Scott Hagley
Gospel and Cultures
Book Report

Lee, Jung Young. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995).

In *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology,* Jung Young Lee proposes a theology of marginality in that his conception of marginality serves as both a "hermeneutical paradigm" and "a key to the substance of the Christian faith" (1). For Lee, theology has been dominated by centrist thinking that stresses, among other things, uniformity and dominance. In an increasingly multicultural society, such centrist theology excludes and oppresses those on the margins of the dominant culture. Thus, Lee draws on his own experience of marginalization as a Korean-American to write a praxis-oriented theology for a multicultural society.

Lee develops his proposal in three distinct stages. In the first stage, he begins with an autobiographical account of marginality that reveals some of the assumptions and lived experiences that will guide his work. Lee holds that theology is a reflection on praxis. As such, it must be written from lived experience in order to be authentic. He describes his own experience as a minority in America allegorically as a dandelion in an otherwise green yard. In the allegory, the stubborn dandelion refuses to leave the yard while gradually becoming aware of his difference, learning to see himself not as a weed but as a flower. For Lee, this allegory demonstrates his own awareness of the hidden beauty on the margins—a beauty he will argue is essential to understanding the Christian faith.

Next, Lee describes what he means by "marginality" through a brief account of the sociological use of the word. Traditionally, sociologists used "marginality" to refer to the "in-between" stage for immigrants who left behind their old culture in the process of assimilation to the new culture (36). In more recent writing, however, the positive elements of marginality have been emphasized, that the immigrant is not "in-between" but "in-both" cultures simultaneously (48-49). In Lee's experience, marginality is simultaneously neither/nor and both/and, a condition he calls "in-beyond." Lee argues that every marginal person experiences marginality as a paradox. As a Korean-

American, he is neither Korean nor American, and yet he is both. Thus, marginality is the condition of "being at the margin that connects both worlds" (60). As "in-beyond" he identifies marginality as a "creative core" where "two or multiple worlds merge" in a way that does not replace the "centers of centrality" (60). As in the allegory of the dandelion, one who can live "in-beyond" by harmonizing the "in-between" and "in-both" elements of her marginality becomes a liberated person, one who is "a new marginal person who overcomes marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person" (62).

In the third stage, Lee develops his theology of marginality primarily through reflection on the incarnation and creation before articulating the implications of marginality for discipleship and the church. Building upon the description outlined above, Lee asserts that "Jesus-Christ"[1] is the marginalized person *par excellence* based on his life of poverty, rejection, loneliness, and minority ethnicity. Moreover, since he became a marginal person in the kenotic act, Lee states: "the stories of Jesus' birth and incarnation are stories of divine marginalization. During the incarnation, God was marginalized in Jesus-Christ" (79). In Jesus' life, teachings, and death he demonstrates the suffering life of homeless emigration that is marginalized existence. However, in his resurrection he reveals a new paradigm for marginalization, where he initiates a new marginal humanity that transcends all the cultural, class, economic, and ethnic barriers that marginalized him. In the resurrection, Jesus shows a new way to be a marginal humanity, for he becomes the "creative core" in which all divisions are reconciled "in beyond" the center of centrality. Lee phrases it in this way: "God is not central to those who seek the center, but God is center to those who seek marginality, because the real center is the creative core, the margin of marginality" (97).

The argument from incarnation logically leads to creation. For if the new humanity in Christ-Jesus is an "in-beyond" marginal humanity, then it follows that we must have been created to be marginal. For this, Lee turns to the differentiating activity of God in the Genesis narrative. Lee notes that *creatio ex nihilo* is not evident in the text, but rather it speaks of God separating various elements such as light from dark and water from land. Applying this principle to the creation of humanity along with some

[1] Lee hyphenates "Jesus-Christ" to avoid conflating "Jesus" with "Christ" or "Christ" with "Jesus" for he is "the margin of marginality." This is an expression referring to the kenotic act of the Son in becoming not just a man, but a marginalized one (72-80).

Trinitarian reflection, Lee argues that the plurality of differences in humanity is the image of the God who is plural. This difference and plurality is at the root of the created order, and original sin is "indifference"—"the denial of God's creativity" through the conscious denial of difference (107). Thus, Lee can say that a pluralistic theology of marginality is preferred to an ideology of the center that looks for uniformity.

Lee contends that this ideology of the center has co-opted the church since the days of Constantine. For Lee, the church that claims to be "mainline" and thus the center of centrality must die so that a marginal church can be resurrected. Such a church will not enforce dogma, high liturgy, hierarchy, or bureaucracy. It will shun all trappings of power, prestige, and riches. It will see itself as a servant to society and live an actively communal public life in work for love and reconciliation. In order for such a church to emerge, Lee anticipates a holistic shift in theological education to a cell-group praxis-oriented methodology and a massive transformation of denominational/congregational structures to networks of loosely organized cell-churches with no declared orthodoxy or orthopraxis.

Finally, the marginal church must be understood as a people of the mission of liberation. They must look for the liberation of both themselves and the centrists of an occupation with the center. The church must be an agent for reconciliation, or the "overcoming [of] marginality through marginality" (149). Lee believes that as the church seeks marginality, and suffers the marginality of Christ they will also participate in their own liberation and be a subversive presence of liberation and reconciliation in society from centrist ideology. And when the church embraces this kind of marginality, it makes a multicultural society possible—one where all can embrace their own marginality and live in the creative core of "in-beyond."