

**Doing Empatheology as a Praxis of Holiness Theology:
Theological Reading Luke 10:30-37**

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I. Introduction

In the beginning was theology, and theology was with God, and theology was in God. Theology was in the beginning with God. All things of theology were made through God; and apart from God nothing in theology has come into being. Theology came from God, and God came into theology. God became word in theology. Theology is the written incarnation of God-reality. Theology is God-rooted in its beginning, God-initiated in its process, and God-centered in its ending. Theology bears witness of who God is. God bears out what theology says. Theology is what God means. God is what theology means. Theology makes sense in light of God; God makes sense in terms of theology. The head of theology reiterates the logos of God; the body of theology reflects the ethos of God; the heart of theology retains the pathos of God. God is the history of theology, and theology is the story of God. Thus, theology in Augustine's definition is *sermo de Deo*, namely "talk about God." God-talk is the text of theology, and God-walk is the context of theology. The foundational subject of theology is God; God is the fundamental object of theology. The primary question of theology is deeply related to the ultimate question of God, without which all other theological questions become groundless, pointless, and meaningless. In this sense, Langdon Gilkey states: "Without some answer to the God-question, all talk about Word and Sacrament, about Scripture and hermeneutics, about the covenant community of the Church, about a Christ who is Lord of our life and history, and about the eschatological interpretation of history as God's action, is vain and empty."¹ It is to take a wrong way to search for theological truth and to do Christian theology by any means without having the proper knowledge of God, no matter how academically it makes its case in a convincing manner. Any theological argument either in disjunction with the very reality of God or in ignorance of the very identity of God is not quite appropriate to sustain its theological accountability in making the truth claims of the Christian faith. There is no authenticity or credibility in a theology that refuses to take the problem of God seriously, no birth of true theology in those who are not keenly aware of the being and doing of God in the world of human history.

No one can seriously deny, therefore, that anyone who wants to hit the nail on the head when one discusses holiness theology must first of all get a real grasp of who God is. Holiness

¹Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 110.

theology is a theology of God. It is neither a theology of Wesley nor of Wesleyans. God is the immediate point of departure for, the intimate point of reference to, and the ultimate point of arrival at, holiness theology. Holiness theology is a wholeness theology of God in a sense that it wholly participates in the totality of God-reality. Indeed, God is the hypothesis of theological thesis, the proposition of theological position, the suprastructure of theological infrastructure in constructing holiness theology. So in order to do holiness theology, one needs to continuously turn back to God rather than to others, and to comprehensively examine the holistic reality of God—the universal truth of God that is *ex cathedra* synchronously or diachronously applicable to the *prius* and *posterius* of all Christian praxis running across the boundary of holiness denominations. For holiness theology is anything but merely a particular, peculiar, parochial theology that is entirely or exclusively limited to epistemological and experiential realm of the so-called holiness denominations built upon Wesleyan tradition. It is rather a universal theology that is not separate and apart from the central truth of Christianity—the very concept of God that has constituted the underlying foundations of all theological instructions and constructions. Holiness theology is exclusive in its connotation, inclusive in its denotation, and comprehensive in its notation. Without right knowledge of God, needless to say, there is no right knowledge of holiness in particular as well as of holiness theology in general. The more we understand God, the deeper we know the meaning of holiness, the better we do holiness theology.

II. Approaches to the Reality of God

Throughout Christian history, there have been differing opinions concerning the reality of God.² They will be classified into three major categories according to the way in which people claim to experience, believe, and understand God's way of being, and God's way of doing, in the historical context of the world. Most God-talks have been made in the wake of these categorical directions, by which they have come to view the real entity of God from the standpoint of their own social framework and location. The three categorical elucidations and assessments of the divine reality in the trajectory of their dominant and ongoing point of direction show in what way, in what sense, and to what degree, they are different to one another.

A. God of Orthodoxy

Our first conceptions and perceptions of God have been wrought by means of the theology of ortho-doxy in traditional Western Christianity, which, by and large, underscores right beliefs, right opinions, right knowledge, right standards, and right doctrines. Their theological construction considers only metaphysical speculation, exegetical circulation, theoretical articulation, and dogmatical recapitulation. This theology of orthodoxy has existed as

²Gordon D. Kaufman, *God The Problem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 9-15; Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy: A Theology Of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 8-19.

a theory-oriented theology on the radical verge of divorcing itself from the flesh and blood of everyday life; thereby falling into, absolute idealism, cold rationalism, blind biblicism and dry dogmatism. This theology focuses much attention on the essential "being" of God and little attention on the existential "doing" of God. The God of orthodoxy is the God of heaven rather than the God of earth. Therefore, because the concept of God is to be funneled into the network of orthodox theology whose firmament and hypostasis have no inkling of the active involvement of God in human history, the image of God appears to be a lifeless, bloodless, motionless Supreme Being, sitting grimly and nonchalantly on the farthest and highest throne of heaven. Such an orthodox concept of God has mainly arisen from habitual metaphysical-suprastructural-dualism that continuously and consciously created an inaccessible, incomparable, and indeterminable lacuna between the divine and the human, on the condition of radical antinomy, dichotomy, and heteronomy. The presence of divinity is the absence of humanity; the presence of humanity is the absence of divinity. In relation to the world, the God of orthodoxy remains as the Wholly Other who is out there, up there, and over there, far beyond the mundane reality of human existence. This God is not accessible to us through our experience, available to us by our call, or accountable for us in our need. Orthodox theism underscores "the distance, the difference, the otherness of God . . . In this picture God is worldless and the world is Godless: the world is empty of God's presence . . . he relates to it externally, he is not part of it but essentially different from it and apart from it."³ God is depicted as a total stranger or a permanent alien who has hardly identified God's self with the people or fully assimilated into the context of their world. As a result, this sort of theology turned out to become an *extreme orthodoxization of God*, by which they made God an apathetic being whose primordial nature is subject to no suffering, no movement, no passion, no change, and no exigency at all.⁴

B. God of Orthopraxy

The second direction by which the conception and perception of God has been molded is a contemporary liberation theology of orthopraxy, that, against and over a theology of orthodoxy, devotes itself to right practice, right action, right commitment, right movement, and right participation in favor of the oppressed victims, and in disfavor of the oppressive reality. Central to a theology of orthopraxy is the contention that what one knows and how one acts do not really exist apart from each other. Hence, orthodoxy without orthopraxy is meaningless and unorthodox. Rather, doing is more important than knowing, in the sense that orthopraxy is the ultimatum of orthodoxy. From this, a theology of orthopraxy has become an action-oriented theology which has launched a frontal assault on the bastion of the divine conceptions in an inactive state of indifference, inertia and inefficacy, as couched in a theology of orthodoxy. The

³Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 65.

⁴Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope*, Chapter VI; Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity In Asian Perspective*, 91-4.

divine idea of radical transcendence and wholly otherness has no place in the framework of this theology. The God of orthopraxy is an actor or agent who appears in and through action. Thus, we understand who God is only in light of what God does. For it is in the midst of what actually happened in the events of history that God comes into manifestation and existence. The presence of God can be known in the historical presence of God's doing. On the basis that God acts, a theology of orthopraxy maintains that God exists: the divinity means God-in-action. In a word, "God simply *is* what God manifestly *does*."⁵ A God who does not act is absent and dead. This understanding of the divine reality is reasonable in many aspects, but runs the risk of ignoring the other dimensions of God. Certainly God is much more than what God does. What God does is the tip of an iceberg. We need to perceive and conceive the reality of God in other ways. The orthopraxy idea of God is largely configured by, and excessively preoccupied with, the extrinsic outwardness of what God does from the eisegetical-etic (view from the outside) perspective. Thus, it fails to look into the intrinsicness of who God is, behind events, and how God feels before, during, and after, God's act from the exegetical-emic (view from the inside out) perspective. What orthopraxy theology is concerned about is nothing but God's "doing"—a phenomenal manifestation of God's self that is a consequential part of the primordial whole of the divinity. As such, the divine concepts issuing from an *extreme orthopraxization* of God have no perceptible indication of, and no penetrating insight into, what is going on within the innermost heart of Godhead as a whole. Therefore, they are unable to reach, grasp, or touch a profound dimension of God beyond and behind concursus *Dei*.

C. God of Orthopathy

There is the third direction as an intermediary matrix (*tertium quid*) that forces a critical reconsideration of the concept of God, frequently bypassed by theologians in the positions of either God's being-oriented orthodoxy or God's doing-oriented orthopraxy.⁶ This direction, which opposes the orthodoxy-line (thesis) of Western religious tradition and the orthopraxy-line (antithesis) of liberation thought, is the orthopathy-line (synthesis) that underlines right passions, right compassion, right tempers, right affections, and right patience. [Pathy is derived from Greek *pathos*: feelings, sympathy, compassion, affection]. This position avoids conceptualizing the ideas of God in the trajectory of orthodoxy or orthopraxy. This type of polarization tends to

⁵Joseph Sittler, *The Structure of Christian Ethics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 4.

⁶The good examples of theological works thus far made in this direction are Kazo Kitamori, *The Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965); Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); Jung Yong Lee, *God Suffers for Us* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

fall into two extremes by placing either the other-sidedness (esotericism) of God at the expense of divine relativity on the right, or by placing the outsidedness (extrinsicism) of God at the expense of divine inwardness on the left. Instead, keeping a dialectic tension between the theory-chained and the action-chained concepts of God, it seeks to understand and descant upon the nature of God from the more fundamental perspective, in terms of orthopathos as the qualificative total sum of the divine reality. For this reason, the most appropriate locus used to identify and comprehend holistically the reality of God is neither theory nor praxis, but a divine pathos which is viewed as constituting the initial and permanent ethos of God in relationship to the entire creation. It is *initial* in the sense that according to order there is a divine action prior to any theory about God, and before any action of God there is a divine pathos. Strictly speaking, without a divine pathos, there is no divine act and no theory. The genesis of the divine revelatory activity is a divine pathos from which the unspeakable is spoken, the unknown known, the unattainable attained, and the unavailable available: God's pathos is a centripetal force and centrum of the centrifuged revealing activity of God through and toward the world. God's revelation proceeds neither "from above" in the case of orthodoxy theology emphasizing its vertical dimension, nor "from below" in the case of orthopraxy stressing its horizontal dimension; but its very starting point is "from within," from deep within God's very being as God—the divine pathos in the case of orthopathy theology. The situation is this: while a theology of orthodoxy claims, "In the beginning was the *Word*," and while a theology of orthopraxy exclaims, "In the beginning was the *action*," a theology of orthopathy proclaims, "In the beginning was the *pathos*." The pathos is the very essence and very presence of God, the *a priori* of God's action, and thus Jesus Christ is the *a posteriori* incarnation of the pathos. On the other hand, a divine pathos is *permanent* in the sense that it does not disappear even after a divine action is taken and its goal achieved. In addition, it is not so much a temporal ethos of the divinity as an omnipresent and ongoing essence of God from beginning to eternity. The divine pathos always remains as a permanent living reality in and with God, engendering a divine action from God's self toward the world, engraving a knowledge of God in the human mind, and enduring a tremendous burden of sinful corruptions in the course of history. Indeed, the divine pathos is the alpha and omega of God's reality, identity, and activity, whereby a theology of orthopathy attempts to perceive the images of God which have been defracted, distorted, and depreciated by the way of orthodoxy and orthopraxy theologies. To reflect God through the prism of orthopathy is not merely to cause another blurred view that is vulnerable to the charge of either a new Patripassianism or theopaschitism in its own wager of the divine passibility of the Father, or an *extreme orthopathization* as an intrinsicism of God at the expense of both the extrinsic-esoteric transcendency and the exoteric-exigent immanency of the divinity in orthodoxy and orthopraxy traditions respectively. Rather, it is to have a sharp focus on the image of God which has been obfuscated by the astigmatic eyes of epistemology at the interplay of a

hypermetropic lens of orthodoxy and a myopic lens of orthopraxy, because, a lens of orthopathy has the ortho-focus on the very essence of God who *is* the pathos.

III. Three Ways to the Nature of God

At this juncture, it is necessary to expand on the concept of God by means of three different terms-apathy, sympathy and empathy-in order to better understand the God of orthopathy. To begin with, let us identify the meaning of apathy and then compare and contrast the other two similar, yet different words-sympathy and empathy. The term apathy, in radical opposition to sympathy and empathy, derives from the Greek word *apatheia*, which means impassiveness, indifference, unresponsiveness or unchangeableness. It is a state of mind entirely free from subjective emotions, interactive interests, and intersubjective concerns. An apathetic person is one who continuously keeps oneself distant from the world of others and is totally incapable of identifying oneself with others by participating in their conditions by any means. In apathy other has no place in myself at all. Nobody is permitted to keep in touch with myself, and I am not allowed to get in touch with other. I am absolutely free from anything, anyone, anytime, anyhow. Apathetic being is self-centered, self-contained, and self-sufficient. I am that I am. No one except myself can either influence what I do or determine who I am. Apathy means an attachment to myself and a detachment from others. Apathy is the absence of sympathy as well as empathy. Apathy cannot exist along with sympathy or empathy.

The term sympathy which derives from the Greek word *sympátheia* is equivalent to the German *Mitfühlung* which translated means "feeling of being with other." The term empathy which derives from the Greek word *emphátheia* is equivalent to the German *Einflhlung* which imports "infeeling of being into other." Sympathy imposes a feeling of I on thou and empathy transposes a feeling of thou into I. That is to say, "A sympathetic person feels *along with* another person but not necessarily *into* a person . . . Empathic behavior implies a convergence . . . Sympathetic behavior implies a parallelism in the behavior of two individuals."⁷ Sympathy is incapable of assuming the position or condition of other. Empathy enables the full participation of oneself in the reality of other as if it is one's own experience. Sympathy is the external way of identification with the other in a superficial manner, whereas empathy is the internal mode of union with the other in a spontaneous manner.⁸ In sympathy, the other still remains as the other (my object), but in empathy the other becomes a part of myself (my subject). I can sympathize without losing the self, but not empathize without losing the self. "When we empathize, we lose ourselves in the new identity . . . When we sympathize, we remain more conscious of our

⁷Buchheimer, A., "The development of ideas about empathy," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1963 (10), 63.

⁸Jung Young Lee, *Patterns of Inner Process: The Rediscovery of Jesus' Teachings in the I Ching and Preston Harold* (Secaucus N. J.: The Citadel Press, 1976), 171-2.

separate identity.”⁹ Sympathy commands a full affirmation of who I am in contrast to other. Empathy demands a radical negation of who I am for the sake of other. In sympathy, there is an ongoing tension between who I am and what I am supposed to do. In empathy, there is no conflict of interest between one and the other, no hierarchy between the empathizer and the empathized, no qualitative difference between the subject and the object, and no dichotomy between essence and existence. In a word, sympathy is a self-oriented way of being with other at the center of oneself, and empathy is an other-oriented way of being into other at the sacrifice of oneself.

A. God of Apathy

The Greek concept of divinity is characterized by apathy, for God as perfect being is believed to be unaffected and unchanged by external situations and conditions around him. Divinity means the absolute transcendence from all things that is the complete freedom from dependence on all possibilities and probabilities of external circumstance in the course of nature. To be divine is to be absolutely above and totally free from the property of the created which is subject to impulse and passion, without turning from itself to the right or to the left. Human nature has nothing to do with divine nature and thus divinity is the complete absence of humanity. The affectional aspects of humanity are supposed to be incongruent with deity so that pathos could not be interposed into the reality of the deity and juxtaposed alongside the identity of the deity. Emotional response, passionate involvement, and sentimental participation are essentially and existentially alien to the very nature of God, *theos apathes* who is believed to be emotionless, senseless, pitiless, motionless. What happens *to* God do not, cannot, and will not change what happens *in* God. God is passionless and changeless: nothing changes apathetic God internally or externally. For God it is totally impossible to be passible and totally possible to be impassible. It is apathy that is constitutive of, and representative of God-reality, so to say, impassibility that let God be God and God remain God independently of constantly changing circumstances.

The Greek concept of God prevailed throughout the ages had played a major role in shaping the classical idea of God within the orthodoxy line of Western theological thought. The concept of apathy that had heavily dominated over the Hellenistic notion of God “becomes a fundamental principal in the doctrine of God for Jewish and Christian theologians.”¹⁰ Because of the deep influence of the Greek deity that is essentially impassible and existentially immutable, God of orthodoxy is believed to seem the apathetic Supreme Being who neither shows sympathetic concern for all things nor takes empathic participation in worldly matters. For such a God, apathy is intrinsic; pathos is extrinsic. Pathos could be hardly consonant with the absolute

⁹Katz, R. L., *Empathy: Its Nature And Uses* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 9.

¹⁰Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*(II), 34.

transcendence, total independence, full complacency of God who remains forever in God's own status and entity. God and pathos are mutually exclusive and actually contradictory. "Indeed, to attribute any pathos to God, to assert that He is affected by the conduct of those he has brought into being, is to reject the conception of Him as the Absolute. Pathos is a movement from one state to another, an alteration or change, and as such is incompatible with the conception of a Supreme Being Who is both unmoved and unchangeable."¹¹ Therefore God of orthodoxy emerges as the apathetic Being who could not be capable of, proactively or reactively, responding to any suffering conditions of the created, becoming thereby the Wholly Other who is considered wholly apathetic beyond passion and compassion. Both by disassociating God's self from all things and by withdrawing within Godself, God of apathy needs not and cannot feel the pathos of suffers by, sympathetically or empathically, identifying with their painful situations. God of apathy is a disabled God who is completely immutable and impassable to the suffering cry of person and thus totally incapable of treating the problem of the world. God is too apathetic to be pathetic. Apathy defines the essential identity of God, and designates the existential reality of God in a theology of orthodoxy.

B. God of Sympathy

As already discussed, the classical concept of God is neither sympathetic nor empathic, but apathetic. However, there have been exceptional attempts made from some traditional theologians to understand the apathetic nature of God, keeping in mind the somewhat perennial question of "Can God suffer?" They had struggled to find an answer to the question of the passibility or impassibility of God in the midst of human tragedy. One of the best examples is Anselm of Canterbury who tried to make sense of the pathos of God in God's apathetic nature through his theological praxis of faith seeking understanding.¹² The core of his astute perception is that "the ontological aspect of God is incapable of being passible for human wretchedness, but the soteriological aspect of God is capable of being passible for the wretched."¹³ As it were, the suffering of human beings can be expected, experienced, and expressed by God, not so much essentially and substantially as existentially and relationally. This view is consciously or

¹¹Ibid., 40.

¹²Anselm of Canterbury, *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. W. Dean (La Salle: Open Court, 1962), 13-4. He stated the passibility of impassible God in his *Proslogium* as follows: "How, then, art thou compassionate and not compassionate O Lord, unless because thou art compassionate in terms of our experience, and not compassionate in terms of thy being. Truly, thou art so in terms of our experience, but thou art not so in terms of thine. For, when thou beholdest us in our wretchedness, we experience the effect of compassion, but thou dost not experience the feeling. Therefore, thou art both compassionate, because thou dost save the wretched, and spare those who sin against thee; and not compassionate, because thou art affected by no sympathy for wretchedness."

¹³Andrew Sung Park, *op. cit.*, 113.

unconsciously shared by some contemporary Christian in the direction of orthopathy. According to Heschel, "the divine pathos is not conceived of as an essential attribute of God ... but as an expression of God's will; it is a functional rather than a substantial reality ... pathos is not something absolute, but a form of relation."¹⁴ Kitamori in consort with Heschel writes: "Theology of the pain of God does not mean that pain exists in God as *substance*. The pain of God is not a 'concept of substance' - it is a 'concept of relation.'"¹⁵

It becomes clear from their positions that God's essential mode of being as God in heaven is at variance with God's existential way of doing in earth. In my view, such an idea of God is so problematic that I take issue with their positions. It is my observation that their notion of God seems to be in an empathic position at a glance, but still in a sympathetic position in a strict sense, on the basis of the following aspects.

Firstly, their way of understanding the reality of God does not overcome the dualistic category of Greek philosophical thought by which they, consciously and continuously, make a radically qualitative distinction between God's essence and existence. In their minds God's essence parallels God's existence. There always exists an ongoing tension or antithetical conflict between the infinite essence and the finite existence of God, without either completely uniting or completely disuniting from each other. Indeed, dualism enables them to perceive the wholeness of God from the exclusive "either/or" way rather than the inclusive "both/and" way so that it fails to do full justice to the knowledge of God. In the totality of God, essence and existence are not separate entities. God's essence and existence are one and all. "Existence is the being of essence, and therefore existence can be called 'essential being.' Essence *is* existence. It is not distinguished from its existence."¹⁶ God is fully God "both in its essence *and* in its existence."¹⁷ God is not a different God in essence or in existence. "In all ultimate matters, truth lies not in an either-or, but a both-and."¹⁸

Secondly, incarnation is the perfect paradigm to show the mysterious truth of how God came into full essence and full existence at the same time. "The Word became the flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:14). Incarnation means that God's essence became God's existence and that God's existence became God's essence. Incarnation is firstly, the ontological and secondly, the existential shift of God. God is both ontologically existent and existentially ontological. We have beheld the full presence of God in the full existence of God, and the full existence of God in the full presence of God. The Word and God are one. "In the

¹⁴Heschel, *The Prophets* Vol. II, 11.

¹⁵Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), 16.

¹⁶Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 82.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 72.

beginning there is no duality."¹⁹ In the middle of incarnation there is no dichotomy between the Father and the Son, heaven and earth, the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal. Incarnation is not the either/or event but the both/and event in which God's essence and existence became united as one Person in Christ Jesus without distinction, without disruption, and without antithesis. The incarnated One is both ontologically God and existentially God.

Thirdly, when Christ suffers, God suffers both ontologically and existentially. He is not the kind of God who is ontologically, substantially, and existentially impassible; yet soteriologically, functionally, relationally, and existentially passible. I wonder how God, who is intrinsically unable to be passible, is able to be extrinsically passible. It is possible for the God of sympathy. For the God of sympathy is one who externally participates in the suffering reality of others without internally incorporating the pain into one's very being. The God of sympathy is one who superficially identifies Godself with sufferers without substantially losing one's own identity. The God of sympathy is one who indirectly assumes the role of other without directly negating one's exclusive position. On the other hand, it is impossible for the God of empathy. For the God of empathy is one who is ontologically and existentially, capable of being passible. The Christian God is not so much the God of sympathy whose essence and existence are entirely incompatible with each other, as the God of empathy who can suffer holistically. If God suffers existentially, God must suffer ontologically. Also, if God suffers ontologically, God must suffer existentially. There is no God who suffers *either* ontologically *or* existentially. The God of Jesus Christ is The God of empathy who can suffer *both* ontologically *and* existentially. God really died on the cross, ontologically and existentially. Jesus Christ is not only the "existentially" crucified God but also the "ontologically" crucified God.

It is clear that God of orthopraxy preoccupying with the existential(outer) doing of God without taking seriously the essential(inner) being of God may run the risk of becoming God of sympathy. For only on the ground that what God does externally and *a posteriori* rather than what God internally and *a priori* feels could it be claimed who God is in a theology of orthopraxy. Thus the hermeneutical use and wont of orthopraxy that was caught in a radical dualism of the divine doing and the divine being, is so keenly unaware of the empathic union between God's essence and existence that it might have a difficulty to understand how God is passible ontologically and existentially. God of sympathy is theologically possible in orthopraxy but impossible in orthopathy.

C. God of Empathy

The God of orthopathy is not the God of apathy or sympathy but of empathy. God is too pathetic to be either apathetic or sympathetic. God by no means exists as either the *Deus absconditus* or the Wholly Other or the Unmoved Mover or the First Cause that is supposed to be

¹⁹Jung Young Lee, *Patterns of Inner Process*, 178.

ontologically indifferent to and existentially independently of the pain of the suffering people in the world. In and through empathy, God cannot be a stranger of the world, nor does God remain as a spectator of history. It is empathy that brings God into immediate contact with the misery of people, into intimate convergence with their broken existence, and ultimate manifestation toward their wretched world. God is in motion and at work where empathy is. Empathy is a starting point of God's redemptive activity, and thus the prime mover of God. God falls into human history by empathy. God moves in empathy: empathy moves in God. Empathy is an inseparable part of God's essential being as God, and of God's existential doing as God. Indeed, empathy is the *modus operandi* of the divine pathos, and the *modus vivendi* of God in the world. The divine pathos overflows with boundless empathy. Empathy is what characteristically and continuously defines the vertical dimension of God's telos and determines the horizontal dimension of God's praxis throughout human history. It is empathy that makes it possible to see the Invisible, touch the Untouchable, experience the Holy among us. This is what incarnation is all about. God has become Jesus in and through empathy. The kenosis of Christ, the self-emptying of God, the radical negation of Godhead, was absolutely impossible by sympathy but absolutely possible by empathy. Incarnation is the empathic event and not the sympathetic one. Christ is the empathic being of God. Immanuel is the empathic, not sympathetic sign of "God with us." The life and message of Jesus Christ is full of empathy. He is never a condescending sympathizer for people, but a suffering empathizer with others. The preferential option for the poor and the oppressed is not his sympathetic choice but empathic imperative. His passibility is not just an expression of sympathy, but a profound manifestation of God's empathic pathos. Jesus Christ died on the cross not because of God's sympathy toward us but because of God's empathy with and into us. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the radical antithesis to the apathy and the sympathy of God. The cross is an ultimate symbol of the divine empathy. Christ is the embodiment of God's empathy, and Christianity is the religion of Christ's empathy.

IV. Theological Reading of the Samaritan Story

Jesus answering said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him he had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host and said unto him, 'Take care of him;

and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.' Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He that showed mercy on him." Then said Jesus unto him, "Go and do thou likewise." (Lk10:30-37, King James 21 Century version)

This is a famous story told by Jesus, a very important story full of theological implications and significations that, in my view, may have to do with the essential and existential nature of God. It contains especially a crucial key to a deeper understanding of God-reality so that this story enables us to realize the reality of God and conceptualize the concept of God from the perspective of apathy, sympathy, and empathy. This is not only a story of human beings but also a story of God-a *theological* story that may provide the insight and powerful foundation for a theological praxis of faith that seeks to understand "who or what God is" at the essential and existential level. This is a constant reminder that throws light on the nature of theology, the concern of theologian, the focus and locus of theological construction. Consequently the exegesis of this story helps us to acknowledge three types of doing theology-apatheology, sympatheology, empathology-in accordance with three aspects of God's ontic nature.²⁰

A. Apatheology

Apatheology is a theology of those who believe in the God of apathy. It literally means an apathetic theology which, like its God, is fundamentally or structurally incapable of being concerned for and participating in the suffering reality of people, as indifferently and constantly remains in a deep silence in the face of harsh human condition throughout history. Keeping itself aloof from the grinding reality of the status quo, apatheology has been systematically reinforced in an effort to evade any prophetic request of the biblical message, in such a way that it may directly or indirectly not only legitimize the social fabric of absurdity but also consciously or

²⁰ Theology is a critical reflection of theologian on God, and all theology is built upon and stands for its own understanding of God. The way theologian understands the nature of God determines the way he/she constructs the character of theology. By and through an understanding of God, the pretext of theologian can be motivated, the text of theology activated, and the context of theological work cultivated. Doing theology is to deeply participate in its own perception and conception of God who is anticipated by theologian in faith seeking understanding. There must be a foundational idea of God behind all kinds of theology-the underlying belief of God that can theoretically justify, structurally fortify, and religiously sanctify theological praxis. Thus, each of apatheology (a combination of apathy and theology), sympatheology (sympathy and theology), and empathology (empathy and theology) respectively means theology based on the idea of an apathetic, sympathetic, and empathic God.

unconsciously contribute to the apathetic structure of the world. In this manner apatheology has tended to become a powerful weapon in the hands of apathetic persons—group ideology that may supply plausible answers to questions arising out of living on the boundary-line of those who suffer ruthlessly and countlessly. For concrete instance, in the name of the holy (apathetic) God, European traditional theology was used to colonize the third world countries, German state theology slaughter millions Jews, American white theology discriminate black people, patriarchal theology oppress women, contemporary choice theology kill the numberless unborn babies, and so on. All these theologies have overtly or covertly contributed to rob them of all they had, and thus in the sight of those who are victimized, theologians and their God alike are to be viewed as apathetic beings: apatheologians and apatheos.

Biblically speaking, they are robbers without any sympathy or empathy, who “who stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead.” The robbers were so apathetic that they could simply regard the robbed just as a ‘thing,’ and that they must have no feeling, no passion, and no remorse toward him at all. Apathy forms the human relationship of I-It in terms of Martin Buber, a type of apathetic relation by which I treat all others just as “It,” namely insignificant others, indifferent beings, impersonal things, inhumane objects for the sake of one’s own selfish desire. It is in the state of apathy that nothing bothers, nothing stirs, and nothing stops us. Thing does not create any pity from within us. Thus any theology in the relation of I-It is apatheology, a senseless, heartless, and spiritless theology that makes it possible to strip God and us of passion and compassion.

B. Sympatheology

Sympatheology is a theology of those whose belief and behavior are closely affiliated with the God of sympathy. It literally means a sympathetic theology which externally seems to show a little pity on suffering victims in general way, but internally quite reluctant to dedicate itself to the duty of helping them in particular way at the sacrifice of anything if necessary. Unlike the apathetic theology, this sympathetic theology may feel a certain guilty for the tragic circumstances of the world that have victimized people in demonic way, but its response to deal with their tragedies still remains in the official, superficial, and inactive dimension of attitude by way of neither fully identifying itself with the painful existence of people nor deeply engaging into their riskful situation of life. Since a sympathetic theology is self-centered in its concern, self-oriented in its content, and self-contained in its context, it is structurally unable to break the *de jure* status quo of theological praxis apart from the real pain of people and mentally unwilling to go beyond the *de facto* boundary of its own world that is exclusively confined by the line of race, gender, class, culture, nationality etc. Sympathetic theology does not allow itself to fully enter in the suffering realm of people, so it may objectively or dispassionately feel their virtual/phenomenal reality of suffering but not subjectively or passionately experience their actual/noumenal reality of suffering. In a word, sympathetic theology is nothing more and

nothing less than a theology in just *feeling sorry*. The suffering of others is none of their theological business at all. Their doing theology has nothing in actual contact with the suffering others, and nothing to do with the suffering reality of others. As a result, sympathetic theology in opting for self-interest assumes the attitude of an onlooker in the face of suffering fellow human beings.

Biblically speaking, the priest and the Levite in the Samaritan story can be called as sympatheologians and their theology coined as sympatheology. When the Levite saw the bloodstained victim lying on the street, he “did feel a little pity, and stopped to look, no doubt compassionately, on the sufferer.”²¹ It also is quite probable that the priest like the Levite might feel a certain pity within at the sight of the robbed sufferer. However on the basis of what has been discussed so far and of reading the text as a whole, it becomes clear that what both of them felt at that time on the spot was not empathy but sympathy. Sympathy makes us feel sorry conventionally and psychologically toward sufferer from the own standpoint of spectator, whereas empathy enables us to shake ontologically and existentially through solidifying ourselves with sufferer. Sympathy moves our eyes; empathy shakes our whole being. Sympathy comes and goes according to interests; empathy works regardless of them. Sympathy depends on human condition (race, class, gender, status, nationality, religion etc.); empathy overcomes it. Sympathy flows from head; empathy overflows from heart. Sympathy disappears sooner or later; empathy remains long. Sympathy is so self-oriented and self-directed that it may leads us to easily forget suffering others and in the end make us inactively shy away from their painful reality, while empathy urges us, profoundly and proactively, to be somebody for nobody and do something for nothing. That’s why the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road, far be it from them to help the victim in a critical situation, when they saw him. For the priest and the Levite who were religiously claimed to be entirely sanctified and socially considered *holy* men, “At any rate something else was more important to [them] than a man’s life—even the life of a fellow Jew.”²² It is quite possible and understandable for sympathetic person having sympatheology to do so, for sympathy induces him to behave according to what might happen to him rather than according to what might happen to other as a result of his action. What sympathetic person is really concern about, more accurately, is not other at all, but only himself in search of position, job, status, career, success, etc. What always matters to sympatheology is to do theology for the sake of theology itself, while not only glossing over what is going on in the tragic life of robbed neighbors on the road to Jericho but also ensconcing itself comfortably or complacently under the sacred canopy of the established order of Jerusalem.

²¹H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, edited, *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 16 (Virginia: Macdonald Publishing Company, ?), 275.

²²Ralph Earle, A. Elwood Sanner, Charles L. Childers, *Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1964), 503.

In this sense, any theology which passes by on the other side by avoiding the suffering reality of people around the world can be thought of as sympathology that may produce irresponsible religious hypocrites like the priest and the Levite under pretence of holy personality.

C. Empatheology

Empatheology is a theology of those whose heart and mind are full of empathy over sympathy and against apathy. It literally means a theology of empathy which can actually not only feel the painful reality of people a theology of apathy may in no way experience because of its impassibility, but also wholly embrace the total reality of sufferer a theology of sympathy may hardly grasp because of its self-centeredness. This empathic theology is immanently/passionately submerged in the tragic condition of sufferer, existentially/ontologically merged in the broken being of sufferer, and concretely/continuously emerged from the actual participation in the context of sufferer. For it is foundationally and profoundly rooted in a God of empathy who is willing to stand in preferential solidarity with the insignificant others by choosing to reveal Godself through the divine identification with them in the redemptive history of the world. To be more explicit, a God of empathy seeks the last, the least, and the lost—those whom apathetic persons have robbed and sympathetic persons have neglected—the insignificant sufferers who are politically oppressed, socially discriminated, economically exploited, culturally alienated, sexually abused, bodily disabled, spiritually and religiously condemned in the dark side of history. “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things -- and the things that are not -- to nullify the things that are”(1Cor.1:27-28). In terms of Karl Barth, “God always takes His stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: Against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly, against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it.”²³ This is what a God of empathy means: “God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil. He is always partial to justice.”²⁴ God is not a colorless, heartless, and motionless God. God is ontologically and existentially bound to the pain of the suffering people, “for a God who loves actually and not just figuratively must be wounded and hurt as the people in whom God dwells are hurt.”²⁵ It is in empathy that the Unmoved Mover is deeply moved, the Wholly Other becomes wholly present among the suffering victims, and hence God of I AM THAT I AM no longer remains as the *Deus absconditus* in the suffering situation of the wretched world. Empathy is the prime mover of God. God is not the Unmoved Mover. *God is the Moved Mover!*

²³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1 (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1957), 386.

²⁴Heschel, *op.cit.*, 11.

²⁵Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 229.

God is not the Wholly Other. *God is the Wholly Nonother!* God is not I AM THAT I AM apathetic or sympathetic. God is I AM THAT I AM empathic. Thus the theology of such a God is empatheology.

Biblically speaking, the Samaritan must be a man of empathy-empatheologist who was to do empatheology. In those days Israeli and Samaritans like cat and dog were enemy for the long period of time so that they refused to have any official or private relationship by apathetically looking down one another. Under this circumstance, the Samaritan was not obliged or supposed to treat a Jew well who was attacked by bandits and lying half dead beside the road. However, “When he saw him,” according to the story, he didn’t had either apathy like robbers or sympathy like the priest and the Levite, but “he had compassion on him, and went to him ... took care of him.” It is neither apathy nor sympathy but empathy that enabled the Samaritan to do so. At that time, religious law and theological doctrine didn’t rule over him, nor did racial prejudices and social customs rule over him, nor did personal interests and peer pressure rule over him. He followed only his empathy along, for his heart, his mind and his body-his whole being-were melting down in empathy. Any visible or invisible walls of political hostility, social animosity, historical antagonism, racial bigotry, religious contempt between them were totally broken down by and through empathy, and thus these things couldn’t prohibit the Samaritan from doing good to the Jew. It is in empathy that nothing else was more important to him than the life of he who suffered. To the eyes of the Samaritan fully charged with empathy, the Jew could not be counted as either a thing of robbery at all as in the eyes of the apathetic bandits or the object of cheap mercy and temporal concern as in the eyes of the priest and the Levite in sympathy. Rather he was a neighbor in a critical condition whom the Samaritan needed to love like himself, so that he could not be a stranger to him or remain as a bystander of his desperate need. Indeed, the Samaritan way of doing, explicitly or implicitly, indicates what empatheology means. Empatheology is a theology of “compassion [which] asks us to be where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish ... [Empatheology] requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. [Empatheology] means full immersion in the condition of being human.”²⁶

V. Conclusion: Empatheology as Holiness Theology

The Holy God of the Bible is not the Wholly/Holy Other as what the Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* - the *numinous* that is a strange, awesome, fearful, weird, uncanny, Being, absolutely and completely veiled in the incomprehensible and impenetrable

²⁶Daniel S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988), 220-21.

mystery.²⁷ The Holy One of Israel is not so much the apathetic Being who is by nature thought of as being heartless, passionless, motionless, and painless in ongoing relation to the world as the empathetic Being of compassionate pathos who is deeply moved and affected by the suffering reality of people. The Holy Other has no place in the realm of Christianity. The very entitative and genitive character of the Holy One in the understanding of the biblical man implies the “relatedness” of God. So to speak, holiness signifies a pattern of God’s relation to human being.²⁸ What the biblical persons-Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others-encountered and experienced were not just the concept or idea about God, but the holy reality of the empathetic God who has a living and personal relationship with them. In this sense, “The holy in the Bible is not a synonym for the weird.”²⁹ It is a synonym for the empathic. The Holy One is the Empathic One. To be holy is to be empathic, for God is holy means God is empathic. “Be holy, because I am holy”(I Pet 1:16) indicates “Be empathic, because I am empathic.” Empathy is the very essence and very existence of the Holy God. Empathy is what holiness means. Holiness is what empathy means. One can experience empathy in holiness. One can experience holiness in empathy. Holiness *is* empathy. Entire sanctification means entire empathy. There is no entire sanctification without entire empathy. Indeed, *Holiness theology is empatheology*. Doing empatheology is a praxis of holiness theology. Holiness theology in either apathy or sympathy is the direct antithesis to a theology of the Holy God who is empathic.

After telling the Samaritan story, Jesus simply said: "Go and do thou likewise." Theologically speaking, what he means by that is: “Do empatheology like the Samaritan.” It is of course not Jesus’ intention to order his followers to do apatheology or symaptheology. Empatheology is the Samaritan theology. By the way, it has been allegorically said that the Samaritan here stands for Jesus Christ himself. In fact, no one can deny that Jesus’ theology was empatheology, whereas almost other theologies of the religious status quo in his days were either apatheology or sympatheology (Mt 21:13; Lk 11:42-52). A great theology always comes from a great heart, namely a great empathy. Jesus’ great theology came from his great empathy. In order to do a great theology thus one needs to have a great empathy over a great mind. To do theology without a great empathy may fall in danger of doing apatheology or sympatheology. God has called one to be empatheologian and to do empatheology in one’s given context. Christianity is neither an ideology of apathy nor a theory of sympathy but a praxis of empathy.

²⁷Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. By John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 5-11.

²⁸Heschel, *op.cit.*, 7-8.

²⁹*Ibid.*