

Elaine Graham. *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age*. London: SCM Press, 2013. 288 pages. \$120.

Contrary to modern secularists' prediction that religion will gradually wither away as societies become increasingly modernized and secularized, religion continues to be a significant force in social and political arenas today. While the continuing effects of secularization persist, a recent public resurgence of religion indicates a newly emerging post-secular condition in western societies. In this book, Elaine Graham, a renowned practical theologian at University of Chester engages with this new reality particularly in the UK and proposes a new path of public theology "between the 'rock' of religious resurgence and the 'hard place' of institutional decline and secularism" (xxvii) in a post-secular age.

This book is comprised of three parts: "Post-Secular Society," "Post-Secular Public Theology," and "Public theology as Christian Apologetics." Part one analyzes the distinctive nature of the post-secular context. The author describes the 'post-secular' as an ambivalent and contradictory space where two apparently incompatible currents of enduring secularism and religious resurgence co-exist without an easy conflation. Personal religious affiliation and the institutional power of religion continue to decline, but the visibility of religion in public affairs becomes apparent. Not only are the conventional demarcations between 'public' and 'private' blurred, but also "the categories of 'secular' and 'religious' co-exist in complex inter-relationship" (63). This paradoxical nature of the post-secular society poses a challenge to the traditional secular construal of the public realm as a neutral space in which religious voice has to be excluded to ensure its neutrality and free communication of all participants. It also calls for a new paradigm of public theology.

Part two examines the nature of public theology and various manifestation of public theology. Public theology by nature locates itself in the boundary between the secular and the religious. Public theology is concerned with public issues beyond the community of faith and seeks to communicate its theological and ethical deliberations to the public square by making its particular theological claim and language accessible and intelligible to those who do not share the Christian faith. However, this bilingual nature of public theology includes an implicit danger of losing its particularity of discourse in the process of translating into common language. With critical attention to this inherent dilemma of public theology between "fidelity to its own traditions" and "openness to a diverse and critical public domain" (71), the author provides comprehensive contours of various approaches to public theology, including postliberal theology, radical orthodoxy, and evangelical identity politics. The author acknowledges the strengths of each approach, but concludes that all have limitations in responding to a post-secular condition in contemporary societies.

Part three presents Graham's own proposal for public theology as a Christian apologetics of presence. In her articulation of public theology, the author attempts to synthesize particular strengths of postliberal theology with her basic liberal stance. Public theology needs to be rooted in biblical and theological tradition but it also must be understandable/comprehensible to non-Christians in the public square (232). However, public theology as a Christian apologetic does not seek a rational defense of Christian belief, nor is it an appeal to believe propositional truth claims. Rather, it is an invitation to participate in a new way of life by appealing to transformational truth, which is witnessed by the incarnational and performative action and word of the Christian community. Public theology's accountability is measured by its facilitation of the Church's commitment to the marginalized and of transformative praxis for justice and

liberation in the public square. “The primary expression of public theology, then, will be in practical demonstrations that authentic faith leads to transformation” (215). Thus, public theology is first and foremost a Christian “apologetic of presence” in a post-secular age.

While homiletics and preaching are not direct objects of the book, this book is beneficial to the preacher who is called to the path between a rock of ‘mystery of word of God’ and the hard place of ‘mystery of everyday life.’ This book is a valuable resource for preachers to understand the newly emerging preaching context and their proper role as resident public theologians. In a post-secular society in which the division between the secular and the religious is breaking down, the preacher’s role cannot be confined to developing a distinctive identity of the Church. Rather, the preacher needs to help the congregation understand the public vocation of the Church, which calls Christians to show concern for the common good of society. The preacher as a resident public theologian helps people understand increasingly complex local and global contexts in which they live, and how to live as good disciples in everyday life and witness to the gospel in the public. For these tasks, the preacher not only needs to know the contemporary context, but must also articulate and rearticulate relevant theological expressions of faith in the public square. This book provides a comprehensive contour of a post-secular context and a way of doing theology in public. This book is a thoughtful guide for both theologians and preachers who are concerned about public issues, public Christian witness and doing theology in public.

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