INTRODUCTION

ASIAN IRREGULAR THEOLOGY:
INCULTURATION AND EMANCIPATION

Theology is historically, culturally, and linguistically conditioned and shaped. The contextual character of theology is not a new reality because throughout the centuries, Christians have lived and witnessed to the Gospel in different times and places. A theology does not exist apart from its setting in life (Sitz im Leben).

In a context of the Global South or East, an endeavor for self-theologizing in one’s own particular life setting becomes necessary. Consequently, one must bid farewell to a Eurocentric or North American paradigm. Christian self-understanding of the Word of God has to be rearticulated, reshaped, and lived anew in each particular culture. Inculturation is necessary for coexistent living and working in peace with non-Christian religious communities.

Much has been said about the assumed cultural superiority of Western modernity and its demise. It is insulting and delusional for Western Christianity and cultures to regard other cultures and religions as stepping-stones. In relationship with other religions the Eurocentric and/or North American character of Christian theology does not suffice for coping with the uniqueness and challenge of an emerging world Christianity and theology.

In today’s philosophical discussion of human rationality, the modern concept of the “self,” like the modern concept of rationality, is shaken to the core by the masters of suspicion (Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx). Furthermore this demands a radical rethinking in the presence of the “Other.” A Postmodern suspicion of the universal narrative of human reason, or in other words “incredulity toward metanarratives,” functions as a synchronic hermeneutic of doubt and refusal. This hermeneutical strategy reveals a nexus between

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power and knowledge embedded in politics, institutions, human science, and religion.

It is recognized that human beings deal with worldly affairs and cultural issues from a plurality of perspectives. This plurality of perspectives leads to an ambiguity of the “truth” in a univocal and determined sense. We are aware that there is an emergence of many diverse forms of postmodern (or postcolonial) theologies in feminist, womanist, African-American, and global liberationist perspectives.

Liberation theology in Latin America has posed a fundamental and serious question of how to understand the perspective of the poor in socioeconomic terms and put their perspective into praxis. Here, biblical Scripture is seen as a text against oppression and for liberation.

In the circle of feminist theology gender becomes a matter of power. In the course of history women’s experience has been inscribed, reinscribed, and made to be subservient to and in service of man’s interest. Challenging androcentricity (man-centeredness), feminist theology focuses on the roles and characters of the women in the text, in confrontation with misogynist tendencies in androcentric interpretation.3

In an East Asian context, a postcolonial orientation and a task of inculturation gains a much sharper contour than any others due to the multiple religious spiritualities in this life setting. Poverty, religiosity, and wisdom (especially of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) are deeply connected with each other. In other words, the spiritual wisdom of East Asian religions constitutes a lifeworld and source for an Asian theological endeavor to bring forth inculturation and to promote emancipation.

Among Asian contextual theologians a Christian’s absolute claim of salvation becomes suspicious and even insulting to non-Christian communities. A new hermeneutic of Scripture emerges in a spirit of postcolonial resistance and inculturation when one encounters the narratives of Asian people, their life experiences, and the wisdom of East Asian religions.4 An Asian irregular theology, which I pursue and explore in this book, is grounded in an endeavor to develop a new hermeneutic in a spirit of postcolonial interest in the inculturation of the

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