Rev. Son Yang-Won (1902-1950),
A Martyr of Love: Pastoral Theology and Care for Those Left Behind

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I. Introduction

The idea of this paper was ignited as I was reading the book about the life and martyrdom of Rev. Son Yang-Won entitled Son Yang-Won: Aeyangwon and Martyr of Love (Cha Chong-Soon, 2008). Rev. Son, one of the icons of Korean Christian leadership, is well known for his uncompromising faith demonstrated in his refusal of Shinto Worship during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945) and embodying of Jesus’ love through not only forgiving An Jae-Seon, the murderer of his two oldest sons, but also adopting him as his own son. His unwavering faith and love for Christ are verified throughout his life: his love for and ministry with the lepers at Aeyangwon for the last ten years of his life, and evangelizing and witnessing Christ to the prison guards and the communist army who finally led him to his martyrdom in 1950 at the break of Korean War. The book and the film by the same title, Sarangui Wonjatan or Atomic Bomb of Love by An Yong-Jun¹ powerfully captures Rev. Son’s unprecedented zeal, devotion, and passion for Christ.

I was greatly moved and challenged by Rev. Son’s intense devotion to God and the Word, and his embodiment of Jesus’ love and forgiveness. Moreover, as a Korean American, I felt proud to have such an exceptionally faithful, passionate and enthusiastic Christian leader in the history of Korean Christianity.

At the same time, what I could not shake off was the small yet growing voice inside me saying, “It is almost all good. But something does not seem quite right.” This unsettledness was accompanied by the

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strong desire to explore the \textit{voiceless voices} that were hidden in the midst of almost perfect and flawless picture of the life and death of Rev. Son. It is not that these silenced voices would necessarily downplay or alter the heroic and Christ-like legacy which Rev. Son has left. Rather, inquiring into the neglected voices in his life would give rise to the proper attention to the victims that are inadvertently created by the godly acts of good intentioned Christians and Christian leaders. My attempt to give rise to the voiceless voices, in fact, would promote the core of Rev. Son’s theological and social belief system that so uncompromisingly insists on the importance of loving and caring for God and our neighbor who especially are oppressed and unjustly treated.

What I wish to focus and investigate in current paper are the psychological and theological implications and care for those who were in the center of the life and death of Rev. Son, and yet pushed aside to the peripheral in the shadow of the visible and obvious hero. Rev. Son’s wife, his remaining children, and An Jae-Seon, the adopted son who murdered his two sons, are the main figures whom I desire to zoom in on and bring forth to the front stage.

In exploring the sufferings and pain of those who are closely related to the life and death of Rev. Son, and the ways through which one can care for them, this paper is divided into five major sections. First, in the \textit{Introduction} section, it outlines how the current paper on caring for those in the life of Rev. Son Yang-Won came about and will proceed. Second, the early years of Rev. Son, the formation of his Christian faith, his ministry with the leprous patients, and his martyrdom are explored in \textit{The Life and Ministry of Rev. Son Yang-Won}. Third, in the \textit{Theology of Rev. Son Yang-Won}, some of Rev. Son’s key theological themes such as kenosis and embrace are investigated. This is followed by the fourth part, \textit{Pastoral Theology and Care for Those Left Behind}, where three suggestions in doing pastoral care for the wounded and hurt in the life of Rev. Son are given. Finally, the \textit{Conclusion} section presents some final thoughts and suggestions in caring for the victims of the godly actions.

\textbf{II. The Life and Ministry of Rev. Son Yang-Won (1902-1950)\textsuperscript{2)}}

Korea experienced one of the most critical and tumultuous periods

\textsuperscript{2) For an excellent overview of the life and ministry of Rev. Son Yang-Won, see Cha Chong-Soon,}