

진실로 너희에게 이르노니 너희  
중에 두 사람이 땅에서  
합심하여 무엇이든지 구하면  
하늘  
저희를  
두 세  
곳에는 나도 그들 중에  
있느니라.

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마태복음 Matthew 18: 19-20

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (NRSV)

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# Preaching the Lectionary to the Second-Generation Korean-Americans: Providing a Meaningful Story to the Story-Lost Generation

Sunggu (Paul) Yang

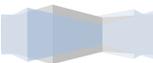
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## Introduction

I believe second-generation Korean-Americans<sup>1</sup> are a culture-lost or story-lost generation. In fact, second-generation Korean-Americans have had a privileged opportunity to enjoy a bicultural environment: one containing elements of both Korean and American cultures. Unfortunately, however, living in this bicultural environment has prevented them from fully embodying either the Korean or American culture. As a result, they have failed to experience and inherit a *meaningful cultural narrative* from either culture, a narrative which can provide them a cultural identity, moral foundation, and necessary social virtues. In this unfortunate situation, simply encouraging second-generation Korean-Americans to embrace either the Korean or American cultural heritage to find a truthful and meaningful cultural narrative does not work well, since they do not perceive either culture as their own.

In this article, therefore, I suggest a third way by which we may provide second-generation Korean-Americans with a truthful and meaningful cultural narrative, namely, *preaching the lectionary*.<sup>2</sup> Building on Stanley Hauerwas' outstanding argument on the importance and necessity of a meaningful cultural story<sup>3</sup> for both an individual and a community, this article will analyze the cultural and social effects of the lack of a meaningful life narrative on second-generation Korean-Americans. Then the article suggests that preaching the lectionary may be a beneficial and effective way of providing a meaningful life narrative to this story-lost generation.

## I. Starting with Stanley Hauerwas



According to Stanley Hauerwas, a meaningful (Christian) story is the foundation on which a person or a community develops self-identity, moral virtues, socio-political institutions, and social ethics.<sup>4</sup> Further, he argues that “the social and political validity of a community [and an individual] results from its being formed by a truthful story, a story that gives us the means to live without fear of one another.”<sup>5</sup> This argument has two important implications, both personal and communal.

First, when a foundational or meaningful story is not shared amidst a community, that community comes to lose its communal self-identity, moral foundation, and social virtues, such as sacrifice for worthy ends, family, cooperation with others, and forgiveness. Instead, the community tends to be highly legalistic and individualistic, having liberalism, privatism, power, self-fulfillment, legalism, and economic abundance as its core virtues. For Hauerwas, American society as a whole has suffered from the lack of a foundational story. People drenched in American liberalism have assumed that we are a people without a shared history, but with many different kinds of histories. So, “in the absence of any shared history” Americans have developed “a system of rules that constitute procedures for resolving disputes as they pursue their various [individualistic] interests.”<sup>6</sup>

Second, when a community can provide an individual with a truthful and meaningful, shared narrative, the individual starts forming his or her own character, a “coherent sense of self” and the deep foundation of one’s own moral life.<sup>7</sup> This is vitally important for any individual living in a community, since sufficient character provides one with the moral skills that help one to “live coherently amid the diversity and conflicts that circumscribe and shape our moral existence.”<sup>8</sup>

Whether we fully agree with Hauerwas’ argument above, we must come to recognize the importance of story or narrative in both our individual and communal lives. Specifically, when a story is truly meaningful to our own life situation, we experience it as the ontological or fundamental ground of our existence. In a practical sense, we *enjoy* telling our family history beginning with “distant” ancestors, and we do not forget to recount our own nation’s ancient origin when describing it to foreigners.

Thus, it is safe to say that any individual or community needs a truthful and meaningful narrative, one which strongly undergirds that individual’s or community’s ontological ground,

moral foundation, communal virtues, social relations, and ultimately, their spiritual journeys in faith.

## **II. Second-Generation Korean-Americans as a Story-Lost Generation**

Based on Hauerwas' argument and the implications described above, we now recognize that second-generation Korean-Americans find themselves in a dangerous cultural quandary. Put most bluntly, second-generation Korean-Americans have lost meaningful narrative(s) that can be shared 1) among themselves and 2) in a larger Korean community. As a result, they often experience identity crises, relational problems with both Koreans and Americans, and loss of moral or ethical foundation.

Of course, it cannot be said that second-generation Korean-Americans have “no” meaningful narrative(s) inherited from their cultural circumstances, since they already have a bi-cultural background from birth: Korean and American. Theoretically, second-generation Korean-Americans are placed in a very rich cultural circumstance that could provide them with at least two meaningful cultural narratives. In real life, however, their seemingly rich cultural circumstance does not work that way. Rather, the bicultural circumstance has triggered emotional and psychological dismay in second-generation Korean-Americans in various life situations.<sup>9</sup> As bicultural people, they remain in a state in-between Korean immigrant and white American societies, feeling themselves to be resident aliens, refugees, or immigrants in a foreign land.<sup>10</sup> Instead of potentially inheriting two meaningful cultural stories, they have neither a Korean nor an American narrative, having not belonged to either culture sufficiently to learn and inherit its narrative. In this respect, we can say that the second-generation Korean-Americans' “bicultural” life circumstance has become a “non-cultural” one, since neither culture has provided them with a truthful and meaningful life narrative. This is why I would like to consider second-generation Korean-Americans as a story-lost generation.

Indeed, this story-lost life circumstance has generated negative life trends among second-generation Korean-Americans, such as those suggested earlier in the implications of Hauerwas' argument. Above all, we find that the present values of the second-generation Korean-Americans “are heavily bent towards an ethos of financial and professional success” to the extent that “they have few aspirations when it comes to their spiritual lives.”<sup>11</sup> From a socialistic angle, this

means that second-generation Korean-Americans have lost their *communal* self-identity, essential moral foundations, and necessary social virtues, such as sacrifice for worthy ends. Rather, being highly legalistic and individualistic, they uphold liberalism, privatism, power, self-fulfillment, and economic abundance as their core life virtues. As a result, many second-generation Korean-Americans have isolated themselves from both immigrant Korean and mainline American societies. They have even left Korean churches, which for their first-generation Korean-American parents are still an essential social-gathering place.

More worrisome is the failure by second-generation Korean-Americans to form their own healthy character as individuals, the deep foundations of their own moral lives, as a result of having no meaningful life narrative. As Hauerwas discusses, character is one's own coherent sense of self,<sup>12</sup> which enables one to live amidst complicated life situations and the various conflicts of life. Hence, healthy character is a crucial element for making appropriate moral or ethical decisions and leading socially acceptable lives. Unfortunately, many second-generation Korean-Americans have failed to form this healthy individual character. This is why many second-generation Korean-Americans suffer from continual cultural chaos, feelings of loss, denial, anger, and relational stresses with their parents and their Korean-American churches.<sup>13</sup>

Many second-generation Korean-Americans have not developed a truthful and meaningful narrative that can function as their ontological or fundamental ground of existence. Even though in schools they are taught American history and culture, and in Korean churches they have learned Korean language and cultural heritage, they have not sufficiently experienced either culture to develop a meaningful cultural narrative. So, what cultural heritage, or what cultural narrative, can be provided to them that will be meaningful? Will it be helpful to encourage them to revisit their Korean culture and find a fundamentally Korean narrative for their lives? This does not seem to work well for them—mainly because they would like to be treated as authentic Americans.<sup>14</sup> Then, will it work well to help them inherit an American cultural narrative as their authentic and meaningful narrative? Probably not, since as discussed earlier, they still consider themselves to be resident aliens, refugees, or immigrants on American soil.

In this seemingly, self-closed cultural dilemma, I suggest *preaching the lectionary* as a possible third way to provide a meaningful narrative to the story-lost Korean-American

generation. As a whole, the lectionary has an intrinsic narrative nature and indeed provides a meaningful and truthful narrative in a Christological and cosmological sense. Since most second-generation Korean-Americans have been exposed to the Christian culture in one way or another and a considerable number of them still attend Korean-American churches, using the lectionary has a strong potential to provide them a meaningful life narrative.

### **III. Preaching the Lectionary to the Second-Generation Korean-Americans**

As in most churches in Korea, the pulpit is *the central* place in Korean immigrant churches in America where the congregation gets their Christian identity, becomes acquainted with Christian theology and culture, and learns Christian moral lessons and ethical virtues. Thus, in Korean immigrant churches, the act of preaching is the moment when churchgoers most powerfully can experience, enjoy, and embody the Christian cultural narrative, which can function as their ontological or fundamental ground of existence. Unfortunately, however, the pulpits of immigrant churches have failed to provide a meaningful Christian cultural narrative to the congregation, mainly due to the pastors' arbitrary use of the biblical texts. In other words, because of their quite "selective" use of the texts, Korean-American pastors have not been able to embody the full narrative nature of the Bible and provide the rich Christian cultural story to the congregation. Selective use of the biblical texts has not generated a serious narrative problem for first-generation Korean-Americans, since they already have their own cultural narrative that they brought with them from Korea.<sup>15</sup> However, for second-generation Korean-Americans, selective use of the biblical texts produces a subtle-yet-profound problem by not providing them a meaningful, *full* narrative of Christianity. Thus, now second-generation Korean-Americans (mostly, young adults) not only do not fully embody either a Korean or American cultural narrative, but they also have not obtained an alternative Christian cultural narrative, their third option for personal or communal cultural identity.

For this story-lost second generation of Korean-Americans, preaching the lectionary can be an effective methodology to provide a truthful and meaningful cultural narrative. In fact, the lectionary is an effective methodology because of its intrinsic multi-layered, cultural and societal character: it has within itself narrative, cosmological and ontological, and communal and societal dimensions.

First and foremost, the lectionary readings for a year include a complete narrative—the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, this narrative nature of the lectionary may affect congregations in two ways. On one hand, in the lectionary narrative, the congregation finds a truthful and meaningful life narrative that they can easily experience, absorb, and embody as their own. De facto, this is possible only because “the Jesus of the Bible is always fully human.”<sup>16</sup> By identifying with the human Jesus, a congregation comes to experience Jesus’ life narrative as their own. On the other hand, by following a year-round lectionary storyline, the congregation encounters a Christian story that informs them about how to structure their world and locate themselves in it.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this world-structuring experience has profound implications for the congregation’s life, since by it; they fully participate in the world as active subjects.

These narrative functions of the lectionary are especially significant for second-generation Korean-Americans. This group is in desperate need of a truthful and meaning life narrative that neither the Korean nor the American cultures can provide them. This life narrative allows them to re-structure their world and re-locate themselves within it as fully-participating active subjects! In this way, the narrative aspect of the lectionary can be a key methodology to fulfill their desperate need and deep desire.

Second, the lectionary is fundamentally cosmological and ontological. As a collection of biblical texts from Genesis to Revelation, it tells us not only the life narrative of Jesus, but also recounts a cosmological and ontological narrative starting with God’s creation story and proceeding to the eschatological end of the world. Hence, through this cosmological narrative of the world, a congregation is invited to ponder who they really are, where they come from, where they are going, and what life purposes they themselves have as active participants in the cosmological narrative. Moreover, from the cosmological perspective of the world, the congregation comes to confront a *bigger* world that embraces and goes beyond their current cultural environments, be they Korean or American. Both cosmological and ontological dimensions of preaching the lectionary have particularly profound benefits for second-generation Korean-Americans. Above all, they need to encounter a larger cosmological narrative of the world in order to overcome the cultural limits of the Korean and American cultures in which they have failed to find their own life narrative. By listening to the cosmological narrative

of the Bible, they are invited to experience a larger Christian cultural narrative that both encompasses and goes beyond Korean and American cultural narratives. For instance, the liberalism, striving for personal success, focus on self-fulfillment, and reliance on economic abundance that are so much a part of the American cultural narrative are encountered and overcome by the cosmological narrative of God and Jesus that transforms time and space.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the lectionary's communal and societal dimension has possible benefits for second-generation Korean-Americans. As Gail O'Day and Charles Hackett clearly state, preaching the lectionary can help members of a congregation understand themselves as more than simply isolated entities.<sup>19</sup> This is possible, first, because the whole congregation participates in and shares a particular moment in time and space on each Sunday by following the lectionary narrative throughout the year.<sup>20</sup> Second, using the same biblical texts at the same time with churches around North America and the whole world leads the congregation to a broader sense of ecumenism, communication, and fellowship. In these ways, the communal and societal nature of the lectionary will definitely help second-generation Korean-Americans overcome the cultural limitation of today's America, their primary cultural narrative, which puts a premium on individual achievement, privatism, legalism, and autonomy.<sup>21</sup>

The lectionary, as a third cultural (or counter-cultural) narrative alternative to current Korean and American cultural narratives, offers considerable benefits for second-generation Korean-Americans. Listening to preaching based on the lectionary, this story-lost generation is invited and encouraged to form both self- and communal identities, to experience a larger narrative of the world, and finally, to share their lives with others with open minds and faith.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Preaching the lectionary provides a beneficial methodology to provide a truthful and meaningful life narrative to second-generation Korean-Americans who have not been able to find a profound life narrative in either Korean or American culture. By providing a meaningful story to this generation, we expect to help them form their own personal and communal cultural identities and equip them with sound moral and ethical virtues. Of course, this does not mean that the Christian cultural narrative alone is sufficient and that they are supposed to abandon their Korean-American bicultural heritage. Rather, by preaching the lectionary to them, we expect

them to experience and embody in themselves a larger and inclusive Christian cultural narrative that both embraces and goes beyond their bicultural heritage.

There are some ecclesial and educational obstacles to the beneficial use of the lectionary in current Korean-American churches, such as English Ministry pastors' unfamiliarity with the lectionary, the immigrant Korean church's ignorance of the church year, and a wide-spread practice of "topical preaching" in English Ministry.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, preaching the lectionary will be tremendously beneficial for second-generation Korean-Americans if sufficient contextual research is done to put preaching the lectionary into practice. Because the Christian narrative provided by the lectionary is a reality-making claim, second-generation Korean-Americans will hear the truth about the world and themselves.<sup>23</sup>

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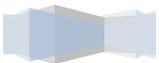
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### **Abstract**

**Title: Preaching the Lectionary to Second-generation Korean-Americans: Providing a Meaningful Story to the Story-Lost Generation**

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Second-generation Korean-Americans have not been able to experience and embody in themselves a truthful and meaningful cultural narrative, a narrative which can provide cultural identity, moral foundation, and necessary social virtues to them. This is mainly due to the fact that they do not perceive either Korean or American culture as their own. The article suggests *preaching the lectionary* as a beneficial methodology to provide second-generation Korean-



Americans with a truthful and meaningful cultural narrative. The author bases this thesis on Stanley Hauerwas' narrative ethics, which contends that a meaningful Christian story is the very foundation on which a person or a community develops self-identity, moral virtues, sociopolitical institutions, and social ethics.

**Key Words:** Narrative, Bicultural environment, Korean Americans, Preaching, Lectionary

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<sup>1</sup> This article adopts Matthew D. Kim's definition of second generation Korean Americans, which defines them as "Americans of Korean ethnic descent either born in the United States or who emigrated from Korea before the age of five whose primary cultural affinity is American and whose primary spoken language is English." Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 11.

<sup>2</sup> When I use the term, "lectionary" throughout the article, I refer to the Revised Common Lectionary.

<sup>3</sup> In his own writing, Hauerwas uses the terms, "story, history, and narrative," in an interchangeable sense. In my article, I will also use those terms without difference in meaning.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 36-52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. For Hauerwas, the story of God's kingdom being achieved through the life of Jesus Christ is the primarily meaningful and truthful narrative for the Christian community.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew D. Kim, "Possible Selves: A Homiletic for Second Generation Korean American Churches," *Homiletic* 32, no. 1 (Sum 2007): 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 146.

<sup>13</sup> Kim, *Preaching to Second Generation*, 130-137.

<sup>14</sup> Kim, "Possible Selves," 2.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, they have a cultural narrative deriving from a variety of common cultural elements such as the history of Chosun Dynasty (the last patriarchal kingdom of Korea) and the experiences of Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula, the Korean Civil War, rapid modernization from 1960s to 1980s, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Hackett and Gail R. O'Day, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> English Ministry in Korean American churches is defined as "Korean American congregations whose 1.5 and second generation members are more comfortable speaking English than Korean. The worship service in English Ministries is conducted entirely in the English language." Kim, *Preaching to Second Generation*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001), 102.

