Homiletical Theology for the "Deconstruction of the Marginalized Self":

A Proposal for the Reconfiguration of Preaching Theology in Korean Immigrant Churches

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Abstract

This study proposes a homiletical theology aimed at the "deconstruction of the marginalized self" within Korean immigrant churches in the United States, emphasizing the urgent need to reformulate homiletical theology in light of the post-pandemic socio-cultural landscape. Since the inception of Korean immigration to Hawaii in 1903, Korean immigrant churches have functioned as vital spiritual sanctuaries and cultural centers for the Korean diaspora, especially during times of political upheaval and cultural displacement. However, these churches now confront significant challenges, such as declining memberships and a failure to navigate effectively within an increasingly multicultural and pluralistic society.

This research identifies the challenge of the "marginalized self" as a pivotal issue within contemporary Korean immigrant churches, where preaching has often perpetuated ethnic exclusivity and insularity, alongside promoting a prosperity gospel for individual believers and churches. This tendency has hindered the development of inclusive spiritual formation and social communities, further entrenching these churches in their status as 'the other' within the context of socio-political injustices. Employing Richard Osmer's practical theological method, this study critically evaluates the present state of homiletical theology in Korean immigrant churches, highlighting the shortcomings of their current frameworks. It calls for a reimagining of "Woori (우리)," grounded in the Korean concept of *Ren* (仁) — a philosophy that underscores compassion and resistance — as a hermeneutical lens to deconstruct the marginalized self. Additionally, it proposes biblical lamentation as a homiletical framework that embodies the dynamics of compassion and resistance, serving as a means to transcend marginalization and foster a more inclusive ecclesial identity, one that encompasses both the pastoral and prophetic dimensions of proclaiming God's word. By engaging with the socio-cultural realities of Korean immigrants, this study aspires to offer a transformative vision for homiletical theology that addresses the spiritual and existential needs of contemporary Korean-American congregations.

Preaching Theology for "Marginalized Self-Deconstruction":
A Proposal for Restructuring Preaching Theology in Korean Immigrant Churches
Jeremy Kangsan Kim

Introduction

Since the first wave of Korean immigration to the United States began in 1903 with laborers heading to sugar plantations in Hawaii, the church community has always been closely intertwined with the history of immigration. During the early stages of immigration, the immigrant church played a significant role as an overseas independence movement organization amid the unstable political situation in Korea. After 1965, with the official surge in immigration, the immigrant church became both a spiritual refuge for Koreans in a foreign land and a cultural community that shared common values, fulfilling the role of a diaspora ethnic cultural community. However, under its inherently pastoral and social roles, the Korean immigrant church community is now facing a crisis as it enters the post-pandemic era. Many of those who physically left the church during the uncertainty and fear of the pandemic are still hesitant to return, seeking spiritual and emotional support from a faith community. Additionally, in the cross-cultural, open, and pluralistic environment post-pandemic, the church has struggled to fully fulfill its role as a faith community responding to the broader social currents while remaining within the boundaries of an ethnic cultural community. This failure to expand inclusivity not only acts as a current threat but also contributes to the phenomenon of future generations fleeing the church. Ultimately, this has resulted in the Korean immigrant church limiting its role as a spiritual refuge for immigrants to the physical space of the church, leading to a ghettoization of the ethnic cultural community, which has failed to extend beyond its cultural boundaries and social responsibilities. Unfortunately, the current existential uncertainty places the immigrant church at risk of choosing privatization in its struggle for survival rather than expanding its spiritual and social inclusivity.

Thus, what kind of preaching message should the Korean immigrant church proclaim and testify to in the marginalized socio-cultural context in which it finds itself today? This study seeks to propose an answer from a "preaching theology" perspective through Richard Osmer's practical theology methodology. First, the current state of preaching theology in Korean immigrant churches will be explored, and the limitations of contemporary preaching theology that have contributed to the creation of the marginalized self will be examined. Then, the study will reinterpret the meaning of "us" in the context of Korean thought (仁) from the perspective of a hermeneutic of the other, and propose a preaching theology based on the biblical "lamentation" that carries this de-marginalizing characteristic. For effective research, the scope will be limited to the first-generation (1.5 generation) churches that make up the majority of Korean immigrant churches in the United States today.

Current State of Preaching Theology in Korean Immigrant Churches: The Creation of Marginalized Selves

Traditional Role and Characteristics of Immigrant Churches

As mentioned earlier, the real growth of Korean immigration to the U.S. began with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which had a significant influence on the shaping of the traditional role of Korean immigrant churches. Before 1965, the immigrant church's role was politically oriented and socially participatory, acting as an overseas base for the independence

movement, in line with the socio-political context of Korea. However, after 1965, as large numbers of immigrants began to arrive, the church shifted to focus on the religious calling and spiritual care within an ethnic framework for Koreans in marginalized positions.

As a result, the Korean immigrant church has developed two main roles. The first is that of a "faith community overcoming suffering." Despite many immigrants not coming through religious organizations like the initial waves, 52.6% of them already had Christian faith from Korea. These immigrants were typically educated, skilled, urban middle class, but many failed to find social standing in the foreign land. Language barriers restricted their communication, limiting job opportunities, and they began their lives as outsiders, not assimilating into mainstream society. In this situation, the Korean immigrant church became a trusted refuge, providing spiritual comfort and emotional support. This pastoral role expanded to include assistance with settling into the new country, taking on social activities for immigrant members. The church, as a faith community overcoming suffering, became a place where many immigrants changed their religious traditions to Christianity as a means of survival. This led to the second role of the church as an "ethnic cultural social community" for Koreans, preserving Korean culture and identity in a foreign land.

Characteristics and Limitations of Immigrant Church Preaching Theology

In the reality of the personal and social challenges faced by immigrants, the Korean immigrant church provided spiritual stability and social adaptation through its ministries. However, these positive aspects inadvertently reinforced the homogeneity of immigrants and contributed to social division, leading to a stronger ethnic boundary and ghettoization of Korean immigrants. This impact also extended to the pulpit, where preaching often focused on individual salvation, personal satisfaction, and peace through direct spiritual experience. As a result, the immigrant church's preaching theology became heavily influenced by prosperity theology, which combined material success with the American Dream and shamanistic blessings from Korea, shaping the church's messages around individual prosperity.

Such preaching messages, rooted in prosperity theology, led to a problematic understanding of God’s blessings, equating success with material achievements and inadvertently reinforcing secular American values like consumerism, materialism, capitalism, and individualism. Although this type of preaching met the immediate needs of immigrants, it contributed to a privatized form of church life, where topics not directly related to the survival needs of immigrants disappeared from the pulpit. This internal focus of the preaching, driven by the prosperity gospel and the individual growth of the church, led to an intensification of ethnic boundaries and a retreat from addressing broader social issues, further contributing to the ghettoization of Korean immigrant churches.

Unfortunately, the current reality of immigrant communities only strengthens this marginalizing identity. At the core of this issue are social factors such as the failure of generational succession and changes in immigration patterns. After the 1992 LA riots, the Korean immigrant community and Korean immigrant churches began calling for a new model that would break free from a homeland-centered perspective and embrace the political and social realities of the United States. This naturally became an opportunity for generational succession within the immigrant and church communities, with second and third-generation Koreans, who were more open to the

American societal context and language, culture, and environmental influences, playing a key role. However, the flow of Korean immigrants, which had been declining in the 1990s, sharply increased in the 2000s following the IMF crisis and the process of globalization in Korea, and this trend continued until 2019, before the pandemic. As a result, the continued influx of first-generation believers from Korea led to the persistence of a church community centered around first-generation immigrants. Consequently, the generational shift to second and third generations did not occur, and the silent exodus of these younger generations deepened. Thus, rather than providing an opportunity for theological challenges related to openness and inclusivity, immigrant churches became a key mechanism for reinforcing the ethnic boundaries centered on Koreans, further strengthening the marginalizing identity of the church. Additionally, the changes in the forms of immigration that began in the 2010s led to a decreased reliance on traditional religious institutions, which dulled the awareness of the changes and challenges facing Korean churches, leaving insufficient reflection on their marginalizing identity. Ultimately, the current social and ecclesial reality of Korean immigrant churches in North America presents the following homiletical challenges: How does the cultural and religious heritage of immigrants in a foreign land, who live both as members of the Korean immigrant community and as members of the faith community, influence their identity formation and faith development (pastoral perspective)? Moreover, how has Christianity acted as a source of resistance against injustice and immorality in the face of social realities of alienation and discrimination experienced due to their racial and cultural characteristics (prophetic perspective)?

The Limits of Korean American Immigrant Church Homiletics: Theological Responses to the Marginalized Identity

In order to respond to these homiletical challenges, one must take into account the sociocultural interpretation of how mainstream American society treats Korean immigrants. The homiletical theology that deeply influenced first-generation Korean immigrants has developed within the historical context of post-Korean War industrialization and democratization, and has been divided into pastoral and prophetic perspectives. Particularly, the issues of personal life and identity faced by Korean congregations in the immigrant society should have been addressed in the pulpit not just from a pastoral perspective but also extending to a prophetic dimension, as these issues are connected to racial problems in American society. However, the prosperity theology-based pastoral approach has often obscured the essential issues faced by Korean immigrants, further entrenching their marginalization. To face these essential issues, it is crucial to examine the racial problems in American society that have marginalized Korean immigrants.

Racial Othering

The internal social values of the United States emphasize individual rights, benefits, and independence. However, despite their high educational levels and abilities, Asian Americans are not able to enjoy the same political, economic, and social securities that align with these values. This leads to a sense of exclusion, disenfranchisement, and social marginalization, known as "otherization." Otherization arises when a dominant group develops prejudice and fear toward a non-dominant group based on the concept of "difference." In American society, white Americans, who believe they belong civically, have historically othered individuals and groups that are racially different. Since Asians first immigrated to the United States in the late 18th century, they have been classified as outsiders who do not fully belong to the dominant group,

enduring racial discrimination and hate crimes. Nevertheless, Asian immigrants have not been viewed as targets of racial discrimination in the same way as African Americans. They are classified as immigrants (foreigners) in the binary of native vs. immigrant, but treated as not entirely different. This led to Asians being seen as incomplete others, falling outside of the dichotomy of black vs. white, and native vs. foreigner, thus becoming a "third" invisible other. A prominent concept that emerged from this is the "model minority myth," which reveals the post-racial reality for Asian Americans. They are categorized as honorary whites and integrated into mainstream American society, surrounded by a pseudo-white identity. This myth frame highlights a narrow image of successful immigrants, defining them as a successful minority rather than a majority. Ultimately, this myth fosters harmful competition within the same racial group, ignores the layered suffering they experience, and leads to Asian Americans and immigrants being excluded and rendered invisible in society, experiencing otherization. Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has resurrected the "yellow peril" theory, blaming Asians for the origin and spread of the virus. In this context, many Asian Americans and immigrants have become targets of anti-Asian hate and crimes. This political and social experience has shaped the self-awareness of Korean immigrants, who have come to realize their inevitable marginalization in society. Rather than accepting the reality of alienation, they have internalized this marginalization, leading them to accept their marginalized reality as a natural consequence.

Theological Response

Despite the marginalized reality, the evangelical theology that formed the foundation of Korean immigrant churches has had little influence in deconstructing the structural injustices of the political and social environment. Amos Yong explains that "methodologically and practically, evangelical theology has been understood as ahistorical, decontextualized, and even non-contextual." Furthermore, Lee Seungchan points out that American evangelicalism has been captured by white culture and racism. This lack of understanding of political, cultural, and social contexts in evangelical seminaries meant that Korean pastors and church leaders, trained in these seminaries, were not equipped with the theological capacity to clearly recognize the historical and structural racial realities within the United States.

Nonetheless, Korean theologians have made efforts to find a theological response to their marginalized identity. Prominent theologians like Lee Jeong-yeong and Lee Sang-hyun have taken the marginality and liminality experienced by Asian Americans as the theological basis of their responses. Lee Jeong-yeong, in particular, argues that theologians addressing immigrant issues should not do so from a central position but rather engage in creative theology from the periphery to address the oppression, discrimination, and suffering immigrants face. He uses the concept of "marginality" from Stonequist to describe the immigrant's position between worlds. Lee Jeong-yeong suggests that those on the margins do not belong to either world fully but live in an "in-between" state, affirming their identity as both Asian and American simultaneously. He defines this duality as living "in-between" two worlds — the homeland and the new land. This unique identity, he argues, transcends the duality to an "in-beyond" state, exemplified in Christ, who transcended both worlds without being bound by either. Based on this Christology, Lee emphasizes that the church must follow Christ as a community of new, marginalized disciples and must embrace its mission of solidarity with others in similar marginal positions, overcoming its desire to center itself.

Despite the strengths of Lee Jeong-yeong's theology in empowering Korean immigrants to accept and spiritually overcome their marginalized identity, his approach faces criticisms. He fails to clarify whether immigrants should accept their marginality or challenge the dominant cultural center. Kim Young-seok critiques Lee's theology, arguing that while embracing the marginality of Christians is acceptable, external conditions such as race, culture, religion, gender, and poverty should not be embraced but rather overcome. Discrimination based on race or culture should not be passively accepted but actively challenged. Peter Phan also echoes this criticism, asserting that marginality should be viewed as an evil to be overcome rather than a natural state.

Lee Sang-hyun, in critique of Lee Jeong-yeong's theology, argues that the marginalized position of immigrants is inherently negative because it stems from the structural exclusion and discrimination of the dominant culture. However, Lee Sang-hyun offers a more positive view, seeing immigrants as occupying a creative "liminal space." He borrows from Victor Turner's concept of "separation-liminality-reintegration" from the rites of passage to explain the immigrant's marginal position. Turner viewed liminality not just negatively but as a creative space for new ideas. Lee Sang-hyun extends this to argue that God, in the process of redemption, chooses the marginalized because they are more open to the message of salvation. He further points to Jesus Christ as the archetype of a liminal figure, rejected by the dominant culture in Jerusalem but accepted in the marginalized space of Galilee. Lee applies this to Asian immigrants in the U.S., suggesting that their experiences of exclusion and marginalization place them in a position to embrace new possibilities and transformation, much like the Galileans did.

However, Lee Sang-hyun's focus on the positive aspects of marginality faces challenges in fully capturing the complexities of immigrant experiences in a rapidly changing and pluralistic society. Lee Hak-jun critiques Lee Sang-hyun's view, arguing that in an era of de-territorialization and multi-belonging (e.g., social networks), marginality is increasingly ambiguous and constantly redefined. Nonetheless, both Lee Jeong-yeong and Lee Sang-hyun have contributed significantly to forming a positive identity for Korean immigrants based on biblical interpretation, encouraging the church to follow Christ's example and engage with society's marginalized communities.

Today, immigrant churches must move beyond their ghettos and marginalization, rejecting passive silence or victimhood, and work towards proving their rightful place within the dominant culture. They should strive to envision a new American reality based on racial reconciliation, political equality, and socio-economic justice, rooted in the message of Jesus Christ.

Homiletic Response

This text explores the theological and homiletical responses to the marginalized identities of Korean immigrant churches, especially within the framework of their struggle to affirm their unique cultural and social position in American society. It discusses key theological thinkers, such as Lee Jeong-Young and Lee Sang-Hyun, who have proposed frameworks for understanding the concept of marginality in the context of Korean American immigrant identity.

In the realm of homiletics (the study of preaching), scholars like Lee Jeong-Young and Kim Eun-Ju have sought to reframe the theological approach to preaching by incorporating the cultural and historical contexts of Korean immigrants. Lee, for example, suggests that preaching for Korean immigrants should bridge the gap between Scripture and the immigrant experience, emphasizing the unique cultural and historical experiences of the Korean people. He critiques traditional evangelical preaching methods for overlooking the immigrant context, urging for a homiletical approach that includes both the ethnic identity and the marginalization of the audience.

Similarly, Kim Eun-Ju's work integrates East Asian religious traditions and end-time (eschatological) interpretations, presenting a holistic framework for preaching that reflects God's presence in the immigrant experience. She suggests that preaching should not only address the theological aspects of faith but also engage with the cultural and political struggles that Asian Americans face within a Eurocentric society.

Despite these contributions, both Lee Jeong-Young and Kim Eun-Ju have faced critiques from some within the evangelical community, who argue that their approaches can be seen as overly eclectic or mixed, potentially compromising the integrity of Christian faith by blending it with non-Christian traditions. Critics argue that their emphasis on cultural relevance can lead to confusion, particularly for second-generation immigrants.

The ongoing efforts by Korean American homileticians to develop preaching that engages deeply with the immigrant experience and offers a prophetic witness to social and cultural issues continue today. However, the challenge remains to balance cultural context with scriptural faithfulness and to establish a distinct voice for Korean immigrant churches within the broader American Christian context. The need for a theology of marginality and a homiletic that fully acknowledges and engages with the social realities of immigrant communities is more urgent than ever.

Deconstruction of the Marginalized Self: The Rediscovery of 'Us'

The Concept of 'Us'

The structure of exclusion and discrimination experienced by the Korean community has been based on a binary otherness that clearly distinguishes the self from the other. However, the ideological framework that dominates Koreans does not adhere to this discriminatory and dichotomous concept of otherness. Instead, it is based on the concept of 'us'. In the Korean cultural context, the concept of 'us' encompasses "identity, unity, mutual dependence, mutual protection, and mutual acceptance." Therefore, 'I' refers to an individual within the community, 'I' is the individual within 'us', and 'us' refers to the group within 'I'. Hence, we are not simply an arithmetical collection of individual selves but an extended self, where the relational collective of 'I' is 'us', and 'us' forms a relational bond that integrates the self and the other. This character is rooted in the Korean concept that humans are beings who love one another, recognizing humanity as both heavenly beings and social beings within the community.

This concept of 'us' is grounded in the '仁' (In), which has been emphasized throughout ancient Korean history. While '仁' is widely known as the essence of Confucian thought, it was ingrained in the Korean psyche long before Confucianism entered the Korean Peninsula in the 4th century. Anthropologist Ryu Seung-guk traces the etymology of the term 'Dongyi' (Eastern

barbarians), which referred to ancient Koreans, through anthropological evidence. He argues that ‘Yi’ (夷) in ‘Dongyi’ corresponds to ‘In’ (仁) or ‘In’ (人), which are deeply rooted in the Korean heart. Chinese historian Lao Gan also shares a similar view, asserting, "We always refer to the Dongyi as the Eastern Yi people. ‘Yi’ and ‘In’ can be used interchangeably, and both ‘In’ (仁) and ‘In’ (人) have the same root. Therefore, in Chinese characters, ‘In’ (仁) is rooted in Dongyi." This indicates that the Korean people were formed with this concept of ‘仁’ from ancient times.

This concept of ‘仁’ is also supported through the origins of the primitive Chinese characters. Heo Shin states that “仁” is a compound of “人” (person) and “二” (two), meaning the intimacy and inclusive love between two people. Confucian philosopher Tu Wei-ming also draws from this etymological concept, understanding ‘仁’ as the primal form of human relationships. He asserts that individual humans (人) must form relationships with others in a communal context, and in doing so, they must understand and practice ‘仁’ to sustain these relationships. Therefore, ‘仁’ operates not in opposition or separation between ‘I’ and ‘the other’, but as a reciprocal force that directs ‘I’ toward ‘the other’. This feature serves as the core of Confucian philosophy and thought. Confucius viewed ‘仁’ as the inherent nature of universal ethics for all humans. In the *Analects*, he said, “仁 is more important than water or fire to people. I have seen people die from stepping on water or fire, but I have never seen anyone die from stepping on ‘仁’.” He saw ‘仁’ as the most universal expression of humanity, characterized by love for others. In this context, ethical humans must possess openness and reciprocity, which, through the practice of ‘仁’, dismantles the dualistic relationship of ‘I’ and ‘the other’ as subjects and objects, turning outward toward the community. This ultimately becomes the philosophical foundation that systematizes the Korean concept of ‘us’.

Thus, the concept of ‘us’, inherent in the Korean ethnicity, presents a different kind of otherness from the dominant structures of American society, where immigrants are situated. It begins with the recognition and acceptance of the other, through love for the other.

The Dynamics of Compassion and Resistance in ‘仁’ (Ren)

The philosopher Mencius (孟子) was the one who systematized and developed the metaphysical concept of the otherness inherent in ‘仁’ (Ren). The first concept is the heart of compassion (or sympathy). Mencius believed that human beings have a moral potential that cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of others. He explains this concept through an example.

If someone suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well, their heart will be filled with surprise, anxiety, compassion, and sympathy. Their reaction is not driven by a desire to gain favor from the child’s parents or to receive praise from neighbors or friends, nor is it motivated by fear of negative reputation for not responding appropriately. Mencius asserts that anyone who cannot feel compassion or sympathy in this situation is not truly human. The heart of compassion (or pity), *cheuk-eun-ji-sim* (惻隱之心), is the seed of ‘仁’ (Ren).

Mencius argues that it is a human’s natural inclination to respond to the suffering of others, and that this reaction is not driven by self-interest or impure motives, but is a part of human nature, a manifestation of *cheuk-eun-ji-sim*. Brian Van Norden explains Mencius’ character of ‘仁’ by

saying, “Compassion (benevolence) is feeling pain for the suffering of others and joy for their happiness... Benevolence includes an emotional response (such as compassion/pity) to the perception of an attribute (such as the suffering of others).” Furthermore, in the Neo-Confucianism, which has deeply influenced Korean society, it is taught that when one practices the core of ‘仁’—compassion— the walls that separate the subject from the object, or the self from the other, are torn down, leading to the merging of the self and the other, or the recognition of the other as oneself.

The love for others inherent in ‘仁’ develops further into another concept—the ‘resistance’ that arises from anger against the unvirtuous. Here, anger is not an emotional reaction or sensation, but a moral decision to resist injustice. Mencius explains the resistance inherent in ‘仁’ through the concept of 義 (Yì, righteousness).

The king of Qi (齊), King Xuan, asked Mencius, "Is it true that Tang (湯) exiled Jie (桀) and that Wu Wang (武王) attacked Zhou (紂)?" Mencius replied, "The records say so." The king then asked, "Can a minister kill a king?" Mencius answered, "One who abandons ‘仁’ is called one who harms others; one who abandons ‘義’ is called a cruel person. Those who harm others and are cruel are isolated and have lost the support of the people. I have heard of Jie (紂), who lost the people's support because of his loss of ‘仁’ and was executed, but I have never heard of a king being killed by a minister."

Mencius argues that it is a just act for the people to depose a tyrant because they suffer under his rule. This event was not about the assassination of a monarch or rebellion but was a form of punishment for a person who had violated ‘仁’ (Ren). A ruler who ignores the heavenly mandate (天命) and fails to relieve the suffering people with compassion has lost ‘仁’, and thus his removal is considered a righteous act. Mencius emphasizes that the decline or preservation of the state depends on ‘仁’.

The ‘compassion’ and ‘resistance’ inherent in ‘仁’ emerge in a place where the interpretation of the self and other has been dismantled, no longer as entities of separation, distinction, and opposition. This new concept of the other forms the foundation of Korean thought through the identity of ‘us’, not ‘I’ and ‘the other’. Today, this concept of ‘仁’ serves as a framework for the Korean community to dismantle the marginalized self. It reminds individuals that they are not objects to be marginalized or defined by race, ethnicity, or language but are beings whose existence cannot be separated by a system that imposes suffering and division. Human beings, as dignified entities, must practice compassion (love) for one another, and ignoring one another's suffering is not an option.

For Korean immigrants, the concept of ‘us’, or the re-confirmation of ‘仁’, provides a framework to dismantle their marginalized selves. It emphasizes that human existence itself cannot allow for the separation and oppression of the other. Immigrants who are marginalized and discriminated against due to their differences are experiencing something that is contrary to the very existence of humanity. This framework does not support the definition of an immigrant as someone on the periphery but allows for a transcendence of the marginalized self.

This view offers a pastoral perspective for immigrant church congregations suffering from marginalization. The heart of compassion is part of God's divine nature, particularly evident in the actions of Jesus Christ when humans face alienation and suffering. Andrew Purves points out, “God’s compassion should be understood in terms of ‘suffering alongside someone,’ as indicated by the Latin etymology of compassion.” Jesus demonstrated that this characteristic of compassion is not limited to His divine nature but is shared by all of us—as Mencius’ *cheuk-eun-ji-sim* asserts. We, as individuals and as a unified community, embody this compassion in the ‘body of Christ’. Therefore, the value of compassion characterizes the lives of those who wish to live in Christ and be His disciples. Ultimately, compassion defines our existence ‘in Christ’ and reflects the interconnectedness of ‘us’ through mutual reciprocity, not opposition.

Thus, the pastoral perspective for immigrant church congregations encourages them to break free from their marginalized selves and recognize that they share the same ontological essence as the body of Christ. In doing so, they create true solidarity within the community. This solidarity, based on compassion, is forged through a shared, collective experience of oppression, as Johann Metz suggests, and motivates the will to connect with others in order to overcome injustice. The pastoral perspective inspired by ‘仁’ also expands into a prophetic stance against the structural evils that marginalize immigrants, particularly through the radical criticism of unjust political and religious systems, exemplified by the crucifixion of Christ. The cross serves as a symbol of both divine compassion and public resistance against systemic evil.

Preaching Theology for Today's Era: Preaching as Lament

The concept of ‘仁’ (In), embedded within us, dismantles the marginalized identity of Korean Americans and, in the context of today’s transcultural pluralism, forms a new self while offering a hermeneutical framework to fulfill the pastoral and prophetic mission of the immigrant church pulpit. However, there are limitations in directly applying this to the pulpit. First, in terms of receptivity, the reality of the immigrant church pulpit, which is strongly influenced by evangelical theology, may lead to criticism and misunderstanding of the concept of ethnic culture (religion) when directly adopted as a theological interpretative framework. Furthermore, there is a resistance within immigrant churches to the concept of ‘仁’, which is central to Confucian thought. Unfortunately, the core Confucian value of ‘仁’ has been distorted into hierarchical and conservative values that practice rigid formalism, especially during the Japanese colonial period and in the rapidly changing society thereafter, which continues to dominate modern Korean society. Moreover, preaching is not a rhetorical act that connects all parts of the Bible and doctrines, but an act of constructing a new world of the gospel in the relationship between the Bible and the present situation and context. Thus, for the construction of preaching theology, as suggested by Sally Brown, it is necessary to engage in a theological-hermeneutical process that includes “congregation (situation), biblical text, church tradition as shared history and experience, and the horizon of understanding.” Therefore, I propose “lamentation” (탄원시, 애가) as a sermonic methodology rooted in shared biblical and church tradition.

Lament in the Scriptures

Lamentation (애가) is a literary genre found in the ancient Near Eastern Hebrew Scriptures, arising from various painful situations (war, poverty, famine, oppression, national violence, etc.) in ancient societies. In particular, biblical lamentation was a declaration made by God's people who suffered unexpected pain, anticipating God's presence and salvation. This bold declaration was not a fundamental distrust in God, but an expression of trust in His faithfulness. Lamentations appear throughout the Old Testament, with Psalms being the primary source, revealing a tension between faith based on God's covenant and the pain experienced in the silence of God. Billman and Migliore argue that the Psalms of lament are "the language of painful dissonance between vivid experience and God's promises." The literature expressing this pain is composed of various elements, and Sally Brown, referencing Brueggemann, categorizes it rhetorically as follows:

I. Lament: a. Appeal to God b. Complaint (cry of pain, sometimes questioning God, sometimes blaming God for the problem) c. Request (needed actions) d. Justification for divine action e. Protest against adversaries

II. Praise: a. Affirmation that God will answer b. Vow to praise when help is needed c. Doxology

As seen in the above structure, lament provides appropriate language for projecting painful emotions toward God, and therefore, cannot be considered blasphemous. Such laments can be found not only in the Psalms but also in Job, Ezra, Jeremiah, and other scriptures. In particular, Jeremiah's laments expose the evil of injustice and idolatry that has brought suffering upon the people and propose a communal lament on behalf of the Jerusalem community. His lament is not a mourning for the loss of the covenant but a prophetic resistance against unjust political and religious institutions that broke the covenant with God. In summary, the Old Testament lament is an expression of primal anger toward God, who seems absent in the midst of suffering, based on trust, while providing an extended practice of resistance against social injustice that inflicts pain and violence upon the innocent.

In the New Testament, lamentation is more commonly found in the Gospels than in other scriptures. Particularly, Jesus Christ's painful cry on the cross, quoting Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46), confirms that the incarnate God understands the reality of human suffering. He is both fully divine and, at the same time, a victim of violence, powerless to protect Himself from pain and death. His lament testifies that the experience of being forsaken by God is not new to those who suffer today. Furthermore, Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35) was a voice of resistance against the oppressive political and religious institutions of His time. Just like the Old Testament, the New Testament lament also calls for God's intervention in suffering and protests against the dominant socio-political systems that cause pain. However, over time, lamentation lost its vitality after the Reformation in Christian history and was reduced to a narrow role in hymns and liturgies. The development of modern philosophy and science, which allowed crises such as natural disasters, disease, and pain to be explained without divine intervention, contributed to this reduction. Yet, since the 1980s, theologians have begun to call for the recovery and practice of lamentation in the church community. Despite technological advancements and wealth that have prospered human life, suffering and pain remain unavoidable. Additionally, the church community has lost the means of expressing their painful emotions and realities to God. In particular, the 9/11

tragedy became a significant turning point in both theology and church life, rekindling the value of lamentation.

Lamentation as a Message of Compassion and Resistance

Lamentation does not provide a moment to ease the painful emotions of those who cry out in adversity, but instead offers appropriate language and space to express those emotions. The language of lamentation helps overcome the silence of early suffering by providing "the necessary vocabulary and rhetoric of pain" for the afflicted to articulate their grief in a vulnerable state. However, rhetoric focused solely on emotional catharsis can dangerously escalate wrongful anger and hatred, potentially leading to violence. Yet, as John Swinton asserts, the lamentation of Jesus Christ on the cross demonstrates solidarity with suffering humanity, conveying the message that "despite the pain you are enduring right now, God is with you and for you." Through this, the lamenter encounters a merciful and compassionate God who does not remain silent, but suffers alongside those in pain, enabling them to move from despair to hope.

The compassionate nature of lamentation presents a sermonic theological possibility to resist the reality of suffering experienced by immigrants living as marginalized selves. Lamentation first reminds us of the most important theological and sermonic tasks when the congregation faces suffering in social structures. Today's various forms of structural suffering do not require a perfectly systematized theological theory but demand the practice of merciful action toward them—that is, praxis. As Edward Farley mentioned, the core of practical theology is "situational hermeneutics." Thus, preaching theology is not simply the application or completion of a specific theological tradition but the performing of theology in light of a particular situation and context. Therefore, the compassionate nature of lamentation enables preachers to provide a safe, spiritual refuge in God while standing in solidarity with those enduring suffering in immigrant communities. It gives them the space, time, language, and authority to express and acknowledge their reality before God. Moreover, it helps establish the practice of solidarity within the faith community. As Wendy Farley notes, compassion toward the Other means "reviving the ability to recognize another as human, even within a tragically structured environment." Lamentation leads to solidarity with another "we," rather than unrefined anger that creates division between "us" (immigrants) and "them" (structural oppressors). This communal solidarity becomes a force resisting the dehumanization in societal structures. In that moment, the rhetoric of lamentation expands from a cry of agony to a call for justice, indicating an expansion from pastoral to prophetic dimensions in preaching.

Lamentation is both a medium for conveying the emotions of the suffering and a resistance to the realities that cause pain. Ra Seungchan defines lamentation as "recognizing the suffering of life and crying out for justice against the present injustice." Lamentation not only forces individuals and communities to confront the realities of the society they belong to in the public sphere but also offers an alternative consciousness that reflects on their history in the light of God's justice. Frank Crüsemann, in this context, emphasizes the social aspect of ancient Israel's laments. Lamentation was not an individual creation but a public act, and the right and legal protection of lamentation played a central role in maintaining social justice in ancient societies. Thus, lamentation suggests a new understanding of God's justice in response to suffering and holds the hope of reinterpreting the essence and meaning of social systems in unjust situations. Although

lamentation can be seen as an individual act, it is essentially a public act of resistance because it reflects the collective emotional experience and pain of the community. By sharing this communal reality and emotions, the solidarity among all those in suffering is strengthened. Stanley Hauerwas states that there is no definitive "solution" to the problem of evil and suffering in society, but the solidarity of the community can absorb "the terror of evil that constantly threatens to destroy all human relationships." True solidarity is therefore formed in the merciful God who laments on the cross. When Jesus Christ cries out in the midst of suffering, it reveals "God's complete identification with the suffering one," rather than an unrealistic rhetoric or expectation. Through this true solidarity, we can look forward to God's justice that will end evil and suffering and bring an end to oppression and alienation under the socio-political structures.

Preaching as Lamentation: The Dynamics of Compassion and Resistance

Ultimately, the compassion and resistance inherent in lamentation—its pastoral and prophetic aspects—emerge as an inseparable dynamic. This demonstrates that the preaching ministry in today's Korean immigrant churches in the U.S., which faces the socio-political reality of marginalization, is not divided into pastoral duty declaring God's compassion for those experiencing alienation and discrimination and prophetic duty to resist structural social injustice and evil, but is one unified mission. It also reminds us that we are all a church, united as the true 'we,' participating in Christ's body and standing in solidarity, liberated from marginalized identities. The incarnation of Christ, in which we partake, is a symbol of God's active and resolute resistance to evil and a demonstration of radical love that actively resists the forces that destroy and distort human life, rather than enduring suffering. The dynamics of Christ's compassion and resistance are evident in His ministry on earth. His merciful work toward the lost and suffering is also a voice of resistance against the unjust social structures and religious systems under violent empire rule. The message, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4), stirred solidarity among the marginalized and oppressed in society. The marginalized were not only objectified and pushed to the periphery, but they could remain in a space of mercy as subjects who had received God's grace. Likewise, the redemptive event of Christ's cross was an act of compassion and mercy toward all those who suffer on earth, and a declaration of resistance against an unjust society. Therefore, preaching as lamentation is, in itself, Christ-centered preaching. Charles Campbell also argues that preaching, by its very nature, is an act of justice against the powers and authorities of this world that stand in opposition to God's justice and will.

However, the message most often conveyed in immigrant church settings has been limited to the spiritual peace and prosperity of individuals within the immigrant community. But preaching as lamentation creates a hermeneutic dynamic that empowers us to resist and overcome the evil inherent in our lives, demonstrating that God's mercy is not a grace separated from our life realities, but a concretized love and praxis. In this way, preaching becomes not an abstract or metaphysical collection of ideas or doctrines, nor merely a sharing of personal experiences, but a "concrete communal praxis that forms the lives of believers" as participants in Christ's love and justice. Furthermore, preaching that declares God's mercy and resistance based on the dynamics of lamentation does not conclude with action but ends by proclaiming hope in our lives. Preaching as lamentation opens a path to restore hope in God's love for those living with marginalized identities in the immigrant experience, like a journey through the wilderness

fraught with anxiety and fear. It offers the possibility of embracing a new identity and a future hope, not being consumed by the marginalized self nor confined to the situational context.

Conclusion

This study proposes a new sermonic-theological approach to overcome the socio-cultural challenges and theological identity crises faced by Korean immigrant churches in the U.S. In the post-pandemic, pluralistic environment, Korean immigrant churches must not remain confined to a traditional pastoral role, but must be reborn as a prophetic community that dismantles marginalized identities and seeks social justice and reconciliation. To achieve this, this paper suggests a hermeneutical and sermonic-theological alternative to dismantle the marginalized selves of immigrants, who are subjected to othering. At the core of this alternative is the rediscovery of the identity of compassion (仁) and resistance centered around the unique concept of "us" in Korean ethnic thought. Preaching as lamentation becomes a powerful sermonic tool that combines God's pastoral mission of mercy and prophetic mission of justice, providing a theological framework for the existential pain and social injustice experienced by immigrant church congregations. This proclamation reinterprets the pain of the congregation and the reality of their marginalization from God's perspective, enabling them to share and overcome their suffering on a communal level. Preaching as lamentation encourages the congregation to expand their faith beyond personal comfort, promoting active faith practices in pursuit of social justice and change.

Nevertheless, the sermonic-theological approach I propose may be challenging for many immigrant church preachers and leaders who are rooted in the traditional evangelical sermonic foundation. To mitigate this challenge, two paradigm shifts are necessary. First, the interpretation of scripture, the sermon's primary text, requires a dual approach of both the text and its context. As evidence, I emphasize in this paper that biblical laments are both spiritual and social. Second, the role of the preacher cannot be split into a dichotomy of pastoral or prophetic responsibility. This is aligned with the essence of the church itself. Moreover, this paradigm shift is a response to the challenges posed by the post-pandemic era. The church must raise a theological and hermeneutical challenge to American society's understanding of the political-social consequences of the 'marginalized self' imposed upon the Korean immigrant community through mainstream cultural history. When the Korean immigrant church community refuses to remain silent in the face of social injustice and takes on a prophetic voice, it will play an important role in not only calling out to God but also effecting real change in our lives. Thus, preaching as God's proclaimed word will dismantle the marginalized identities created by an unjust society and, from that liberation, will fulfill the hope of true freedom as the 'we' of the church, one in Christ's body, enjoying the freedom of being God's 'one' church.