

Jeremy Kangsan Kim. *Preaching on Social Suffering: Formulating a Homiletical Theology for the Contemporary Korean Context*. Eugene: Pickwick Publication, 2023. 244 pages. \$29.40.

This book is an attempt to formulate a homiletical theology for preaching on social suffering in the contemporary Korean context, focusing on Sewol Ferry Sinking in 2014, a tragic event that claimed 304 lives in South Korea. Since the tragedy occurred a few days before Easter Sunday, Korean preachers were faced with theological questions, such as why God left the innocent to die helplessly and how Christians could understand it and respond to such a calamity. Jeremy Kangsan Kim argues that Korean Protestant preachers failed to adequately respond to the tragedy due to the limitations of the theological framework they employed to interpret suffering. Therefore, he proposes a new model of preaching on social suffering as lament grounded on Confucian ren (仁, meaning "co-humanity" or "humaneness").

In the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, Kim sets the foundation for understanding the concept of "social suffering" by locating it in the scholarly discussions from the research in the eighteenth century to contemporary academia. After describing the traumatic events in modern Korean history to catch the characteristics of social suffering in the Korean context, he defines social suffering as "collective suffering that emerges from sociopolitical violence and oppression" (30-31).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter takes the Sewol ferry incident as a case study, focusing on how social suffering was expressed in the aftermath of the tragedy. Consequently, the author reveals that Korean society's response to the tragedy was identical to the reaction to earlier national traumatic events and criticizes Korean Protestant preachers for failing to effectively offer sincere comfort and support for those who were suffering.

In chapter 3, the author analyzes twenty-nine sermons delivered after the traumatic event, focusing on how preachers addressed three topics —suffering, the Sewol ferry incident, and applications related to the incident. As a result, the author uncovers two approaches to Korean preaching that show distinctive theological-homiletical perspectives on social suffering. The first interpretation views the incident as a result of egocentric actions and desires based on original sin or a sign or warning from God (86), while the second considers it a consequence of sociostructural corruption. (87)

In chapter 4, Kim traces the theological-homiletical foundation of the two streams presented in the sermon samples. He identifies the theological foundation of suffering as the result of original sin, which is emphasized by Western missionaries and the conservative majority of Korean churches. On the other hand, there is the view of suffering as the result of sociostructural matters, as presented in Minjung theology. The author argues these two approaches have limits in proclaiming an integrative gospel since they tend to lack either compassion or resistance in response to social suffering. For instance, if one emphasizes resistance to correct social discrepancy resulting in a social traumatic event, it tends to fail to comfort the sufferers with sincere compassion, and vice versa.

In chapter 5, Kim proposes preaching as lament which is an alternative homiletical model to overcome the limits of both groups. He believes that preaching as lament can provide a space for mourning and build solidarity among sufferers. In such a case, lament interplays compassion and resistance. He says that lament is "a declaration by the people of God who are encountering unexpected suffering in their lives while God is silent" since it is "a vehicle to deliver people's emotions of suffering to God in order to call for God's presence and saving activity" (136). In his view, lament is an act of protest against the evil experienced in human existence and an act of hope to encounter the compassionate God who suffers with sufferers,

crying out for justice against existing injustices (146-7, 155).

In chapter 6, the author presents the otherness of ren (仁), in place of Levinas' otherness, as a theological foundation for preaching on social suffering, which contains both compassion and resistance. Kim argues that the Confucian concept of ren can overcome the dichotomy of self and other, which is the foundation of Levinas' theory of otherness.

This well-structured book deserves to be acclaimed because it enriches the understanding of Korean preaching formulated throughout modern history. It deepens the homiletical discussion about how to preach on social suffering in a particular context. Also, its fresh claim of preaching as lament presents an alternative homiletical model for preaching on social suffering. Its sharp critiques of a traditional hermeneutic on suffering beneath Korean preaching reveal problems that hamper the proclamation of the gospel to the people in social suffering. It serves as a clarion ringing to awake Korean preachers from a theological slumber that is blind to the pain of the sufferers from a social tragic event spawned from systematic evils and sins. Although non-Korean readers or those less familiar with Korean preachers might feel challenged due to the cultural distance, it offers an intriguing opportunity to widen homiletical perspectives and obtain valuable wisdom for preaching on social suffering.

Jaewoong Jung  
Assistant Professor of Homiletics  
Seoul Theological University  
Bucheon, South Korea