

ASIAN CHRISTIANITY
IN THE DIASPORA

Series Editors: Grace Ji-Sun Kim
and Joseph Cheah

palgrave▶pivot

**ASCENSION
THEOLOGY AND
HABAKKUK**

A Reformed
Ecclesiology in Filipino
American Perspective

Neal D. Presa



Asian Christianity in the Diaspora

Series Editors

Grace Ji-Sun Kim
Earlham School of Religion
Richmond, IN, USA

Joseph Cheah
University of Saint Joseph
West Hartford, CT, USA

Asian American theology is still at its nascent stage. It began in the 1980's with just a handful of scholars who were recent immigrants to the United States. Now with the rise in Asian American population and the rise of Asian American theologians, this new community is an ever-important voice within theological discourse and Asian American cultural studies. This new series seeks to bring to the forefront some of the important, provocative new voices within Asian American Theology. The series aims to provide Asian American theological responses to the complex process of migration and resettlement process of Asian immigrants and refugees. We will address theoretical works on the meaning of diaspora, exile, and social memory, and the foundational works concerning the ways in which displaced communities remember and narrate their experiences. Such an interdisciplinary approach entails intersectional analysis between Asian American contextual theology and one other factor; be it sexuality, gender, race/ethnicity, and/or cultural studies. This series also addresses Christianity from Asian perspectives. We welcome manuscripts that examine the identity and internal coherence of the Christian faith in its encounters with different Asian cultures, with Asian people, the majority of whom are poor, and with non-Christian religions that predominate the landscape of the Asian continent. Palgrave is embarking on a transformation of discourse within Asian and Asian American theological scholarship as this will be the first of its kind. As we live in a global world in which Christianity has re-centered itself in the Global South and among the racialized minorities in the United States, it behooves us to listen to the rich, diverse and engaging voices of Asian and Asian American theologians.

More information about this series at
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14781>

Neal D. Presa

Ascension Theology and Habakkuk

A Reformed Ecclesiology in Filipino
American Perspective

palgrave
macmillan

Neal D. Presa
Village Community Presbyterian Church
Rancho Santa Fe, CA, USA

Asian Christianity in the Diaspora
ISBN 978-3-319-76341-5 ISBN 978-3-319-76342-2 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76342-2>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018935186

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Cover pattern © Harvey Loake

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For
my parents: Noel and Carol Presa
my paternal grandparents: Lorenzo and Pacing Presa
my maternal grandparents: Bing Dionida and Puring Dionida

Para sa
Aking Tatay at Nanay
Aking Papa Ensoy at Mama Pacing
Aking Grandpa Bing at Grandma Puring

PRAISE FOR *ASCENSION THEOLOGY*
AND *HABAKKUK*

“By way of acknowledgment, I say thank you for honoring a community of the faithful that is too often, too easily pushed to the margins. Through such a beautiful and accomplished expression, Dr. Presa has honored the Filipino American diaspora and future generations of those who live in the realm of the theology of struggle. It is this both-and dynamic of living in the liminal tension of multiple identities that then become both a challenge and an opportunity for authentic witness in the midst of the struggle to belong. Dr. Presa connects a multiplicity of intersectional dots that give voice to Habakkuk as he links arms and engages mission and ministry with the Filipino communities.”

—Mienda Uriarte, *World Mission*
Office of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, USA

“Dr. Neal Presa, who is deeply rooted in the Filipino culture and perfectly at home with life and ministry in the United States, uses insightful studies of the much-neglected book of Habakkuk and the less-visited doctrine of Ascension to spell out a Reformed ecclesiology that would speak meaningfully to people in Diaspora. These biblical-theological explorations built on personal experiences is a significant and valuable contribution to the emerging field of Diaspora Theology.”

—S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Drew University, USA*

FOREWORD

Dr. Neal Presa writes from the heart. A third-generation Filipino American theologian, Dr. Presa lives in the realm of three cultural influences. He is not so far removed from his Filipino roots that would make him a stranger from the culture and land of his parents and grandparents; yet he has lived for most of his life in the land where he currently writes. But he is equally at home in the land and culture of the Scriptures, where he theologizes his lived experience and the struggles of Filipinos in diaspora in the land where he now lives and the land of his roots. The interaction of these three cultural realms provides him with a unique standpoint and grounding when he propounds a Reformed ecclesiology from a Filipino American perspective.

He looks at ascension theology from a union–communion continuum and not as a detachment–departure from this world. In this union–communion continuum, he reflects on the connectedness sought and maintained by the Filipino in diaspora to their homeland, while at the same time being interwoven into the fabric of the life and culture of their new land.

The Filipino values of *kasamahan* and *bayanihan* and those of *pakikibaka* and *bahala na* provide hope, the connectedness, and a lens by which they wed what Dr. Presa describes as their “rootedness to the homeland and bearing fruit in the hometown.”

The period of the ascension of Christ must then reflect this sense of rootedness and connection, not an uprootedness or a disconnection; a call to continuing engagement, not disengagement, in the present time and in the place where we are. It means “living in and with hope” as the church, gifted with the power, promise, and presence of the Holy Spirit, participates in the

“history and ongoing life of Jesus Christ,” and as the church struggles to live out God’s mission of bringing the fullness of life for all.

May this book engage the reader’s heart and mind in forming an ecclesiology that is Reformed and relevant in a world and at a time where Christians from many lands live in diaspora.

General Secretary
United Church of Christ
in the Philippines

Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

When I had the privilege and pleasure to serve as the Moderator of the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) from 2012 to 2014, I did so with a grounded calling and commitment to the ecumenical unity of the body of Christ in the midst of its deep theological and political divisions. Even as a candidate standing for the highest elected office in my denomination, the vision I articulated to the church and to the General Assembly gathered in Pittsburgh was as an ecumenist who cared deeply about divisions that threatened to undermine the Gospel witness, about battles that conflicted with any integrity and legitimacy of teaching “love your neighbor,” let alone the practice of washing one another’s feet as Jesus Christ did for his disciples.

This sense of our shared calling as the body of Christ—in its multivocal, multilingual, multiperspectival dimensions—grew out of my anchoring as a Filipino American Christian who was a student and teacher of the Reformed theological traditions, but who was baptized as a Roman Catholic, who studied Christian liturgical theologies and practices, and who engaged in ecumenical work through the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

What followed was a moderatorial tenure emphasizing theological dialogues and conversation on twin axes: (1) dignifying difference¹ and (2) Reformed ecclesiology, the nature and purpose of the church. For the first, the series of conversations on dignifying difference centered around finding common language for approaches to biblical hermeneutics, race and racial relations, and the use of the Reformed confessional traditions in

theological debates. For the latter, on Reformed ecclesiology, a series of colloquia were hosted by Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary. These colloquia invited pastors, seminary professors, seminarians, and church judicatory officials to present and respond to papers on the notion of what it means to be the church in the twenty-first century, the relationship of the church's worship and witness, and the interplay of the fields of liturgical theology and missional theology.²

This present volume is my humble contribution to the ongoing conversation and consideration of what it means to be a twenty-first-century church at this time in particular contexts. I offer these reflections from the perspective of a Filipino American who is a pastor and a theologian in the Reformed theological traditions. Our conversation partners are Filipino postcolonial theologies, Reformed articulations of the theology of the ascension, and the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. The result will be an evolving project of a constructive, contextual Reformed ecclesiology that is pastorally practical. The four-part perspectival framework of the popular *Feasting on the Word* and *Feasting on the Gospel* commentary series from Westminster John Knox Press will be the means by which this volume is organized: theological perspective, homiletical perspective, hermeneutical/exegetical perspective, and pastoral perspective.

Growing up and being nurtured in Filipino American churches means being family, akin to the *barangay* (village) in the Philippines or to the fiesta neighborhoods in my native Guam. I am grateful to series editors Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Joseph Cheah for their encouragement and invitation to contribute to Palgrave Macmillan's Asian Christianity in Diaspora series, and for their stalwart leadership for Asian/Asian American ministries. Thanks are due to Amy Invernizzi, assistant editor of the Philosophy and Religion section of Palgrave Macmillan, and to the staff at Palgrave for seeing this book through editing and publication. Thanks to the two congregations with whom and for whom I have served and continue to serve: Village Community Presbyterian Church in Rancho Santa Fe, California since 2014, and Middlesex Presbyterian Church in Middlesex, New Jersey (from 2003 to 2014); and to the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the wider ecumenical family, especially the World Communion of Reformed Churches, who have collectively enabled me to learn, witness, and contribute to Reformed ecclesiologies in their varied forms. I give thanks to the Lord for the two Filipino American congregations in which I was nurtured: the First Filipino-American United Church of Christ in San