

Sejong Chun. "Exorcism or Healing? A Korean Preacher's Reading of Mark 5:1-20." In *Mark: Texts @ Contexts*, edited by Nicole Duran, Teresa Okure, and Daniel Patte, 15-34. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011. 288 pages. \$8.95.

Sejong Chun's reading of Mark 5:1-20, the story of the Gerasene demonic, is based on his intercontextual dialogue acknowledging that both text and context influence each other, because "'text' is a product of 'context' in the sense that the latter shapes the former and 'context' becomes 'text.'" For this dialogue, Chun introduces the story of the Korean shamanic ritual *kut*, performed for a boy named Muno. Muno suffers mental illness caused by spirit-possession of his deceased sister who died with *han*. Being raised in patriarchal and hierarchical Confucian culture, she was treated poorly by her parents as a female and the last child nearly not being able to see a medical doctor. Since she died incompletely in her young age and unmarried even without her own name, she could not go to "Heaven" where she can rest but wanders as a restless spirit between the world of living and the world of the dead and harm Muno by possessing him. By having a *kut*, therefore, Muno's parents call out her spirit, have 'spirit talk' allowing her spirit to speak out her resentment against her mother and to hit herself by a Spirit Stick, and have a wedding between the miniature bride and the bridegroom. In doing so, her misfortune is resolved and now she can go to "Heaven." Before introducing his interpretation, Chun investigates what scholars think about the point of Mark 5:1-20: 1) Jesus' superiority over evil powers; 2) a severe battle between God's power and the destructive power of evil spirits; 3) Jesus' boundary-crossing ministry; 4) Jesus' symbolic action of liberation for the colonized; and 5) Jesus' healing of mental illness caused by oppression of Romans. Unlike those, Chun reads the story of Markan Gerasene demonic story in the light of the story of Muno based on two striking resemblances found in both: spirit talk and dying with *han*. Unlike other Markan exorcism stories, Jesus gives an opportunity for the spirit to talk by asking its name. Its name is *Legion* which denotes that they died with *han* formulated by "the brutal violence of the Roman imperial force, Legion." The spirits do not want to leave the area, because they want to live as the "living dead" with their families like it is believed that departed ones still remain present in their family after death. Finally, just like the pig used in a *kut* to take the *han* of the ghost, Jesus permits the spirits to enter the swine so that they may rush into the sea which signifies the resting place, "Heaven" in the story of Muno. This striking resemblance makes clear that "God's healing power in Jesus cures not only the living one but also the spirits that died with *han*."

Reflection:

Chun's article is a fascinating reading of the Markan Gerasene demonic story by a Korean preacher raised in a shamanistic and Confucian society. Through his inter-contextual dialogue by bringing the story of Muno, Chun shows how a text can be read in a new, fresh way: the story of the Markan Gerasene demonic is not just a story of exorcism but a story of healing.

There are three points worth noting. First, the Korean cultural context can broaden the understanding of Biblical studies. What is in the background of Asians and non-westerners,

when they read biblical stories, is that their cultural background might not be helpful, because biblical stories are products of Western thought, which is not true. Though Palestine is closer to Europe than Asia, Asian cultural traditions can have similarities if they have remained intact as ancient human activities. Chun shows how a Korean cultural tradition, *kut*, can unleash mysteries of the Markan Gerasene demonic story. Just as Korean contemporary society still functions with the honor and shame code which was the main code of the Greco-Roman world, other cultural aspects of Korean culture can function as a catalyst for biblical interpretation.

Second, other religious traditions other than Christianity are not antagonistic but can be helpful to understand universal human experience. The feeling of resistance is a tendency or gut-reaction for Christians, when they see any attempts to connect a biblical story with other religious traditions, because they are considered as pagan and idol worship. However, Chun's article shows that there are universal human experiences even in the realm of the spirit. Therefore, it could be a helpful reference to see other religious traditions, human experience and even manifestation of the spirit in their rituals, in understanding biblical stories that are difficult to understand in the modern way of thinking and contemporary human experience.

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