

**Response Paper on
Doing Empatheology as a Praxis of Holiness Theology:
Theological Reading Luke 10:30-37 by Dr. Kwang Don Chun**

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Dr. Chun's paper is creative, innovative, and persuasive. His theological concern is practical, helpful and influential. No one can deny after reading his paper the fact that he made an important contribution to the theological world. He used and even created some words that clarify what is to be the essential understanding of God in our world today. He opts for the genuine understanding of God as the God of Orthopathy, God of Empathy, and chooses a kind of theology he terms as Empatheology. In all his theological concern, the word pathos is the most important key to unlock the reality of God. Let us think through with the author how he reaches his conclusion in this direction.

In the introductory section, Dr. Chun makes a point that the proper knowledge of God is the foundation of doing theology. He makes an apt comment that holiness theology is a theology of God and that it is neither a theology of Wesley nor of Wesleyans. Holiness theology is a universal theology that is not separate and apart from the central truth of Christianity. He emphasizes the fact that without right knowledge of God, there is no right knowledge of holiness. Thus Dr. Chun begins to search for the right knowledge of God which is essential in understanding holiness theology in the following pages.

In understanding God, Dr. Chun first typifies three kinds of theological approaches to the reality of God, which are **God of Orthodoxy**, **God of Orthopraxy**, and **God of Orthopathy**. He feels the need for developing a theology of Orthopathy believing that it has been largely neglected in traditional Western theology. Pathos being vital in understanding the nature of God, Dr. Chun further typifies three kinds of approach to the nature of God, which are **God of Apathy**, **God of Sympathy**, and finally **God of Empathy**.

And using a scriptural passage from the Samaritan Story, he further categorizes three kinds of theology: **patheology**, **sympatheology**, and **empathology**. These terms are Dr. Chun's unique way of sharpening the understanding his theology based on empathy, which is, according to him, synonymous with holiness.

Now let us look more closely at what Dr. Chun means by these terminologies. His first categories are God of Orthodoxy, God of Orthopraxy, and God of Orthopathy. He means by God of Orthodoxy right beliefs, right opinions, right knowledge, right standards, and right doctrines. Understanding God as the God of Orthodoxy fails to take human reality seriously and has a danger of falling into absolute idealism, cold rationalism, blind biblicism and dry dogmatism. It projects God as a lifeless, bloodless, motionless Supreme Being detached from human suffering and living. He identifies this kind of theology with the traditional Western Christianity.

The second type in this category is God of Orthopraxy. What he means by God of Orthopraxy are right practice, right action, right commitment, right movement, and right participation

in favor of the oppressed victims, and in disfavor of the oppressive reality. In this perspective, understanding of God depends on what God does. Because of its heavy emphasis on the actions of God, this kind of theological perspective fails to perceive the innermost heart of God as a whole. It fails to reach the profound dimension of God. Dr. Chun identifies this kind of approach with contemporary liberation theology.

In the light of above discussion, Dr. Chun considers a position which is neither the God of Orthodoxy nor the God of Orthopraxy. And that third approach is the God of Orthopathy. This approach emphasizes understanding God from within, from deep within God's very being as God. By God of Orthopathy the author specifically means right passions, right compassion, right tempers, right affections, and right patience. It is different from right thinking, or right doing. It is right feeling, if we understand the author correctly. He defines the Greek word pathos to mean feelings, sympathy, compassion and affection. Since the divine pathos is the alpha and omega of God's reality, Dr. Chun believes the theology of orthopathy can ameliorate the damages done by the theology of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Now establishing a case for God of Orthopathy, Dr. Chun elaborates on the meaning of orthopathy by distinguishing three Greek words related to pathos. They are apathy, sympathy, and empathy. Using these three words, he typifies the understanding of God as God of Apathy, God of Sympathy, and God of Empathy. This is the author's attempt to further clarify the term orthopathy. The first type, God of Apathy is absolutely above his creation and completely detached from humanity. The God of Apathy is passionless and changeless, much like the description he made about the God of Orthodoxy. Dr. Chun traces the roots of this kind of theology in the Greek concept of God which had a major influence upon the formation of classical idea of God in the Western theological thought. The God of Apathy is a Supreme Being who is an Unmoved Mover, Wholly Other beyond any human reach. God of Apathy cannot identify with the pathos of sufferers nor their painful situations.

The second type is God of Sympathy. The Greek term sympathy is, according to Dr. Chun, equivalent to German term *Mitfuehlung* which can be translated as feeling of being with other. The sympathetic person feels *along with* another person but not necessarily *into* a person. Sympathy is incapable of assuming the position or condition of other. Sympathy is the external way of identification with the other in a superficial manner. In summarizing the concept of sympathy, Dr. Chun writes, sympathy is a self-oriented way of being with other at the center of oneself. So 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. Dr. Chun sees the danger in God of Orthopraxy preoccupied with the doing of God without taking seriously the essential being of God by becoming God of Sympathy. In other words he sees in liberation theology the risk of superficial identification with the sufferers and the painful situations.

The author opts for the third possibility of God of Empathy as the most viable genuine understanding of the nature of God. God of Empathy comes into immediate contact with the misery of people, into intimate convergence with their broken existence, and ultimate manifestation toward their

wretched world. God comes into human history by empathy. Christ is the empathic being of God. 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 cross is the ultimate symbol of the divine empathy. Christianity is the religion of Christ's empathy. Here is the summation of Dr. Chun's theology of empathy, or what he calls Empatheology.

In the following section, the author skillfully analyzes the Samaritan Story into the three categories of theology he has been discussing, namely, apatheology, sympatheology, and empathology. He sees the robbers in the story as a type of apatheology. It is a theology that is incapable of being concerned for or participating in the suffering reality of people. Dr. Chun cites concrete instances in history when in the name of the holy (apathetic) God, European traditional theology was used to colonize the third world countries, German state theology slaughtered millions of Jews, American white theology discriminates black people, patriarchal theology oppresses women, contemporary choice theology kills the numberless unborn babies, and so on. This is a strong criticism of a kind of theology which separated God from identification with human suffering.

Dr. Chun sees in the priests and the Levite in the Samaritan story sympatheologists. They do feel sorry for the hurting people but they do not go further than just feeling sorry. They neither fully identify themselves with the painful existence of people nor deeply engage into the risky situation of life. It is an attitude of an onlooker in the face of suffering fellow human beings. Though Dr. Chun does not associate sympatheology with liberation theology explicitly, the flow of his paper seems to suggest such conclusion.

And now comes the grand idea of the empathologist identified with the Samaritan. The 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. And the next sentence is worth quoting. 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.

In concluding his paper, Dr. Chun relates his theology back to holiness theology. In his words, holiness is what empathy means. Entire sanctification means entire empathy. *Holiness theology is empathology*. And his last sentence is impressive. Christianity is neither an ideology of apathy nor a theory of sympathy but a praxis of empathy.

Now please allow me to make some comments on this excellent paper of Dr. Chun, who is my personal friend. First I must say that I am deeply indebted to this paper in clarifying my mind in understanding the nature of God by his skillful comparison of three types of theology. I believe that he also realizes that those are types of theology and by the nature of types, these types of theology do not exist in pure forms but rather in reality there are myriads of combinations of these three types. But these types help us to search for a more genuine expression of Christian faith in theological thoughts.

Dr. Chun's emphasis on empathy is well taken and very much needed in today's world where in the name of God wars are being waged, and in the name of prosperity theology, economic exploitation takes place, and in the name of religion, women are oppressed. Empathy is called for in every sector of our world today. I agree with the author that orthodoxy nor orthopraxy is sufficient in today's world where human beings have become too intelligent and over-informed, and our world has become too materialistic and too success oriented. Empathic understanding is essential if we desire for a more peaceful world with less craving for wealth and success.

I am especially appreciative of this paper, because Dr. Chun in my opinion has expressed his theology from a very Asian perspective. He is in line with Asian theologians such as Kazo Kitamori in his Pain of God Theology, C.S. Song in his Compassionate God, Kosuke Koyama in his Broken Image of God, Andrew Park in his Theology of Han, Shusaku Endo in his Silence and many others. Kitamori made a long lasting contribution in theological world by illuminating the feeling of pain in the heart of God which culminated in the cross of Christ. The cross was the expression of God's pain of embracing those whom He should not embrace. C. S. Song made a distinctive contribution to our theological world by elucidating the point of contact between God and humanity at the reality of human suffering. God meets us in our suffering. God is a God of compassion. Koyama depicts the brokenness of God in His suffering for humanity. Weakness of God is emphasized in his theology, because in weakness God opened Himself to humanity. In his brokenness God heals the brokenness of humanity. Park emphasizes the human suffering in terms of Korean word, han, and Christ in His han experience of the cross, He heals the han-ful condition of humanity. Endo depicts Christ not as a victorious King of Kings or Lord of Lords but rather as one who walks along side of us in total misery and weakness. By identifying with us in our total weakness and shamefulness, Christ heals us and gives us hope.

These examples and the paper by Dr. Chun reinforce my contention that it is uniquely Asian experience to see and hear and understand Christ and the nature of God in terms of One who totally identifies Himself with humanity at the point of suffering and weakness and sin and shame in motherly empathy, selfless brokenness, and total compassion. And this emphatic identification of God in Christ with us brings healing to our souls. I concur with Dr. Chun that this is an area where traditional Western theological thoughts did not fully explore, perhaps because of their preoccupation with doctrinal correctness, or proselytizing zeal. The fact that these Asian theologians are concurrently expressing theology of similar vein seems to indicate that Asian Christians are hungry and thirsty for God who meets us in our suffering and weakness in empathic understanding rather than in our right understanding or right doing. Asian Christians are generally less interested in seamless orthodoxy or rigorous militant proselytization than conciliatory spirit and meditative character. And if there is anything Asian theologians can contribute to the world, I believe it is this empathic understanding of God.

Now I need to also raise a question to my friend, Dr. Chun. Dr. Chun in this paper seems to criticize traditional Western theology quite severely as well as liberation theology. It is true and obvious that the Western societies have made many mistakes in the past and religion had a large part in them. It is also true that liberation theology has done both good and harm in many parts of Latin

America. But so have Asian societies. Most notoriously my own country has done unimaginative wrongs. How much of our wrongdoings can we attribute to religious faith? Is it the religious faith that causes people to do wrong things? Or is it the people who do wrong things in the name of religion? Is it the Islam religion that causes people to go into terrorism, or the people that use Islam religion to justify their cause? I tend to think it is the latter. Religion historically has been manipulated by people who have their own agenda. Orthodoxy of the Western society is not the cause of their historical misbehavior, but rather the people used the doctrines of the church to justify their political, social and economic expansionism. It is the human sin that uses anything to justify their desires. In this sense, it is a universal nature of human beings to seek self-interest in the name of anything, be it religion or ideology. So I would not go so far as to identify traditional Western theology with God of Apathy. There is a line of theology in the Western society which is as empathic and compassionate as any Asian theology, if not more so.

As Dr. Chun aptly pointed out that theology emerges out of a particular social, cultural and historical milieu, I believe that Western society and culture influenced the birth of systematic, rational, dogmatic, way of thinking and doing theology. A particular cultural, social and historical moment called for the kind of liberation theology that we see in Latin America and in other parts of the world. In the same manner, theology we find in Asia often reflect our cultural, social and historical characteristics whether we realize or not. Thus, I would rather perceive different kinds of theology as attempts to express their Christian faith in the particular cultural, social and historical context. And each theological tradition has its own peculiarity and characteristics which can make contribution to the rest of the world, if it is developed with discernment and compassion. If I may say boldly using Dr. Chun's terminology, God is God of Orthodoxy, God of Orthopraxy and God of Orthopathy and much more. God enhances our thinking, doing, and feeling and our entire existence.

Just as there are two sides to a coin, there are positive and negative aspects in every theology. We may find negative aspects in Empatheology. If we lose sight of right thinking, right reasoning, and right doing, in order to emphasize empathic understanding of God, we might build our theology on a sand rather than a rock. We must always critically examine our theology with reflection and discernment in order for our theology to become instrument of God's love and peace. Rudolf Otto's concept of God as *Das Heilige* (The Holy) was an attempt of examining the prevalent theology of his time in Western church and academia. He tried to correct the theological trend of his time which was too rationalistic and conceptual in nature. So he emphasized the metarationalistic nature of God by using such phrase as *mysterium, tremendum et fascinatum*, or holly Other. I believe it was Otto's way of correcting the theology of his time. Thus, I believe theology is an ongoing endeavor to discern the true nature of God and our existence before this God in Christ by positing and responding our ideas of God through Scripture, reason, tradition and experience as John Wesley insightfully instructed us.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Chun who gave me this opportunity to reflect on his precious paper. He caused me to think some vital issues of theology in relation to society, culture and history, for which I am truly grateful. I do hope whatever I said would not mar our friendship which I cherish deeply. Thank you, Dr. Chun!