

The Almighty God : An Attempt to Understand the Doctrine of the Divine Omnipotence

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Abstract

In this article I made an attempt to understand the omnipotence of God as one of the most fundamental articles of the Christian faith. From the time of Aufklärung and especially since the Second World War, the doctrine of the divine omnipotence has been criticized and revised on a large scale. How could be reconciled between the good, almighty God and the inconceivable atrocities? First of all, we examined and criticized the 'two powers of God' theory held by scholastics. Secondly, we criticized the 'not all-powerful but merciful God' theory suggested by the modern Jewish scholars. Thirdly and lastly, we evaluated the view of H. Berkhof that God seems to be powerless but He is supreme in all and over all. It is impossible to fully accept his view without criticism. But His view could be the insightful help to understand the doctrine of the divine omnipotence.

Key words: the omnipotence of God, the supremacy of God, God's powerlessness or defenselessness, Hendrikus Berkhof, 'Two powers of God' theory

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explicate one of the very problematic theological concepts in the contemporary theological controversies : the

omnipotence of God. The Christian Church has confessed and is confessing up to now in her worship : I believe in God the Father of Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth(*Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem, creatorem caeli et terrae*).¹⁾ Although no one knows whether Credo had been made from the oral tradition of Apostles or not, from the time of the early Church it has been regarded ecumenically as most standard norm of Christian faith. If someone identifies oneself as a member of Christian Church, he cannot deny any article in this Creed. The confession, “God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”, however, has been attacked by the intellectuals from the time of *Aufklärung*. The more vigorous objections have been made since the Second World War.

The core of problem is how one can solve the contradiction between Christian faith in the benevolent, almighty God and the disastrous situations of this world. So-called theocracy became an urgent issue again. To understand the involved problems appropriately, the following citation might be helpful :

The problem in this discussion(i.e. theodicy) is already so old as the human being. But by the inconceivable atrocities of this century, indicated by the name ‘Auschwitz’ and ‘Hiroshima’ is this question more urgent than ever : How can, considering all suffering that not only guilty but also innocent men strike, a good and almighty God exist?(Schwiy, 1996 : 8).²⁾

Most of contemporary theologians acknowledge that the objection raised

1) Greek word *pantokrator* means ruler of all and Latin word “*omnipotens*” means capable of doing everything (Küng, 1993 : 27).

2) Originally this book is published in German as *Abschied vom allmächtige Gott* (München 1995). The author is influenced by the tradition contemporary Jewish thinkers as Günter Anders and Hans Jonas.

by the 'protest atheists' has founded on *Felsen der Schmerz*(G. Büchner).³⁾ This is not the trifle thing from which one can evade to comment on. The orthodox Christians however used to get around the difficulty without mentioning it. Most of the influential theologians of 20th century have considered seriously and earnestly the grounds of argumentations of the protest atheism. So they have regarded the problem remarked by atheists as a task to be explicated with intellectual honesty.⁴⁾ However how did they solve so difficult problems? Did they succeed to give a sufficient answer to contemporary atheists?

We must now take another situation into account. The problem mentioned above has been raised in the Christian Church too. Many Christians also has been suffering all sort of suffering and evil in this world. The good example of this case is a British Christian writer, C. S. Lewis(1898-1963). In his famous book *The Problem of Pain*(1940), he poses the problem as follows : "If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty he would be able to do what he wished, but the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either the goodness, or power, or both."(Lewis, 1940 : preface). However after painful losing his wife through death he could no longer treat that problem in purely theoretical ways. In his second book *A Grief Observed*(1961), he confessed even that he was plainly angry with

3) D. Sölle(1982 : 172-72) says as follows : "Immerhin has sich der neuzeitlich bewußte und dezidierte Atheismus ... aus ... sein existentielles Argument (bei Büchner und Heine, bei Grabbe und Jacobsen) waren der Schmerz, die Ungerechtigkeit und das Leiden der Unschuldigen." Also see Moltmann(1979 : 373-83). Over the argumentation of natural atheology on the basis of the evil(See A. C. Plantinga, 1977 : 7-64).

4) E. Jüngel(1992 : 128) commented as follows : "Der Atheismus ist als Verneinung des Theismus ein kritisches Moment christlicher Theologie, das im Gottesbegriff selbst zur Geltung zu bringen ist."

God.(Lewis, 1963 : 1-89). The one of the most influential Christian philosophers, Nicolaas Wolterstorff had to confronted with the same problem after loosing with his young son because of an accident in mountain climbing. In a moving passage of his meditative book, he lays bare his heart as follows :

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and resurrector of Jesus Christ.

I also believe that my son's life was cut off in its prime. I cannot fit these pieces together. I am at a loss. I have read the theodicies produced to justify the ways of God to man. I find them unconvincing. To the most agonized question I have ever asked I do not know the answer. I do not know why God would watch him fall. I do not know why God would watch me wounded.

I cannot even guess ... I am not angry but baffled and hurt. My wound is an unanswered question. The wounds of all humanity are an unanswered question(Wolterstorff, 1990 : 68).⁵⁾

This heartbreaking utterance is not merely of him, many Christians have expressed the same cases in speaking and writing.

The fact that the just and the unjust have been suffered indiscriminately in this world is the most strong foundation of atheology for protest atheists and makes an urgent crisis in the Christian faith. After all, the core of the problem is related with the understanding God's attributes, i.e. his goodness and omnipotence. If God is omnipotent,, why is there so much suffering in this world? Perhaps does He only permit suffering? So, Why? In this case, can such a God be called a good God? Or do we misunderstand the word 'good'?(Depoortere, 1995 : 27). Innumerable

5) We can refer to recent bestseller novel *The Shack : Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* written by Willam Young(2007) too.

thinkers has endeavored to find a solution and has proposed some answers throughout the history of Church and theology. As a matter of fact, the solutions are so many that we cannot expect any new solution. To examine and evaluate those solutions is the main purpose of this article. So from the next section on we will examine some important solutions. In the second section we will consider the 'two powers of God' theory held by scholastics and the objection against it raised by Reformed theologians. In the third section we take the completely extraordinary alternative represented by some contemporary Jewish thinkers into account. In the fourth section we will consider viewpoint of God's defenseless superior power presented by Hendrikus Berkhof(1914-95).⁶⁾

II. Two powers of God

Medieval scholastics differentiate two sorts of powers of God(McGrath, 1993 : 19-21, 77-82 ; Adam 1986 : 109, 120, 137, 158). The distinction between the absolute and ordained powers of God had its origin in early scholasticism, with Peter Damien and Anselm of Cantebury, although it would not be used extensively until the 14th century. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas points out that while God is omnipotent, there are many things which He is perfectly capable of doing, but which He *elects* not to do(Thomas Aquinas, 1961 : 196-204). From an initial set of possibilities, limited only by the condition that the outcome must

6) The phrase 'the defenseless superior power' is a translation of Dutch 'de weerloze overmacht van God'(Berkhof, 1993 : 136). This phrase, I think, can be translated into 'the powerless supremacy of God' too.

emphasized that God could have selected a different set of possibilities for actualization had he desired to do so : however, having now willed to actualize a particular subset of possibilities, God abides by his decision, so that the remaining subset of unwilled possibilities must be set aside as only hypothetically possible. God's absolute power(*potentia Dei absoluta*) refers to the initial set possibilities which God determined to actualize.

But the later scholastics had fallen into abstract speculations over omnipotence of God. So-called nominalists such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, defined God's omnipotence as the power which not only can do whatever he wills but is able to will anything whatever. By virtue of His absolute power, God was able to sin, to go astray, to suffer, to die, to be changed into a stone or into an animal, to change bread into the body of Christ, to effect contradictions, to undo the past, to make false what was true and true what was false etc. "According to His absolute power, God is pure indifference or arbitrariness, absolute potency, without content ; he is nothing but may become anything"(Bavinck, 1991 : 243). This nominalistic view was accepted by the Jesuits, Socinians, Arminians, the Cartesian theologians etc. God's omnipotent will, according to them, sustains no relation to other attributes. According to Herman Bavinck, "in principle this is the standpoint of all those who accept the primacy of the will ; hence, we meet it again and again, not only in the Christian religion but also in others, especially in Mohammedanism"(Bavinck, 1991 : 243).

John Calvin and the reformed theologians were careful to state that their approval of the distinction between *potentia Dei absoluta* and *potentia Dei ordinata* was not unqualified. Nominalists had made misuse of this distinction so that they had even taught that with reference to the former

God was able to do everything, even that which was not in harmony with his nature. They used this argument to prove the doctrine of transubstantiation. Calvin rebelled against this notion and branded as profane this ‘fiction of absolute power.’ Calvin, however, did deny the fact that “God can do more than he actually does, but he assailed the notion of an ‘absolute power’ apart from God’s being, a power that would enable him to effect all kinds of contradictions” (Bavinck, 1991 : 245). Old Reformed theologians, according to Heinrich Heppe’s resource book, asserted that the object of divine omnipotence is all that is possible at all, i.e. all that may be a means of glorifying God and that God will also really let be realized for this purpose. What is not of this kind is impossible, i.e. ideally it is not real at all ; rather absolutely non-existent ; and therefore cannot be the object of divine omnipotence (Heppe, 1984 : 99–104). According to J. H. Heidegger,

God can do *θεοπρεπῆ*, things worthy of God, the supreme, infinite and most perfect Being ; not those which degenerate from His nature and entity and point to nothingness. Therefore He cannot do, nay, He most powerfully cannot do things which are repugnant to His nature, as to destroy Himself, suffer, die, because in Augustine’s words He is omnipotent in doing what he wills, not by suffering what He does not will. He cannot not love, not bear witness to His Son eternally (Heppe, 1984 : 101).

Reformed theologians refuted the unworthy speculations of nominalists depending on the authorities of the Bible and Early Church Fathers. They cited Tit 1 : 2, 2 Tim 2 : 13, Hab 1 : 13, Heb 6 : 10, Num 23 : 19 as reliable authority. And they are in line with Church Fathers as Athanasius, Basil, Augustine, and John of Damascus. Especially, Augustine of Hippo stated that “God’s will and power are not distinct from his essence”, and

that if God could go astray, if he could sin. etc., this, indeed, would be an indication of impotence. That He can do everything in accordance with His essence is, Augustine thinks, 'not lack of power but the absolute omnipotence'(Bavinck, 1991 : 244). If God could do everything as nominalists think, how can we trust Him with our whole personality. If God were so, he would be at best 'a heavenly king, that is, cosmic despot'(Hartshorne, 1984 : 14). What is difference between Satan and such a God? Such an idea of divine power is a *good-for-nothing* to give answer to as well suffering Christians as atheists.

III. *Not All-Powerful God.*

The experience of the Jewish people during the Second World War have severely impaired the credibility of the concept of God as the sovereign Ruler of this world, the Lord of history. In order to save the moral credibility of God, a philosopher like Hans Jonas asserts that

not because he chose not to, but he could not intervene did he fail to intervene ... God ... has divested himself of any power to interfere with the physical course of things ; and responds to the impact on his being by worldly events, not with a mighty hand and outstretched arm ... but with the mutely insistent appeal of his unfulfilled goal(cited from Sarot, 1992 : 175-76).

Ideas similar to those of Hans Jonas have been worded in a much more popular way by the liberal rabbi Harold Kushner. His son suffered from progeria, rapid aging, and died at the age of fourteen. Out of this cruel experience he wrote *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* in the year 1981.⁷⁾ His solution is that the misfortunes do not come from God at all. According to him, many existential benefits are connected with the

abandonment of the idea of the all-powerful. For example, people no longer hold on to unrealistic expectations of God and, consequently, are not disappointed when these are not realized. This is a good thing because one who is angry at God loses the experience of His nearness. Moreover, people will not feel judged and condemned by God, even if He does not provide what they ask of Him. They recognise that the fulfillment of their wishes does not depend on His judgment about whether or not we deserve this or that. In the same way, people stop condemning themselves to guilt if misfortunes occur. They can be angry about what happened, without being angry with God. What is more, they know that God is on their side, and is Himself angered by the unfairness of life (Depoortere, 1995 : 63-64).⁸⁾ We may ask a question to Kushner as “If one believe that God wants justice but cannot always arrange it, what can be the meaning of prayer?” He answers us that it is essential for a believer to pray, but bad prayers ask for things God cannot give. Praying does two things according to him : it puts people in touch with other people, and it puts people in touch with God (Depoortere, 1995 : 67-68).

Such a viewpoint would be an encouraging answer for suffering Jewish people. For God is, according to such a viewpoint, near to His suffering

7) All references to Kushner is according to summary and evaluation by Depoortere (1995 : 61-72).

8) In this point we can remember very famous passage from E. Wiesel which represents same understanding of God with Kushner : “The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. ‘Where is God? Where is he?’ someone behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, ‘Where is God now?’ And I heard a voice in myself answer : ‘Where is he?’ He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows ... ” (cited from Moltmann, 1974 : 273-74).

people and loves them always. Although God is present, however, He is powerless in essence. He has no power to have things under his control. If this is right, powerlessness of God really means the lack of power to do something. The adherents to this viewpoint want to cling to love of God at the cost of omnipotence of God.. In the light of the Holocaust, this viewpoint seems to present more realistic God. However, we cannot meet intrinsical powerless God in any passage of th Old Testament. On the contrary, we can come across the proclamation over the mighty Creator and Redeemer in the innumerable passages(for example, in Jeremiah God announces the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the words : Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all fleshes ; is anything too hard for me?[Jer. 32 : 26, 27]). As A. van Egmond well remarked in his dissertation, the notion ‘God’ must imply that of ‘power’, because it is in the first place a predicate that tries to express- among other things- this aspect of the subject to which it is attached(van Egmond, 1986 : 251). Over against unprofitable speculations by nominalists, above-mentioned viewpoint is existentially one-sided one.

IV. Powerless Supremacy of God(= *Weerloze Overmacht van God*).

We now arrive at the last significant discussion over so-called powerless supremacy of God. This designation is attributed to God by H. Berkhof(1993 : 136-142 ; ET. 1979 : 133-40 and Depoortere ((Depoortere, 1995 : 95-134). By this attribution they want to present the right understanding of God's attributes in the light of the unavoidable Post-Holocaust perspectives .⁹⁾ In this section, let's follow up the

explanation of H. Berkhof.¹⁰⁾ He divides his explanation into two parts. In the first part(Berkhof, 1993 : 137-140) he explicates the adjective powerless(*weerloos*), and in the second part(Berkhof, 1993 : 140-42) he explains the noun supremacy(*overmacht*).

H, Berkhof defines the powerlessness as follows :

By this we understand that attribute by which he leaves room for his 'opposite' and accepts and submits himself to the freedom, the initiative, and the reaction of that 'opposite.' It has to do with the passive and receptive, the enduring and the suffering God, though it is very prominent in the Bible. We do not call this attribute the 'impotence' of God. That would be a logical contradiction of the omnipotence of God. Defenselessness does not as such exclude an active exercise of power ; it does exclude a forcible exercise of power which wipes out the power of the opposite(Berkhof, 1979 : 134).

This description about powerlessness doesn't implicate God's powerlessness in essence at all.¹¹⁾ After a glance on the title of chapter, we may expect the same explanation as the one popularized by Kushner. On the contrary, according to Berkhof, the powerlessness of God is not in

9) Depoortere's remark as follows is apt : "In our day, reflection on suffering and on God cannot avoid the dreadful reality of Auschwitz"(1995 : 74).

10) I don't agree with the entire theology presented by H. Bekhof. In this short article, however, I cannot criticize him for his theological errors in detail. I would like to commend two Korean theologians as the expert scholars of H. Bekhof. Chul-Won Suh, in his dissertation, criticized him for the elevation theology in detail (Suh, 1982 : 101-19, 241-43) and Yoon- Bae Choi criticized him for his binitarian doctrine of Trinity and overemphasis about the humanity of Jesus Christ etc. (최윤배 [= Choi], 2003 : 99-138).

11) Berkhof also hold fast to the attribute of divine power, and he admits even that God "is already in himself and from eternity the almighty"(Berkhof, 1993 : 142). However "in the Bible the term 'almighty' occurs only a few times and then in escathological contexts. For the present we cannot use it"(Berkhof, 1993 : 141). However, we cannot agree to the latter opinion of Berkhof.

His essence, but “what is at stake here is the very special way in which God makes his power felt”(Berkhof, 1979 : 134). He maintains that God's powerlessness has been made to in His creation of human being and continuous relationship with them. According to Berkhof, human being is created by God in his image,

which implies at least that, analogical to God, he has the freedom to love and exercise power.

He can respond, be a counter-player, take the initiative, in fact on behalf of and under God even exercise dominion over a part of creation. In creating man, God as it were recedes (is it really ‘as I were?’- more about this later) to make room for another. That room is needed because the other is to be a partner whom God wants to meet and have fellowship with. One cannot be a real partner without having one's own area of freedom and initiative(Berkhof, 1979 : 135),¹²⁾

In other words “His powerlessness is a gracious unwillingness to be almighty without us and against us”(Berkhof, 1979 : 139).

From above-mentioned explanation we can perceive that Berkhof stands in the line of the dominant tendency in contemporary Christian theology, in that he also endeavor to overcome the problems of polarization of subjectivism and objectivism, of divine sovereignty and human freedom. So his viewpoint is not strange to contemporary Christians. S. Kierkegaard also related the omnipotent power of God to the human freedom :

The greatest good, after all, which can be done for a being, greater than anything else that one can do for it, is to make it free. In order to do just that, omnipotence is required ... Only omnipotence can withdraw itself at the same time it gives itself away, and this relationship is the very independence of the receiver. God's omnipotence is therefore his goodness. For goodness

12) In other place he also says that “He desires free men ; but freedom exists for the sake of love, and love is made possible through freedom”(Berkhof, 1979 : 458).

is to give oneself away completely, but in such a way that by omnipotently taking oneself back one makes the recipient independent ... Only omnipotence can make (a being) independent (Kierkegaard, 1970 : no 1252).

Moreover, we can find the same viewpoint in K. Barth : “God has an real history in and with the world created by him ... We need not hesitate to say that ‘on the basis of the freedom of God Himself God is conditioned by the prayer of God.’” (*KD* II/1, 565, 574 ; Weber, 1984 : 67). Although the later Berkhof wanted to deviate his standpoint from Barth's, he follows Barth's viewpoint on divine love that gives room for freedom of his creatures.

To give freedom to human being is the expression of divine love according to contemporary theological viewpoints. Love is understood, by contemporary theologians, as making room for the beloved and implying vulnerability in relation with the beloved. Anyone who loves makes himself dependent on the good-will and the response of his beloved (Sarot 1994 : 176-77).¹³⁾ God's love appeared in His humiliation than in His splendors witnessed by nature, and His incomparable great power can be seen well in his ability to condescend or restrict Himself in order to love His creatures. In order to save His miserable people from sin and death, God who created the world *ex nihilo* condescended to become a man.¹⁴⁾ and

13) In other words we may speak as follows : “To love means to promise and to promise each other never to use means of power vis-à-vis the beloved person. To reject the use of ‘power’ means to expose oneself to refusal, incomprehension, and unfaithfulness. The only language which suits love is prayer. God does not ‘will.’ He prays. To will implies power. To pray means to forsake power. To pray means to ask in fear and hope. If a human being hears God's prayer, he reaches the summit of his existence.” (F. Varillon. cited from Depoortere, 1995 : 86).

14) See remarks of Gregory of Nyssa : “In the first place, then, the fact that the omnipotent nature should have been capable of descending to the low estate of

the creator was even crucified by his own creation.¹⁵⁾ And God the Spirit also works “with defenseless means, with the means of proclamation and persuasion. The Spirit, too, goes the way of the cross, because everywhere he is resisted and grieved”(Berkhof, 1979 : 135).

In the second part, H. Berkhof goes on explaining over supremacy (*overmacht*). According to him powerlessness or defenselessness(*weerloosheid*) of God is “the expression of his superiority. He can yield because he knows that he will win [*De weerloosheid is de uitdrukking van zijn overmacht. Hij kan terugwijken, omdat Hij weet dat Hij het wint*]”(Berkhof, 1979 : 138).¹⁶⁾ I would like to cite some important passages :

The creation of man means freedom and for man and delegation of authority from God. But God keeps accompanying man as his sustainer and lawgiver. When man has fallen into sin, God does not abandon him but goes after him with his invitations and warnings, his favors and his

humanity provides a clearer proof of power than great and supernatural miracles ... But the descent to our low estate is a surpassing display of this power which is no way impeded even in conditions opposed nature ... the lofty, coming to exist in lowliness, is seen in this lowliness, and yet descends not from its heights”(MPG, 1 5 : 63, 64).

- 15) Eberhard Jüngel, one of whom promoted *nova theologia crucis*, said as follows : “For Paul, the Crucified One is weak, subject to death. Paul, however, does not celebrate this thought with melancholy, but rather thinks of it as the gospel, as a source of a joy. The weakness of the Crucified One is for Paul the way in which God's power of life is perfected (II Cor. 13 : 4) ... F. Nietzsche ridiculed such as a Pauline God as ‘A God of the kind created by Paul is the negation’ (*deus, qualem Paulus creavit, dei negatio*, in his *Der Antichrist*, nr. 47). For He acutely and clearly see that a new understanding of God has been followed Paul did.”(Jüngel, 1983 : 205ff).
- 16) We can find the same expression in Calvin as follows : “God must win”(J. Cadier, 1960).

judgments(Berkhof, 1979 : 138)

He is present in his judgments when he allows his unfaithful covenant partner to walk his self-chosen path all the way to the bitter end. But when man has reached that end and stands there with empty hands he discovers that God is there waiting for him as his redeemer(Berkhof, 1979 : 138)

Especially, however, in Christ's resurrection the superior power of God's presence manifest itself in the face of sin and death. And in the light of the resurrection the cross is shown to be not only the confirmation of man's power over God, but also and much more the opposite : the expression of a divine must and a sign of the power of God which was reconcilingly active in it(Berkhof, 1979 : 138).

According to Berkhof, we can say that the Holy Spirit also works in such a defenseless way. Let's consider his explanation :

Finally, the Holy Spirit in his own defenseless way is active with superior power. No matter how stubborn the resistance of the human heart, the Spirit is able to make of antagonists children of God through the power of forgiveness and renewal, and to give them a new birth unto faith, hope, and love. And no matter how worldwide the resistance may be, the Spirit is able to gather a people of God out of all nations and races and to make the gospel a leavening influence, also in secular culture (Berkhof, 1979 : 138-39).

“For the present we cannot almighty-concept use,” according to Berkhof, rather we can say only “the supremacy of the holy love[*de overmacht van de heilige liefde*].” From our faith in this supremacy of God, we can hope in certainty that “some day this love will melt away all resistance and will then be almighty, because then our God-given power will fully put itself into the service of this love”(Berkhof, 1979 : 139).

Berkhof asserted strongly that God is almighty in His essence from eternity to eternity. “Powerlessness remains an adjective by supremacy. A pure impotent god is not God… God is not crucified, dead and resurrected”(Berkhof, 1993 : 142).¹⁷⁾ Therefore we must bear in mind that “in this suffering God is not a helpless powerless victim but one who suffers along with man. This is another form of suffering, but not a lesser suffering”(Berkhof, 1979 : 140).¹⁸⁾ God must win at last, and he will achieve his eternal purpose in spite of all the adversaries of free creatures.

V. Summary and Concluding Remarks

Up to now we have endeavoured to get adequate understanding of divine power, i.e. omnipotence of God. However, the problematics is so broad and deep that we cannot treat it in this short article sufficiently. Nevertheless we can make some concluding remarks from

17) These phrases are not in English edition. I cite from Dutch edition appeared in 1993.

18) In connection with this we have to read Bonhoeffer's text as follows carefully : “The same God who is with us is the God who forsakes (Mark 15 : 34!). The same God who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God, and with God, we live without God. God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross ; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8 : 17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering! This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, God as *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and the suffering of God ; only the suffering God can help [*nur der leidende Gott kann helfen*]”(Bonhoeffer, 2010 : 478-79 ; 1990 : 191-92).

above-mentioned discussions.

Firstly, our starting point was the unsolvable contradictions between our faith in benevolent, omnipotent God and the disastrous reality of this world. We must acknowledge that protest atheism is established on a solid basis. So we are responsible to answer atheists with adequate understanding of divine omnipotence. However, we must agree to the remarks made by Heinrich Ott as follows : “I have an opinion that the problem of theocracy, that is, the question about the innocent suffering in this world doesn't answer. I think, there is no rational answer”(Ott, 1978 : 38).

Secondly, the powerlessness of God doesn't mean that he has lacked intrinsically power to do something. That means God can exercise *self-restraint*, that is to say, He can choose not to use his power in a certain way. As for us, the self-restraint of God seems to be powerless in His essence.

Thirdly, God does everything in accordance with His essence or Being. God's Almightyness is in other word “almighty mercy” or power of love.¹⁹⁾ So we can entrust our life and soul to Him. And we can believe in Him always as “He will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself”(II Tim. 2 : 13, NIV).

Fourthly, the omnipotence of God is an attribute eternally worthy of God(Θεοπραξίη), as H. Berkhof pointed out, we cannot perceive it sufficiently in this world. So, we, even the children of God, cannot help crying for our suffering or troubles as the souls of martyrs : “How long,

19) Karl Barth said that God's omnipotence is “not only almighty, but also almighty mercy[allmächtige nicht nur, sondern auch allmächtige Barmherzigkeit]”(Barth, 1956 : 13).

Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”(Rev. 6 : 10, NIV).

Fifthly and Lastly, we must acknowledge humbly that “the Word of God is an empty concept or a mere principle unless it is connected to daily life”(Depoortere, 1995 : 75-76). In other words, an adequate understanding of Divine power must be applied to our Christian life. It has to lead to reorient our life-style, especially the use of all sort power given to us. One of those that is required to us is to crucify our will to power(*Wille zur Macht*). Every power is given us to serve the another persons, not to rule over another persons. Our theological knowledge also has to be crucified with crucified Christ²⁰).

“이 논문은 다른 학술지 또는 간행물에 게재되었거나 게재 신청되지 않았음을 확인함.”

20) Moltmann remaked this point very definitely as follows : “This theology is 'in itself crucified theology and speaks not only about cross'(K. Rahner). It is more crucifying theology and in which it is liberating theology”(Moltmann, 1972 : 72).

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논문초록

전능하신 하나님 : 하나님의 전능성 교리 이해를 위한 한 시도

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본 논문에서 기독교신앙의 가장 근본적인 조항 중의 하나인 하나님의 전능성 교리를 이해하기 위한 시도를 해 보았다. 홀로코스트를 겪고 난 후의 서구 신학계에서는 하나님의 전능성 교리가 많이 비판되거나 수정이 시도되어 왔다. 우리들 역시도 때로는 이렇게 재난이 많은 세상 속에서 여전히 전능하신 하나님을 어떻게 고백할 수 있을까 고민을 때때로 하게 된다. 본 논문에서는 우선 중세 신학자들이 제안한 하나님의 두 종류의 능력이론을 검토한 후에 비판했고, 현대 유대인들이 제안한 자비로우나 전능하지는 않으신 하나님 이론에 대해서 살펴본 후에 비판했으며, 마지막으로 네덜란드 신학자인 헨드리쿠스 베르코프가 제시한 “무능해 보이시나 주도권을 가지신 하나님”이론에 대해서 자세하게 살펴보았다. 베르코프는 바르트 신학에 많은 영향을 받은 현대신학자로서 다른 현대 신학자들처럼 홀로코스트 이후의 관점에 대해서 나름대로 답변을 하고 있다. 하나님께서는 본질적으로 전능하시지만, 사람들에게 자유와 책임성을 허락하시기 위해서 무능해 보이시기로 자신의 능력 행사 방식을 선택하시는 것이라는 점을 그는 설득력 있게 논증했다. 우리는 베르코프의 이론을 전적으로 수용하기는 어렵다고 하더라도 나름대로 하나님의 전능성 교리를 이해하는데 도움을 얻을 수 있다고 사료된다.

주제어 : 전능성, 하나님의 주도권, 하나님의 무력해 보이심, H. 베르코프, 하나님의 두 종류의 능력이론.