

REFORMATION FROM BELOW:

Looking at Münster Anabaptism Anew
Through Korean Minjung Theology

Youjin Chung

Foreword by Dion A. Forster

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ENDORSEMENT

A critical, creative, and constructive work that bridges the history and theology of the Radical Reformation with the Korean Minjung Theology. This book revisits the concept of minjung or ordinary people as the subjects of history from the perspectives of history from below, mission from the margins, and the underside of Reformation. For these reasons, I highly recommend this book, which provides excellent insights into the reformation of Christianity and the transformation of society today.

Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum
Distinguished Professor of World Christianity
Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary
Seoul, South Korea

In this book, Youjin Chung, creatively reconstructs the 16th century Radical Anabaptist theological history from the lens of the Korean Minjung Theology of solidarity and suffering. He attempts to generate a counter-history of the tragic Münster Anabaptism through a responsible hermeneutical lens. In the process, the book tries to give voice to both the powerful and less powerful, the victors and victims. It is a history that seeks to empower common people engaged in the struggle for justice not only in the Korean but other contexts as well. I heartly recommend this book to the wider public.

Professor Henry Mbaya
Faculty of Theology
University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

In Reformation from Below: Looking at Münster Anabaptism Anew Through Korean Minjung Theology, Youjin Chung offers a creative interpretation of the 16th century Radical Reformation, and particularly, Münster Anabaptism, by looking at these related movements through the lens of 20th century Korean Minjung theology. Chung's skillfully written and informed attempt to do "history from below" by highlighting the contributions of common people rather than the elite offers the reader rich insights into the both the Radical Reformation and Minjung Theology. Through careful analysis of the key figures that helped shaped these seemingly disparate movements, Chung is able to present more positive assessments of Thomas Münster and Münster Anabaptism than most previous scholars have allowed. Although Chung does not develop the implications of his study for Pentecostalism, this book might stimulate Pentecostal responses to his descriptions of Münster Anabaptism and Minjung theology. Additionally, Chung's book could encourage Pentecostals, not many of whom have been considered "wise" or "powerful" by "worldly standards" (1 Cor. 1:26), to write "history from below" as they produce their own histories.

Robert Menzies
Director of the
Asian Center of Pentecostal Theology
Kunming, China

Dr. Chung's book is highly recommended for anybody interested in the history of Anabaptism. By looking at the grassroots of the Radical Reformation, one which takes into consideration the socio- political, economic and religious experiences of the 'common' folk people and peasants, Chung not only does an excellent job in showing the complex interplay of the 1525 Peasants War, the rise of Anabaptism and the Radical Reformation in its totality, but also in turning the focus away from mainstream historical accounts of the Reformation that have predominantly focused on figures like Luther, Calvin or Zwingli. His addition of Korean Minjung theology as a means of re-reading Münster

Anabaptism as a harmonious movement between the ‘common people’ and their representatives is particularly intriguing and helps to bring a larger overview of how the Church, as a history of the faithful, unfolds throughout time and within various cultures.

Prof. Dr. Peter De Mey

Vice-Dean for International Relations Research Unit Systematic
Theology and the Study of Religions Centre for Ecumenical Research
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
Leuven, Belgium

In this fine and in-depth study, Youjin Chung provides a fresh perspective – through the lens of Korean Minjung theology – on the 16th century Radical Reformation, and in particular Münster Anabaptism. Drawing on a methodological level on the emphasis on “a history from below” or “a people’s history of Christianity,” this book offers a rich contribution that will enhance future discussions on the topic.

Münster and Minjung combines a historical and constructive approach in an informative and creative way, and as such serves the project of a critical re-reading of Reformation historiography well. Highly recommended!

Robert Vosloo

Professor in the Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology
Stellenbosch University, South Africa

We are thankful to Dr. Chung for challenging us to think differently and pointing out some of the weaknesses of the inherited history, and helping us to understand “people’s history of Christianity.” I hope we will be profoundly challenged by Dr. Chung’s creative imaginations and thoughts. I am sure readers will be provoked and gained new insights for the construction of a better common future.

Prof. Wati Longchar
Dean, Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA)

My friend and colleague, Dr. Youjin Chung has crafted a wonderful work that will challenge the elitist versions of church history, which are often trapped by standard Western narratives. The involvement of traditional Korean cultural worldviews and Minjung versions of church history in this re-reading of key events in the Reformation period of the church will encourage fresh voices from the margins. The successful publication of this work will embolden other scholars from the Global South to remain grounded in their own cultural environment while contributing to the continuing global theological dialogue.

Tham Wan Yee
President, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary

FOREWORD

The writing of any history is a complex task. Whose stories get told? What sources are used to construct a particular historical narrative? What are the power relationships that contributed towards the construction of particular historical narratives instead of others? Why are some narratives given a higher qualitative value than others?

In contemporary historical scholarship there is an important focus upon unearthing and telling “people’s histories”. Such projects are predicated upon an ideological commitment to “re-read” the events and historical sources of historical narratives, and of course to include new perspectives and new sources, to tell a different story or focus on a different element in the telling of the story. In church history, and the history of Christianity, such approaches are described variously as liberative, de-colonial, contextual, or social histories (among others). The re-telling of history from differing perspectives invites the reader to adopt a different vantage point in her or his understanding of persons and events that constitute the narrative. This has the possibility to unlock new meaning, to ask deeper and more critical questions, and to gain a greater appreciation for the complexity of the task of the historian. Of course, it can also create space for silenced persons to speak, and marginalised communities to be seen.

Dr. Youjin Chung invites us into such a process as he seeks to “re-read” the histories of the Anabaptist Münster traditions through the hermeneutic lens of Korean Minjung Theology. He is uniquely qualified to undertake this task given his own theological tradition, his cultural heritage, and his academic training. All of these elements serve to enrich his scholarly contribution in this text.

This book poses some important methodological questions for scholars in the field of church history. A primary question is, “To what extent should Christian history give the ordinary people their voice?”

His contention is that it is the responsibility of the academic Church historian to seek to identify, listen to, and present the voices of the “ordinary faithful” in their research.

Of course, such a task is not without some challenges. It is laden with power—the power of the academic historian, the power of the analytical tools, and the power of the present and absent sources that construct the narratives. If such a task is not undertaken with care, self-awareness, and scholarly rigour it could unknowingly present a distorted view of the persons and events under consideration. One way in which the academic historian can guard against such a mistake is by presenting their commitments, presuppositions, and intentions with transparency and clarity. In this case, Dr. Chung has chosen to adopt a ‘Minjung optic’ for his task. By doing so he acknowledges that all histories are written by persons within their own social, cultural, and ideological settings. Consequently, what they write stems from both known and unknown premises. Each of these elements play a role in shaping what is read, or not read, who is included, and who is excluded, and the value that is attached to sources that are present, or not present in the research journey. By adopting a ‘Minjung optic’ Dr. Chung is signalling to his readers that he is making some important choices related to his research methodology and the analysis that results from his engagement with historical sources. In this case, he undertakes to revisit interpretations of the Radical Reformation and Anabaptist histories from the perspectives of the ‘ordinary faithful’. There are many fine histories that focus on major figures in these historical narratives. Their thoughts, words and actions were recorded (because they were prominent persons), and in the centuries since they have been engaged and presented in varying forms by numerous historians for various purposes. Dr. Chung, however, aims to ask what a reading ‘from below’ might add to the dominant narratives of Radical Reformation and Anabaptist histories.

One of the more creative elements that emerges in Dr. Chung’s project is the notion of the “guru-avatar” dialectic. In this study the guru-avatar metaphorically represents the notion of “reinterpretation” and “double transformation” that a history from below introduces. One possibility that he highlights is that in the dialectical interchange of reinterpretation, a history from below can reconfigure both what we

regard as history, and so how history is re-told. As you will see, he argues that this has both narrative and methodological implications for future historians in this field.

I found it fascinating to read Dr. Chung's manuscript. It invited me to revisit both my understanding of the histories of Anabaptist traditions, and my understanding of how church historical research is undertaken. I commend his commitment to focus upon the 'ordinary faithful' in the re-telling of important historical events. I do so, first, because it has the possibility of treating history with a measure of ethical responsibility. History is made up of individuals and communities who lived and acted within various contexts. Some are remembered, and some are not. Some are remembered in ways that celebrate their lives and contributions, while others are ignored, misrecognized, or even vilified. An approach to history that asks honest and important questions about these choices in credible and rigorous ways ultimately serves historical scholarship. Second, I commend his approach to you since Dr. Chung's doctoral supervisor, the late Professor Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel, encouraged her students to ask difficult and critical questions about historians and the constructions of histories. Prof. Plaatjies van Huffel, who passed away very suddenly in the 19th of May 2020, was well known for her use of Foucauldian post-structuralist approaches to church history. I am certain that Mary-Anne would have endorsed Dr. Chung's project enthusiastically! Hence, I am grateful to do so on her behalf. I celebrate Dr. Chung's scholarly contribution and recognise the important work that is represented in this text. I appreciate his commitment to echoing the voices and perspectives the 'ordinary faithful' in his engagement with history, and thank him for the way in which his academic progress honours the work and guidance of our late colleague Prof. Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel.

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