

**When Will We Proclaim Lament from the Pulpit?  
Preaching to a Traumatized Society in the Korean Context<sup>1</sup>**

Jeremy Kangsan Kim, PhD Candidate  
The University of Aberdeen, UK

**Abstract:** *Preaching on nationwide trauma was a less developed theological-homiletical theme of Korean Protestant churches, although Korean society has been traumatized by consecutive national crises during the twentieth century. Despite the fundamental cause of suffering, the unbearable trauma of victims has been interpreted as divine punishment based on early missionary tradition, which is based on an orthodox theodicy. Korean preaching, therefore, revealed its deficiency because it has not only failed its pastoral role to provide a secure haven for victims, but also has not preached a message of justice to the corrupted sociopolitical structures in its prophetic role. This paper suggests the significance of lament as a theological-homiletical strategy that proposes a hermeneutic dynamic of compassion and resistance in response to a national trauma.*

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has been traumatizing and transforming the whole world in various ways for over a year. The society of South Korea (hereafter Korea), has undergone tumultuous moments, particularly in the initial stage of the pandemic (February and March 2020). Mainline preachers from conservative and evangelical churches promptly diagnosed the cause of the crisis as divine punishment from God due to the people's sins—a teaching consistent with conventional theodicy. Thus the church asked its believers for sincere repentance.<sup>2</sup> The sermons emphasized the personal piety in believers' religious lives as a fundamental way to liberate themselves from suffering, and became one of the reasons that some of the churches underlined in-person worship in the midst of the nationwide outbreak of COVID-19 with the statement, "The Korean church has a martyrdom spirit that responded with unceasing worship during the Japanese colonization era, as well as during the Korean war."<sup>3</sup> Thus the "Korean Protestant church" was pointed out as a critical source of infection during the last three COVID-19 waves in Korean society.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the church turned into an object of hatred in society because it did not present a truthful message of comfort, lamentation, and solidarity in the midst of national trauma.

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<sup>1</sup> The main idea of this paper—preaching as lament—is quoted from one of the chapters in my pre-defense dissertation, "Preaching on Social Suffering: Formulating a Homiletical Theology to Preach the Theme of Suffering in the Contemporary Korean Context" (PhD diss., The University of Aberdeen, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Sangduk Kim, "COVID-19 The Pandemic, the Public, and the Korean church," *Theology and Praxis* 26 (2021): 197–220.

<sup>3</sup> Dongkyu Choi, "Christian Ministry in the Era of the New Normal Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Mission and Theology* 52 (2020): 171–200.

<sup>4</sup> The first massive outbreak of COVID-19 in Korea was caused by a secretive Christian sect *Shincheonji* Church of Jesus in March 2020. The second incident was initiated by GwangHoon Jeon and his *Sarang Jeil* Church that held a massive Christian rally in August 2020 in the Gwanghwamun square, located in the center of Seoul. And the third wave was ignited by InterCP (a heresy missional parachurch), IM ministry, and Busan *Yeolbang* Church that allowed the in-person gathering and worship, although it violated the government's guidelines for the prevention of epidemics. Ibid.

In fact, during the last century, Korean society has been exposed to multiple nationwide crises: imperialism, ideological conflict, brutal war, dictatorship, poverty, and economic depression. These various traumas were not limited to specific groups; rather these were existential life-and-death traumas experienced by all people. These collectivistic experiences under the sociopolitical structures not only have overwhelmed “the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning,”<sup>5</sup> but also have created large populations in today’s society who suffer from issues of economic marginalization, psychological anxiety, political and social insecurity, and spiritual emptiness. Yet, the research of trauma within a social context had not significantly developed in both arenas of theology and academia until the 2014 *Sewol* ferry disaster which paralyzed the whole country.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the Korean Protestant church received severe nationwide criticism due to its controversial sermons populated with questionable theodicy during the post-*Sewol* phase. The Korean preachers, nevertheless, repeatedly delivered similar sermons only a few years later, although the *Sewol* case offered the momentous chance to correct its theological-homiletical oversight. The fundamental and distinctive characteristics of preaching in response to social trauma have been affected not only by the theological-homiletical development of Korean Protestant theology but have also been strongly influenced by the sociopolitical context of modern Korean history.

### Social Responses to the National Trauma

Right after the nation’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule (1910–45), which was the first of the national crises that impacted Korean society in the twentieth century, the resultant unstable sociopolitical state of the country was unable to provide a space or time for national grief or to allow closure to the traumatic Japanese experience. Rather, the issue of atrocities during the pitiless imperial regime—including the case of comfort women and forced labor—has turned into a diplomatic matter between Korean and Japanese governments related to the political or economic gain for the state, while the victims’ trauma has not been addressed nor dealt with compassionately and the victims have not received a sincere apology from the Japanese government.<sup>7</sup> The severe ideological and political polarization that resulted from the period of division—the trusteeship (1945–48) and the Korean War (1950–53)—brought about paranoia among Koreans who became obsessed with discerning, in fear, whether a neighbor was an enemy or ally. This fear and mistrust often resulted in the massacre of innocent civilians.<sup>8</sup> The government exhibited paranoiac behavior by confining people who expressed critical opinions of governmental authorities and by labeling them “communists.” The victims and bereaved families

<sup>5</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 33.

<sup>6</sup> After the *Sewol* case, academia has been endeavoring to identify the origins of the issue by studying the series of national traumatic events through the holistic lens of “trauma” and recognizing that distinctive traumatic events have had a cumulative effect on contemporary South Korean society. Representative research studies include: Dongchoon Kim and Myunghye Kim (eds.), *Korea in Terms of Trauma* (Goyang: Critical History, 2014); Sungmin Kim, et al., *The Nine Traumatic Events in Korean History* (Seoul: Paradigms Book, 2016); Sunyoung Yoo, *Colonial Trauma: Finding the Origin of Collective Anxiety in Korean Society* (Seoul: Pure History, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> In the 1965 Japan–Republic of Korea Normalization Treaty, the Japanese government claimed they completed compensation to Korea regarding their atrocities in the colonial era by proposing huge economic aids. However, the treaty stipulates that the comfort women and the forced labor issues would not have a claim within international law, thus silencing their voices. J. Ward and William D. Lay, “The Comfort Women Controversy: Not Over Yet,” *East Asia* 33 (2016): 259.

<sup>8</sup> Jaeseung Lee, “What is Justice in a Violent Society?” in *The Nine Traumatic Events Left in Korean History*, ed. Sungmin Kim (Seoul: Paradigms Book, 2016), 130–31.

had to endure the misrepresentation of their distress as mental problems instead of being provided with the compassionate help they needed to bring closure to their traumatic experience. Instead, according to Judith Herman, they adopted dissociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimization, and outright denial of the experience of suffering.<sup>9</sup> The voice of the traumatized was utterly silenced and overlooked within their controlled society. The anticommunism frame used state violence as an effective means to maintain the military dictators' regimes during the period of the democracy movement (1961–87). The authorities systematically suppressed and ruthlessly penalized people who voiced their opinions in support of justice and peace. As a result, more than a thousand people were tortured, jailed, disappeared, or even killed after being falsely accused of being North Korean spies.<sup>10</sup> The government allowed a small economic compensation to the victims or their family members under the condition that they would not disclose the brutality and cruelty of the government's action.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the sufferers' traumatic experiences were monetized and minimized to be a personal matter, which created the condition known as *han* throughout the community, society, and country.<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of these consecutive national crises, the unbearable trauma of victims has been forced to be seen as an individual matter. The victims did not receive a sincere apology from the perpetrator, their trauma was diagnosed and managed by the governmental authorities, the cruel suffering was translated into terms of economic value, and victims' demand to know the truth of the traumatic event caused them to be labeled an enemy of the state even though the nationwide traumatic events had occurred under sociopolitical structures. In 2014, these characteristic responses to social trauma were repeated again in the case of the “*Sewol* ferry incident”<sup>13</sup> with no change. That incident—which resulted in over three hundred casualties—was not just a maritime incident; rather it was a national, socially-traumatic event. Although the inexplicable action of key crew members, who instead of rescuing passengers fled from the submerging vessel, was the main cause of this tragic incident, the fundamental cause was the corrupt relationship that existed between government institutions and the ferry company, which led to the approval of an overloaded and insufficiently inspected vessel. The tragedy was also the result of the passive rescue operations of the Coast Guard that had prevailed for a long period in the socio-structural system. Nevertheless, the response of the society during the post-*Sewol* phase reminded us again how Korean society has treated victims of these national traumatic events. Soon after the incident, the government too hastily defined the sunken ferry event as merely a maritime accident. In doing so, it diluted their responsibility and blamed others for the cause of

<sup>9</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, 87.

<sup>10</sup> Dongchoon Kim, “The Long Road Toward Truth and Reconciliation: Unwavering Attempts to Achieve Justice in South Korea,” *Critical Asian Studies* 42(3) (2010): 537

<sup>11</sup> With the use of brutal violence, the people were denied their human dignity so that the traumatized victims were treated as less than human. Dongchoon Kim, “The War/State Violence and Traumatic Korean Society.” in *Korea in Times of Trauma*, eds. Dongchoon Kim and Myunghee Kim (Goyang: Critical History, 2014), 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Han* is not a single feeling but many feelings condensed together, including resentment, regret, resignation, aggression, anxiety, loneliness, longing, sorrow, and emptiness. These collective emotions of suffering are the characteristics of *han* which has been engraved in the hearts of Koreans by its history of oppression. Jae Hoon Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds—Han* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>13</sup> The incident occurred on April 16, 2014. The ferry was headed to Jeju island with 476 passengers on board, including more than 300 high school students who were on a field trip. Suddenly the ferry tilted and quickly began to sink. Immediately, the captain and key crew members fled from their submerging vessel to the safety of a rescue boat, even as hundreds of their passengers remained trapped inside, having been told, “Stay put,” “Do not move from your location.” In the end, while 172 survived, a total of 299 died, and 5 remain missing. Of the 325 high school students on board, only 75 survived.

the tragedy and the failure of the rescue procedure.<sup>14</sup> The conservative media emphasized the need to end the *Sewol* phase of mourning and to return daily lives to normal as soon as possible by using the “accident-compensation” logic proposed by the government. As a result, the victims’ voices that were calling for the truth of the incident were severely minimized. Rather, the unbearable suffering of bereaved families was managed or diagnosed by the governmental institution which specialized in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The medical experts, however, were unable to comprehend the demand from the bereaved families that the only way to treat their psychological state was to uncover and reveal the truth of the incident.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the symptoms of trauma, such as grief and anger, had not been appropriately evaluated, and their misery became medicalized.<sup>16</sup> As the period for settlement of the incident was extended, the rightwing group fiercely denounced the bereaved families as rebellious because they not only expressed critical opinions of the government but also became an obstructive factor with regard to the economy. Moreover, the conservative media and the intelligence agencies made an effort to isolate the bereaved families and their supportive civil organizations from the rest of society by labeling them “communists” who were a danger to the state.<sup>17</sup>

The *Sewol* case revealed that social trauma continues to be dealt with as an individual matter in contemporary society, even when the cause of suffering results from sociopolitical structures. The voice of sufferers, furthermore, has been silenced by the authorities without any proposal for a safe place to relieve their sorrow and agony. Yet the case proposed a significant moment to academia for researching “social trauma” as the people declared that nationwide trauma could no longer be regarded as an individual matter.<sup>18</sup> Further, community and solidarity have been underlined by sociologists and psychologists as an ultimate way to overcome the issues of social trauma in Korean society because of its collectivistic features.

### **Theological-Homiletical Development on National Trauma in the Korean Protestant Church**

Similar to the social response to national traumas by Korean society, the Korean Protestant Church has mainly considered social trauma as a matter of individual belief and responsibility. In particular, it speaks of punishment for sin rather than asking for God’s compassion and justice in society. This attitude strengthened during these consecutive nationwide crises.

In 1885, when the first clerical Protestant missionaries arrived in Korea from North America, the missionaries used consistently vivid approaches to social crisis issues with a dichotomous view such as the strong division between the sacred and secular.<sup>19</sup> At the dawn of

<sup>14</sup> Park Sojin, “Rethinking Violence and Neoliberalism by Examining the Case of the Sewolho Disaster,” *Culture and Society* 23(3) (2018): 149.

<sup>15</sup> Myunghee Kim, “Medicalization of Misery: Critical Realistic Consideration of the Sewol Trauma,” *Health and Social Science* 38 (2015): 232–35.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (eds.), *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the government deployed more than one thousand (accumulated figure) police officers in the city of *Ansan*, which was the residence of the majority of the victims, in order to monitor the bereaved families. Sunmin Lee and Sanggil Lee, “The *Sewolho*, State, and the Media: Critical Discursive Analysis of ‘The Imagination of the State’ Represented in the Opinion Articles of <Chosun-ilbo> and <Hankyoreh>,” *Media and Society* 23(4) (2015): 55–58.

<sup>18</sup> Hyeon Jung Lee, “Social Suffering after the Sewol Ferry Sinking: On Representation, Experience and Intervention,” *Health and Social Science*, 43 (2016): 63–83.

<sup>19</sup> The non-political stands of early North American missionaries in Korea made a significant contribution to the Presbyterian Council of Missions’ statement of the “Relationship between Church and State,” published in *the*

Japanese colonization, the Korean church initiated the Great Revival Movement in 1907. The movement, however, focused on personal piety by which believers publicly repented of their sin with the help of the Holy Spirit and promised to return to the original faith of the New Testament. The movement established *Tong-Sung Kido* (pray aloud),<sup>20</sup> a unique prayer of the Korean church, as a form of lamentation in the midst of crises.<sup>21</sup> The highlighting of the traditional doctrines in the movement led to sermons filled with eschatology and were preached by missionaries during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). As a result, these factors were intentionally designed to discourage political involvement following the policy of missionaries not to take political stands but instead to adopt a neutral demeanor toward national issues impacting the Korean peninsula.<sup>22</sup> Yet in contrast to the missionaries, the Korean preachers proclaimed justice and liberation in their sermons, as well as having led the independence movement since the emergence of the native church leaders in the 1910s. The representative case was the March First Movement in 1919, which awakened an independence-oriented Korean nationalism. Sixteen out of the thirty-three leaders who signed the Independence Declaration on March 1 were Christians.<sup>23</sup> The rationale for the movement was well projected in *Sermons by One Hundred Pastors and Teachers*, the first book of collected sermons by native Korean Christian leaders.<sup>24</sup> The preachers proclaimed that the citizens of heaven must be social beings who also contribute to the world.

However, the failure of the nationwide March First Movement in 1919 created radical discord between faith and reality. Therefore, in their preaching, the “premillennial eschatology,” which was one of the missionary traditions, was underscored as the theological way to interpret the traumatic era.<sup>25</sup> The second coming of Christ and the afterlife were popularly used as topics by prominent preachers, such as Ikdoon Kim and Sunju Kil. Moreover, *Lectures on Homiletics*, the first homiletic textbook of the Korean church—published by Charles A. Clark in 1925 and the only one used until the late 1970s—strongly influenced the native preachers to have the following homiletical perspective with regard to the national crisis: “The primary purpose of preaching is not social reform and cultivating knowledge, but leading the people to heaven by

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*Christ Press* (October 3, 1901), the report of Arthur J. Brown, a secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the PCUSA, *Report of a Visitation of the Korea Mission of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.* (1902), and Charles A. Clark’s letter titled *the Korean Information Papers* (1907) to the Mission Board in New York.

<sup>20</sup> *Tong-Sung Kido* is introduced in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* as follows: “In Korean congregations, among others, Tong-Sung Kido is a popular and an important part of prayer life. Usually, the congregation is given a specific time period with a common theme of petition or supplication. Then all pray aloud at the same time. The voices of others will not bother them when they concentrate on their own earnest prayers, longing for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.” United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 1992), 446.

<sup>21</sup> Myungsil Kim, “Tong-Sung Kido as a Communal Lament Prayer,” *Theology and Praxis* 24(1) (2010): 299–335.

<sup>22</sup> Kyungbae Min, “The Presbyterian Church in Korean History,” in *Korean American Ministry: A Resource Book*, eds. Sang Hyun Lee and John V. Moor (Louisville: General Assembly Council, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1993), 7–8; Eunsik Cho, “The Great Revival of 1907 in Korea: Its Cause and Effect,” *Missiology: An International Review* 26(3) (1998): 291.

<sup>23</sup> Insu Kim, *The History of the Christian Church in Korea* (Seoul: Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press, 1997), 412.

<sup>24</sup> Ikhwan Yang, ed., *Sermons by One Hundred Pastors and Teachers, Vol. 1* (Seoul: Pakmoon Seokwan, 1920).

<sup>25</sup> Arthur J. Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East: The Story of Korea’s Transformation and Japan’s Rise to Supremacy in the Orient* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1919), 540.

redeeming them from sin and death.”<sup>26</sup> This approach encouraged preachers to thoroughly criticize sin and repeatedly call for repentance. Notably, the consecutive traumatic experiences after the liberation—the trusteeship (1945–48) and the Korean War (1950–53)—were understood by preachers as divine punishments that were the result of the Shinto shrine worship by believers during the colonial era, and the severe theological conflict between liberals and conservatives. In this period the primary focus of sermons was repentance. The representative figure was Hyungryong Park, a Calvinist theologian and preacher. In the midst of the war, he consistently declared that the cause of the national crisis was individual and national sin. Park called on refugees to show their repentance to God, and he considered their suffering as providing an opportunity to strengthen the people’s relationship with God.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the homiletical contents of suffering are filled with otherworldly discourses that underscore the practice of personal piety, which was considered the ultimate way to solve the national traumatic experience just as it did during the colonial period.

Korean society faced two significant transitions after the post-war rehabilitation, which strongly affected the emergence of two theological streams—the prosperity gospel and the *minjung* theology—in the period of the democracy movement (1961–1987). Firstly, as industrialization and modernization emerged as the highest priority of the country, material success became identified as one of the ways to achieve liberation from nationwide trauma. These sociological factors resulted in highlighting the proclamation of a personal relationship with God to achieve individual success and blessings—which refers to the prosperity gospel—which subsequently flourished among the mainline churches (conservative and evangelical). The representative preacher was David Yonggi Cho. He claimed that salvation is not limited to the soul but also has effects on reality as a “wider salvation,” which means prosperity in all things and a healthy life. In this sense, he established his own theological discourse, which is called the fivefold gospel and threefold blessing.<sup>28</sup> Most of the growing churches’ sermons were filled with the prosperity gospel, and the concept of blessing became understood in terms of personal and material goods rather than social justice or ethical living.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, this phenomenon led the Korean church and believers to disregard the sociopolitical and socio-structural issues at that time.

Secondly, the military dictator regime emerged, which took precedence over social values such as civic ethics and human rights. These political factors paved the way for the emergence of *minjung* (the masses or people) theology. Byung-Mu Ahn, one of the founders, has developed an indigenous biblical hermeneutic for *minjung* by discovering the *of ὄχλος* (*ochlos*)

<sup>26</sup> Charles A. Clark, *Lectures on Homiletics* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1925; revised edition 1997), 13–41.

<sup>27</sup> Hyungryong Park, *A Sermon Collection: Our Refugee* (Seoul: Euncheon Moonhwa Press, 1953).

<sup>28</sup> The fivefold Gospel is the Gospel of regeneration, being filled with the Holy Spirit, healing, blessing, and Christ’s return. The threefold blessing is the blessing of the soul’s wellbeing which is redeeming one’s soul and becoming filled with the Holy Spirit, the blessing of prosperity which is represented by material success, and the blessing of health which is represented by healing, based on 3 John 2. David Yonggi Cho, *Fivefold Gospel and Threefold Blessings* (Seoul: Seoul Malssum-Sa, 1998), 262–264.

<sup>29</sup> Eunjo Mary Kim points out the problem of the Korean church during the 1970s–80s as follows: 1) emphasis on a personal relationship with God; 2) emphasis on God’s blessing as the fruit of personal devotion and faithful commitment to church activities; 3) emphasis on faith that leads to positive results. Many Korean preachers understand the Christian faith to be the key to gaining positive results; 4) emphasis on the church-growth model of evangelism. Eunjo Mary Kim, “A Korean American Perspective: Sing a New Song in a Strange Land,” in *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Christine M. Smith (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 101–106.

in the Gospel of Mark, which indicates the masses following Jesus.<sup>30</sup> He proposes an alternative understanding of sin. The root of sin is the structural evil of society that brings suffering upon the *minjung*, so that sin is not located in human disobedience to God but in covetousness and power by which humans become subordinate to sociopolitical structures.<sup>31</sup> Nam-Dong Suh, another founder, concentrates on the phenomenological factor of *han*, which is the driving force to establish solidarity within the common traumatic experience and to raise people's voices. He suggests that the role of the preacher is the priesthood of *han* to heal the *minjungs'* wounds, and to relieve and comfort their *han* in the sociopolitical context.<sup>32</sup> Thus, liberation-type theology made pronounced efforts to proclaim justice and humanization for accomplishing the kingdom of God, while it also solidified the voices of sufferers who were traumatized under political oppression and socio-structural issues. The theological-homiletical strategy in this period underwent a significant transformation in which the response to national trauma was turned into worldly blessing and humanization—away from the otherworldly. Yet many of the traumatized people in this era chose the mainline church, which underscored prosperity as their spiritual refuge, rather than the liberal church (*minjung* theology). The novelty of the alternative theology, the sociopolitical context at that time, and the naïve attitude about *han* had made the people hesitant to choose the liberation type of theology,<sup>33</sup> while the identity of churches corresponded well with the integral request of the sufferers for emotional rest, healing, and physical aid.

The liberal church proposed the prophetic role for sermons that identified unjust sociopolitical issues that existed in reality as the fundamental causes of trauma, but it has not successfully provided a spiritually secure haven or created a pastoral role that embraces the sufferers. Even though the mainline church corresponded well with the request of the spiritual and emotional comfort of the sufferers, their messages took on a de-political and de-historical attitude. Then, their preaching disregarded the resistance, which is the prophetic role of the sermon as displayed in previous periods.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the theological-homiletical strategy to respond to nationwide traumatic events has led to a deficiency of two factors—compassion and

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<sup>30</sup> Ahn argues that the *ochlos* are contrasted with the ruling hierarchy from Jerusalem, and they were clearly on the side of Jesus: they were the *minjung* from Galilee and they were an object of consternation for the authorities and the ruling class. Byung-Mu Ahn, "Jesus and Ochlos in the Context of His Galilean Ministry," in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Paul S. Chung (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 43–47; Byung-Mu Ahn, "The Gospel of Mark," in *Reading Minjung Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Yung Suk Kim and Jin-Ho Kim (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 69–70.

<sup>31</sup> Byung-Mu Ahn, *The Story of Minjung Theology* (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1991), 92.

<sup>32</sup> Nam-Dong Suh, *Study on Minjung Theology* (Seoul: HangilSa, 1983), 43.

<sup>33</sup> Korean society, in the post-Korean War era, was paranoid about communism, so that embracing liberation theology that emphasizes praxis, a concept from the Marxist tradition, was impossible. Indeed, the alternative approaches of *minjung* theology such as the image of God, Christology, and biblical hermeneutics elicited uncertainty and anxiety on the part of the *minjung*. Koo D. Yun, "Minjung and Asian Pentecostals," in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: A Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, eds. Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, and Kyoung-Jae Kim (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 93. The wounds of *han* made the connection with the Other an attractive factor while forming solidarity, but the resistance voice of this group also led to the acceptance and eruption of violence. Therefore, violence as an agonized form of love is not a fundamental solution in the process of liberation of the Other from social trauma. Jae Hoon Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds—Han* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 155–58; Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>34</sup> A similar phenomenon has been discovered in the Black church community in the United States. Black practical theologian Dale P. Andrews analyzes the situation as establishing "a big chasm" between church and theology. Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 43.

resistance—in each preaching group over the last four decades. Finally, the Korean Protestant church encountered the *Sewol* ferry incident without having a chance to integrate its perspectives.

After the incident, society anticipated that Korean Protestants, as a dominant religious group of Koreans, would demonstrate a compassionate response and provide a hopeful message to meet the needs of the grieving society. However, their theological-homiletical strategy on social trauma was unprepared. Therefore, many preachers mimicked the traditional perspective as the church proposed during previous events.<sup>35</sup> The dominant interpretation of the incident was divine punishment as a result of individual or communal sin, although the preachers agreed that the fundamental cause of the event was the corrupt socio-structural system. Preachers insisted that the incident was God's sign or warning to demand our repentance or the incident provided a good opportunity to restore one's relationship with God. The prominent preachers, finally, raised the questionable interpretation that the victims, in particular high school students, had been used as a scapegoat for urging society's repentance to God. The sermon of Samhwan Kim presents a representative case. He claimed "God did not sink the ferry without a reason. It is because God is about to sink this nation. However, instead, God has chosen these young students to give this nation one more chance."<sup>36</sup> As Thomas Long claims, these sermons that apply a theological interpretation—which is based on conventional theodicy—to the context of traumatic suffering cruelly mocked the bereaved families instead of offering comfort.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the sermons of dominant Protestant leaders caused national outrage while the Korean church ranked as the most untrustworthy group in society, and resulted in the exodus from the church of 80 percent of the victims and bereaved families, who were left with ineradicable scars.<sup>38</sup> Although the consecutive national traumas presented an obstacle to the development of the theological-homiletical perspective of the Korean preaching on social trauma, they have still not been utterly liberated from the early missionary point of view on social trauma, which emphasized personal piety within its dogmatic discourse. As the theological-homiletical interpretation of social trauma has been limited to being an individual matter of faith, Korean preaching lost its voice of compassion for the sufferers and of resistance to the unjust society. Nevertheless, the Korean preachers once again repeated their same perspective on social trauma in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Preaching as Lament

Lament is found throughout the Old Testament, principally in the Psalms, and these are cited in the New Testament.<sup>39</sup> The petitioner of the laments submits a variety of complaints and

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<sup>35</sup> The sermon analysis was conducted with the use of twenty-nine sermon samples—delivered in the specific period from April 20 to June 1, 2014—which were preached by nineteen preachers and distributed by one organization.

<sup>36</sup> Samhwan Kim, "The three requisites of the faith (1 Thess. 5:15–23)," Myungsung Presbyterian Church, May 11, 2014. Other prominent preachers delivered similar messages such as, "If we don't consider their sacrifice to be the steppingstone to make this a better world, there will be no way to atone for our sin"; "The children have become a sacrifice and they have died instead of us"; and, "I believe the students and other victims were used as missionaries to restore our country."

<sup>37</sup> Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say?: Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 44–45.

<sup>38</sup> Hyunmo Pyo, "Do you know why victims' families left the church?" *Kidok Kongbo*, April 14, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> The Book of Psalms contains sixty laments which is 40 percent of all psalms. The lament psalms commonly consist of five elements—an address to God, complaints, requests, motivation (why God should act), and confidence in God. Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012), 65.

requests that God not only regard the individual's physical and psychological stability but also social justice and shalom. In spite of its vital importance, lament has seldom been practiced in the contemporary Western church or in the Korean church.<sup>40</sup> Preaching that lacks lament in the face of societal trauma reinforces the misinterpretation that suffering is a punishment from God who is sadistic and without compassion. Further, it fails to support the social and political dynamics in this world that calls us to justice. Lament, therefore, simultaneously proposes the voice of compassion and resistance to preachers who are encountering the theological-homiletical question of social trauma.

Preaching as lament provides a secure haven in which to break the silence of suffering by proposing an opportunity to encounter the compassionate God who suffers with the sufferer. When people encounter a traumatic experience, the initial response is silence. The unexpected suffering causes silent "psychic numbing"<sup>41</sup> and it imposes isolation on the victim who is cut off from society, even destroying the memory of where the victim belongs. Preachers, in this situation, often have a theological reaction and stick to the domain of theodicy, as shown in the Korean preaching during the national crises; nevertheless, "the painstaking task of reconstructive theology may well come later; the more immediate task for the sermon is lamentation."<sup>42</sup> The lament enables the sufferers to speak, and allows them to express their emotions while it breaks the silence. Further, the language of poetry in the lament "allows for ambiguity and openness, both putting experience into words,"<sup>43</sup> despite the fact that ordinary language is inadequate for the articulation of pain and agony. Dorothee Sölle notes that the first language out of suffering is psalmic, which enables us to find a language that leads out of the incomprehensible suffering that makes one mute.<sup>44</sup> The lament, therefore, allows preachers to interrogate the root causes of suffering and to ask searching questions about God's attitude toward suffering.<sup>45</sup>

Further, lament invites the sufferers to bring out one's sorrow and rage before God and also awakens them to the awareness that God always listens and can be trusted to help in the midst of the horrible experiences. Preaching as lament, therefore, makes space for the experience of the compassionate God who is crucified as divine and fully human. Andrew Purves notes that "God's compassion requires us to understand God now in terms of God's vulnerability and willingness to suffer with us,"<sup>46</sup> like the original meaning of compassion in Latin, which is "to suffer alongside someone."<sup>47</sup> The ultimate compassion of Jesus is revealed on the cross as a victim of violence, a seemingly weak and ineffective figure, who was unable to protect himself

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<sup>40</sup> Denise Hopkins, *Journey Through the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 5–6; Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World Through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene: Pickwick Publication, 2008), 11; Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012), 131, 441–45; Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>41</sup> Robert J. Lifton, *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 27

<sup>42</sup> Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., *Crisis Preaching: Personal and Public* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 28; Similarly, LeRoy H. Aden and Robert G. Hughes note "giving voice to human lament" as the first step in pastoral preaching on suffering. LeRoy H. Aden and Robert G. Hughes, *Preaching God's Compassion: Comforting Those Who Suffer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2008), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 70.

<sup>45</sup> Sally A. Brown, "When Lament Shapes the Sermon." in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, eds. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Purves, *The Search for Compassion: Spirituality and Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>47</sup> Alister McGrath, *Suffering* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 68.

from suffering. His lament on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” rejected a pious attitude toward God and stands as testimony that sufferers today are not the first to have felt abandoned by God.<sup>48</sup> It also delivers the message of solidarity with the others: “It’s okay to feel this way; God remains with you and for you despite what you are experiencing at this moment.”<sup>49</sup> Preaching as lament, as a result, discloses “not a disappearance of scars, or an absence of tears, but rather their acknowledgment in the presence and purposes of God and wiping away of tears that have really been cried.”<sup>50</sup> Further, the preaching moves the sufferer out from narcissistic ground then enables people to experience a compassionate God who walks along with them in the midst of suffering.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, preaching about social trauma is not only intended to perform the rhetoric of lament while publicly proposing a pastoral refuge for sufferers, but is also intended to participate in and proclaim the compassionate God within their reality. At that moment, the preaching that was imbued with God’s compassion—sympathy with the divine pathos—evokes prophetic speech about how God weeps over our plight as we seek God’s justice and peace in this world.<sup>52</sup>

Preaching as lament represents a resistant voice that is a profound expression of people’s desire for God’s justice and liberation. In the public arena, the lament not only brings individuals and communities into a closer view of the reality of the society to which they belong but also proposes an alternative consciousness, one in which people can see their history in the light of God’s justice. Many laments in the Psalms implicitly or explicitly rejected the idea that suffering is caused by sin; rather they recognized that it is often caused by the socio-structural context.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Jeremiah is a representative figure who proclaimed the resistant voice against unjust political-religious institutions which sinned against the covenant with God. In fact, his lament was not merely an expression of mourning for the loss of the covenant and its effects, but it also embodied social critique.<sup>54</sup> Jeremiah, therefore, described how fundamental evil resulted in society’s hurt and pain in the form of social suffering—injustice, corruption, violence, abuse of the vulnerable—but also how it restores the hope of a new orientation with God. Frank Crüsemann, in this respect, underlines the social aspects of the laments in ancient Israel; it was not only an individual’s creation, but it occurred in public environments as a praxis so that the right to lament and the protections of the law functioned as the two central pillars in the maintenance of social justice in ancient society.<sup>55</sup> Lament, therefore, proposes a new definition of the situation in light of the reality of suffering. The lament also encourages hope in the midst of the social situation, which becomes a significant factor that makes believers who are suffering

<sup>48</sup> Nancy J. Duff, “Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church.” in *Lament*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 101.

<sup>50</sup> David Schnasa Jacobsen, “Promise and Cross: Homiletical Theology, the Vocative Word Extra Nos, and the Task of a Revisionist Eschatology,” in *Homiletical Theology in Action: The Unfinished Theological Task of Preaching* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 123.

<sup>51</sup> Luke A. Powery, “Lament: Homiletical Groans in the Spirit,” *Homiletic* 34(1) (2009): 33.

<sup>52</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2008), 136–37.

<sup>53</sup> Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel’s Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 29.

<sup>54</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 155.

<sup>55</sup> Frank Crüsemann, “Das Alte Testament als Grundlage der Diakonie.” quoted in Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (eds.), *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 169–73.

behave differently than society expects.<sup>56</sup> In these respects, preaching as lament is not only the individual voice of mourning, but also the public voice of resistance. As an agency of hope, lament acts within the world of suffering, it invites people into deeper sociopolitical engagement, while at the same time it reframes and reconstitutes the nature and meaning of the social structural system that longs for the justice of God.<sup>57</sup> Thus, preaching as lament is not only cathartic, it is also social, because its expression and sharing of painful emotion intensifies personal ties and even enhances communal solidarity. Stanley Hauerwas states we do not have an exact “solution” to the problems of evil and suffering in society, but solidarity in the community makes it possible “to absorb the destructive terror of evil that constantly threatens to destroy all human relations.”<sup>58</sup> Genuine solidarity has formed in the compassionate God who laments on the cross. When Jesus cried out in the midst of suffering, it revealed “God’s solidarity with the sufferer, not in unrealistic platitudes or false expectations, but in total identification and solidarity.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, preaching as lament establishes the hermeneutic dynamic of compassion and resistance within its praxis: the worth and value of the sufferers are not invalidated by the compassionate God, but the divine experience leads them to act with courage and claim justice in God’s fierce resistance to the evil and suffering in their reality.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, in preaching, the sufferer’s solidarity—which is established upon the experience of a compassionate God—has not been limited to the personal level as a charity, but it discloses a more radical love which offers resistance through the power to break the silence of evil in an unjust society.

Research on lament, despite its simultaneous nature, has been divided into pastoral and prophetic roles by mainline and liberal groups respectively, and is reflected in dealing with the national traumas by the Korean Protestant church. Since the late 1990s, lament has emerged as a significant theme in biblical theology and homiletics.<sup>61</sup> Approaches on lament, however, reveal stark differences depending on theological stands. Firstly, the mainline group personally underscored the pastoral character of lament that is a personal petition to God. In such petitions, sufferers ask for God’s intervention in the midst of their suffering that is the result of sin which violated their covenant relationship with God.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, sincere repentance to God who hears the petitioners’ agony is stressed as a homiletical strategy to liberate them from suffering. This was clearly represented in the sermons that responded to the *Sewol* ferry incident. This orientation is the reason why their preaching did not seem to have practical implications for the

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<sup>56</sup> Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 109; Katongole, *Born from Lament*, 95.

<sup>57</sup> Katongole, *Born from Lament*, 261.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 53.

<sup>59</sup> Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 101.

<sup>60</sup> Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 111–12.

<sup>61</sup> Tae-Kyung Kim, “The Psalms research in current Study since the 1990’s,” *Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 20(3) (2014): 325–56.

<sup>62</sup> Jungwoo Kim and Yoomi Park, “Preaching with Pastoral Counseling according to the Psalms,” *Hermeneia Today* 43 (2008): 85–101; Sa-Ya Lee, “Literary and Theological features in the Book of Lamentations,” *Theological Forum* 55 (2009): 7-33; Changhoon Kim, “Preaching from the Psalms,” *Journal of Evangelical Practical Theology* 24 (2011): 71–102; Taehoon Lee, “Exegesis and Preaching Guide on Lamentations,” *Hermeneia Today* 52 (2011): 155–168; Daehyeok Kim, “A Methodological Suggestion for Genre-Sensitive Preaching: Focused on the Lament Psalms,” *Journal of Evangelical Practical Theology* 30 (2014): 42-88; Daewoong Kim, “The Theology of Lamentations in the Light of the Oracles of Jeremiah,” *Bible and Theology* 82 (2017): 29–61; Sang-Ki Moon, “The Practice of Preaching in Consideration Literary Characteristics of the Psalms of the Old Testament,” *Gospel and Praxis* 64(1) (2019): 181–213.

victims and bereaved families despite the fact that the preachers highlighted lament: the specific feature of lament that was highlighted was the consequence of divine punishment, and that approach did not allow sufferers to experience genuine compassion from others in their reality. Further, the preaching did not build up the solidarity of the victims and bereaved families as a voice of resistance. Conversely, the liberal group publicly emphasized the prophetic character of lament as an expression of communal grief raised to God by those who suffer under sociopolitical or socio-structural violence and oppression.<sup>63</sup> In this way, lament was a voice of resistance against unjust realities while longing for God's justice and shalom. Yet, it presents a similar problem with preaching that too often concentrates exclusively on the prophetic. Those who preached from this more liberal orientation have adapted the solidarity of sufferers that resulted from their shared experience of sociopolitical oppression. Although the voice of resistance publicly revealed social issues and the existence of the others who are marginalized in society, ironically it caused the exodus of some of the sufferers from the liberal tradition. The wounds of sufferers made their connection with the others an attractive factor in the formation of solidarity but the resistance of this group also led to the acceptance and eruption of violence in its praxis.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, in this orientation to preaching, the identity of individuals who need physical and spiritual care is sometimes overlooked.

Preaching as lament, however, is neither a personally focused pastoral task addressed to sufferers while underscoring their "trauma," nor is it the publicly emphasized prophetic task to address social injustice and violence while highlighting "national" matters. These are not independent projects of preaching on national traumas and therefore should not be divided into two separate tasks. Instead, preaching as lament provides a pastoral voice to sufferers, liberating them from their silenced reality by articulating God's compassion. Speaking compassionately then has led to presenting the prophetic voice as a way to establish the genuine solidarity of resistance against evil and unjust socio-structural context by proclaiming God's justice and peace.

Korean society has been traumatized by multiple national crises. But the consecutive cruel events failed to provide physical and psychological space to recover from the unbearable trauma of those who sufferer. Rather, the voices of sufferers have been silenced and forgotten while the social trauma is regarded as an individual matter. Indeed, the Korean Protestant church's theological-homiletical point of view with regard to nationwide trauma—which is based on orthodox theodicy and a dichotomous view of the world—enforced the idea that the sufferers deserved divine punishment due to their sin. As a result, the church abandoned its role for providing compassion to the suffers and for raising a voice of resistance to evil and unjust social structures which produce various forms of social suffering. These days, however, social

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<sup>63</sup> Young-Il Kim asserts that lament proposes a public voice to resist unjust reality that is a homiletical strategy of the prophetic role. Young-Il Kim, "Interpreting the Psalms," *Theological Studies* 30 (1989): 203–214; Sehoon Son notes that lament discloses the people who are oppressed and who suffer under socio-economic power and authoritarian political power in contemporary society. Sehoon Son, "Comprehending Lament in the Psalms," *Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 15 (2003): 65–94; Jong-Gil Kim claims that lament is the communal voice of *minjung* who suffer under sociopolitical oppression. Jong-Gil Kim, "The Counter Speech of Minjung in Psalms 9–10," *Theological Thought* 137 (2007): 40–66; Tae Kyung Kim proposes that the economic theological theme of researching lament focuses on concept of the poor and needy who are under sociopolitical oppression. Tae Kyung Kim, "Economic theology and economic ethics in the Psalms," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 82(1) (2012): 75–98.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds*, 155–58.

trauma pervades our lives in various forms due to the rapid transformation of society within its multinational and multicultural contexts. Therefore, encountering people who are suffering from diverse social issues becomes the inevitable task of preachers every Sunday. The task is not limited to Korean society, but the mission of preachers all around the world where people are facing traumatic experiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, racism, political conflict, and military coups. Now is the time to preach lament from the pulpit in places where God's compassion and God's justice are needed.