

Sunggu Yang. *Evangelical Pilgrims from the East: Faith Fundamentals of Korean American Protestant Diasporas*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016. 163 pages. \$68.77.

In this book, Sunggu Yang, Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in Preaching and Worship at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, explores the unique cultural faith formation of Korean American Protestant diasporas in the United States through three key analytical lenses: the bicultural theological lens, the interreligious historical lens, and the ecclesial liturgical lens. Through a thoroughgoing analysis, the author uncovers the five socio-ecclesial codes of Korean American faith constructs and investigates how these faith fundamentals have been actualized in ecclesial practices with style variations, particularly in preaching (xvii). The author organizes each chapter of the book in accordance with two key concepts, namely, code and style. He defines code as “a specific configuration of the Korean American cultural-religious hermeneutical foundation” (xxviii) and style as “a very unique adoption and adaptation of the code depending on various situations” (xxix). The author identifies the five codes and two or three styles in each code. The five socio-ecclesial codes are “the Wilderness Pilgrimage code, the Diasporic Mission code, the Confucian Egalitarian code, the Buddhist Shamanistic code, and the Pentecostal Liberation code” (xv).

Chapter 1 examines the socio-ecclesial situation of the Asian/Korean American community and delineates key themes arising from the unique experience of Asians/Korean Americans. Living in a liminal and marginal space in two different cultures is not only a locus of struggle for survival and identity, but also a creative space for new possibilities of life and transformation. From this liminal but creative standpoint, Korean American evangelical protestants formulated the five socio-ecclesial codes in response to the socio-ecclesial issues and challenges (12). The five socio-ecclesial codes function as distinctive Korean American hermeneutics.

Chapter 2 and 3 explore the first two foundational codes with their style variations through the bicultural theological lens. The Wilderness Pilgrimage code provides a particular theological interpretive perspective through which persons in the Korean American diaspora interpret their life journey in the foreign land as pilgrims. By creatively adopting the pilgrim idea in the Biblical and Christian tradition for their own context, Korean American Christians have constructed their own pilgrimage narrative upon which a new socio-ecclesial identity of Korean American diaspora has built. While the Wilderness Pilgrimage code provides a deep ground for socio-contextual identity, the Diasporic Mission code gives rise to the fundamental sense of calling or vocation (49). The influence of premillennial evangelical western missionaries and biblical fundamentalism shaped Korean Christians to adopt the Great Commission as the central task of all Christians. Relating to the pilgrimage code, the Korean American church tends to understand itself as an evangelical mission community or missional outpost in the United States. (40) Thus, this diasporic mission code shapes the *telos* of Korean American Christians as “missionary pilgrims” (49).

Through the interreligious perspective, Chapter 4 and 5 examine historical Korean religions and how these traditional religions have contributed to the formation of Korean American Christian spirituality and relating codes. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism are three religions that shape the fundamental ethos of Korean spirituality and influence on the Korean American church. While the author’s cultural analysis of the Confucian Egalitarian code and the Buddhist Shamanistic code relies on earlier studies on the same topic by theologians and homileticians, the author’s genuine and insightful work identifies recent style variations in these

codes for the practice of preaching. The basic religious ethos and codes shaped by traditional religions continue to influence Korean American Christian spirituality, but the Korean American church creatively adopts and adapts these codes in relation to new socio-ecclesial contexts. As a result of contextual style variations in codes, new visions of codes—i.e., a more egalitarian vision of the Confucian code—are articulated by revising oppressive aspects and values in traditional religions.

Chapter 6 scrutinizes the Pentecostal Liberation code with three style variations—the pure spirituality style, the prosperity living style, and the liberative style—through the ecclesial liturgical perspective. Unlike many other Korean and Korean American theologians who generally consider Korean Pentecostalism in relation to Shamanism, the author treats the Pentecostal Liberation code as distinct from the Buddhist Shamanistic code. By attending to unique Pentecostal characteristics of Korean American worship and its liberational aspects, the author contends that Spirit-led worship “as an outlet for spiritual and social liberation” (89) contributes to the formation of liberational ethos in the Korean American church. The Pentecostal Liberation code attends to the direct, transformative, and liberative presence of God in the world. For Korean American Christians, this historical involvement of the Spirit God in human reality is the ultimate ground for both healing inner brokenness and liberation from external oppressive reality (121).

Notwithstanding its century-long presence in the United States and contributions to North American homiletics, the voice of the Asian/Korean American church and its practice of preaching still remains at the marginal place in the field of homiletics due to limitations of cross-cultural investigation on complex bicultural and liminal experiences of Asians/Koreans. This innovative in-depth study on faith fundamentals of the Korean American evangelical church provides a clear and accessible pathway to the multidimensional aspects of Korean American faith constructs. The contribution of this volume to the field of homiletics is twofold: content and method. The author’s comprehensive description of multifaceted Korean American faith constructs, namely, the five socio-ecclesial codes, and a critical analysis of the prescriptive use of the codes in the practice of preaching with style variations, provides rich theological, historical, and cultural resources to those who wish to engage with the study of Korean American Christianity and Asian/Korean American preaching. Further, the author’s use of symbolic anthropology as a foundational research method for this project introduces new methodological options for a cross-cultural approach to homiletical traditions other than one’s own. This book is, foremost, a thoughtful guide for Korean American preachers, but the wisdom of this book can still be a valuable resource for those who preach the gospel at multi-cultural congregations.

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