Foreword

A foreword is neither an afterword nor a review. A foreword should open up the door to a text and make one feel so invited that the book gets read. I will confine my introductory remarks to such an invitation. The work of Paul Chung says much more than the title suggests. The title speaks of a comparison between Martin Luther and (Mahayana) Buddhism in regard to the "Aesthetics of Suffering," but the content provides an extraordinarily rich theology that combines Europe with Asia, the sixteenth century with the twenty-first century, and Christian theology with the history of religion in a postmodern cultural context. I've rarely read such a multi-faceted study. The reader will be instructed extensively and be brought to develop his/her own thoughts in every chapter. One gets no impression of superficiality in any chapter. To the contrary: the author goes to the root of the questions and does not exempt the reader from the "Anstrengung des Begriffs" (Hegel). After reading, I put this book down with great surprise and decided to encourage students and anyone interested in theology in Europe, America, and Asia to urgently and repeatedly read it. Here, "theology of the cross" is radicalized, and the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, and also between Asia and the West, is exalted onto a new level.

My contribution in this foreword can only be reserved. I'd like to engage two related pictures: (1) the crucified Christ and the dying, declining Buddha; (2) the cross in the rose, Luther's shield image (Wappenbild), and the Lotus flower, on which the Buddha sits or stands.

The crucified Christ is the living Son of God. He suffered torture in his body, wore a crown of thorns, and was nailed and died on a Roman cross. He suffered in his soul the abandonment of his people, whose high priests delivered him, and the crowd demanded his execution. He suffered betrayal, denial, and curse on the part of his many disciples. Only women kept an eye on him "from afar." He lost his identity as a Jew, as rabbi and teacher, as a friend, and died in human loneliness. On the deepest level, however, his suffering relates to God whom he has called "Abba,

dear Father" since his baptism, and whose proximity he has proclaimed to the poor and the sick among his people. He died with the cry: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the experience of hell, as Luther and Calvin rightly interpreted it. The passion of Jesus Christ culminates in the passion of God, the experience of the darkness of God, and the corresponding dark night of the soul. If this passion is "the gospel of the Son of God," as the gospel of Mark states at the beginning (1:1), the Father is also abandoned by the Son in the Father's forsakenness of the Son. The Son suffered the dying in the far distance from the beloved Father, and the Father suffered the death of the beloved Son. These are different pains at the same suffering. What occurred on the cross between God the Son and God the Father embraces the whole suffering of this world and opens up all the hells of torture.

What we perceive in the declining Buddha and the Bodhisattva by contrast, is *dukkha,* divine compassion and sympathy. This is also grounded in self-denial and self-sacrifice, self-emptiness and compassion. With limitless compassion the Buddha takes part in the cosmic suffering of the world, and in so doing he shows his completeness. But he does not cry; no statue shows the Buddha who is distorted by affliction. No one must feel sympathy or compassion with him. Rather, all Buddha statues and pictures show forth wonderful rest and world-transcending spiritual peace. Also, the Bodhisattva who gives up his/her own perfection in order to help the weak shows mildness, compassion, and merciful understanding of the weak who are not yet enlightened. The declining Buddha died a beautiful death on the way to salvation. Christ didn't die a beautiful death, but a death that was frightening even in his own day.

Where do the suffering Christ and the compassionate Buddha converge and diverge from each other? Paul Chung's book pursues an answer to this question. The perfect beautiful Lotus on which the Buddha sits or stands is a primordial symbol of world genesis. This sublime floating flower blossomed, together with the creator of the world, out of primal water. In India there was Brahma, who created the world sitting and ruling on it. Then the Buddha was given to the world. The Lotus flower is the conceptual key to created-creative beauty. Anyone who meditates on it is reminded of Dostoevsky: "Beauty will redeem the world," because beauty has produced everything. The flower of the Lotus is an aesthetics of the beautiful.

Against this, "no stately form or beauty" (Isa 53:2) is to be known in the crucified. "The suffering servant of God" is no image of human beauty. But this image of the savior on the cross does not stand for himself alone, because his background is always drawn in the shining color of the twilight of the resurrection. It is not the cross of the dead, but always the cross of the Christ who was resurrected by God into the new creation. Since medieval times this symbol is represented by a flower: the rose. Luther's shield image shows the cross of Christ in the midst of a blossoming rose. The crucified who redeems the world from sin and suffering is embraced by the leaves of the rose, which points to the beauty of God's new creation. As the Buddha stands on the Lotus blossom of world genesis, so the one who is crucified for the world is set on the petals of the rose of the resurrection of the world. It was not only Luther who saw such a thing in his shield image; the Lutheran philosopher Hegel did the same thing in the nineteenth century. Hegel made a universal Good Friday out of the historical Good Friday and looked for "the rose in the cross of the present," and in so doing, he meant God's reconciliation in the midst of the suffering and affliction of the present. Lotus flower and blossoming rose: What do they say to us about common ground? And what do they say for themselves about the aesthetics of suffering and beauty? We find the answers to these questions in Paul Chung's book. Books also have their own destiny. I hope that this work of Paul Chung will be attractive to intelligent readers and have a lasting impact on ecumenical theology.

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