

PREFACE

Comparative Theology among Multiple Modernities marks a different stage of my intellectual journey. Rather than taking on epistemological rupture, it can be understood as a mature stage of deepening my theological reasoning and comparative study of religions in a phenomenological frame of reference, as involved in the sociological study of religion. In my earlier book *Martin Luther and Buddhism* (2002), I dedicated the work to Helmut Gollwitzer, who is the theological father for my intellectual journey. An association of Gollwitzer, one of the most important Barth scholars, with a comparative study of religion, seems out of joint at face value, but I am much indebted to his theological thinking and critical social theory in my study of Karl Barth and religious discourse. In a move from *Martin Luther and Buddhism* toward the present project of comparative theology, I endeavor to phenomenologically renew and develop Barthian theology of the word of God. A notion of solidarity and blamage effect, which is developed in the sociological study of religion, is much indebted to Gollwitzer's heuristic reconstruction of historical, materialist inquiry of religion and society.

Through phenomenological construal of religion and culture, I have come to position myself to elaborate comparative theology with emphasis on a religious, prophetic ethic, and immanent critique for solidarity and emancipation. My reading together of Barth and Levinas is inspired

by F.W. Marquardt, a successor of Helmut Gollwitzer and the exponent of theological audacity in the prophetic tradition of Karl Barth.

Furthermore, this study wants to make a contribution to the correlation of comparative theology with postcolonial theory, in which a critical, emancipatory theory is undertaken in the problematization of an Orientalist mode of representation in an archeological analysis of the interplay of knowledge systems with power relations.

My commitment to critical theory and sociology of religion, especially, Weber, Geertz, and Foucault, is articulated and developed in this volume for multiple modernities imbued with the postcolonial notion of trans-modernity. A critical model of comparative theology attempts to develop a regime of religious value rationality, especially for a religious inspired prophetic ethic in the study of religions.

Comparative theology in the context of multiple modernities champions a hope of life and restorative justice vitiated under the hegemony of the racially injustice society of late capitalism. Shared with Benjamin's remembrance of the innocent victim, this book attempts to elaborate the critical, emancipatory horizon of religious discourse and comparative theology in contrast to the blamage effect, as obviously seen in religious fanaticism and violence in our midst. Along with Max Horkheimer and Karl Barth, the existence of a theologian in the experience of despair and hopelessness is still characterized as a longing for the new meaning of life, as driven in a desire for the completely Other, that is, in a phenomenological, theological search of *totaliter aliter*.

I am in gratitude with Prof. Craig L. Nesson who has helped me greatly to cut through moments of depression and frustration. I give my gratitude to Prof. Andreas Pangritz at the University of Bonn who provides substantial comments on the chapter on Barth, Levinas, and comparative theology. Professors Francis X. Clooney, S.J., and Prof. George Hunsinger must be thanked for their valuable exchange of Barth's relational theology and the comparative theology. My gratitude extends to Peter Watters, who has done the meticulous editorial work and improved on limitations of my study through substantial critique and comments. I appreciate that Philip Getz, editor at Palgrave Macmillan, has accepted this writing project for publication.

Hercules, CA, USA
Easter 2017

Paul S. Chung

Comparative Theology Among Multiple Modernities

Cultivating Phenomenological Imagination

Chung, P.S.

2017, XII, 329 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-58195-8