

Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity

Paul S Chung

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Two theological conversations that have captured my imagination over the last decade have been around missional church and contextual theology. The missional church conversation is grappling with how to express church and gospel in engaging Western culture. Contextual theology is inviting all cultures of the world to express what they understand about God and the Bible in their own locally appropriate forms. So I was interested when I saw *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology* addresses both topics and argues they need to relate more closely.

The other thing that grabbed my interest was the author and his teaching context. Paul Chung is a South Korean pastor who has led a multicultural congregation in California for a decade (in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). He has written on Barth and Luther but also Buddhism and East Asian contextual theology. He currently teaches as Associate Professor of Mission and World Christianity at Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota. Over recent years, Luther Seminary has developed some innovative programs in its Centre for Congregational Mission and Leadership and rethought its overall curriculum in the light of mission in the world today.

Chung is an advocate for applying missional church frameworks to address and critique his context of American society and civil religion and its multiculturalism and postmodernism. *Missio Dei* needs to be expressed in and through the *diakonia* of local congregations. But our local church ministry and theological reflection also needs to consider postcolonial and postmodern critique and the contribution of intercultural theology and world Christianity. This is where the book is at its best and most unique – in calling for and modelling a reframing of mission for local churches in conversation with postcolonial theology and world Christianity.

In Part I Chung celebrates two heroic missionary leaders who were post-colonial and embodied world Christianity ahead of their time. Bartolomé de Las Casas in the New Indies, the region's "first liberation theologian", advocated for the humanity and rights of indigenous people in the face of massacres and slavery. Matteo Ricci boldly and controversially inculturated the gospel in China. Their stories show lessons for prophetic dialogue in the Western world – we need to advocate for those on the margins and engage with our host culture with a "hermeneutic of appreciation" as well as critique. This is critical in a world of huge justice issues and complex religious diversity and conflict.

Part II offers an in-depth treatment of twentieth-century history of theology of mission from the optimism of Edinburgh, through Karl Barth's mission as Trinitarian sending, and on to the missional church and public theology. Chung is particularly keen to reclaim Lutheran and Reformation foundations for mission (contra Bosch). He seeks to contextualise confessional issues such as justification, economic justice, and especially the priesthood and vocation of all believers. The church as the body of Christ is called and sent into the world not primarily as consumers but as stewards, to cooperate with God in *missio Dei* and *diakonia Dei*.

Part III moves on to consider public aspects of faith. Chung challenges missional churches towards engagement with society's major issues and solidarity with the other. He critiques millenarian and rapture-focused eschatology and American (and any other culture's) civil religion that condones much that is sub-Christian. For inspiration he draws on Bonhoeffer's ethical discipleship and social justice, as well as more of Luther and Barth. As part of his sociological analysis of American public life he celebrates multiculturalism and its "symphony of difference", and considers what witness and renewal can be gained from dialogue with other religious traditions, particularly Confucianism.

The book is a long and detailed volume, drawing on a wide range of historical, missiological, anthropological, missional, postcolonial, hermeneutical and comparative religion sources, and voices from the world church and throughout history. It will be of interest to scholars of the missional church, world Christianity and/or post-colonial theology, or especially those interested in their interrelationships and application with Lutheran theology. Its implications have broader relevance. In the Western world the church is facing decline and needs to grapple with its missional, multicultural and postcolonial context. Voices like Paul Chung's and books like *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology* are helpful prompts and guides to reflect on what we can learn from missional church and world Christianity.

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