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A REVIEW OF JENNIFER BUCK'S
REFRAMING THE HOUSE:
CONSTRUCTIVE FEMINIST GLOBAL
ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE WESTERN
EVANGELICAL CHURCH (PICKWICK
PUBLICATIONS)

GRACE JI-SUN KIM

I. INTRODUCTION

I want to thank the Quaker Theological Discussion Group and especially Carole Spencer for putting this session together and for inviting me to be part of this book review of Jennifer Buck's book *Reframing the House*. Though I am not a Quaker, I do teach at a Quaker institution, Earlham School of Religion, so it is an honor to be part of this session and to review this fine book.

II. SUMMARY

Reframing the House is an interesting read on the global church and ecumenical theology which is a pertinent topic of our time. Our world is getting smaller and smaller and we are living in a global world where people are migrating and immigrating. We live in an inter-dependent and inter-reliant world. What happens in Asia affects us here in North America and what happens here in North America affects those in Africa.

Additionally, due to climate change, there are many climate refugees who are seeking better places to live. Due to the socio-economic and political contexts, we have refugees fleeing their homes for a safer and more stable place to live. In a time of flux, movement and globalization, we need to recognize the importance of a global understanding of ecclesia. The failure to do so may lead to larger

consequences and hopelessness as the church continues to dwindle in the west but grows in the global south.

Therefore, Buck's book *Reframing the House* is an important book for scholars and those in the church to read and examine. This book provides a good roadmap for Evangelicals (and others) in search of new ecclesial lenses to understand themselves in a globalizing world. Jennifer Buck provides new frames or lenses to address diverse questions which are of utmost concern for those in the church today. She provides a new way to understand the globalizing church and how the church will continue to move into the future. She uses feminist theology and method and remains Christo-centric in her theological endeavor. The use of feminist theology is a much needed tool for the church which, has been so patriarchal, heterosexual and western-euro-centric.

Thus it is with interest that we should read Jennifer Buck's book *Reframing the House*. Her book lays out a path for how to be inclusive of different voices to become a church of the future. She engages in global theology which is the way forward for the church. She includes women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Buck understands that leaving these voices out would be incomprehensible in today's globalizing world. These women's voices provide insight, depth and innovation to a global theology and a global understanding of the Church.

Buck incorporates these women's voices: Mercy Oduyoye, a Ghanaian feminist theologian as representative of Africa; Kwok Pui-lan, a Chinese feminist theologian as representative of Asia; and Maria Pilar Aquino, a Mexican feminist theologian as representative of the Americas to help critique Evangelical theology of the church in the West. These three women's voices are not exhaustive global and feminist voices, but they do provide insight which is crucial to a global theology of the future. These three women are prominent theologians in their own right and have published a wealth of knowledge from their own respective ethnic identities and tied it into their theological understanding of the church.

It was good to read these three women in conjunction with other political, Quaker and feminist voices. These voices present a growing global ecclesiology, which is the way of the future. In her book, Buck covers important themes such as salvation, sin, peacemaking and others to help us come to a deeper understanding of the global church.

III. CRITIQUE

I want to offer some helpful critiques for this book.

The subtitle of Buck's book is "Constructive Feminist Global Ecclesiology for the Western Evangelical Church." For a book which focuses on feminist global ecclesiology, Buck relied too heavily on male theologians to help her articulate a feminist ecclesiology.

In chapter 1, "The Significance of Christian Ecclesiology," Buck included Karl Barth's ecclesiology (26-29), Joerg Rieger, David Fitch, Justo Gonzalez, Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, Walter Wink, Alister MacGrath, Anselm Min, Philip Jenkins and other male theologians. These are important theologians and their work is important. However, if the book is a constructive feminist ecclesiology, it should have used less male voices and should have included more women's voices. There are numerous feminist theologians who do work on ecclesiology such as Letty Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Anne Carr, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Cynthia Rigby and so on. The lack of feminist voices in chapter 1 was alarming for a constructive feminist global ecclesiology.

The lack of women's voices continues in chapter 2 which focuses on "Methodology." I am not sure why Buck focused so much on Moltmann's work and then moves on to John Howard Yoder, William Cavanaugh, and Gustavo Gutierrez's method and theology before finally moving into feminist theologians. This section on method should have only included feminist theologians work on method and how feminist theology should present a new method of doing ecclesiology. Furthermore, in the "Quaker Ecclesial Tradition" section, there was too much focus on male theologians such as George Fox and Edward Burrough and again, it should have included and focused more on female Quaker voices and tradition.

The most engaging and enriching part of the book was "Third World Feminist Ecclesiology." I thought that this section should have been expanded into several sections and made more into the focus of the book. The scholars that Buck chose to focus on in this chapter have deep insight and vision of what the church should be like in the coming years.

The section on Kwok included *minjung* theology and the concept of *han*. While I am grateful that Buck included these concepts in the section under Kwok, I am not sure that Kwok uses these terms that much in her own theological work. Both these terms are specific

to Korea and Kwok is from Hong Kong. Perhaps Buck could have focused more specifically on Hong Kong's struggles like the "Umbrella Movement" and terms that are more authentic to the Chinese language.

It is also interesting to note Buck's choice of the three women theologians, Mercy Oduyoye, Kwok Pui-lan and Maria Pilar Aquino. I have really admired these three theologians work for some time. However, Kwok and Aquino live in the United States. If this section was to include Majority World women's voices, perhaps, Buck could have chosen feminist theologians who actually still live in their native countries. Ivone Gebara lives in Brazil, so she could have been a possible voice from South America. Sharon Bong lives in Malaysia, so she could have been a possible feminist voice from Asia.

Buck's decision to include Kwok and Aquino could have highlighted the notion of hybridity as a form of identity politics. Being born in a different country and then living in the United States creates a different identity which postcolonial scholars would identify as hybridity. This could have served as an entry point for understanding why these two women were included in the book and how hybridity also helps us understand the global ecclesiology and the movement towards the future.

Furthermore, even though these three women's voices are important, it would have been interesting to also hear voices of further marginalized subaltern women whose voices are ignored and suppressed. Buck needs to critique power and hegemony that has displaced certain groups of people and in particular women so that they are left voiceless. A preliminary background study of "power, power within, powerless of the other" would have been a helpful element in the book to aid us in understanding the importance of including such women in the book.

The book ends with a chapter on "Constructive Global Ecclesiology" which included ideas about peacemaking and feminism. Buck emphasizes how "feminism presents a unique voice in the discussion of peacemaking. Women raise distinct issues in which the broader theological landscape must address" (144). I appreciated that Buck tied in peacemaking with not just one another but also with the earth. I have done a lot of work with the World Council of Churches on making peace with all of creation. At WCC's last assembly meeting in Korea in 2013 (10th Assembly meeting), the WCC wanted to focus on "Making Peace with the Earth." This is an effort to include how

we need to be mindful of climate change and work towards climate justice. My edited book for the WCC, *Making Peace with the Earth*, tries to focus on how the global churches around the world are engaged in sustainability and advocacy work for climate justice. Thus it was exciting to see how Buck ties in peace with working towards peace with all of God's creation.

Buck concludes the book with a focus on multi-ethnic churches. This was a wonderful way to end the book as multi-ethnic churches are the way of the future. However, I would have liked to see more movement towards how American churches can become such multi-ethnic or intercultural churches. I know the focus of the book is global ecclesiology but Buck's readers will be mostly American. As a person living in the United States, I would like to know how these three important theologians that Buck focuses on will help me to live in and live out of the intercultural churches. A practical step or guide near the end of the book would have strengthened the book.

IV. CONCLUSION

I really enjoyed this book, *Reframing the House*. I learned a lot and the book left me with new concepts and ideas to continue to reflect on for many years to come.

It is clear that Buck is committed to gender equality and ecumenism. Her use of global feminist theologians is a testament to her understanding that without listening to voices around the world, we cannot sustain ourselves any longer.

Buck's book reminds us that if Western churches are to survive in the future, they have to be "reframed" in light of a globalizing world and a movement towards world Christianity. Buck's book works towards a constructive global ecclesiology that touches on the meaning of sin, salvation, and church. She presents a community of faith which is against sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, and individualism, which exists in our church. I hope that others will continue to enjoy this book and be challenged on how we can also reframe the churches that we attend and lead.