

Paul S. Chung. *Postcolonial Public Theology: Faith, Scientific Rationality, and Prophetic Dialogue*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016. 234 pages. \$21.23.

In this book, Paul Chung, a Professor of Mission and World Christianity at Luther Seminary, seeks to articulate a public theology in a postcolonial context through the rereading of Christian confession, a critical theological dialogue with scientific rationality, and interreligious dialogue. Although Chung's basic understanding of closely relates to David Tracy's proposal for public theology as a mutually critical correlation of Christian faith and the contemporary situation, he critically revises it by employing postcolonial hermeneutics and analectical methods that focus on dissimilarity and difference rather than similarity-in-difference. Through a thoroughgoing interdisciplinary analysis and dialogue, the author has developed a postcolonial public theology that calls for *metanoia* toward God's eschatological future and responsible and liberative action for others including non-human others in the postcolonial world.

This book is composed of nine chapters in three parts. In Part 1, the author undertakes the rereading of the theology of Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Karl Barth through a postcolonial lens, interreligious perspectives, and public ethics. In chapter 1, the author engages with and radicalizes Luther's theology in light of the suffering of *minjung*-subaltern in East Asian context. He particularly attends to Luther's understanding of the gospel as the living voice of God in order to find a hermeneutical principle for a dialogue in Christian faith and biblical narrative with the life of world. For Luther, the gospel cannot be merely reduced to written texts in Scripture. Rather, the gospel is the living word of God that addresses and encounters us in the midst of our lives. Since the gospel is the living voice of God, here and now, ongoing critical contextual interpretation of God's word in different times and places is an integral part of understanding and proclaiming the gospel (28). Thus, his notion of *viva vox evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel, posits a dynamic interaction, communication and translation of the biblical narrative and Christian faith through dialogue with the world in open-ended manner (37). In the study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology from a postcolonial, contextual, and intercultural perspective, the author seeks to develop a theological-ethical rationale for public theology to transcend postcolonial reality. Bonhoeffer challenges any binary construction of reality in light of God's reconciliation in Christ with the world while he invites the church to participate in God's reconciliation by being in solidarity with the Other (45). Solidarity with others is necessary for a church to be church because Jesus Christ had given for others and God speaks to the church through the otherness of the Other (47). A dialogue with the other, including religious others, becomes a theological mandate for a public theology. Through intercultural and interreligious exchanges, the church can encounter a living voice of gospel in the otherness of the Other and discover a new horizon of theological meanings for postcolonial and interreligious contexts. In chapter 3, the author explores Karl Barth's theology and its relevance for postcolonial theology. Barth's excessive emphasis on revelation from above does not preclude his theology from being a rich soil for a public theology that seeks dialogue with social and natural sciences and other religions in the public sphere. Barth's analogical theology in relation to the universal effectiveness of the word of God provides a space for a hermeneutical conversation between theology and natural science (66). It opens a possibility that even profane words and wisdoms, whether in natural science or other religions, "analogically may bear witness to God's reconciliation in Christ" (65). Hence, God may speak to the church through the otherness of the world. Barth's notion of God as the Wholly Other supports the freedom of God's act of speech through the "face" of others (80).

In Part 2, the author seeks to develop a postcolonial rationality for advancing public theology through a theological dialogue with scientific rationality. In chapter 4, the author examines how the Western Enlightenment and rationalization ended up with an instrumental rationality that results in human domination over the natural world, ideological domination of the West over the non-Western countries, and a domination of socio-political and economic structures and systems over human bodies. As a way of developing a postcolonial rationality transcending beyond the domination of instrumental reason, the author attends to “God’s act of speech through the Other” (95) and attempts to incorporate the social discourse of *irregularity* in the life of *minjung*-subaltern into his postcolonial public theology. In chapter 5, based on the position of critical realism, the author advances a theological dialogue with scientific rationality. The author points out a linguistic and hermeneutical dimension of scientific discourse. This hermeneutical horizon in scientific discourses becomes an intersection for dialogue between the theology of nature and natural sciences, particularly evolution theory. In addition, the author enriches this dialogue between theology and science by adding a Buddhist understanding of compassion and its contribution to ecology. In chapter 6, the author examines implications of Ted Peters’ proleptic theology for public theology and public ethic. Peters contends that God’s eschatological future is both the *telos* and the ground of all beings (140). This eschatological kingdom of God breaks in the present as “an advent in which creation undergoes genuine and transforming renewal” (140). Our lives need to be reoriented toward God’s eschatological future. In other words, the proleptic advent of God’s eschatological future in Jesus Christ becomes a ground for public ethics.

In Part 3, the author seeks to articulate a postcolonial public religious theology and social ethics through interreligious dialogue in a postcolonial and global context. For this task, the author develops a conceptual framework for comparative religious study and interreligious dialogue in chapter 7. He critically revises Ernst Troeltsch’s relativistic sociological approach to public ethics and comparative religious study through a dialogue with Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory, Habermas’s critical social theory, and Levinas’ notion of God as infinite Saying through the otherness of the Other. This hermeneutical and postmodern reorientation of a sociological frame of reference for comparative religious study enables public theology to move “from Eurocentric modernity to a transmodernity, which seeks to articulate a global project of solidarity and recognition of religious others for ethical humanism” (165). In chapter 8, the author provides an example of public religious theology rooted in a transmodern rationality that emerges from interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. In a comparative study of a Buddhist notion of compassion and its contribution to economic and ecological justice with a theology of the cross, the author shows how a trans-scriptural reading of other religious texts opens up a new horizon of theological meanings for the present. In chapter 9, the author is concerned with refining public theology in terms of world economy and economic justice in a postcolonial world, in which the anonymous Empire still takes control and dominates the lives of people. He employs a biblical-prophetic notion of *diakonia* as the basis for God’s economy to criticize and counter global capitalism as possessive individualism. Since God speaks through the face of others, it is necessary to carefully listen to “God’s irregular voice marginalized in the world” (195) and to seek to economic justice in the public realm.

The colonial period ended long ago, but ongoing impacts of colonialism and imperialism continue to shape a post-colonial world and the daily lives of people. This interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious approach to a public theology provides a comprehensive frame of reference to engage with moral, ethical issues facing postcolonial reality in the public realm. This

book persuasively invites readers to take ethical responsibility for others, including non-human others, on the basis of God's Saying through the face of others. Its postcolonial understanding of the gospel as the living voice of God is particularly beneficial for preachers as resident public theologians who struggle to take both Christian confession and context seriously. One minor critique is the absence of a tentative definition of a postcolonial public theology. Throughout the whole book, the author claims to develop a postcolonial public theology but he does not provide any one definition for it. It would be helpful for readers to have a tentative but clear definition of what postcolonial public theology means as they read through Chung's complex and insightful arguments.

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