

Courtney G. Goto. *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope for Community*. Boston: Brill, 2018. 292 pages. \$61.

In critical reflection on practical theology's complicated history and position within the academy, some practical theologians have recently addressed intellectual and practical dilemmas within the field in *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (2016). One of the contributors to *Conundrums*, Courtney T. Goto, admirably continues *taking on* this demanding task in her new book, *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope for Community*. Goto identifies and explores another central "conundrum" in the discipline: the idolization of context, namely how practical theologians approach context in their own practice, research, and teaching.

By "taking on" the field, Goto intends to do two particular tasks: first, to challenge "what is taken for granted in the very way we 'do' practical theology," and, second, to reflect on "what is problematic and implicit in producing practical theological knowledge" (1). The primary concern of this project came from the recognition that practical theologians, those influenced predominantly by white North American, Western European, and Protestant perspectives, have often used the term "context" superficially, which Goto names the "idolization of context." In other words, theologians tend to idolize context by "taking as normative their own cultural, theological, gendered, and/or disciplinary frame of reference, all the while believing they are being helpful and even attentive to 'context'" (5). One striking example can be found in a seminary classroom, where the course readings predominantly represent "a male, Eurocentric, heterosexual point of view," and an instructor fails to recognize how the syllabus reflects and privileges only his own context (5).

After a sharp and provocative introduction, Goto explores how knowledge has been produced in the field, which offers a theoretical background for an analysis of "idolization of context" in Part I (chapters 1-2). Goto describes this process by drawing on the notion of paradigm from Thomas Kuhn, which unveils how a specific paradigm could suppress "the minoritized," and damages "the integrity of the community as whole" (45). In response, Goto challenges those in the field to exercise "prophetic tactics" as a community to reform knowledge production. By creatively merging Walter Brueggemann's idea of "prophetic imagination" and Rey Chow's notion of "tactic," Goto demonstrates how prophetic imagination opens up the possibility for practical theologians to be tactical, which means to be "an insider and an outsider to multiple groups in order to challenge oppression" (59).

In Part II (chapters 3-6), Goto inspects the paradigm in the research methods of practical theology by addressing the idolization of context in the notable research of several practical theologians, in critical conversation with her own ethnographic case study of Filipino American Catholic community in Florida. According to this careful examination, what these practical theologians failed to employ is a critical intersubjective approach that enables "all participants in the research process [to] practice critical awareness of themselves, others, and other interaction as they discern 'context'" (97). Goto proposes a critical intersubjective approach as an appropriate tool for practical theologians to use in empowering, facilitating, and collaborating with members of faith communities to reflect theologically about their own situations in research process.

Last but not least, Part III (chapters 7-9) focuses on thinking about how to develop habits of "identifying and revising idols" in teaching (193), so that instructors and students may become co-researchers and colleagues in a community that beautifully embodies "the prophetic tradition

that is essential to practical theology” (189). In the closing chapter, Goto earnestly invites her readers to enter and co-create “a critical intersubjective space,” where the author and readers can examine the nature of their differences and engage in richer work on issues of privilege and oppression in doing practical theological endeavors.

Goto’s weighty work will be difficult reading for people outside the field because all chapters assume a level of knowledge that non-experts do not have. But this might be the same for practical theologians in the field who may feel destabilized even acknowledging “the pervasiveness of the idolization of context.” The act of “taking on” is not an easy task. As Goto reminds us throughout the book, it requires “courage, vulnerability, and perseverance” (2). I believe that’s what makes Goto’s particular contribution commendable for taking on practical theology with courage, self-reflexivity, and even professional risk. It truly demonstrates the author’s and her allies’ hope and commitment to create a more ethical and loving practical theology community.

David Cho, Emory University, Atlanta, GA