "From this point we can see, in astonishing clarity, the whole plan of salvation for all of God's creation."⁴⁴ This passage is close to the climax of Romans 8 which is itself the climax of the epistle. Paul attempts to illuminate the eschatological redemption of the whole creation in light of Exodus story: "Creation, you see, was subjected to pointless futility, not of its own volition, but because of the one who placed it in this subjection, in the hope that creation itself would be freed from its slavery to decay, to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified."(Rom. 8:20-21) And echoing the prophetic expression of God's intention for redeeming Israel through a New Exodus(Isa. 42:14), Paul declares that the Spirit of the redeeming God "will join together with creation's groaning in labor pains to intercede for the ultimate deliverance of the saints and the world."⁴⁵ This is a significant intensification of Exodus 2:23-24. In other words, God not simply heard the groaning and crying of the Israelites in their slavery but "enters so fully into the pain of the unredeemed creation that the creation's groans are ... actually echoed and amplified by the divine Spirit's own groans."⁴⁶

2. Beyond Intrabiblical Intertextuality: intertextuality as the semiotic matrix of text

Unless one goes deep enough to study "the semiotic matrix within which a text's acts of signification

⁴² *ibid.*, 146.

⁴³ Hays, *Spirit*, 45.

⁴⁴ Wright, 149.

⁴⁵ Hays, *Spirit*, 47.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 46.

occur”⁴⁷, a mere intrabiblical intertextuality ends up with a comparative understanding of symbols, old and new. Hays critically distinguishes his own intrabiblical intertextuality from that of Julia Kristeva “which very quickly shades over into sociology or anthropology.”⁴⁸ Instead he proposes to focus on “the symbolic field created by a single great textual precursor: Israel’s Scripture.”⁴⁹ He writes in relation to Paul:

“The vocabulary and cadences of Scripture – particularly of the LXX – are imprinted deeply on Paul’s mind, and the great stories of Israel continue to serve for him as a fund of symbols and metaphors that condition his perception of the world, of God’s promised deliverance of his people, and of his own identity and calling. His faith, in short, is one whose articulation is inevitably intertextual in character, and Israel’s Scripture is the ‘determinate subtext that plays a constitutive role’ in shaping his literary production.”⁵⁰ Hays’s reading of Paul “is limited to an exploration of the intertextual echoes of Israel’s Scripture in Paul.”⁵¹ His reading, however, avoids the aspect of the semiotic irruption of the unsymbolized repressed language in relation to the poetic imaginative signification of the text.

Romans 8 indicates a distinctively Christian expression arising from the living experience of the first Christians, "as they came to the realization that the enabling power of God was sustaining them in the depths of their inability as well as in their higher flights of worship, especially if they could relate it to promises held out by Jesus during his ministry."⁵² Rom. 8:26 refers to the depth experience of the Spirit's intercession: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Groans that words cannot express or inarticulate groans is sighs too deep for words or the unutterable words. Being entangled and frustrated in their earthly existence, suffering Christians were not able to "put into words the reality of their own condition and relation to God."⁵³ Instead, they experienced in the midst of such a despair the inarticulate groans as the voice of the Spirit itself.

Kaesemann considers the intercession of the Spirit with groans that words cannot express a unique

⁴⁷ Hays, *Echoes*, 15.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 16.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² James D. G. Dunn, *World Biblical Commentary, Volume 38 A, Romans 1-8* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 478.

⁵³ *ibid.*

ecstatic experience of the first Christians during their Spirit-filled worship.⁵⁴ He even goes further to identify it with glossolalia which is the eschatological sign of the realization of God's promise (Isa. 28:11-12; Deut. 28:49). However, Paul unlike his opponents at Corinth did not see tongue-speaking as the glorious evidence of the 'sophoi'(the wise). For Paul it was rather the humble evidence of the weakness of Christians facing the despairing and discouraging futility and slavery of the whole creation. Thus, only through the intercession of the Spirit they were able to pray for the suffering creatures in order to recover the eschatological freedom of the children of God. Unless they wholeheartedly participated in the groaning creatures' inexpressible affliction, they could not receive the blessed assurance of the Spirit that they were the children of God: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" (Rom. 8:15)

Paul's description of both depth and height of the ecstatic experience of the worshipping Christians in Romans 8 needs to be understood from the perspective of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic semiology related to the dynamic and dual process of linguistic signification, namely, the semiotic and the symbolic.⁵⁵ Through the groans the words cannot express the Spirit intercedes the crying and even shouting Christians representing the suffering creation in their affliction. The glossolalia will remain infantile and regressive as long as the Spirit does not help our weakness "for we know not how to pray as we ought." (Rom. 8:26) The 'uninterceded' glossolalia is analogous to the echolalia of the infant baby. The pre-linguistic musicality of the infantile language reflects both the pre-Oedipal narcissism and the child's dependency on mother. As we can enjoy music without understanding meaning, the semiotic irruption of the rhythm and music in the echolalia gives rise to the fundamental foundation of every creative poetic language. Semiotic process which predates the symbolic one is the modality of the instinctual and maternal as well as archaic and pre-linguistic signification prior to the acquisition of language, i.e., the symbolic modality as the order, the syntax, and the grammar of language. Upon entering the Mirror Stage (6-18 months of age), the child begins to distinguish between self and other through separating oneself from the mother. Thus, the child enters the realm of shared cultural meaning, namely, the symbolic. This symbolic realm of language is contrasted with the semiotic in that it is associated with the masculine, the law, and the word of the father. However, even after entering the symbolic the subject continues to oscillate between the semiotic and the symbolic. Thus,

⁵⁴ Ernst Kaesemann, tr. by Korea Theological Study Institute, *An die Roemer* (Seoul, Korea: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1982), 393.

⁵⁵ Cf. Jong Chun Park, "A New Reading of the Story of Atonement in Dialogue with Julia Kristeva's Maternal Semiology of the Subject/ the M-Other," *Theology and the World* (Seoul: Methodist Theological University, Fall of 2013).

the eschatological expectation of the groaning creation for the appearance of the child of God who is able to exclaim ‘Abba, Father’ should not be understood aloof from the profound intercession of the Spirit working by the semiotic energy of inarticulate words or of sighs too deep for words.

3. Intercultural Reading of Romans 8:18-25 and Zhong Yong 22

“Only those who are absolutely faithful (ch’eng) can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a triad with Heaven and Earth.” (Zhong Yong 22)⁵⁶

“唯天下至誠 爲能盡其性 能盡其性 則能盡人之性 能盡人之性 則能盡物之性 能盡物之性 則可以贊天地之化育 則可以與天地參矣” (中庸 22)

Zhong Yong 22 describes the ideal of a sage who is ‘absolutely faithful’(至誠). ‘Sage Learning’(聖學) is another name of Neo-Confucianism in East Asia. Sage is the absolutely ‘faithful’ (ch’eng) person who not only fulfills his own nature but also fulfills the nature of others and myriad things of the world to form a triad with Heaven and Earth. ‘Sage’(聖人) as ‘the absolutely faithful person under Heaven’(天下至誠) is the one who can fully develop his own nature which is ‘the command of Heaven’(天命). The first chapter of Zhong Yong begins as follows: “What Heaven commands is called nature.(天命之爲性) To follow nature is called Tao.(率性之爲道) To cultivate Tao is called education.(修道之爲教)”

The key symbol ‘faithfulness’(ch’eng)⁵⁷ is not so much an ethical notion as a religious notion. In Zhong Yong 16 ch’eng is used in the context of a religious ritual:

“Confucius said, ‘How abundantly do spiritual beings display the power that belongs to them! We

⁵⁶ Zhong Yong, tr. by Sanderson Beck, published in Wisdom Bible, www.san.beck.org.

⁵⁷ It is my argument that faithful/faithfulness is most appropriate translation of ch’eng. The Korean translation of the divine faithfulness(emet/pistis) of both the Old and New Testament is ch’eng. Please note that the recent scholarship of St. Paul prefers translating "pistis tou jesu christou" (for instance, Rom. 3:22 and Gal. 3:22) into the faithfulness of Jesus Christ rather than the faith in Jesus Christ.

look for them, but do not see them. We listen to them, but do not hear them. They are in all things, and there is nothing without them. They cause all people in the world to fast and purify themselves and put on robes in order to sacrifice to them. Like the rush of overflowing water they seem to be above and on the left and right. The Book of Odes says: The approaches of the spirits/ Cannot be surmised./ Yet they cannot be disregarded. Such are the manifestations of the subtle. Such is the impossibility of hiding faithfulness(ch'eng).'"

The context of this text is related to ancestral memorial service. Yulgok, Korean Neo-Confucian thinker in the 16th century, developed a profound doctrine of ch'eng in relation to prayer. He wrote: "Heaven achieves the nourishment of the world in terms of true principle while man achieves the 'affect and response' (感應感通) in terms of true heart."⁵⁸ According to Yulgok, "the true principle and true heart are nothing but ch'eng. The substance of ch'eng is very subtle while its function is very apparent. Thus, it can move Heaven and Earth, the spirits, and the human heart."⁵⁹ Yulgok's report on his grandmother's prayer well matches with his "Treatise on Prayer." The main thesis of his report is the 'utmost ch'eng'(至誠) of his grandmother 'affected'(感應) Heaven and Heaven faithfully 'responded'(感通) to her intercessory prayer for her dying husband. Yulgok wrote in his "Treatise on Life, Death, and Spirits": "The myriad things under Heaven exist when we say they are while they do not exist when we say they are not. But we cannot say the spirits of dead persons neither exist nor do not exist because, if there is ch'eng for them, we can say they exist while, if there is no ch'eng for them, we can say they do not exist."⁶⁰ According to Yulgok, when one's ancestor dies in the near past, one's utmost ch'eng can affect and respond to him in terms of 'ch'i'(氣) which has dispersed but not yet extinguished. When one's ancestor dies in the far past, one's utmost ch'eng can affect and respond to him in terms of 'li'(理) which has survived despite ch'i has already extinguished. The being of my utmost ch'eng affects and responds to the non-being of my ancestor because my spirit is connected to the spirit of my ancestor.

Right after describing the subtle manifestation of faithfulness(ch'eng) of worshipers attending their ancestral memorial service, Zhong Yong 17, through Confucius's lips, praises the filial piety of a sage king Shun. And it concludes as the following: "Therefore whoever has great virtue will certainly receive a mandate from Heaven." Confucius's teaching on filial piety continues in Zhong Yong 19 as he describes the influential power of ch'eng of King Wu and Duke Zhou as follows:

⁵⁸ 栗谷全書 IV (Seoul: Hanguk Jungshin Munwha Yungoowon, 1996), 439.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 363.

“To occupy places of their forefathers, to practice their rites, to perform their music, to reverence those whom they honored, to love those who are dear to them, to serve the dead as they were served while alive, and to serve the departed as they were served while still with us: this is the height of filial piety.

By the ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth they served the Most High Lord, and by the ceremonies of the ancestral temple they served the ancestors. Whoever understands the ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and the meaning of the seasonal sacrifices to the ancestor will govern a kingdom as easily as looking at one’s palm.”

Ch'eng(誠) is etymologically constituted by 'to speak'(yan/ 言) and 'to consummate'(cheng/ 成). Ch'eng expresses the dynamic process of fostering true relations through effective communication not only among men but between man and spirits. The sense of abundance or plenty is evident in ch'eng's cognate, 'sheng/ 盛) which means ample, to prosper, to flourish. Thus ch'eng as sincerity or integrity is more than being true to oneself: "Since all selves are constituted by relationships, integrity/faithfulness(誠) means being trustworthy and true in one's associations. It is effectively integrating oneself in one's social, natural, and cultural contexts. At a cosmological level, integrity is the ground from which self and other arise together to maximum benefit. It is not what things are, but how well and how productively they are able to fare in their synergistic alliances."⁶¹ Ch'eng is analogous to Whitehead's notion of the creative process as 'the production of novel togetherness.'⁶² Ames agrees with the Whiteheadian thought of ultimate reality as creativity according to which the ontological value of all beings are equal in the sense that they all participate in the co-creating process of the universe.

Interculturally speaking, 'the persons of the utmost ch'eng under Heaven' in Zhong Yong 22 can be prospectively identified with the ideal image of 'the sons of God'(Rom.8:19) whom the creation waits in eager expectation to be revealed. This presupposes that presently the whole creation is subjected to frustration and longs for being liberated from its bondage to decay(Rom.8:20-21a) : i.e., their Heaven-endowed nature has been distorted yet not completely destroyed. Indeed, they are earnestly aspiring to participate in the 'glorious freedom of the children of God.'(Rom.8:21b) In other words, they are waiting for the persons of the utmost ch'eng 'to get the most out of the very nature of the whole creation'(能盡物之性).

⁶¹ Ames and Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 33.

⁶² *ibid.*

Paul's keen prophetic awareness that "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time"(Rom.8:22) reminds us of the Confucian 'awareness of misfortunes'(憂患意識) that the common people as well as all sentient beings on earth have tragically lost their nature that Heaven mandated. As the saints/ Christians themselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as they wait eagerly for their adoption as sons, the redemption of their bodies(Rom.8:23), the 'great transformation'(大化) and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth all begins right from the cultivation of the self: i.e., "Next in order are those who cultivate themselves to the utmost. From this they can attain to the possession of faithfulness(ch'eng). As there is faithfulness, there will be its expression. As it is expressed, it will become manifest. As it will become manifest, it will be full of light. As it is full of light, it will move others. As it will moves others, it changes them. As it changes them, they are transformed. Only those who are absolutely faithful can transform others."(Zhong Yong 23)

Eventually the interceding Spirit on behalf of the risen Christ at the right hand of God helps the weak children of God in accordance with God's will(Rom.8:26-27, 34). This trinitarian grammar of Christian theology needs to be put not in the clash but in the dialogue with the Confucian 'theanthropocosmic'(天地人) vision of forming 'a triad with Heaven and Earth' in order to enhance the survival and liberation of both humanity and globe.

From the vantage point of 'pneumatic' interpretation on Rom.8 the Spirit's role of life-giving, assuring, and interceding for the creation needs to be extended to the re-creating, i.e., transforming and nourishing, work of ch'eng as ultimate reality. The Spirit as ch'eng "can be designated as serendipitous creativity manifest throughout the universe - that is, the coming into being through time of the new and the novel ... it presents creation of the new and the novel as ongoing processes or events in the world, and does not call forth an image of a kind of 'cosmic person' standing outside the world, manipulating it from without."⁶³ The Spirit as ch'eng sustains and reinforces the healing continuity of a holistic cosmic-social-ethical system of the globe. It can carry normative content for life in postmodern society, helping the West which "is not skilled in drawing moral meaning from value-free systems, nor in understanding how the value got there if the systems are not value-free."⁶⁴

Appropriating Tu Weiming's description of ch'eng in Zhong Yong 26, we may illuminate the brilliant

⁶³ Gordon D. Kaufman, "Re-conceiving God and Humanity in Light of Today's Ecological Consciousness: A Brief Statement by Gordon D. Kaufman," *Cross Currents*, Spring/Summer 2000, Vol. 50, Issue 1-2.

⁶⁴ Tucker and Berthrong, *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 84.

and profound operation of the Spirit as ch'eng for the healing of our common home: "In a deeper sense, the Spirit as ch'eng is not merely an ordinary form of creativity; it is which brings about the transforming and nourishing processes of Heaven and Earth. As creativity, the Spirit as ch'eng is 'ceaseless' (pu-hsi/ 無息). Because of its ceaselessness it does not create in a single act beyond the spatiotemporal sequence. Rather, it creates in a continuous and unending process in time and space. It is therefore a 'lasting' (chiu/ 久) event. Because it always manifests itself in concrete human affairs, it is necessarily 'evident' (cheng/ 徵). However, the manifestation of the Spirit as ch'eng is evident not merely because it can be objectively verified, but also because it is a principle of subjectivity. As an experienced reality in both of these senses, the working of the Spirit as ch'eng is 'infinite and lasting' (yu-chiu/ 悠久) in time, 'extensive and deep' (po-hou/ 博厚) in breadth, and 'high and brilliant' (kao-ming/ 高明) in profundity. Like Earth it 'contains all things' (tsai-wu/ 載物), like Heaven it 'overshadows all things' (fu-wu/ 覆物), and since its creativity is infinite, it 'completes all things' (ch'eng wu/ 成物). The Spirit as ch'eng so conceived matches Heaven and Earth in its unlimited creativity, and thus 'becomes prominent without any display, produces changes without motion, and accomplishes its ends without action' (如此者 不見而章 不動而變 無爲而成)"⁶⁵

Conclusion:

An intertextual and intercultural reading of Romans 8:18-25 and Zhong Yong 22 is thought-provoking for those who seek for the religious, theological grounding for saving the world facing ecological crisis. As demonstrated in part 1 of this paper, The intertextual interpretation of Rom. 8 has been limited by the intratextual framework of the Jewish Christian Scripture. Despite its distinctive merit in overcoming the traditional Protestant bias in concentrating on the forensic image of salvation centering at the doctrine of justification by faith, it has not gone both deep and far enough to embrace the critical dialectical tension between a semiotic archeology and a symbolic teleology in reading Rom. 8:18-25. The intertextual hermeneutic especially of Richard Hays stops short at a figural interpretation on the basis of retrospective and receptive intertextuality. It should be enriched and upgraded by a pneumatic interpretation on the basis of prospective and productive intertextuality.

In part 2 intertextuality beyond intratextual intertextuality is proposed as the semiotic matrix of Rom. 8:18-25 in order to understand an unique Christian expression arising from both depth and height of

⁶⁵ Weiming Tu, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 81-82.

the ecstatic experience of the early Christians. The seismic landscape change in World Christianity has taken place since 1980's in terms of the semiotic irruption of Pentecostal and Evangelical movement among the groaning and moaning people of global South. The work of the Spirit described by Paul in Romans 8 needs to be appropriated in relation to our contemporary irruption of the semiotic energies of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly of speaking in tongues.

The intercultural reading of Rom. 8:18-25 and Zhong Yong 22 in part 3 is crucial for enlarging the horizon of Christian theology and mission in our world of religious, cultural plurality as well as of ecological crisis of our common home. We are responsible for inspiring our young generations to save our common home not through the clash but through the dialogue among civilizations. Particularly for those Christians who do not bother themselves and excuse themselves in the matter of good work outside the churches, a theological and ethical proposal for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as ch'eng can be outrageous. Nevertheless, we must not give up our bold theological study in both an 'archeological' interpretation of the semiotic irruption at the grassroots Christians in the global South and a 'teleological' interpretation of the symbolic meaning of sage learning in recruiting our young Christians so that they may strenuously cultivate themselves in order to serve God, the humankind, and our common home without falling into the idolatry of money.